He's Finished!

Why some elections threaten authoritarian rulers

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Abstract: Most authoritarian regimes now hold multiparty elections. These elections, though generally not free and fair, allow authoritarian leaders to manage inter-elite competition and legitimize their rule through a demonstration of popular support. However, on occasion, opposition parties win those elections or generate enough turnout to make it obvious that official results were falsified. A better understanding of the dynamics of unfair elections has important implications for democracy movements and policymakers who aim to understand authoritarian governments. Using data from national elections between 1946 and 2013, I identify signals of regime vulnerability that predict an opposition breakthrough. I find that the transfer of power from an incumbent to a chosen successor and poor polling results for the government predict opposition mobilization. A government's access to external aid also has a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of an opposition victory.

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I. Introduction: Warped Elections

"You must know there are two ways of contesting, the one by the law, the other by force; the first method is proper to men, the second to beasts; but because the first is frequently not sufficient, it is necessary to have recourse to the second."

-Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince

In consolidated democracies, citizens entrust elections with the incontrovertible authority to select their government. Adam Przeworski calls these democracies 'self-enforcing' (Prezeworski 2009). Though no third-party authority forces losing parties to accept their defeat and cede power, widely accepted and understood election rules guarantee that no government can ignore election results without confronting a catastrophic rebellion and likely overthrow (Fearon 2011). Instead, losing parties swallow their disappointment, congratulate their rivals and hope they have better luck the next time around.

Starting during the last stages of the Cold War, the number of states holding elections has dramatically increased (Hyde 2020). The 'Third Wave' of democratization explains part of this trend (Haggard and Kaufman 2016). Democracy advocates and ordinary citizen protesters overthrew decades old regimes all around the world, from Berlin to Santiago to Seoul. Despite some region-specific arguments to the contrary, by the end of the 20th century, democracy was accepted as the 'default' legitimate form of government (Sen 1999). Meanwhile, international organizations like the EU and the OAS encouraged democratization (Pevehouse 2005), and NGOs promoted democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law.

However, in recent years, an increasing share of those elections are unfree and unfair or tilted in favor of the incumbent leader (Hyde 2020). Regimes that hold elections, but cheat,

manipulate or steal them have been labeled ‘Electoral Authoritarian’ (Schedler 2009), ‘Competitive Authoritarian’ (Levitsky and Way 2002) or Hybrid (Diamond 2002) regimes. Instead of embracing unrepentant dictatorship, electoral authoritarians hold elections while using an array of strategies to manipulate them (Schedler 2002). Regimes vary in their tactics: some only allow elections for subordinate offices, while continuing to vest power in an unelected office, as in Jordan’s parliamentary elections. Others, like Iran, allow only regime friendly candidates onto the ballot. Some, like Russia’s current regime, murder political opponents outright. In more competitive systems, the regime might rely on media control, ballot stuffing or when threatened, pre-election violence (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2013). Electoral authoritarian leaders continue to innovate and develop new strategies for subverting the democratic process (Corrales 2020).

Electoral authoritarian regimes are not unique to the post Cold War world. The PRI’s dictatorship in Mexico, for instance, endured for most of the 20th century. And just as these regimes vary in their tactics, they also vary in their origin. Some authoritarian regimes, threatened by the rising tide of global democracy and under international pressure to liberalize, chose to appease critics by holding multiparty elections while remaining authoritarian in substance (Levitsky and Way 2002). Other authoritarian leaders have made use of elections to stabilize their rule. Some use elections as an arena for managed competition between elites (Lust-Okar 2006). Candidates win by providing spoils to their supporters, encouraging them to align themselves closely with the regime. Ambitious elites can compete for prestige and patronage while only enhancing the King’s reach. In other cases, elections without democracy take place in former democracies where governments incrementally consolidate power and make elections less competitive while maintaining the appearance of institutional continuity (Waldner and Lust 2018).

In Hungary, Orban and his Fidesz party slowly consolidated control over the press, courts, and formerly non-partisan or technocratic government institutions. They then rewrote electoral boundaries, changed election rules to guarantee a parliamentary supermajority, shuttered civil society organizations and cut off funding to opposition parties.

Despite the heterogeneity of these regimes, they all share in the willingness to wield the powers of government to dramatically manipulate the electoral process (under the guise of law or unapologetically illegally), in their favor. Candidates in authoritarian elections compete not just for votes, as their democratic counterparts do, but also compete over the degree of manipulation in the electoral process (Schedler 2009). Unlike self-enforcing democracies, where the rules of the electoral process are well-understood and agreed upon, the electoral process in authoritarian elections is contested and in flux. Therefore, we ought to understand authoritarian elections as phenomena with their own dynamics that differ from those of democratic elections (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009).

Electoral authoritarian regimes possess resources far beyond those that are available to the opposition. Opposition parties tend to lack government experience, unity and cohesion and voters tend to have previously either supported the government or stayed at home (Bunce and Wolchik 2009). However, with surprising regularity, oppositions shock the world with dramatic victories. Evidently, oppositions can apply strategies which make up for their tremendous disadvantages.

In fact, each key actor in authoritarian elections has a set of strategies and constraints, dictated by their organizational capacity, level of popular support, resources and inventiveness. Authoritarian leaders must tow a fine line between allowing completely free elections, which could result in their removal and outrageous, blatant election-stealing, which could incite mass

protest (Tucker 2007). Governments can also strategically co-opt opposition parties by offering them a place in their government (Gandhi and Buckles 2016).

Opposition parties must choose whether to boycott elections, run on their own or enter a united front against the regime. Opposition parties can choose to accept fraudulent elections or challenge them, take to the streets, and confront government forces.

However, as in other autocracies, these actors must make decisions on the basis of imperfect information. Neither opponents of the regime or the regime itself can accurately estimate its true popularity. Much of the population may engage in preference falsification, where they outwardly voice support for the regime out of fear of punishment, while privately opposing it. Under the right conditions, a small change in outward support for the regime, like a protest or an emotionally searing display of collective frustration (Farim 2011) can snowball out of control (Kuran 1997).

Meanwhile, authoritarian rulers must also maintain the support of their key elite backers or risk overthrow (Svolik 2012). Moreover, the contest for power takes place under 'dismal' conditions, where dismissal from office is typically a terminal condition. On the other hand, Authoritarian rulers can weaken their elite supporters and inure themselves from the threat of a coup. However, a dictator who weakens the elite risks overthrow by mass rebellion. At the same time, divisions between elites or the loss of support from a key outside power can also open the door to democracy (Haggard 2016).

In that environment, signals that the regime is unpopular or that it has lost the support of a key backer take on considerable importance to the decision-making of those key actors. Signals of the regime's vulnerability should increase the likelihood of an opposition election victory, as it would incentivize opposition parties to form a united front and avoid boycotting the election.

