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Leadership Succession and the Resilience of Electoral Authoritarian Regimes

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Qingjie Zeng

Abstract

How does leadership succession influence the dynamics of electoral competition in authoritarian regimes? Previous studies suggest that leadership successions tend to result in more competitive elections, creating favorable conditions for political changes. The literature, however, has not examined how the electoral impact of succession depends on specific mechanisms of succession management. We argue that the outgoing leader's clear designation of a successor plays an important role in neutralizing the electoral impact of succession. Clear designation, defined as the appointment of a "second-in-command," prevents unbridled power struggle among ruling elites and grooms the successor for the leadership role. We support this argument by analyzing an original dataset covering over 400 elections in 60 authoritarian regimes. This article adds to the burgeoning literature regarding the effects of elections and institution-building on authoritarian resilience.

Keywords

leadership succession, electoral authoritarianism, alternation of power, clear designation

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Introduction

In the post–World War II era, especially since the onset of the "third wave" of democratization in the mid-1970s (Huntington, 1991), the growing influence of the West and the democratic values they represent has led most developing countries to hold multiparty elections to select their rulers. In many of these regimes, however, ruling political parties employ systematic and widespread measures of manipulation to tilt electoral playing field against the opposition, making alternation of power an unlikely prospect. If partisan alternation has never occurred, it is impossible to know whether the incumbent governments will hand over power peacefully as a result of electoral defeat (Cheibub et al., 2010). Electoral authoritarianism (EA) that combines regular elections with undemocratic means

Fudan University, Shanghai, China

Corresponding author:
Qingjie Zeng, Fudan University, Handan Road 220, Yangpu District, Shanghai 100871, China.
Email: zqingjie@fudan.edu.cn

of governance has become the modal type of political regime in the developing world (Diamond, 2002; Gandhi, 2015; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Morse, 2012; Schedler, 2002).

Despite the biased nature of authoritarian elections, rulers do occasionally lose power to opposition parties at the ballot box. Scholars have pointed to a wide array of factors that could contribute to the downfall of seemingly invincible authoritarian parties. However, relatively few studies have examined threats to EA regime's resilience arising from leadership succession within the ruling party.[1] In this study, leadership succession refers to the appearance of a new person filling the position of the ruling party's principal leader (Govea and Holm, 1998: 133). As a fundamental feature of politics, succession is "guaranteed by the hazards of health, the risk of fortune and the certainty of death" (Rustow, 1964: 104). It has been argued that succession under electoral authoritarianism can create favorable conditions for political changes (Cheeseman, 2010; Maltz, 2007; Treisman, 2015). Succession tends to create a power vacuum within the ruling party or fuel internal bickering between potential successors, conditions that could be exploited by the opposition to increase its electoral strength. According to this view, democracy advocates should seek to promote norms of regular leadership turnover within authoritarian parties. Repeated successions are expected to gradually erode the incumbent party's ability to control electoral processes until alternation of power is realized.

The electoral impact of leadership succession refers to the change in vote share received by a ruling party compared with the last election that can be attributed to the succession. So far there has been little systematic explanation for why electoral impact might vary substantially across different cases of succession. Existing theories can shed little light on why, for example, succession proved a catalyst for alternation of power in Croatia's 2000 elections or Kenya's 2002 elections, but was no more than a slap on the wrist for dominant parties in Singapore and Ethiopia. In addition to structural factors such as socioeconomic development and levels of repression, does the electoral impact of succession depend on the specific mechanisms employed by the authoritarian party to manage the transition process?

This study shows that ruling parties in electoral autocracies cope with leadership succession in different ways, and the mode of managing succession has systematic effects on its electoral impact. Specifically, we argue that the decisive factor in neutralizing the electoral impact of succession is the outgoing leader's clear designation of a successor. Clear designation, defined as the appointment of a "second-in-command," assures party elites that the regime will live on and continue to distribute benefits to them after the incumbent ruler leaves office. As such, it reduces the likelihood of unbridled power struggle within the ruling party that typically undermines its electoral dominance. These arguments are tested on an original dataset that covers 416 elections and 56 successions in 60 EA regimes from 1946 to 2015.

This article makes three main contributions to the study of comparative politics. First, we add to the burgeoning literature that explains the resilience and decline of authoritarian parties facing electoral contests. Previous studies have focused on state capacity (Croissant and Hellman, 2018; Seeberg, 2018), the ruling party's control over state resources (Greene, 2007, 2010; Magaloni, 2006), its ability to resolve intra-party conflicts (Brownlee, 2007a; Langston, 2006; Reuter and Gandhi, 2011), the mobilization strategy of the opposition (Bunce and Wolchik, 2010; Howard and Roessler, 2006; Magaloni and Kricheli, 2010; Van de Walle, 2006), and international pressure (Donno, 2013; Levitsky and Way, 2010). This article, which shows the importance of succession

strategies, highlights how actor-centered factors could interact with structural conditions to shape political dynamics in EA regimes.

Second, our study continues a long-standing research tradition that treats succession as a central component of political life (Calvert, 1987). Previous research has overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of peaceful, orderly succession for political stability (Govea and Holm, 1998; Herz, 1952; Hughes and May, 1988; Meng, 2018; Nathan, 2003). These studies treat the nature of succession as the dependent variable and focus on factors that can promote peaceful transitions, characterized by the absence of violence and adherence to established procedures.[2] This research tradition has overlooked the fact that peaceful, orderly transitions alone are not sufficient for guaranteeing success in the upcoming elections for authoritarian parties. By presenting evidence that clear designation of successors can mitigate negative electoral impact, this article shows that the political strength of EA regimes depends not only on peaceful transitions but also the specific mode of managing the succession.

Finally, this study engages in a conversation with the larger literature on party institutionalization and authoritarian durability. A broad consensus has emerged in recent scholarship that institutionalization—the creation of rules and procedures that regulate the distribution of power and resources—strengthens ruling parties and enhances authoritarian rule (Brownlee, 2007a; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Magaloni, 2006; Meng, in press; Morse, 2015). This article adds a cautionary note to the conventional wisdom by suggesting that institutionalization does not always thwart liberalizing political changes. At least in the realm of leadership succession, institutionalized procedures such as competitive primaries and intraparty election at party congresses tend to endanger the ruling party's electoral prospects, which seems more likely to be bolstered by the dictator's informal, discretionary power to designate a successor.

The rest of the article will be organized as follows. The next section explains why dominant parties generally receive fewer votes in the wake of leadership successions. Building on these arguments, we present a theory of how modes of managing succession can moderate its negative electoral impact. The next section introduces the data and research design, followed by key findings of empirical analysis. The final section concludes by discussing the study's implications for future research and efforts to promote party alternation in EA regimes.

Threats of Leadership Transition to Authoritarian Ruling Parties

Before discussing how modes of managing succession affect electoral dynamics, it is necessary to clarify why ruling parties in EA regimes tend to perform badly in elections immediately following a succession.

Authoritarian regimes have long been considered incapable of conducting peaceful, orderly transfer of power, as the transition process often opens the door to elite rupture and violent conflicts that shake regime foundations. The inability to provide for ordered continuance is therefore regarded as "one of the main drawbacks of dictatorship as a form of government" (Herz, 1952: 19). For "closed" regimes that prohibit any kind of multiparty electoral contest, the main threat posed by succession lies in the violent overthrow of incumbents and/or massive purges of ruling elites, which severely damages cohesion among authoritarian rulers.

By comparison, even if EA regimes manage to complete a peaceful transfer of power, they still have to face the electoral impact of succession. Unlike closed autocracies which can hide signs of elite discord from the public, multiparty elections present the ruling party with the alarming prospect that the regime's internal weakness may be translated into declining electoral support. Indeed, descriptive statistics offers prima facie support for this suspicion. Based on the dataset complied by the author, the average vote share received by authoritarian ruling parties in post-succession elections is 55.6%, compared to 62.4% in other elections.

Existing studies provide a number of explanations for the decline in electoral support after succession. First, it takes time for the successor to fully inherit the outgoing leader's control over patronage network and coercive state organs. Authoritarian parties rarely built their prolonged dominance exclusively on broad-based policy appeals. Instead, they routinely rely on a mixture of patronage and repression to keep the opposition forces at bay (Greene, 2007: 5; Magaloni, 2006: 19–24). Tight grip over state resources allows the ruling party to reward supporters with earmarked public expenditure, public sector jobs, or even bribes. When distributing patronage goods is not sufficient to ensure electoral victories, the loyalty of coercive apparatus makes it a reliable ally in the use of heavy-headed repression and electoral fraud against the opposition.

When an authoritarian leader enters an election with rich experiences of managing patronage and coercion, these resources are likely to be deployed effectively to serve his purposes. Once a succession occurs, however, even the most skillful successor will need some time before he could command the same level of loyalty and support from the state apparatus. If an election takes place at a time when the successor's grasp of the patronage machine and coercive apparatus is still fragile, the resource gap between the government and opposition will be narrowed significantly (Cheeseman, 2010: 146). Generally speaking, the longer the incumbent has been in power and the more personal power he has amassed, the more difficult the transition will be as the new leader needs to inherit a support network that has been forged over a long period and based on personal loyalty to the old ruler (Clapham, 1988: 283).