In particular, a unified opposition increases the risks of using repression or cheating in the election for regime agents. If the opposition wins, they could face criminal charges. It also elevates the opposition to a credible alternative to the government in the eyes of the public. The opposition can speak to the dreams of those who had previously lost hope (Howard and Roessler 2006).

In this thesis, I hypothesize that signals of an incumbent leader or party's vulnerability predict a lower likelihood of boycott, and higher chances of an opposition victory or post-election protests against fraud.

Specifically I will consider a few signals of incumbent vulnerability:

- The incumbent does not run for reelection, tapping a chosen candidate instead
- Short incumbent tenure
- A lack of outside aid to the regime
- Reliable polling that shows the regime performing poorly

To analyze my hypothesis quantitatively, I draw from the NELDA (National Elections across Democracies and Autocracies) (Hyde and Marinov 2012a) data to identify incumbency, polling performance, to identify election boycotts, to determine whether the incumbent leader or party lost the election and to identify post-election protests. I use the ARCHIGOS (Goemans, Gleditsch and Chiozza 2009) dataset to obtain personal information about incumbent leaders. I use data from Casey (2020) to identify regimes that are client states.

This paper contributes to the literature on elections in undemocratic settings by demonstrating that actors competing in undemocratic elections have incentives, strategies and logics that are different from those of parties in democratic elections. I establish a logic for why oppositions choose to boycott, or seriously contest unfair elections. And I offer a bit of insight into

how oppositions manage to win those unfair elections. I demonstrate that neither broad structural factors, nor circumstances unique to every particular undemocratic election entirely explain outcomes but that there is also a set of strategies and choices that are common to many competitive authoritarian elections and help explain seemingly surprising opposition victories.

In chapter II, I review the relevant literature about undemocratic elections and collective action.

In chapter III, I outline my hypotheses, present my key variables in detail, explain my case selection and explain my regression model.

In chapter IV, I present my quantitative results and consider the evidence for my hypothesis.

In chapter V, I evaluate the evidence for my hypotheses. I consider the surprising implications of my empirical findings and informed by my results, I suggest an extensive form game of authoritarian elections. I identify the equilibrium strategies from that game and tie them to my results.

In chapter VI, I summarize my study and propose future research.

II. Structure, Strategy and Collective Action in Authoritarian Elections

In examining the electoral dynamics of authoritarian regimes, as well as the prospects for opposition victory, I depend upon layers of groundbreaking work done by scholars of electoral authoritarian regimes.

One segment of the literature investigates the structural conditions that explain the long-term trajectory of those regimes. Those scholars look beyond the waxing and waning of the election cycle and draw on geographic, economic and institutional structures to explain the political evolution of electoral authoritarian and hybrid regimes. At their best, these structural approaches are supported by strong empirical evidence that, non-withstanding some nonconforming cases, explain regime-trajectory across region and time (Lipset 1959; Geddes 1999; Levitsky and Way 2013). However, most structural theories focus on long-term democratization. They offer comparatively less insight into the workings of electoral authoritarian regimes as they are. Structural theories don't attempt to explain, other than in very broad strokes, the decisions made by regime insiders, opposition parties and voters.

Meanwhile, another body of work assigns explanatory weight to the strategies of the regime and opposition; an inverse, but not incompatible, approach (Bunce and Wolchik 2009; Treisman 2020; Corrales 2020; Pappas 2019). These theories are strongly rooted in the experiences of actors on the ground and a sophisticated understanding of the electoral histories of the countries examined. But, in assigning importance to the strategies of intrepid activists and

devious dictators, these scholars sacrifice external validity and the wider applicability of their insights for precision.

Finally, a third set of dictatorship theorists emphasize the fundamental differences between dictatorships and democracies to explain revolutions in authoritarian regimes. Those theorists highlight the importance of preference falsification (Kuran 1997), the phenomenon where people outwardly support the regime, while privately opposing it. Opponents of the regime must overcome a collective action problem to mobilize simultaneously and reach the tipping point where their sheer mass topples the regime (Tucker 2007). Elections in authoritarian regimes can help the opposition overcome this coordination problem (Hyde and Marinov 2014). The regime, on the other hand, must display enough strength to disincentivize public opposition. (Schedler and Hoffmann 2015) I follow this approach most closely. Collective action problems and preference falsification account for the unique dynamics of authoritarian elections, while providing a foundation for more general, widely applicable hypotheses than the strategic approach.

Structural approaches to the study of authoritarian transitions date back to the origin of democratization theory. Lipset (1959), Boix (2001) and Stokes (2003) and others have argued that economic growth and affluence make a transition to democracy more likely. They suggest a hodgepodge of mechanisms to explain how economic growth induces democratization, including urbanization, industrialization, and improved education, all of which they argue to be favorable for democracy. Przeworski finds instead that economic development made reversion from democracy less likely but has no effect on transitions to democracy (Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Acemoglu et al. (2009) also challenged modernization theory with the contention that affluence and democracy emerged concomitantly from ‘inclusive’ institutions that emerged in post-enlightenment Europe. But irrespective of whether economic growth makes transitions to democracy more likely

or merely makes democracy more stable, there is a relationship between modernization and democracy (Geddes 1999). In shorter time-horizons on the other hand, economic crises and poor economic performance portend the breakdown or electoral defeat of authoritarian regimes (Geddes 1999; Haggard and Kaufman 1995; Przeworski 2003; Treisman 2020). Other structural theories, like the link between democratic transition and distributive conflict over resources have mixed empirical backing (Haggard and Kaufman 2015).

Dialing in on hybrid regimes more specifically, Levitsky and Way (2013) argue that economic, social, diplomatic, technocratic and institutional linkages predicted whether competitive authoritarian regimes hardened into stable, closed dictatorships or grew into democracies. Linkages to democracies increased the costs of abuses of power for the autocrat, by threatening to stir the ire of international public opinion. Those linkages, they argue, also strengthen the organizational capabilities of the opposition and motivate those inside the country who support democracy. These structural explanations for the evolution of hybrid regimes have the benefit of being widely studied and tested. I expect that development and linkages to democracies shape the outcomes of authoritarian elections. But, at the level of an individual election, their guidance is muddled. Although an opposition victory doesn't guarantee a successful transition to democracy, opposition election victories often install liberal governments committed to establishing democracy. In so far as the opposition in competitive authoritarian regimes is often the champion of democratization, economic development should strengthen their hand. Conversely though, short-term economic malaise or severe economic crisis can also weaken the government and strengthen the opposition. And some authoritarian regimes stake their legitimacy on the ability to deliver economic growth (Dickson 2018). Growth may strengthen their popular support. International linkages, as outlined by Levitsky and Way, may strengthen the capabilities of the

opposition. But they're certainly not the only source of opposition strength. And while linkages may raise the cost of repression for authoritarian leaders, with their rule (and sometimes their head) directly on the line in an election, they may still be quite willing to engage in risky tactics like violent repression. In fact, Hafner-Burton et al. (2013) find that authoritarian rulers resort to election violence more often when they have reason to view defeat as possible.

Other structural theorists of elections in authoritarian regimes suggest that outcomes are shaped by important differences between regimes (Diamond 2002). They divide regimes into a few broad categories such as competitive authoritarian regimes and hegemonic authoritarian regimes or military, single-party and personalistic dictatorships (Geddes 1999). In their view, the nature of each subtype may explain the prospects for opposition success. Donno (2013) suggests that conditional on an election occurring in a competitive authoritarian regime (as opposed to hegemonic regimes) opposition unity and international leverage increase the likelihood of an opposition breakthrough. Brownlee (2009) finds that autocrats in competitive authoritarian regimes are not more likely to lose power than those in hegemonic regimes but are more likely to be followed by a more democratic system. Geddes (1999), who developed a widely-used classification of authoritarian regimes as 'Personalistic', Single-Party' and 'Military', suggests that military regimes are likely to splinter from the inside, while single-party and personalistic regimes are only likely to be overthrown by popular opposition. Single-party regimes can gradually expand the competitiveness of their elections when threatened, or co-opt opposition parties, while personalist regimes tend to cling desperately to power until the bitter end. Those subdivisions add to a significant literature on types of authoritarian regimes. Other theorists discuss still more forms of authoritarian rule such as 'Sultanistic, 'patrimonial' or 'monarchic' regimes (Svolik 2012). For instance, Sultanistic regimes may be more resilient in the face of

mass-mobilization because family members occupy top posts in the security apparatus. This approach accounts for the diversity and variety of authoritarian regimes. However, distinctions between subtypes are sometimes drawn arbitrarily. Moreover, some multiparty authoritarian regimes do not fit neatly into any of the major subtypes. Using opposition vote-share to categorize regimes as either hegemonic or competitive ignores the underlying reason for the government's electoral dominance. Both organic popularity and electoral manipulation can run up the score for an authoritarian and reported vote-share alone can't distinguish between them (Hyde and Marinov 2012).

Another literature considers in detail the tactics used by opposition parties and their autocratic adversaries. For instance, Bunce and Wolchik (2009) consider eleven competitive authoritarian elections in post-communist Europe, Corrales (2020) examines the Maduro regime in Venezuela, Pappas (2019) and others focus on populist leaders who are initially democratically elected and Bieber (2018) hones in on the recent proliferation of competitive authoritarian regimes in the Western Balkans. The literature on the survival strategies of authoritarian regimes is too large and varied to summarize here. In general however, these authors gather evidence from interviews and expert analysis of their cases, and they tend to have extensive knowledge of the region they profile. Between them, they identify a multitude of strategies that either sustain authoritarian dominance or enable a democratic breakthrough.

Bunce and Wolchik (2009) credited the opposition victories in their cases to organized and ambitious opposition campaigns. Those efforts included voter registration drives, turnout drives, independent polling, and collaboration with civil society organizations. Corrales (2020) meanwhile, argues that Venezuela's authoritarian regime survived intensely unfavorable structural conditions and its own evident unpopularity by inventing innovative (and brutal) new authoritarian

tactics. These tactics include subcontracting governance responsibilities to criminal elements and retrofitting loyal authoritarian institutions to serve new purposes. Maduro deployed armed gangs of supporters instead of police to manage demonstrations and created an all-purpose constituent assembly to rubber-stamp new laws and ban the opposition. Pappas (2018) notes that populists skillfully encourage polarization, especially on symbolic issues, successfully justifying their abuses of power as part of an existential struggle against the hated elite. Their success rides on careful stewardship of their populist image and staying aligned with the impulses of their inflamed base. On the other end of the spectrum, the new competitive authoritarian regimes of the West Balkans manufacture crises and take advantage of regional instability to cast themselves as guarantors of peace and stability (Bieber 2018). They use the same strategy to persuade western powers to overlook their democratic failings and legitimize their rule. In Montenegro, for instance, the government played up an alleged Russian coup-attempt to sideline the opposition and persuade western states to accept their bid for NATO membership. Meanwhile, Cooley (2015), hoping to explain the 'democracy recession' of the last decade, puts a spotlight on new authoritarian innovations that operate across borders, like 'zombie' election monitors and new international sources of financial support for authoritarian governments. Just as NGOs and democracy promoters have shared tactics and organizational expertise with like minded movements in other countries, authoritarian regimes have begun to learn from and assist each other.

Despite the differences between contexts and cases, the literature on strategies reminds us that contested elections are won on the ground by brave and highly motivated people. In an authoritarian system, defeating the government at the ballot box requires a tremendous amount of belief, a sophisticated electoral campaign that doesn't buckle pressure from the government's coercive apparatus and a bit of luck. The opposition can't rely solely on people's dissatisfaction

with the regime. They must prove themselves preferable to the government and worth the personal risk that citizens accept when they vote for them, organize with them and take to the streets with them. Meanwhile, especially when hard repression is difficult or off the table like for the regimes of the Western Balkans, electoral authoritarian regimes must work hard to legitimize their rule in the eyes of the public and divide or smear the opposition. It is in this respect that 'hybrid' regimes bear a resemblance to democratic systems. Their vulnerability to a revolution at the ballot box requires elected authoritarians, especially those who came to power as populists, to maintain public support and manipulate public opinion.

However, much of the literature on authoritarian and opposition strategies is specific to the particular circumstances of the cases examined. For instance, violent repression was an effective strategy for Venezuela's regime. For Ukraine's Viktor Yanukovych, however, responding to protests with force proved to be a decisive mistake. Populist autocrats thrive by tearing open the unhealed wounds of social conflict. But other elected autocrats, like Vladimir Putin, cast themselves as pillars of stability and order for the country. Bunce and Wolchik (2009) detail a series of opposition strategies that succeeded in post-soviet Europe. But, when are oppositions motivated enough, and hopeful enough in victory, to make the effort required to win? Each of the elections they examined included an opposition that was united in an electoral coalition and committed to seriously challenging the government. Assigning explanatory weight to opposition strategy presupposes an opposition capable, cohesive and motivated enough to carry out those strategies.