A second reason why succession matters for electoral outcomes has to do with the delicate relationship between the incumbent leader and his successor. During the takeover process, the weak position of the successor might be greatly bolstered by the outgoing leader's support, either through repressing opponents or stealing elections. If such support is absent, the successor may face an uphill battle to maintain electoral dominance. This support might be missing because the predecessor has played little role in picking the next leader and therefore feels little attachment to him. Alternatively, the outgoing leader might start to consider his political legacy and become reluctant to undermine the fairness of elections (Cheeseman, 2010: 147).

The third causal pathway from succession to eroding electoral strength stems from the possible internal party divisions created by a conflict-ridden succession process. In the absence of a widely recognized successor, candidates tend to engage in an intense struggle to become the party's standard-bearer in the next election, a competition that could undermine the internal cohesion of the ruling party. Senior party leaders whose bids to succeed failed are unlikely to work wholeheartedly for the party's election campaign, leaving the regime substantially less able to execute repression, intimidation, and fraud as tactics of preventing alternation of power (Maltz, 2007: 133). Worse still, these senior members may choose to defect to the opposition and challenge the ruling party. They often bring important resources and experience to the opposition, significantly increasing

the chances of authoritarian breakdown at the ballot box. Prior to Mexico's presidential election in 1988, for example, the left-wing group within the ruling PRI was disgruntled after losing the succession struggle. This protectionist faction, known as the Democratic Current (CD), realized that then-president de la Madrid favored a successor that would continue with his neoliberal reforms. Seeing little political hopes within the PRI, the leader of the CD ran for president as an opposition candidate and came very close to defeating the PRI in 1988 (Langston, 2006: 69–70).

Finally, succession could have an electoral impact by inducing the voters to reconsider the cost and benefits of supporting the ruling party. If a ruler has in the past primarily obtained votes through repression and patronage, his departure tends to create uncertainty over the successor's control over coercive and distributive resources, as we argued earlier. The voters may therefore sense greater freedom to support candidates of their liking, including those from the opposition. In many cases, though, the outgoing dictator has enjoyed genuine popular support due to factors ranging from economic growth, stability to the cult of personality. Before his retirement in 2019, for instance, Kazakhstan's long-time ruler Nursultan Nazarbayev was widely viewed as a strong and popular leader, thanks to the perception that he was central to the country's independence, economic prosperity, and stability (Isaacs, 2010). When a charismatic leader is replaced by a less familiar and visible figure, it is likely that the ruling party's popularity will decline (Maltz, 2007: 132).

Managing Succession by Designation

Dangerous as leadership succession can be for authoritarian parties, its negative electoral impact is by no means inevitable. A number of studies have discussed the political implications of various modes of planning and regulating succession. Frantz and Stein (2017) showed that having some kind of rules that regulate succession can reduce the likelihood of coup d'état. Herz (1952: 37) contended that "clear and unambiguous designation of a successor seems to have been the decisive factor in successful transfer of power." Kurrild-Klitgaard (2000) examined 900 years of succession within the kingdom of Denmark and found that the introduction of hereditary succession limits the number of coups. Kokkonen and Sundell (2014) focused on succession within European monarchies, concluding that the risk of deposition was substantially lower for monarchs who practiced primogeniture. Although these studies were not necessarily conducted with EA regimes in mind, many of their insights are helpful for understanding the link between succession arrangement and authoritarian electoral contests.

We argue that clear designation of a successor is important for minimizing the electoral impact of leadership succession. In this model of succession management, the leader of a ruling party designates a successor by appointing him to the "second-in-command" position, sending a clear signal to other elites regarding the identity of the next ruler. The effectiveness of this arrangement rests on the assumption that senior regime members generally prefer peaceful transfer of power to an intense succession struggle (Brownlee, 2007b: 605–606; Kokkonen and Sundell, 2014: 440; Kurrild-Klitgaard, 2000: 71). Without a clearly designated heir apparent, regime members may sense an opportunity to seize power and grab more rents for themselves, but the risk of losing a succession struggle is often prohibitively high for the participants. When this struggle is unregulated by established norms and procedures, its potential of causing violent purges may pose an existential threat to the regime. During China's Cultural Revolution, for instance, the conflicts

between Mao Zedong and his potential successors resulted in repeated purges of high-ranking officials, causing major upheaval within the Party-state (Sandschneider, 1987). Even with strong institutions such as nomination process at a party congress to select the successor, a bitterly contested succession usually creates deep divisions within the party that can be exploited by opposition forces, as we discussed earlier. In either scenario, an open-ended succession tends to weaken the authoritarian party and leave regime elites uncertain whether they will continue to enjoy benefits after leadership transition.

Seen in this light, the biggest advantage of clearly grooming a successor is to provide certainty and clarity regarding the transition and save ruling allies from an undesirable, risky power grab. The designated successor has an obvious stake in ensuring the success of the transition and the regime's survival. For other regime elites, designation deprives them of the opportunity to assume the top post, but the victims of this arrangement are relatively few compared with the number of beneficiaries of an orderly succession. Thus, transferring power to a designated successor is more likely to preserve elite cohesion and guarantee a strong electoral performance for the party. An additional advantage of designation is that, to the extent the outgoing leader enjoys popular support, he can pass on part of the popularity to a successor seen as the old leader's protégé.

In order to signal to other elites that the next leader has been chosen, the key move is for the ruler to appoint the intended successor as his lieutenant—vice president in presidential systems and vice premier in parliamentary systems (Meng, 2018: 16). In many countries, the constitution makes the vice president the next in line to succeed if the president dies in office or a vacancy otherwise occurs. To make the designation more credible, the appointed "second-in-command" typically starts to perform some of the top leader's functions and stays in office until the succession takes place. The increasingly important role played by the vice president or premier forms part of the grooming process by which the potential successor gradually becomes familiar with state affairs (Hughes and May, 1988: 15). When well managed, this process could lead to a seamless transition and leave little power vacuum for the opposition to exploit. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, for example, was named vice president by Anwar Sadat in 1975, and 'took over the day-to-day running of the government, leading cabinet meetings and handling security details.'[3] He gained foreign affairs experience with many visits to other countries, and even assumed the role of the president temporarily when Sadat went on vacations.

Clear designation, of course, is not without its own difficulties, chief among them being the 'crown-prince problem': the appointed successor may be tempted to stage a coup, as he will assume power once the incumbent is overthrown. Meanwhile, the crown-prince status makes him a center of independent power that other elites can rally around (Kokkonen and Sundell, 2014: 440). The fear of a competitive center of power explains why many dictators refuse to designate a clear successor (Herz, 1952: 39), despite the obvious advantage of the approach, and why they frequently depose a previously hand-picked successor. The crown-prince problem, however, is far from insurmountable, as attested by the many instances of autocrats passing power successfully onto their protégés. Rulers may deliberately appoint successors who seem obedient and unlikely to seize power prematurely. The designated appointee, knowing that an assertive approach will alarm the mentor, has strong incentives to maintain a low profile and wait patiently for the transition. Thus, Jerry Rawlings, President of Ghana from 1993 to 2001, selected a relatively malleable supporter John Mills to be his Vice President. During his campaign to run for president in 2000, Mills was roundly criticized for statements that if elected he would consult with Rawlings.[4]

Based on the analysis above, we hypothesize that, if the ruler of an EA regime can designate a successor by appointing him to second-in-command positions and if the successor manages to take office, this arrangement will reduce vote losses suffered by the ruling party in the next election. We are aware that authoritarian leaders may groom successors by placing them in visible positions other than vice president or premier. These appointments, however, do not send a sufficiently unequivocal signal to other elites regarding the identity of the rulers' favored successor. Take Gabon's presidential succession in 2009. Before the death of the veteran leader Omar Bongo, his son Ben Bongo had served several important positions such as the Minister of Defense and was widely considered his father's likely successor. As the next election approached, however, it was not immediately clear who would succeed Omar, as several factions within the ruling party jostled for the leadership position.[5] Conceivably, had Omar appointed his son as the vice president long before his death, it would have made the succession process more predictable and less fractious. Moreover, the lack of second-in-command experience denies the successor a great opportunity to accumulate governing experience that will be important for a smooth transition.

Focusing on the appointment of second-in-command positions helps reduce subjective judgments in the coding process when deciding whether a succession was characterized by clear designation. In robustness checks, though, we will explore whether designation without appointing the successor as the second-in-command can also benefit the ruling party's electoral performance. We will also apply an alternative measure of designation that eliminates cases wherein the outgoing leader's intention was not clear even though his lieutenant took power.

Hypothesis 1. When a second-in-command takes over as the leader of the ruling party, the negative electoral impact of succession will be weaker.

Alternative Explanations

In addition to designation, there are two major alternative explanations regarding how modes of management can bolster the ruling party's electoral strength after a leadership succession.

First, to address the problem that new leaders may have to face elections before fully consolidating power, an authoritarian party could arrange the timing of succession such that the successor assumes office well before he leads the party to the next election. Since we defined succession as the appearance of a new leader for the ruling party, a succession takes place when one of the following scenarios occurs. First, the state's chief executive leaves office before he completes the constitutional term due to health problems, death, or resignation. Another person takes over to finish the rest of the term. Second, the chief executive steps down after completing his term, and another person becomes the party's candidate to run for the chief executive position. In the second scenario, a succession is considered to have occurred regardless of whether the new leader goes on to win the next election. It should be noted that here we understand "party leader" in a broad sense: one is considered a party's leader if he is the chief executive or the party's presidential candidate even if he does not hold the official title of party head.

If the first scenario of succession occurs with ample time left before the next election, it will give a new leader the opportunity to inherit the predecessor's patronage network, insert his supporters to critical posts in coercive organs, and improve his name

recognition among the electorate. If the succession process does split the ruling party, the period between succession and election may give the party critical breathing space to achieve reconciliation among senior leaders and restore some semblance of party cohesion.[6] This analysis leads to the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 2. When a succession is completed well before the next election, the negative electoral impact of succession will be weaker.

Second, some scholars argued that imposing term limits on the chief executive promotes authoritarian stability by distributing power more equitably among regime elites. Term limits facilitate the monitoring of the autocrat and makes any transgression of institutional rules easily observable. An autocrat's attempt to overstay his office sends a clear signal of violating existing power-sharing agreement, potentially prompting collective actions by rivaling elites to punish the incumbent ruler (Ma, 2016; Svolik, 2012).[7] Moreover, regularized leadership turnover mediates intra-elite conflict by lengthening the time horizon on which regime members weigh gains and losses (Brownlee, 2007a). Political factions understand that losing one succession battle does not mean permanent exclusion from the locus of power, as they can expect to launch another bid in the not-too-distant future. In the case of Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), its uninterrupted 71-year rule was often attributed in part to intra-party elite cohesion promoted by the well-entrenched norm of rotating the president once in 6 years (Castañeda, 2000; Schlefer, 2009). Term limits also help induce a peaceful transition process by decreasing the likelihood of coup d'état. With a fixed schedule of leadership turnover, the heir apparent is incentivized to wait for the leader to voluntarily leave office instead of using violence to seize power. We thus formulate the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 3. When a succession takes place after the incumbent ruler steps down due to term limits, the negative electoral impact of succession will be weaker.

Thus, a prepared succession is one wherein the successor assumes office well before he leads the party to the next election, and a term-limited succession is one wherein the predecessor leaves office due to term limits imposed by constitution or well-established norms.[8] Compared with clear designation, however, we expect the other two models of succession management to be less effective in preserving EA regimes' resilience. Absent a designated successor, ferocious competition among rivaling candidates can cause damage to ruling party cohesion that is beyond repair, even when there is a buffer period before the next elections. Likewise, term limits alone do not identify a clear alternative leader that other elites can coordinate around (Meng, 2018). It is therefore difficult for senior regime members to coordinate collective actions against a dictator who violates term limits. For these reasons, we believe that clear designation, rather than timing of succession or term limits, is the critical factor in maintaining ruling parties' post-succession electoral dominance.

Data and Research Method

The basic research strategy of this study is to exploit cross-national and temporal variation in EA regimes' electoral outcomes in the wake of leadership succession. The focus is on whether modes of regulating succession have any effect on the electoral impact of succession. The data collection process consists of three main steps.

First, we draw upon an authoritarian regime dataset developed by Hadenius, Teorell, and Wahman (the HTW dataset) to identify all electoral authoritarian regimes between 1972 and 2012 (Wahman et al., 2013). Within the broad category of authoritarian regimes,[9] the HTW dataset distinguishes between regimes with and without elected legislatures. The former group is further divided into no-party, one-party, and multiparty authoritarian sub-types. The multiparty authoritarian category, which includes regimes with more than one party represented in the legislature, largely corresponds to the analytic concept of electoral authoritarianism in which "at least a minimum level of competition is allowed and some opposition candidates … are allowed to participate in national elections" (Wahman et al., 2013: 27). For the purpose of this study, we exclude regimes that were plagued by civil war or under foreign occupation since it is not meaningful to discuss the resilience of regimes in such transition modes. Also excluded from the dataset are cases for which the EA spell lasted for less than 3 years. These regimes were too short-lived for leadership succession to become a realistic possibility.[10] This procedure generates a sample of 60 EA regime spells.

Second, we collect information about national elections that took place under these EA regimes. Between 1946 and 2015, a total of 416 national-level executive and parliamentary elections have been held in the sampled regimes. The main dependent variable *electoral impact* represents the change in vote share won by an incumbent party compared with the last election of the same type. This measure shows how political succession and other factors bring about changes in a ruling party's fortunes *relative to the previous electoral contest*. Information about electoral results has been collected from various sources such as the election handbooks of various regions, the 2014 version of *Political Handbook of the World* (Lansford, 2014), the NELDA dataset (Hyde and Marinov, 2012), and newspaper articles.

Third, we identify a total of 56 leadership successions that occurred within ruling parties in the sample and determine whether they adopted any of the three modes of succession management mentioned in the previous section. To code whether a succession has taken place between elections, we examine information in *Political Handbook* to see if the person leading the ruling party to contest an election is different from such a leader during the previous election. If this is the case, then a leadership succession is regarded as having occurred. For example, Jakaya Kikwete was elected by Tanzania's ruling party CCM as its presidential candidate in the 2005 general elections.[11] This represents a leadership succession because during the 2000 elections it was Benjamin Mkapa who served as the CCM's leader and presidential candidate.[12]

Considering the fact that the 60 EA spells have in total lasted 1082 years by 2015, it takes an average of 19.32 years for an EA regime to carry out a leadership succession. Mexico under PRI had experienced an exceptionally large number of successions (10) during the studied period, thanks to the institutionalized practice of replacing the president once in 6 years. If this outlier is taken out of the sample, the average tenure of leaders in EA regimes rises to 22.32 years. The rarity of leadership change speaks to the underinstitutionalized nature of most EA regimes in which dictators were extremely reluctant to leave office voluntarily (Meng, in press).

Three binary variables were created to indicate the mode of management associated with each succession. The coding was based on information gathered from various sources including *Political Handbook*, academic research, and newspaper articles. Thus, the main explanatory variable *designation* takes a value of one if it was the second-in-command who succeeded the outgoing leader to become the chief executive.[13] In our sample, 21 out of 56 successions (37.5%) belong to this category. In terms of alternative explanations, we

Table 1. Modes of Succession Management and Elections Affected.

Mode of management	Number of succession	Elections affected
Designation	21	27
Prepare	15	21
Term limits	24	47

use the binary variable *prepare* to indicate whether a succession is timed well before the next election. The variable equals one if a succession was completed at least 1 year before the next national-level election.[14] Fifteen successions in the sample (26.78%) were managed in this manner. The variable *term limits* equals one if the predecessor stepped down due to term limits. The number of cases falling into this category is 24 (42.86%).

In Appendix 1, we tabulate a summary of the 56 successions, providing the following information: the country, year, predecessor, successor, whether a succession adopts the designation model, and a brief description of the succession event.

Matching election and succession data reveals that 89 national-level elections were held after leadership succession. These 89 elections therefore constitute the main units of analysis for testing the impact of succession management on electoral outcomes. Table 1 summarizes the frequency of the three modes and the number of elections preceded by each of them. These modes are not mutually exclusive as one succession can adopt more than one method. Conversely, it is also possible for a succession to meet none of these conditions. Note that the number of post-succession elections exceeds the number of successions because executive and legislative elections are treated as separate observations. For example, Jonathan Goodluck replaced Umaru Yar'Adua as the President of Nigeria in 2010. Presidential and legislative elections were held in 2011, which are treated as two observations following a leadership change.

To examine whether electoral impact depends on the way ruling parties handle successions, the main analysis estimates the following linear regression model

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta X_{it} + \gamma Z_{it} + V_i + \varepsilon_{it}$$

In this baseline equation, Vi represents unobserved regime-specific effects, and εit stands for the idiosyncratic error term. Xit stands for the matrix of explanatory variables, namely the three dummy variables indicating modes of succession management. Of course, methods of regulating leadership turnover are not randomly assigned but endogenous to a variety of political and socioeconomic factors. To the extent that these factors determine both the characteristics of succession and electoral results, the empirical analysis can generate spurious associations. The following confounding variables (Zit) are therefore included in the regression model:

Past electoral strength: How an authoritarian party replaces its leader may depend on its political strength, which is strongly indicated by the vote share it received in the previous election. Meanwhile, unobservable factors that affected electoral outcomes last time might continue to exert influence in the current election. We measure this variable with the ruling party's vote share in the previous election of the same type (*vote share last election*). Since parties that won by a large margin tend to face a tough battle to maintain the same level of dominance in the following election, we expect the coefficient of this variable to be negative.