Finally, authors emphasizing the importance of collective action focus on a few 'bleak' dilemmas that uniquely characterize dictatorships. Schedler (2013) identifies two major uncertainties that dictators face. The first uncertainty is institutional uncertainty, the dictator's

uncertainty about whether he will be overthrown and whether his key supporters will obey his orders. The lack of binding rules in a dictatorship makes it impossible for a dictator to fully escape this uncertainty. The second uncertainty is informational uncertainty. Neither an authoritarian leader, nor her opponents can know her true level of support. Thus, an authoritarian leader must manage both threats to her rule and the appearance of unchallenged dominance. Timur Kuran (1997) elaborates on the impact of that informational uncertainty on an authoritarian regime's citizens. People engage in preference falsification, where they pretend to support the regime while secretly opposing it. Few people are willing to openly challenge the regime and risk their lives and livelihoods in the process, so the rest falsify their preferences and go along with the system. However, if enough people openly voice their opposition to the regime it can create a sudden cascade of people willing to speak out against it. Elections offer a signal of the regime's popularity, mitigate information uncertainties for citizens and allow opponents of the regime to overcome their collective action problem. Wahman (2012) shows that when, in the lead up to an election, it becomes clear that the opposition could win, opposition parties are more likely to unite under a common banner to contest the election. And once an election is held, Tucker (2007) argues, it can become clear that an authoritarian leader lacks majority support. If an election is evidently fraudulent, it can serve as a powerful motivating factor for opponents of the regime to take to the streets in protest. Hyde and Marinov (2014) argue that when credible international election observers declare an election to be fraudulent, that determination serves as a widely-understood signal for citizens to take to the streets in protest. Little, Tucker and LaGatta (2015) point out that fraudulently-won elections also signal that the regime is unpopular, lifting the veil on citizens' information uncertainty. For the opposition to win, the people must turn out and vote against the regime (sometimes weathering violence and persisting despite intimidation) and

be ready to take to the streets should the ballots be unfairly counted. If enough opponents of the regime make their opposition public, they can reach the 'tipping-point' necessary to overthrow the regime (Van de Walle 2006).

The collective action framework for explaining authoritarian elections has many strengths. It provides a clear causal mechanism to explain how the opposition in authoritarian elections can grow from a fringe actor to an overwhelming force. It also draws on a deep theoretical understanding of dictatorship. Unfortunately, it emphasizes people's beliefs and the availability (or lack thereof) of information about other people's true preferences, both of which are difficult to measure directly. It also offers only limited direct predictive insight. In fact, Kuran suggests that preference falsification makes revolutions highly unpredictable. That said, I identify signals of regime strength or weakness that might affect perceptions of the regime's vulnerability and test whether those signals, independent of the actual strength or weakness of the regime, predict opposition victory.

I proceed with the collective action framework for opposition mobilization as the theoretical foundation for my thesis. It offers a realistic portrait of citizens' behavior when confronted with the unique dilemmas created by dictatorship and is applicable across contexts. To test my hypothesis, I plan to examine the impact of regime characteristics and public information on the regime, on the perceived stability of the regime and thus the likelihood of the opposition successfully ousting the regime in a competitive election. If the insights of the collective action approach are correct, hints of regime vulnerability or widespread support for the opposition can set off a sequence of events which bring the opposition to power. Some of these signals are likely to be unique to the history and circumstances of each country or each election. In this thesis,

however, I look for testable evidence of common signals on regime weakness which can set off a serious opposition challenge.

III. Methods

Hypotheses: Signals of Regime Strength

Hypothesis 1: When an incumbent does not run for reelection, tapping a chosen candidate instead, the opposition is more likely to contest an election and win.

I expect that when an incumbent leader headlines the regime's electoral ticket, it is a sign of regime strength. Conversely, the presence of a chosen successor at the head of a ticket signals a possible opening for an opposition breakthrough. For one, even in democratic elections, incumbency can be a powerful advantage (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2002). In the electoral authoritarian context, where the government faces fewer constraints on its exercise of power, it should represent an even stronger electoral advantage. Secondly, the unwillingness of the incumbent to run for reelection may indicate that the incumbent lacks confidence in his own popularity, or his ability to arbitrarily rewrite the rules of the game to suit him. For instance, authoritarian incumbents frequently overcome term limits, either by abolishing them directly or using "soft contravention" techniques like favorable judicial rulings or constitutional amendments (Maltz 2007). The inability of an incumbent to overcome term-limits could be evidence of a divide in the ruling coalition or a dictator whose grip on power is not as strong as it might appear. Finally, transferring power from an incumbent to a chosen successor is an uncertain and sometimes perilous process. Regime backers may not know whether they'll continue to receive rents from the new ruler. They may have more of an incentive to defect or to refuse to repress the opposition.

Hypothesis 2: As incumbent tenure increases, the likelihood that the opposition contests an election and the likelihood that it wins decreases.

By the same token, I expect that longer incumbent tenure also signals regime strength. When a leader has monopolized power for decades, citizens may struggle to imagine an alternative. Long-suffering opposition parties, demoralized by their past losses, begin to expect defeat. Unless some other signal of regime vulnerability destabilizes the familiar dynamics of past elections, I expect a lower likelihood of opposition mobilization.

Of course, my hypothesis runs into questions of endogeneity. More talented or more resourced incumbents probably manage to stay in office longer than less talented rulers. The winning formula that keeps them in office for decades may also be responsible for their lower likelihood of an election loss. A good analogy for this sort of selection bias is the world of European Football (Soccer). More experienced managers may be more likely to lead their teams to victory than less experienced managers. There could be a causal relationship between managerial experience and the success of the teams they lead. Maybe longer-tenured managers learn valuable lessons from their time in charge? Maybe they're more respected by their players? However, in the cutthroat world of European football, the relationship between managerial experience and success on the pitch may be explained by the fact that only very talented managers last more than a few years. Those very talented managers also tend to win titles. In this respect, running an authoritarian regime is probably a bit like managing Manchester United or FC Barcelona.

Hypothesis 3: When it is public knowledge that an incumbent is unpopular, the opposition is more likely to contest and more likely to win an election.

I expect that the known unpopularity of an incumbent leader provides evidence of regime vulnerability. Known unpopularity does not *guarantee* defeat for an electoral authoritarian. They

can take advantage of the unpopularity of their opposition (like Boris Yeltsin, who famously overcame an eight percent approval rating to win reelection), cheat, or try to cancel the election entirely. But a lack of popular support forces electoral authoritarian leaders to adopt risky strategies (Dragu and Przeworski 2019) to cling to power. Governments are more likely to deploy violence against the opposition when they poll poorly (Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2014). They may need to cheat in blatant, outrageous ways in order to win the election. Those tactics may provoke a backlash (Tucker 2007). If the regime believes that the costs of mass civil unrest outweigh the benefits of cheating, they may even hold clean elections (Magaloni 2010). I expect that opposition parties are unlikely to pass up such a golden opportunity to challenge an unpopular government. I use poor performance in reputable polling as a proxy for incumbent unpopularity.

Hypothesis 4: When a regime receives significant foreign aid, the opposition is less likely to contest and less likely to win an election.

I hypothesize that receipt of significant foreign aid is a signal of regime strength. For client states, rents received from a foreign patron should allow a regime to buy the loyalty of its backers and co-op opponents into the regime (Casey 2020). Military aid may improve the coercive capabilities of the regime and the backing of a foreign power may shield it from facing international repercussions for its repression. Casey (2020) shows that client regimes backed by the US and its allies do not last longer on average than other regimes, chiefly owing to their vulnerability to military coups. But foreign backing may inoculate the regime from external threats, like electoral defeat. Meanwhile, even authoritarian regimes that only receive economic or humanitarian aid can stockpile funds for emergency use when threatened (Kono and Montinola 2009). Overall, Kono and Montinola found that foreign aid lengthened the lifespan of dictatorships. Others, like Bermeo (2011) carve out limited exceptions to that rule. She finds that

in the post-cold war aid from democratic donors was associated with democratic transition. Conditioning economic aid on human rights standards and democracy may make fair elections more likely. However, given the logic of authoritarian political survival, rulers are likely to only agree to aid packages when they believe that aid will help them remain in office (Bader and Faust 2014). Consequently, when a regime receives outside military or economic aid, I hypothesize that opposition parties will interpret it as a signal of regime strength and be less likely to seriously contest the election.

Case Selection

To test the observable implications of my hypotheses, I perform a cross-national analysis of data from national elections between 1945 and 2013. I identify elections using the National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy dataset (Hyde and Marinov 2012a). Per the NELDA codebook, NELDA includes elections for nationally elected executives like a President or a national parliament in 203 independent states. Elections must include mass voting. Indirect elections, or elections by a small committee of people are not included. Referenda, besides referenda that directly determine whether an authoritarian incumbent is allowed to stay in office, are not included.

I select only elections in which it is technically possible for opposition parties or candidates to win. Following the lead of Hyde and Marinov (2012) I adopt minimalist criteria for considering elections competitive. Specifically, I consider only elections where opposition was allowed, more than one party is legal and there was a choice of candidates on the ballot. The first condition corresponds to NELDA3 (‘Was Opposition Allowed?’) in the dataset. I only consider cases where NELDA3 is coded as ‘yes’. Specifically, an opposition party must exist to contest the

election. That party cannot be affiliated with the government. My second criterion for competitiveness is NELDA4 ('Was more than one party legal?). A 'yes' coding for NELDA4 requires that the law permit multiple political parties to exist. And finally, I only consider cases where NEDLA5 ('Was there a choice of candidates on the ballot?') is coded as 'yes'. This variable is coded as yes when there are multiple candidates or parties on the ballot.

These requirements are extremely minimal criteria for competitiveness. Many elections that are transparently fixed or egregiously tilted in favor of the incumbent satisfy them. For instance, by this minimal standard of competitiveness, I consider Egypt's 2005 election competitive. This is despite the fact that the incumbent dictator, Hosni Mubarak, won with more than 88% of the vote. During the campaign, the leading opposition candidate was briefly arrested. Once it was over, the government imprisoned him again. Still, it was technically possible for him to win.

Despite the long odds faced by the opposition in that election, there are strong theoretical reasons to consider it winnable. Requirements that the opposition win a certain share of the vote impose an ex-ante cutoff on case selection. For instance, an election where the opposition overcame long-odds and severe repression to win a large share of the vote would be considered competitive, while a relatively free election where voters chose to vote almost exclusively for the ruling party would be coded as noncompetitive. Moreover, there's no 'right' amount of vote share for the government that unmasks the election as manipulated. Some dictators choose to win with 80% of the vote. Others settle for 60%.

I further limit my analysis to elections where the country's incumbent leader can be replaced with a loss in the election. I rely on NELDA20 ('Was the office of the incumbent leader

contested in this election?') to operationalize this requirement. In cases where the de-facto incumbent leader of a country could lose their office because of the election, NELDA20 is coded as 'Yes'. For the most part, the elections that satisfy this constraint are direct elections for executive office and elections for legislative office in systems where the executive is chosen by the legislature (i.e. Parliamentary democracy).

In authoritarian elections where the office of the incumbent leader isn't contested, those elections do not, generally, pose a serious challenge to the regime. Instead of a contest between opposition parties and the government, these elections tend to develop a different set of dynamics. Lust-Okar (2006), profiling parliamentary elections in Jordan finds that the elections consist primarily of competition over patronage. Legislative elections are competitive but the office of Jordan's incumbent leader, its King, isn't contested in the election. NELDA20 is coded as 'No'. Since representatives more closely aligned with the regime can count on receiving more spoils from the government (allowing them to provide more of those spoils to their voters) the legislature tilts heavily pro-regime even in the absence of electoral manipulation. It isn't true that legislative elections don't ever threaten authoritarian leaders. In 2015, Venezuela's opposition won a supermajority in its legislature, momentarily putting Maduro at risk of impeachment. And after the government used fraud to win Georgia's 2003 legislative elections, opposition protests toppled the president and brought the opposition leader, Mikheil Saakashvili to power. But these examples are the rare exceptions that prove the rule. In competitive authoritarian regimes, the rules of political competition are themselves contested. Authoritarian rulers who lose control of their legislatures can sideline that institution entirely. Maduro, for instance, used his control over the courts to stymie the national assembly and eventually disband it. Thus, I exclude elections that don't determine control of government.

By the same token, I also select for elections where the incumbent or an anointed successor is contesting the election. As Bunce and Wolchik (2009) note, when an incumbent or anointed successor is on the ballot, "it is much easier for the election to become a verdict on the regime and for oppositions to focus their efforts". Moreover, for the purposes of our analysis, without an incumbent or anointed successor contesting the election, it's not obvious if the opposition has won. I operationalize this requirement by selecting for cases where NELDA21 ('Did the incumbent run?') or NELDA22 ('If no (Nelda21): Was there a chosen successor?') is coded as 'Yes'. NELDA22 is only coded as 'Yes' when a candidate is 'understood as being preordained to be the next incumbent.'. NELDA22 applies primarily to elections in the authoritarian context.

Finally, I choose to only consider elections that occur in the authoritarian context. Making a distinction between authoritarian and democratic elections requires setting a necessarily arbitrary cutoff-point. To do so, I turn to the Varieties of Democracy Institute's (Coppedge et al. 2021) Electoral Democracy index. Robert Dahl's definition of polyarchy serves as the basis for the electoral democracy index. Per the V-Dem codebook, the Electoral Democracy index measures whether elections are clean, civil society organizations and opposition parties can operate freely and without fear, and independent media organizations have the freedom to criticize government policy. Countries receive a score on a continuous scale that ranges from zero (low electoral democracy) to one (very high levels of electoral democracy). I lag the score by a year to make sure it corresponds to pre-election, not post-election levels of electoral democracy. I include elections in countries with electoral democracy scores below 0.6. In total, I include 497 elections in 116 independent countries. Malaysia, Turkey and Albania have the highest number of elections in my sample with thirteen each. My dataset also includes twelve elections in Thailand and eleven in Singapore.