Leadership tenure: The mode of replacing a dictator could be affected by how long he has been in office. A political strongman who has stayed in power for decades, for example, is less likely to be constrained by term limits than a president early in his tenure. Lengthy rule also indicates a dictator's consolidated power base and his regime's ability to endure electoral challenges. The variable *tenure* simply records the number of years an incumbent leader had been in office when the succession occurs. A quadratic term of *tenure* is also included to account for the possibility that a leader who has just come into office and who has served for many decades are both politically vulnerable.

Main election: For ruling parties, the importance of elections depends on whether they are "main" elections, namely those that determine who holds executive power. Rulers are likely to devote more resources to main elections to prolong one-party dominance. We create a dummy variable that equals one for presidential elections in presidential systems and legislative elections in parliamentary systems. Ruling parties are expected to perform more strongly in main elections.

Degree of repression: Authoritarian ruling parties pursue a wide range of illegitimate measures to repress opposition and undermine the fairness of elections. It is important to control for the level of repression for two reasons. First, repression indicates a regime's self-perception of electoral vulnerability, which would affect how it handles leadership succession. Second, repression almost certainly has an impact on electoral outcomes, either by exaggerating the ruling party's vote share or instigating more popular anger toward the government. We approximate degree of repression with the civil liberty ratings assigned by the Freedom House to each regime-year observation.[15] The variable *repression* ranges from 1 to 7, with 7 representing the greatest level of repression and 1 the smallest degree of repression.

Scheduled election: Ruling parties often manipulate election timing to maximize the chances of staying in power, and this is especially true in authoritarian regimes (Knutsen et al., 2017: 130).[16] Postponing elections can be a particularly useful tactic if authoritarian parties intend to provide the successors with more time to consolidate power. Thus, whether elections take place according to their scheduled date can be associated with both succession management and electoral results. We create a dummy variable *fixed schedule* that equals one if elections were held on schedule and zero if they were either delayed or took place earlier than scheduled. Information on election timing is based on the Nelda dataset (Hyde and Marinov, 2012). We expect ruling parties to suffer more vote losses when elections are held on schedule.

Economic conditions: it is reasonable to believe that economic situation will affect both the dynamics of succession and popular support enjoyed by the ruling parties. The empirical analysis considers three indicators of economic conditions: the amount of natural resources rents such as oil and natural gas in a country; income per capita; and income growth rate. High values on these variables are expected to boost ruling parties' vote shares. The economic data were extracted from the World Bank Indicators and Penn World Table, version 9.0. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for the relevant variables.

Results of Analysis

The Effect of Leadership Succession on Electoral Outcomes

To contextualize the main analysis, it is helpful to gain a solid understanding of the general impact of leadership succession on authoritarian parties' ability to control elections. Table 3 shows results from models that predict change in vote share, with the main explanatory variable indicating whether a succession occurred between the current and

Table 2. Summary Statistics.

For all elections under EA regimes: 1946–2015					
	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max
Change in vote share	416	−2.121818	13.51464	−43.44	52.57
Designation	416	.0649038	.2466528	0	1
Prepare	416	.0504808	.2191985	0	1
Term limits	416	.1129808	.3169505	0	1
Vote share last election	317	63.64183	19.24611	0	100
Tenure	416	9.896635	7.907988	0	42
Main election	416	.5240385	.5000232	0	1
Repression	416	4.473558	1.022293	2	7
Fixed schedule	416	.7067308	.455809	0	1
Rent	411	12.06177	14.63998	.0004786	86.13238
GDP per capita (logged)	410	6150.84	7269.506	340	59682.61
Growth	409	4.522518	12.61505	−39.2404	88.08437
For post-succession elections: 1946–2015					
	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max
Change in vote share	89	−7.141386	12.89048	−43.44	16.47
Designation	89	.3033708	.4623186	0	1
Prepare	89	.2359551	.4269999	0	1
Term limits	89	.5280899	.5020387	0	1
Vote share last election	85	63.09329	17.43479	15.6	100
Tenure	89	7.337079	6.636579	0	42
Main election	89	.5955056	.4935746	0	1
repression	89	3.865169	.9069305	2	6
Fixed schedule	89	.8314607	.3764655	0	1
Rent	88	9.645642	10.11489	.0004786	42.98944
GDP per capita (logged)	87	7323.297	8511.211	510	59682.61
Growth	87	4.240159	6.329437	−24.97677	25.554

EA: electoral authoritarianism

previous election. Model 1 is a naive binary analysis; model 2 controls for country fixed effects; model 3 includes all the control variables. These models show consistently that ruling parties tend to obtain fewer votes in elections that follow a leadership succession. According to the fully specified model, a ruling party stands to lose 4.10 percentage points of vote share in a post-succession election in comparison with other elections ($p < 0.05$). It is important to note that the impact of succession depends on previous electoral strength of the ruling party. For parties that claimed over 70% of the vote in the last election, successions have almost no effect on the current vote share. For other ruling parties, by contrast, a succession will on average reduce vote share by 6.24 percentage points.[17] Considering the fact that authoritarian parties' average vote share is 60.98%, this is quite a significant reduction that can bring many parties dangerously close to losing an election.

Table 3. Effect of Succession on Electoral Performance.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share
Succession	−6.3857***	−6.6311***	−4.1019**	
	(–4.12)	(–3.57)	(–2.06)	
Forced succession				−6.5249**
				(–2.51)
Vote share last election			−0.5201***	−0.5145***
			(–6.72)	(–6.65)
Tenure			0.1575	0.2538
			(0.41)	(0.69)
Tenure^2			−0.0143	−0.0173
			(–1.04)	(–1.31)
Main election			2.9762*	3.1635*
			(1.79)	(1.91)
Repression			−1.1886	−1.3519
			(–0.92)	(–1.04)
Fixed schedule			−1.0951	−1.3056
			(–0.47)	(–0.56)
Rent			0.0548	0.0743
			(0.42)	(0.56)
GDP per capita (logged)			0.9817	0.8823
			(0.52)	(0.46)
Growth			0.0860	0.0765
			(1.08)	(0.97)
Country fixed effect	no	yes	yes	yes
Adjusted R^2	0.035	0.045	0.341	0.347
Observations	416	416	310	310

Dependent variable: change in ruling party's vote share compared with the last election. Unit of analysis: election. *t* statistics in parentheses. Robust standard errors are used.
*p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

An authoritarian party's vote share in the previous election proves a powerful determinant of its present electoral strength. As expected, the more successful a party was in the past, the more difficult it would be to maintain the same level of support. Thus, one percentage point increase in the previous vote share will increase the change in vote share in the negative direction by 0.52 percentage points ($p < 0.01$). Meanwhile, there is some evidence that ruling parties fought particularly hard to win "main elections," as their average vote share in these elections exceeded others by about 3 percentage points ($p < 0.1$).

Other confounding variables fail to exhibit statistically significant effect on the dependent variable. In particular, the variables reflecting general economic conditions show little impact on electoral outcomes. This suggests that in authoritarian regimes where the electoral process is subject to systematic state manipulation, political dynamics

that shape the ruling parties' incentive and capacity are more consequential for regime resilience than fluctuations in economic fundamentals.

That authoritarian parties tend to do worse in post-succession elections should come as no surprise, as some existing studies have documented this pattern. These studies, however, failed to consider the possibility that dictators' decision to step down may be endogenous to their perception of the political environment. Suppose that leaders are on average more likely to retire when they sense a decline in the ruling party's overall strength, then any progress made by the opposition cannot be attributed to the succession process. While the regression model has controlled for many factors that could affect a leader's willingness to retire, others may have been omitted. We therefore take another step to address the possibly endogenous nature of succession. To exclude cases where leaders may have made a strategic decision to retire facing adverse conditions, a separate analysis was conducted focusing only on successions that were forced upon a leader by death, severe health problems, or constitutional term limits. Among the 56 successions in the dataset, 15 were triggered by death or illness and another 24 by term limits. A case can be made that these 39 successions come close to exogenous events unrelated to factors that could also influence electoral outcomes.

Model 4 in Table 3 estimates the impact of the 39 "forced successions" on ruling parties' vote share change. As can be seen, with this narrower definition of succession, leadership change still takes its toll on ruling parties' electoral performances. Following a forced succession, the vote share claimed by ruling parties is on average 6.52 percentage points fewer than in elections untroubled by succession ($p < 0.05$). This result gives us confidence that the negative association between succession and electoral setback is not an artifact of incumbent leader's greater inclination to step down under difficult circumstances. Indeed, compared with results from model 3, model 4 tells us that not only do authoritarian parties perform worse *generally* in post-succession elections, but they do *especially* badly in elections after forced successions.

The Effect of Succession Conditioned on Mode of Management

We now move on to test the main research hypotheses regarding the mitigating effect of succession management. Here, the dependent variable remains change in vote share, but the observations are restricted to those 89 post-succession elections. The purpose is to inquire, given that a succession has occurred prior to an election, whether clear designation, the timing of succession, and term limits can moderate the negative impact of succession. Results are reported in Table 4: model 1 is binary analysis showing the effect of designation, model 2 also considers the two alternative explanations and all confounding variables, and model 3 adds country fixed effects.

Empirical results lend support to Hypothesis 1 regarding the moderating effect of designation. According to model 2, other things being equal, arranging the former second-in-command to take over power increases the ruling party's vote share by 6.43 percentage points in post-succession elections ($p < 0.1$). The effect is substantial enough to cancel out any negative impact of succession revealed in Table 3. The effects of alternative explanations regarding strategic timing of succession and term limits, however, are not statistically distinguishable from zero. This confirms our expectation that clear designation is a more important mechanism in solving various problems associated with succession than the other two models.

In terms of control variables, the rate of economic growth proves to be an influential factor: a standard deviation increase in growth rate will lead to a 4.28 percentage point

Table 4. Effect of Succession Conditioned on Mode of Management.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share
Designation	4.4078*	6.4306*	22.8201**	5.7462*	7.4899**
	(1.77)	(1.89)	(2.31)	(1.91)	(2.41)
Prepare		5.0605	−6.4820		
		(1.31)	(–1.59)		
Term limits		8.2827	0.6963		
		(1.62)	(0.05)		
Vote share last election		−0.0994	−0.5921***	−0.0657	−0.2982**
		(–1.23)	(–3.27)	(–0.83)	(–2.57)
Tenure		0.5837	0.6764	0.4538	0.2756
		(1.40)	(0.26)	(0.97)	(0.56)
Tenure^2		−0.0111	0.0860	−0.0106	−0.0025
		(–0.97)	(0.58)	(–0.86)	(–0.18)
Main election		−0.1755	1.2409	−0.4929	1.3776
		(–0.06)	(0.51)	(–0.18)	(0.45)
Repression		2.9576*	−10.9753**	1.5747	3.7566***
		(1.90)	(–2.51)	(1.01)	(2.75)
Fixed schedule		−1.8310	6.6984	−0.3332	−2.5540
		(–0.45)	(1.02)	(–0.07)	(–0.60)
Rent		−0.1526	0.6980**	−0.1267	0.0131
		(–1.39)	(2.24)	(–1.16)	(0.12)
GDP per capita (logged)		0.7174	−14.9606**	1.2045	−0.9948
		(0.50)	(–2.18)	(0.72)	(–0.71)
Growth		0.6762***	0.1934	0.7400***	0.8835***
		(3.97)	(0.32)	(4.46)	(4.51)
Forced succession				1.5814	
				(0.35)	
Country fixed effect	no	no	yes	no	no
Adjusted R^2	0.014	0.104	0.529	0.073	0.190
Observations	89	83	83	83	65

Dependent variable: change in ruling party's vote share compared with the last election. Unit of analysis: election. Model 5 excludes Mexico from the analysis. *t* statistics in parentheses. Robust standard errors are used.
*p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

boost in vote share ($p < 0.01$). Thus, when an authoritarian party is running against the backdrop of a rapidly improving economy, the threat of succession can be greatly neutralized. This echoes an earlier study showing that "stronger economic systems tend to produce a more stable form of succession" (Govea and Holm, 1998: 147). Meanwhile, a one-unit increase in the level of repression is predicted to increase vote share by nearly 3 percentage points. Thus, for post-succession elections, repression remains an important means for ruling parties to survive opposition challenge.

Model 3, which controls for country fixed effects and therefore only uses within-country variation in its estimation, also reports significantly positive effect of designation,

albeit with a much larger magnitude. Contrary to model 2, it reveals a significantly negative correlation between the level of repression and ruling parties' electoral support. One explanation for this inconsistency is that, when focusing on dynamics *within a single EA regime*, authoritarian parties tend to use heavy doses of repression when they perceive the regime to be extremely vulnerable or even on the brink of losing power. Moreover, suppression could occasionally create backlash from citizens who turn out in greater numbers to cast votes against the ruling party. Consistent with our expectation, access to resource rents strengthens EA regimes. Rising income per capita, on the other hand, gradually erodes the electoral dominance of ruling parties. Higher socioeconomic status thus seems to increase citizens' critical capacities and support for democracy, as modernization theory has long argued (Croke et al., 2016).[18]

Robustness Checks and Additional Tests

We perform a number of additional tests to examine the robustness of the main results. Since the timing of succession and term limits did not register significant effects, we remove these two variables in following analysis to avoid collinearity and increase degrees of freedom. First, we control for forced succession to see if the main finding is sensitive to the way the predecessor exits power. As seen in model 4 of Table 4, clear designation contributes to ruling parties' electoral strength even after autocrats were forced out of office by death or term limits. The reduced magnitude of its coefficient, however, implies that clear designation works best when an autocrat can exit office on his own terms rather than being removed by external constraint.

Second, since Mexico's PRI went through 10 leadership successions in the post-war period, a number that is by far the largest among the EA regimes in the sample, readers may be concerned if the key findings will remain robust when this special case is excluded. As we take out the Mexican observations and re-run the analyses (model 5 of Table 4), the significantly positive effect of designation remains unchanged. Indeed, the main results are also robust to Jackknife analyses that exclude the UMNO regime in Malaysia or the Colorado Party regime in Paraguay, both of which having completed the second largest number of successions (4).

Third, we take an alternative approach to test the moderating effects of designation. Instead of focusing only on post-succession elections, this approach utilizes information from all 416 elections held under EA regimes. If our theory is correct, the negative impact of succession on ruling parties' vote share (reported in Table 3) should be primarily driven by successions that did not adopt the designation model. In other words, if we regress the dependent variable on successions that practiced designation, the explanatory variable should either have no statistically significant effect or exhibit smaller coefficient. By contrast, if we use "undesignated succession" as the explanatory variable, its negative effects should be significant and larger than the average effects of all successions. These predictions are corroborated by results shown in Table 5. Models 1 and 2 report no evidence that ruling parties would perform worse in elections following designated successions. On the other hand, models 3 and 4 show that the negative effects of undesignated successions are much larger and statistically more significant than the average effects reported in Table 3. These results indicate that clear designation of a successor is indeed an influential factor that differentiates two types of successions with contrasting implications for EA resilience.

Table 5. Robustness Checks Using the Full EA Election Dataset.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share
Designated succession	−1.0096	2.7985		
	(–0.48)	(1.16)		
Undesignated succession			−9.9863***	−8.5597***
			(–3.81)	(–3.40)
Vote share last election		−0.5240***		−0.5213***
		(–6.88)		(–6.88)
Tenure		0.2968		0.3002
		(0.72)		(0.84)
Tenure^2		−0.0188		−0.0176
		(–1.29)		(–1.37)
Main election		2.6175		3.3680**
		(1.57)		(2.06)
Repression		−1.2903		−1.3895
		(–1.00)		(–1.08)
Fixed schedule		−0.5666		−0.9822
		(–0.24)		(–0.42)
Rent		0.0653		0.0663
		(0.50)		(0.51)
GDP per capita (logged)		0.4787		0.6186
		(0.25)		(0.33)
Growth		0.0854		0.0909
		(1.05)		(1.16)
Country fixed effect	yes	yes	yes	yes
Adjusted R^2	0.014	0.333	0.058	0.358
Observations	416	310	416	310

EA: Electoral authoritarianism
Dependent variable: change in ruling party's vote share compared with the last election. Unit of analysis: election. *t* statistics in parentheses. Robust standard errors are used.
*p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

Fourth, we address the concern that the appointed "second-in-command" might not be the outgoing leaders' intended successor, causing a gap between the measurement and the interested phenomenon. After re-examining the 21 cases wherein the second-in-command took over to become the new ruler, we found three cases that should not be counted as clearly designated succession because there is no evidence that the successor was the personal favorite of the outgoing leader.[19] This coding process inevitably involves subjective judgments but can serve as a useful robustness check. A new binary variable of designated succession was constructed that equals one only for the remaining 18 cases of clear designation. As shown in models 1 and 2 of Table 6, the key findings are not sensitive to using this new measure of designated succession.