Model

I hypothesize that in elections where there are signals of regime vulnerability, such as if the incumbent is not running, the incumbent has ruled for only a short time, the government candidate performs poorly in reputable polling, or the government doesn't receive external aid, the opposition is more likely to aggressively contest and win the election. I estimate the following models for each election i in country j:

$$\Pr(\text{Opposition Victory}_{ij} = 1) = f(\beta_1 \text{ Incumbent Running}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{ Poor Government Polling Performance}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{ Incumbent Tenure}_{ij} + \beta_4 \text{ Government is a Major Aid Recipient}_{ij} + \varphi X_{ij} + Y_j + \varepsilon_{ij}),$$

$$\Pr(\text{Opposition Challenge}_{ij} = 1) = f(\beta_1 \text{ Incumbent Running}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{ Poor Government Polling Performance}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{ Incumbent Tenure}_{ij} + \beta_4 \text{ Government is a Major Aid Recipient}_{ij} + \varphi X_{ij} + Y_j + \varepsilon_{ij}),$$

and

$$\Pr(\text{Opposition Boycott}_{ij} = 1) = = f(\beta_1 \text{ Incumbent Running}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{ Poor Government Polling Performance}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{ Incumbent Tenure}_{ij} + \beta_4 \text{ Government is a Major Aid Recipient}_{ij} + \varphi X_{ij} + Y_j + \varepsilon_{ij}).$$

X_{ij} is a vector of control variables, including the level of constraints on executive power, trade linkages with major democracies, membership in liberal international organizations and economic performance in the lead-up to the election. Y_j is a random normally-distributed variable with mean ζ_j and standard-deviation σ_j that models country-specific effects. ε_{ij} represents the random error. My model assumes there is a random effect, conditional on the country where the election occurs, that accounts for some of the unmeasured or confounding differences between states.

Operationalization

Dependent Variables

'Opposition Win' is a dichotomous variable coded as 1 if NELDA23 ('If yes (nelda22): did a successor assume power as a result of the elections?') is coded as 'No' or NELDA24 ('Did the incumbent's party lose?') is coded as 'Yes'. I use this variable to test whether my hypothesized signals of regime vulnerability predict a higher likelihood of the regime candidate losing or failing to assume power. By definition, I consider a loss for the regime candidate or party as a victory for the opposition.

'Opposition Challenge' is a dichotomous variable coded as 1 if 'Opposition Win' is coded as 1 or NELDA29 ('Were there riots and protests after the election?') is coded as 'Yes' and NELDA30 (If yes (nelda29): did they involve allegations of vote fraud?) is coded as 'Yes'. 'Opposition Challenge' encompasses elections where either the opposition denied victory to the government outright or felt sufficiently emboldened to protest the result and allege fraud. Mass protests that allege fraud indicate that the regime may not have won without fraud. For instance, by his government's official tally, Alexander Lukashenko won more than 80% of the vote in Belarus' presidential contest. The months of post-election protests against Lukashenko put the lie to that claim. Granted, sometimes 'sore loser' opposition parties protest the outcomes of free and fair elections. But when reputable international election monitors are present, post-election protests against fair elections are less likely and shorter in duration (Hyde and Marinov 2014). Moreover, post-election protests against fraud suggest that the opposition seriously contested the election and hoped to win. Thus, I use this variable to test whether my hypothesized signals of regime vulnerability predict a higher likelihood of the opposition using the election to challenge the regime.

Finally, 'Opposition Boycott' is a dichotomous variable coded as 1 if NELDA14 ('Did some opposition leaders boycott the election?') is coded as 'Yes'. In a boycott, the opposition party explicitly opts not to contest the election and tells their supporters not to participate. Not all political parties are required to boycott the election for NELDA14 to be coded as 'Yes', but in competitive authoritarian settings, the opposition is extremely unlikely to win if some parties tell their supporters not to participate. Given the herculean effort required to win an election with the rules of the game tilted against them, if a sizable share of the opposition chooses not to contest the election, their prospects are dim. In his analysis of electoral boycotts in Africa, Lindberg, backing up this intuition, found that boycotts were associated with higher vote-shares for the government. Lindberg (2006) also finds that heavily-rigged elections and the use of violence by the government make opposition boycotts more likely. Opposition parties are extremely unlikely to boycott free and fair elections. I expect then that signals of regime vulnerability make opposition parties more hopeful that the regime can't or won't manipulate the election and therefore less likely to boycott it.

Table 1 shows the distribution of each dependent variable. The opposition won almost 26% of elections, won or challenged the results in 45% of them, and roughly 16% of elections had opposition boycotts.

Distribution of Dependent Variables

	No	Yes
Opposition Boycott	84.10 %	15.90 %
Opposition Challenge	55.13 %	44.87 %
Opposition Win	74.25 %	25.75 %

(table 1: dependent variables)

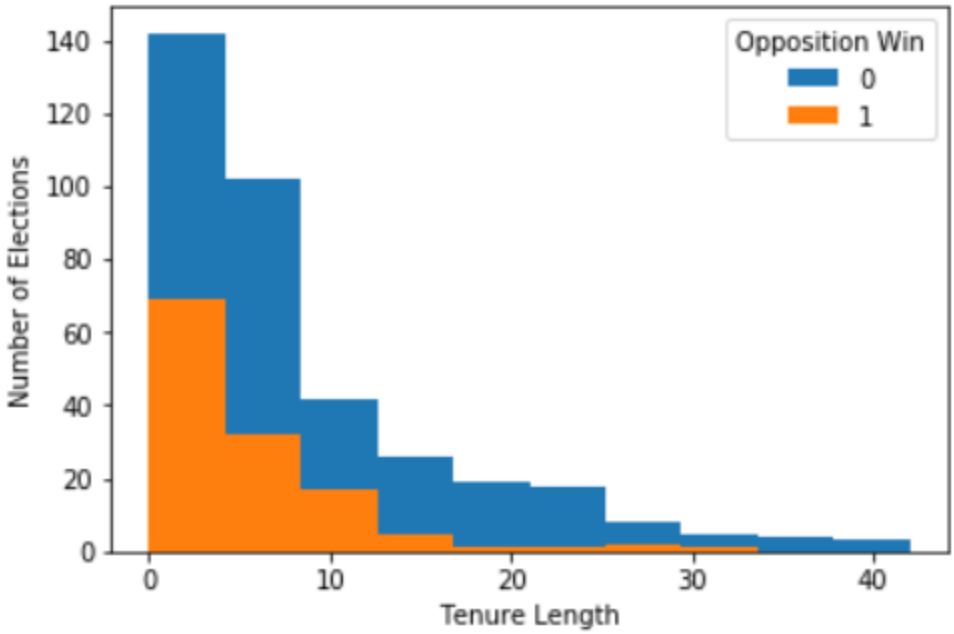
Independent Variables

To operationalize my first hypothesis, I use NELDA21('Did the incumbent run?') to code for elections where the incumbent ran for reelection. Since I only consider elections where an incumbent or chosen successor is running, 'Incumbent Ran' is a dichotomous variable coded as one if NELDA21 is coded as 'Yes' and zero otherwise.