Fifth, it is worth knowing whether the electoral impact is reduced when the outgoing leader's chosen successor was able to take over regardless of whether he served as the second-in-command immediately before the succession. According to our theory,

Table 6. Robustness Checks Using Alternative Measurement of Designation.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share
Designation (excluding 3 cases)	4.4521**	8.9532*		
	(2.13)	(2.01)		
Designation (no second-in-command appointment)			0.1058	−5.4192
			(0.03)	(−1.07)
Vote share last election	−0.0592	−0.6601***	−0.0529	−0.5828***
	(−0.79)	(−3.46)	(−0.70)	(−3.19)
Tenure	0.4207	−1.1911	0.3885	−1.8974
	(0.89)	(−0.49)	(0.78)	(−0.75)
Tenure^2	−0.0111	0.1379	−0.0095	0.1730*
	(−0.90)	(1.42)	(−0.69)	(1.72)
Main election	−0.4951	1.7644	−0.6474	0.7492
	(−0.18)	(0.69)	(−0.23)	(0.30)
Repression	1.3913	−11.4841**	2.0383	−10.6314**
	(0.94)	(−2.25)	(1.50)	(−2.11)
Fixed schedule	−1.8353	1.7454	−2.2907	1.9427
	(−0.45)	(0.27)	(−0.56)	(0.30)
Rent	−0.0828	0.6278**	−0.0729	0.6438*
	(−0.77)	(2.04)	(−0.64)	(1.97)
GDP per capita (logged)	1.0051	−13.1859*	1.3142	−10.7748
	(0.71)	(−1.89)	(0.85)	(−1.62)
Growth	0.7298***	0.0610	0.7730***	0.1884
	(4.47)	(0.11)	(4.41)	(0.35)
Country fixed effect	no	yes	no	yes
Adjusted R^2	0.075	0.493	0.053	0.489
Observations	83	83	83	83

Dependent variable: change in ruling party's vote share compared with the last election. Unit of analysis: election. *t* statistics in parentheses. Robust standard errors are used.
*p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

designation alone will not have this effect because, without appointing the protégé as his lieutenant, the ruler does not provide enough clarity about how the succession will unfold to prevent a power struggle. Reading case history generates a total of 37 successions wherein the new leader was handpicked by his predecessor. Models 3 and 4 in Table 6, however, show no evidence that ruling parties can benefit electorally from designation per se. The results are consistent with our argument that, for designation to matter, it has to be made clear through a second-in-command appointment.

Finally, we make an effort to probe whether the electoral impact of succession depends on the degree to which a dictator has consolidated personal control over the ruling party. As suggested in the theoretical discussion, the more a dictator has secured personal rule at the expense of institutional constraint, the more difficult it would be for the successor to inherit control over the state apparatus. Moreover, personalist rulers deliberately weaken institutions within which elite bargaining could occur, making it more difficult for elites to cooperate to maintain the regime after the dictator is gone (Geddes et al.,

Table 7. Vote Losses in Post-Succession Elections.

	Personalist regimes	Party-based regimes
With designation	−4.98 (9)	−3.61 (18)
Without designation	−19 (2)	−8.13 (60)

Numbers are in percentage points. The number of observations in each category is in the parenthesis.

2017: 202). To measure the degree of personalization, we consulted the autocratic regime dataset developed by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (the GWF dataset). Among the 60 EA regimes in our sample, 25 were coded by GWF as "personalist" wherein discretion over policy and personnel are concentrated in the hands of one man (Geddes et al., 2014: 319). A key feature of personalist regimes is that the dictator usually seeks to remain in office for as long as possible, and such regimes can seldom survive the departure of the dictator (Meng, in press). Thus, only six successions in our dataset took place in personalist regimes, affecting 11 elections. This small sub-sample only allows us to provide very tentative answers to the questions at hand.

We start by examining whether the electoral impact of succession differs between personalist and party-based regimes. On average, personalist regimes will lose 7.55 percentage points in vote share after a succession, compared with a 7.10 percentage-points loss for party-based regimes. Although the difference is not statistically significant, it is consistent with the hypothesis that succession creates more political instability for personalist regimes than for other regime types. In addition, we are curious whether the mitigating effect of designation varies according to the existence of personal rule. As shown in Table 7, in party-based regimes, designation reduces post-succession vote losses from 8.13 to 3.61 percentage points. The same statistic for personalist regimes is from 19.10 to 4.98. The larger mitigating effect in the latter suggests that, due to the acute danger of succession in personalist regimes, there is an even greater need for careful management of the process. In any case, these are interesting patterns that deserve more sophisticated theorizing and empirical tests in future inquiries.

Conclusion

Leadership succession is an important event in any regime type; in EA regimes it could turn out to be a watershed moment. For authoritarian ruling parties, succession has the potential of creating a power vacuum and intraparty conflicts that significantly weaken their ability to distribute patronage and manipulate the electoral process. For opposition parties, the departure of an entrenched dictator could provide a focal point for mobilization and forming united electoral blocs against the incumbent. Empirical evidence shows that successions generally erode ruling parties' electoral dominance, even after excluding those cases where incumbents may have decided to retire due to their weakened positions. In some cases such as Mexico's 2000 election and Paraguay's 2008 election, the opposition managed to come to power through a post-succession election. In others, succession chipped away at authoritarian parties' advantages enough to pave way for an alternation of power in the near future. This article thus joins a series of studies that focus on the destabilizing effects of holding elections under authoritarianism (Bunce and Wolchik, 2010; Hadenius and Teorell, 2007; Knutsen et al., 2017).

More importantly, we demonstrate for the first time that the electoral impact of succession depends on how a ruling party chooses to handle the transition process. When the appointed second-in-command was able to take over power, decline in electoral support can be significantly mitigated. We also find that, the more the economy is growing, the better ruling parties will do in post-succession elections. It should be noted that the main findings are based on a relatively small sample. As we have pointed out, successions are relatively rare in authoritarian regimes and there are only 89 post-succession elections during the studied period. Researchers should continue to follow leadership changes in EA regimes and examine more data to test the hypotheses raised in this article. On the other hand, since the limited sample reduces statistical power and biases against any significant finding, the fact that we did detect an effect increases our confidence that clear designation does play an important role in reassuring party elites and preserving regime continuity.

Future studies can move up the causal chain and inquire why leadership succession takes place at all in EA regimes. Despite the voluminous literature on authoritarianism, it is still poorly understood why some regimes have institutionalized the replacement of top leaders while others have not carried out a single succession. Another promising direction of research is to investigate the conditions under which incumbent leaders will designate a clear successor and groom him for the top post. It would be interesting to know, for example, when the chief executive's hands are tied and the power of selecting the next leader moves to the ruling party's collective decision-making body such as a party primary. Thus, process-tracing of relevant cases can supplement cross-national statistical analysis to further ascertain whether designation does have causal effect on subsequent electoral outcomes or there exists political dynamics that determines both the mode of succession and the ruling parties' electoral strength.

The findings of this article have important implications for pro-democracy advocacy groups as well as academic literature. While it is certainly important for democracy advocates to promote term limits in presidential systems, the international community and domestic activists should also push for more competitive means of leadership selection within the authoritarian party. When the power of choosing successors is transferred from one individual to a collective body such as the Central Executive Committee, the Party Congress, or even a broader electorate outside of the ruling party, designating a successor to reduce the intensity of succession struggle becomes much more difficult, if not impossible. A candidate selected in a competitive manner, unlike a designated successor, will also be less likely to have enjoyed a period of apprenticeship to become familiar with various tasks associated with national leadership. This is a scenario where opposition parties are most likely to gain electoral grounds.

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ORCID iD

Qingjie Zeng https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7739-6793

Notes

1. A number of studies examined the effects of leadership succession on authoritarian resilience in general. See Govea and Holm, 1998; Herz, 1952; Hughes and May, 1988; Maltz, 2007; Treisman 2014, and Geddes et al., 2017: 201–206.
2. There are also studies that used the nature of succession as the independent variable to explain other important outcomes, but they did not focus on succession's electoral impact. For example, Frantz and Stein (2017) showed that institutionalized succession rules protect dictators from coup attempts. Cox and Weingast (2018) showed that executive constraint could moderate the economic impact of leadership turnover.
3. "Hosni Mubarak Biography." http://www.notablebiographies.com/Mo-Ni/Mubarak-Hosni.html (accessed 17 July 2018).
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5. "Gabon's Senate Leader Set to Assume Interim Power." *Mail & Guardian*. 9 June, 2009. Available at https://mg.co.za/article/2009-06-09-gabons-senate-leader-set-to-assume-interim-power# (accessed 9 April 2019).
6. For EA regimes, scheduling succession carefully to soften its impact is easier to accomplish in parliamentary systems where the chief executive does not serve a fixed term and new leaders typically start to exercise power before the next election. In presidential systems, the chief executive usually serves a fixed term that ends at the same time of the next election. For the successor to enjoy a preparatory period, either the party must put off elections or the outgoing leader must leave office before his tenure runs out. The latter scenario will occur when the predecessor willingly chooses to retire early or is forced to do so due to death or health problems.
7. One caveat is needed here: for elites who depend solely on the incumbent for their positions and benefits, they may welcome or even encourage the dictator to abolish the term limits.
8. The Polity IV Project also created a variable to describe different modes "by which chief executives are selected" (Marshall et al., 2014: 20, also see Frantz and Stein, 2017: 944). In that classification, a regime is considered *designational* if chief executives are chosen from within the political elite without formal competition or *regulated* if chief executives are determined through hereditary succession or fully competitive elections. It is worth clarifying how our conceptualization of succession modes differs from that of the Polity IV. First, Polity IV focuses on the procedures for transferring executive power, while we are concerned with succession within the ruling party. Thus, a ruling party defeat in general elections will be counted as a succession of chief executive, but not a succession within the ruling party. Second, leaders of ruling parties are almost always chosen from within the political elite without "fully competitive elections." Therefore, successions within a party will all be considered "designational" by the Polity IV criteria. This article, as we explained, uses "designation" in a very different sense. Third, prepared and term-limited successions are specific modes of managing the process. They were not considered by Polity IV, which was more concerned with the existence of institutionalized procedures for succession.
9. The authors of the dataset created a democracy scale for each country-year by taking the mean value of its Freedom House and Polity IV scores. They then combined information from five well-known regime classification datasets to estimate the empirical cutoff point between authoritarian and democratic regimes. In their estimation, regimes with a rescaled score below 7 were classified as authoritarian.
10. We also excluded two EA spells—Lesotho 1994–2001 and Ukraine 2000–2004—because their democracy scores were only marginally below the 7-point cutoff. Whether these two regime spells should be considered authoritarian is therefore debatable. We made a decision to include cases for which there is no such dispute. In Appendix 2, we re-run the main analysis with these two cases included and the key findings still stand.
11. 'Kikwete Elected CCM's Candidate.' *Daily Nation*. May 5, 2005. https://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/1190-58022-dmqfaaz/index.html (accessed 27 October 2018).
12. Note that a succession is thought to have occurred even if the ruling party's new leader loses an election, ending the EA regime spell.
13. The offices coded as "second-in-command" include vice president in presidential systems, deputy prime minister in parliamentary systems, and prime minster in semi-presidential systems.
14. Inevitably, an arbitrary cutoff is needed to operationalize the strategic timing of succession. We assume that, after taking over power, the successor would need at least 1 year to consolidate his position.
15. Freedom House: "Country and Territory Ratings and Statuses, 1973-2018." Retrieved from: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Country%20and%20Territory%20Ratings%20and%20Statuses%20FIW1973-2018.xlsx (Last accessed 23 June 2018).