I operationalize my second hypothesis by coding for leader tenure using the ARCHIGOS (Goemans, Gleditsch and Chiozza 2009) dataset. For each election i in country j, I subtract the year of election i from the year that the incumbent assumed power. This creates an integer measure of tenure length. I call this predictor 'Tenure'. Critically, even if the incumbent is not running for reelection, 'Tenure' codes for the time in office of the incumbent executive. Thus, 'Tenure' and 'Incumbent Ran' are not correlated in a definitional sense.

Figure 1 outlines the distribution of incumbent tenure, as well as the proportion of elections won by the opposition for each band of tenure lengths. Most incumbents, even in competitive authoritarian systems, have short tenures. However, unlike in democracies, there's a long-tail of elections where the incumbent entered into the election with decades of experience in

office. By initial inspection, the opposition appears less likely to win elections when the incumbent has ruled for many years.



(figure 1: tenure and opposition wins)

For my third hypothesis, I use NELDA25 ('Were there reliable polls that indicated popularity of ruling political party or of the candidates for office before elections?') and NELDA26 ('If yes (nelda25): were they favorable for the incumbent?') to code for poor incumbent polling. NELDA25 is coded as 'Yes' when credible domestic or international pollsters survey the electorate before the election. NELDA26 is coded as 'No' when NELDA25 is coded as 'Yes' and the incumbent or chosen successor is not ahead in the polls. Mixed polling is generally coded as 'No'. 'Poor Government Polling' is a dichotomous variable coded as one if NELDA25 is coded as 'Yes' and NELDA26 is coded as 'No'. It is zero otherwise.

Table 2 below shows the distribution of my dichotomous independent variables. The incumbent leader ran for reelection roughly 78% of the time, and the government polled poorly 14% of the time.

Distribution of Independent Variables

	No	Yes
Poor Polling for Incumbent	85.92 %	14.08 %
Incumbent Ran	21.53 %	78.47 %
Major Aid Recipient	23.14 %	76.86 %

(table 2: binary independent variables)

To account for external aid, I use Casey's (2020) data on client regimes to code for the receipt of significant military aid from a foreign power. His dataset covers all countries between 1946 and 2010. Casey defines client regimes as 'an authoritarian regime in a formally independent state, whose tenure a foreign sponsor makes a serious effort to protect from potential internal or external threats.' To meet that standard, a foreign backer must provide the regime with either military aid or direct financial support. It must also provide the client regime with organizational support, like intelligence or military training. 'Government is a Major Aid Recipient' is a dichotomous variable coded as one if country j was considered a client regime by Casey in the year that election i occurred or if NELDA19 ('Was the country said to be a large recipient of outside economic aid?') is coded as 'yes'. NELDA19 is coded as 'yes' if an international organization or foreign government offers a country very significant economic support.

Control Variables

I first control for international linkages with democracies. Levitsky and Way (2013) suggest that countries with more dense connections to the democracies are more likely to move towards democracy. Since evolution towards democracy often involves opposition election victories, I control for these linkages in two ways.

First, I create a variable called 'IOScore'. Using data from Pevehouse et al. (2019) on international organization membership, I create an aggregate score of membership in six major democratically-affiliated international organizations (the EU, Council of Europe, GATT, WTO, NATO, OAS). Countries receive one point for full membership in the aforementioned organizations and half a point for associate or observer status. My choice of international organizations for the index is deliberately skewed towards Inter-American and European regional organizations. This choice reflects the reality that for most of the period studied, major democracies were concentrated in Western Europe and North America.

I also control for trade ties with major democracies. For this measure, I use Barbieri and Keshk's (2016) data on international trade flows. For each country-year, I calculate the total trade flow (imports + exports) between country *j* and five major democracies (The United States, France, UK, Germany and Japan) for each country *j* (in millions of US dollars). I normalize that number by dividing by the population of country *j* (in thousands). For this, I use Singer, Bremer and Stuckley's (1972) fifth version data on national military capabilities. I give a trade score of zero to countries without trade with those five countries and those are coded as having negative trade. Next, I add one to that fraction and take the log of that number to get an index of trade with major democracies.

$$\text{tradeindex}_{ij} = \ln\left(1 + \frac{imports(ij) + exports(ij)}{1000 \times population(ij)}\right)$$

Finally, though Levitsky and Way (2013, 39) describe the use of leverage by outside powers as emblematic of only "inconsistent and often superficial democratizing pressure" they acknowledge that leverage has had electoral implications, even if its consequences for long-term democratization are limited. Donno (2013) finds that in relatively more competitive authoritarian systems, when wielded to the benefit of a unified opposition, "international conditionality" predicts better results for that coalition. I control for international leverage with NELDA57('Is aid cut-off, or threatened to be cut-off, by an outside actor at any point before or after the election?') and NELDA58('Did an outside actor attempt to influence the outcome of the election by making threats to withhold, or by withholding, something of value to the country?'). I implement a binary variable, leverage, that I code as one if either NELDA57 or NELDA58 is coded as 'yes' and zero otherwise. NELDA57 and NELDA58 do not always code for international pressure for more democratic elections, but except for a couple elections in our sample, they all involve pressure by western democracies.

I further control for the level of constraints of the executive. Levitsky and Way (2013) argue that the organizational capacity of a regime is a key determinant of its likelihood of survival. Weak regimes may crumble at the hint of a challenge and strong ones may survive mass protests, economic collapse or rebellion. While it is hard to quantify the organizational strength of a government, I use Polity V's (Marshall, Gurr and Jaggers 2020) executive constraint variable as a proxy for the ability of the regime to operate outside of the rule of law. An incumbent who can operate without restrictions outside of the dictates of law will tend to be stronger than one highly constrained by checks and balances.

Poor economic performance leading up to an election may also emperil an authoritarian government. It may turn the public against the government, as in democratic elections and it may deprive an incumbent of funds needed to pay off her key supporters. During economic crises, people tend to take a dim view of the corruption that's endemic to authoritarian systems. I use NELDA18('Is country said to be in economic crisis?') to control for this possibility. NELDA18 is coded as 'yes' if the media reports generally describe the country to be in economic crisis. While NELDA18 may not line up precisely with an expert analysis of the real economic data, NELDA18 is a good measure of whether people generally believe that the economy is really suffering.