16. As an example, Morgenbesser (2017: 213–216) showed how the People's Action Party in Singapore, in an attempt to legitimize its authoritarian rule, timed general elections to obtain popular mandate for major policy changes or collect rewards for positive performances.
17. The results are obtained by adding an interaction term between succession and vote share of last election to model 3 in Table 3.
18. It should be noted that, in our dataset of post-succession elections, there are few repeated observations for each country (some countries only experienced one succession during the studied period). Thus, results from a regression that only uses within-unit variation to identify the coefficients should be treated with caution, mainly as a robustness check.
19. These are Malaysia's succession in 1970, Zambia's succession in 2008, and Nigeria's succession in 2010. See Appendix 1 for details.

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Author Biography

Qingjie Zeng is an associate professor at the Department of Political Science, School of International Relations and Public Affairs, Fudan University. He earned his doctoral degree in political science from the University of Michigan in 2015.

Appendix 1

Summary of Leadership Successions in EA regimes

Country	Year	Predecessor	Successor	Designated succession?
Djibouti	1999	Hassan Aptidon	Ismail Guelleh	NO
Aptidon was compelled to retire by ill-heath and old age in 1999. His nephew Guelleh won the nomination for president of the ruling party.				
Gabon	2009	Omar Bongo	Ali Bongo Ondimba	NO
Omar died in office in 2009. His son Ondimba was nominated by the ruling party congress to succeed him.				
Mozambique	2004	Joaquim Chissano	Armando Guebuza	NO
Chissano decided to step down in 2004. Guebuza was chosen as the ruling party's candidate for the 2004 presidential election.				
Mozambique	2014	Armando Guebuza	Filipe Nyusi	NO
Guebuza stepped down due to term limits. Nyusi was chosen as the ruling party's candidate for the 2014 presidential election.				
Nigeria	2007	Olusegun Obasanjo	Umaru Yar'Adua	NO
Obasanjo's alleged agenda to get a third term by revising the constitution was defeated in the senate. Yar'Adua received Obasanjo's support and won the party primary to become the ruling party's presidential nominee.				
Nigeria	2010	Umaru Yar'Adua	Goodluck Jonathan	YES
Yar'Adua died in office in May 2010 and Jonathan became the interim president. He decided to run for president in 2011.				
Senegal	1981	Leopold Senghor	Abdou Diouf	YES
Senghor resigned the presidency in January 1981, giving the post to his protégé Diouf, who was appointed by Senghor as the prime minister in 1970.				
Tanzania	1995	Ali Mwinyi	Benjamin Mkapa	NO
Mwinyi has met the constitutional two-term limit. Mkapa was elected by the ruling CCM's national congress as the presidential nominee.				
Tanzania	2005	Benjamin Mkapa	Jakaya Kikwete	NO
Mpaka has met the constitutional two-term limit. Kikwete emerged victorious among 11 members who had sought the ruling party's nomination for presidency.				
Tanzania	2015	Jakaya Kikwete	John Magufuli	NO
In July 2015, Magufuli was nominated as CCM's presidential candidate for the 2015 election, winning the majority votes against his opponents.				
Zambia	2001	Frederick Chiluba	Levy Mwanawasa	NO
Chiluba was forced to step down due to term limits. The national executive committee of the ruling party elected Mwanawasa as its presidential candidate.				
Zambia	2008	Levy Mwanawasa	Rupiah Banda	YES
Mwanawasa died in office in August 2008, and the vice president Banda succeeded him as acting president. The ruling party's national executive committee used a secret ballot to elect Banda as the party's nominee for president. The by-election took place 3 months later.				
Seychellois	2004	France-Albert Rene	James Michel	YES
In 2004, Rene stepped down in favor of vice president Michel, who had served in that post for 8 years and had been Rene's longest serving cabinet minister.				
Azerbaijan	2003	Heydar Aliyev	Ilham Aliyev	YES
Heydar Aliyev's health deteriorated in 2003, and the ruling party's congress unanimously voted for Ilham Aliyev as party chair and nominated him for the 2003 presidential elections. Two months before the election, Ilham was appointed as the prime minister.				

Appendix 1. (Continued)

Country	Year	Predecessor	Successor	Designated succession?
Malaysia	1970	Tunku Rahman	Abdul Razak	YES
Rahman was forced to resign as prime minister due to severe intra-party pressure after the poor electoral results in 1969. The leader of another faction, Razak, was propelled to the premiership.				
Malaysia	1976	Abdul Razak	Hussein Onn	YES
Razak died in office in 1976 and was succeeded by the deputy prime minister Hussein Onn.				
Malaysia	1981	Hussein Onn	Mahathir Mohamad	YES
Hussein Onn retired in July 1981 due to health reasons, succeeded by his deputy Mahathir.				
Malaysia	2003	Mahathir Mohamad	Abdullah Badawi	YES
Mahathir announced in June 2002 that he will retire in 2003, giving him time to arrange a gradual transition to Badawi, who was elected by the ruling party's general assembly as the leader in 2003.				
Malaysia	2009	Abdullah Badawi	Najib Razak	YES
Badawi retired in 2009 and was succeeded by the deputy prime minister Najib Razak.				
Singapore	1990	Lee Kuan Yew	Goh Chok Tong	YES
Lee Kuan Yew stepped down in November 1990 and was succeeded by deputy prime minster Goh.				
Singapore	2004	Goh Chok Tong	Lee Hsien Loong	YES
Goh stepped down in 2004 and was succeeded by the deputy prime minister Lee Hsien Loong.				
Mexico				NO
Mexico's ruling party PRI experienced 10 presidential successions between 1946 and 2000, which take place once every 6 years. The successions follows simple, basic rules: the outgoing president would select the party's next presidential candidate from a few key cabinet ministers (Castaneda 2000). In 1999, the PRI broke with this old tradition and held a national primary to pick the next presidential candidate.				
Paraguay	1993	Andres Rodriquez	Juan Carlos Wasmosy	NO
In 1992 a constitution was passed limiting presidents to a single 5-year term. In 1993, Rodriguez endorsed Wasmosy as his successor and nominee for president. Wasmosy was formally nominated during a party convention.				
Paraguay	1998	Juan Carlos Wasmosy	Raul Cubas Grau	NO
Lino Oviedo was formally nominated by the ruling party as the official candidate. However, Oviedo was later sentenced to 10 years in prison due to his earlier rebellion against the incumbent president Wasmosy, and his running mate Cubas ran in his stead and won the election.				
Paraguay	2003	Gonzalez Macchi	Nicanor Duarte	NO
After the resignation of Cubas in 1999, Macchi succeeded him from the position of senate president. Duarte, who served as the president of the Colorado party since 2001, was nominated by the party in 2002, and won the 2003 election.				
Paraguay	2008	Nicanor Duarte	Blanca Lvelar	NO
Blanca won a bitterly contested Colorado party's primary to become the party's nominee for president. She lost the 2008 presidential election, despite support from the outgoing president Duarte.				
Guyana	1993	Forbes Burnham	Hugh Hoyte	YES
President Burnham died suddenly in 1985. He was succeeded by vice president and his close associate Hoyte.				

(Continued)

Appendix 1. (Continued)

Country	Year	Predecessor	Successor	Designated succession?
Ethiopia	2012	Meles Zenawi	Hailemariam Desalegn	YES
Zenawi died in 2012 after contracting an infection in Belgium. Hailemariam succeeded him as Prime Minister, initially in an acting capacity. He was then elected as the leader of the ruling party.				
Cote d'Ivoire	1993	Félix Houphouët-Boigny	Henri Bédié	NO
Houphouët-Boigny died in office 1993, and the president of the national assembly Bédié became acting President in accordance with the constitution.				
Egypt	1981	Anwar Sadat	Hosni Mubarak	YES
Sadat was assassinated on Oct 6, 1981. Then Sufi Abu Taleb assumed the duties of Acting head of state, as which he served for 8 days until the accession of then vice president Mubarak on Oct 14.				
Ghana	2000	Jerry Rawlings	John Atta Mills	YES
Barred by the constitution from standing in any election, Rawlings endorsed his vice president Mills as presidential candidate in 2000.				
Kenya	2003	Daniel Moi	Uhuru Kenyatta	NO
Moi was constitutionally barred from running in the 2002 presidential elections. Moi chose Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Kenya's first President, as his successor.				
Malawi	2004	Bakili Muluzi	Bingu Mutharika	NO
After serving two terms, Muluzi nominated Mutharika as his successor, and Mutharika went on to win the 2004 presidential election.				
Malawi	2014	Bingu Mutharika	Peter Mutharika	NO
President Mutharika died suddenly in April 2012. Before his death, the ruling party's national governing council endorsed Peter Mutharika, the president's brother, as presidential candidate for the 2014 elections. Peter Mutharika was elected as the president in the 2014 election.				
South Africa	1978	B. J. Vorster	P. W. Botha	NO
When Vorster resigned following allegations of his involvement in the Muldergate Scandal in 1978, Botha was elected as his successor by the ruling party caucus.				
South Africa	1989	P. W. Botha	F. W. de Clerk	NO
Botha resigned as leader of the ruling party after an apparent stroke, and de Klerk defeated Botha's preferred successor, finance minister Barend du Plessis, in the race to succeed him. In February 1989, he was elected leader of the ruling party.				
Sri Lanka	1989	Junius Jayewardene	Ranasinghe Premadasa	YES
Jayewardene led the UNP to a crushing victory in 1977 and served as prime minister for half a year before becoming the country's first executive president under an amended constitution. Jayewardene retired from politics in 1989, and his successor Premadasa, who was the prime minister, succeeded him in January 1989.				
Sri Lanka	1993	Ranasinghe Premadasa	Dingiri Wijetunga	YES
Premadasa was assassinated in Colombo in a suicide bombing in May 1993. Wijetunga was elected unanimously by the parliament to complete the remainder of Premadasa's term and was sworn in as the fourth executive President in May 1993. Before that Wijetunga was the Prime Minister, appointed by Premadasa in 1989.				
Sri Lanka	1994	Dingiri Wijetunga	Srima Dissanayake	NO

Appendix 1. (Continued)

Country	Year	Predecessor	Successor	Designated succession?
President Wijetunga chose not to run in the 1994 election. Therefore, the UNP selected Gamini Dissanayake as their candidate. However, he was killed in a suicide bombing in October 1994, sixteen days before the election. The UNP, hoping to capitalize on the sympathy vote, chose his wife Srima Dissanayake. Dissanayake was heavily defeated in the 1994 elections.				
Taiwan	2000	Lee Teng-hui	Lien Chan	YES
Lee, observing constitutional term limits, stepped down from the presidency in 2000. Lee had promoted the uncharismatic Lien as the ruling party candidate.				
Bosnia-Herzegovina	2001	Alija Izetbegović	Sulejman Tihić	NO
Izetbegović stepped down as president in October 2000 at the age of 74, citing his bad health. In October 2001, Tihić was chosen to succeed Izetbegović as head of the ruling party. He was elected to the presidency in October 2002.				
Croatia	2000	Franjo Tudjman	Mate Granić	NO
President Tudjman health had deteriorated by the late 1990s. While being hospitalized opposition parties accused the ruling HDZ of hiding the fact that Tudjman was already dead. Tudjman's death was officially declared in December 1999. Granić, the foreign minister and a close associate of Tudjman, won the ruling party's leadership election to become Tudjman's successor.				
Russia	2008	Vladimir Putin	Dmitry Medvedev	NO
In December 2007, president Putin announced that Medvedev was his preferred successor. The ruling United Russia held its party congress in December 2007 to rubber stamp Putin's selection of Medvedev as the party's candidate in the 2008 presidential election.				
Russia	2012	Dmitry Medvedev	Vladimir Putin	YES
In September 2011, after presidential terms were extended from 4 to 6 years, prime minister Putin announced he would seek a third term as president. At the United Russia congress in September 2011, president Medvedev proposed that Putin stand for the presidency in 2012, an offer which Putin accepted.				
Guatemala	1990	Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo	Alfonso Cabrera Hidalgo	NO
Secretary general of the party Guatemalan Christian democracy (DCG). In the internal elections of the ruling party to select the candidate for the presidential elections of 1990, the secretary general of DCG Hidalgo got the nomination with 79.3% of the vote.				
El Salvador	1989	José Napoleón Duarte	Fidel Chavez Mena	NO
In June 1988, Duarte was rushed to a military hospital in Washington, D.C., where he was diagnosed with advanced cancer. At the ruling party's congress, Mena was proclaimed unanimously by 180 national delegates as Duarte's successor. Mena was however beaten in the 1989 presidential election.				
Venezuela	2013	Hugo Chávez	Nicolás Maduro Moros	YES
Prior to his appointment to the vice presidency, Maduro had already been chosen by Chávez in 2011 to succeed him in the presidency if Chávez were to die from cancer. Chávez said that should his condition worsen and a new presidential election be called to replace him, Venezuelans should vote for Maduro to succeed him. After Chávez's death in March 2013, Maduro assumed the responsibilities of the president. Maduro won the special election in April 2013 to become the new president.				

Lansford (2014); The New York Times; The Guardian.

Appendix 2

Analysis with Lesotho (1994–2001) and Ukraine (2000–2004)

As we explained in footnote 10, two EA spells from the HTW dataset, Lesotho 1994–2001 and Ukraine 2000–2004, were excluded because their democracy scores were only marginally below the 7-point cutoff. Between the two cases, only Lesotho experienced a leadership succession in 1998, when Prime Minister Ntsu Mokhehle from the Lesotho Congress for Democracy decided to retire and was replaced by Deputy Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili from the same party. This succession fits our definition of clear designation. The ruling party went on to win the 1998 general election under the leadership of Mosisili (Banks et al., 2009: 773). We repeat the main statistical analysis by including the Lesotho case and the results are shown in Table A2. The key findings are similar to those reported in Table 4 in the main text.

Table A2. Analysis with Lesotho (1994–2001) included.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share
Designation	4.0532	6.1764*	22.8201**	5.4558*	7.1569**
	(1.64)	(1.79)	(2.31)	(1.80)	(2.30)
Prepare		5.3512	−6.4820		
		(1.43)	(–1.59)		
Term limits		8.4637*	0.6963		
		(1.70)	(0.05)		
Vote share last election		−0.1023	−0.5921***	−0.0714	−0.3033**
		(–1.29)	(–3.27)	(–0.92)	(–2.63)
Tenure		0.5991	0.6764	0.4736	0.2870
		(1.43)	(0.26)	(1.01)	(0.58)
Tenure^2		−0.0113	0.0860	−0.0108	−0.0026
		(–0.98)	(0.58)	(–0.86)	(–0.19)
Main election		−0.2524	1.2409	−0.6561	1.1906
		(–0.09)	(0.51)	(–0.24)	(0.39)
Repression		2.9903*	−10.9753**	1.6423	3.8017***
		(1.93)	(–2.51)	(1.06)	(2.80)
Fixed schedule		−1.9421	6.6984	−0.5570	−2.7622
		(–0.48)	(1.02)	(–0.13)	(–0.66)
Rent		−0.1490	0.6980**	−0.1246	0.0190
		(–1.35)	(2.24)	(–1.13)	(0.17)
GDP per capita (logged)		0.7718	−14.9606**	1.3742	−0.8782
		(0.55)	(–2.18)	(0.87)	(–0.64)
Growth		0.6763***	0.1934	0.7519***	0.8922***
		(3.95)	(0.32)	(4.56)	(4.52)
Forced succession				1.9026	
				(0.44)	
Country fixed effect	no	no	yes	no	no

Table A2. (Continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share	Change in vote share
Adjusted R^2	0.010	0.108	0.529	0.073	0.192
Observations	90	84	84	84	66

Dependent variable: change in ruling party's vote share compared with the last election. Unit of analysis: election. *t* statistics in parentheses. Robust standard errors are used. Model 5 excludes Mexico from the analysis.
*p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.