Finally, I also control for transitions. If a regime has turned over power to a transitional government, the dynamics of those elections may be different. I use NELDA10 ('Was the country ruled by "transitional leadership" tasked with "holding elections"?) to code for countries in transition.

Methodological Note

In the following chapters, I explain why opposition parties aggressively contest some authoritarian elections but fail to muster much of a challenge in others. I hypothesize that opponents of the regime use public signals of regime strength to decide when to mount such challenges and when to play it safe. Thus, I choose signals (incumbency, polling, client protection) that are publicly known before the election as my independent variables. These signals may change from cycle to cycle. On the other hand, I generally choose structural variables like trade levels and the level of checks on the executive as my controls. While these variables may also predict the likelihood of opposition victories, boycotts or challenges, they are less likely to change from one election to another. For this reason I don't consider them 'signals' of regime vulnerability. They

are properties of the country or regime in question, not of a particular election. They are structural, not proximate causes of the choices made by opposition parties.

IV. Results

My quantitative results support my first and third hypotheses (that incumbency and public polling are signals of regime strength and predict less engaged opposition) and provide mixed evidence for my second and fourth hypotheses (that incumbent tenure and receipt of external aid are signals of regime strength and predict less engaged opposition).

The estimated parameters of my random-intercept logistic regression model are detailed in table 3 below. The odds ratio of each predictor represents the probability of an outcome if the predictor is one (or in the case of numerical predictors, a one unit increase in the predictor) divided by the probability of an outcome if the predictor is zero, all other predictors held equal. For instance, for the binary predictor X_1 and the outcome I_1:

$$\text{Odds Ratio}(X_1) = \frac{Pr(I_1 | X_1 = 1, X_2, ..., X_n, Y_j)}{Pr(I_1 | X_1 = 0, X_2, ..., X_n, Y_j)}$$

The odds ratio is also the natural number e to the power of the beta-coefficient of the predictor. For instance, if in my model β_1 is the beta-coefficient for X_1 then:

$$ln(Odds\ Ratio(X_1)) = ln(\frac{Pr(I_1 | X_1 = 1, X_2, ..., X_n, Y_j)}{Pr(I_1 | X_1 = 0, X_2, ..., X_n, Y_j)})$$

$$= ln(Pr(I_1 | X_1 = 1, X_2, ... X_n, Y_n)) - ln(Pr(I_1 | X_1 = 0, X_2, ... X_n, Y_n))$$

$$= \beta_1$$

Therefore the odds ratio of a predictor modeled with coefficient β is e^{β}

Odds Ratios below one indicate that the predictor is estimated to decrease the likelihood of the corresponding election outcome, as if $e^{\beta} < 1$ then $\beta < 0$. An odds ratio above one suggests the opposite.

Most of the observed effects mirror my hypotheses. As predicted, incumbency has a significant negative effect on the likelihood of opposition challenges. It also has a highly significant negative effect on the likelihood of an opposition win and a significant positive effect on the likelihood of an opposition boycott. This result is consistent with my hypothesis that incumbency signals regime strength.

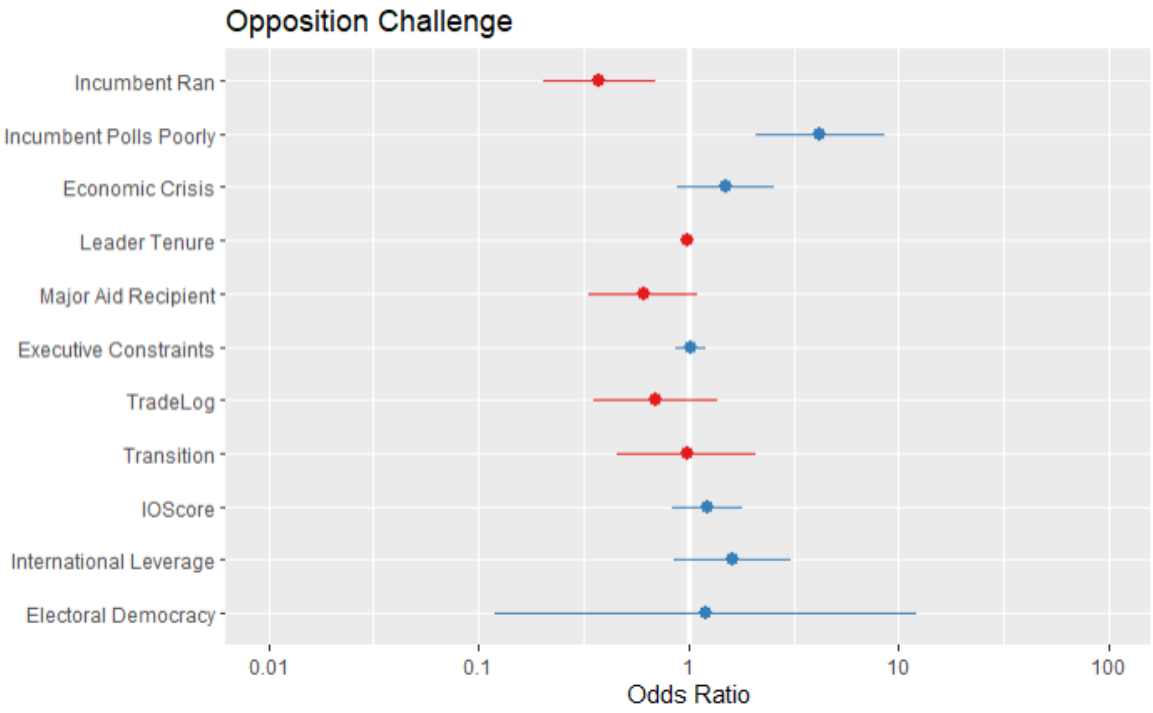
Election Outcomes

	Opposition Challenge		Opposition Win		Opposition Boycott	
Predictors	*Odds Ratios*	*p*	*Odds Ratios*	*p*	*Odds Ratios*	*p*
(Intercept)	1.38	0.573	0.34	0.085	0.19	**0.039**
Incumbent Ran	0.37	**0.002**	0.39	**0.005**	3.10	**0.029**
Incumbent Polls Poorly	4.23	**<0.001**	6.87	**<0.001**	0.30	0.079
Economic Crisis	1.50	0.133	0.93	0.813	0.88	0.715
Leader Tenure	0.98	0.383	0.99	0.709	1.00	0.932
Major Aid Recipient	0.61	0.105	0.45	**0.022**	1.94	0.110
Executive Constraints	1.02	0.792	1.16	0.140	0.89	0.310
TradeLog	0.70	0.302	0.26	**0.033**	0.62	0.281
Transition	0.98	0.955	2.29	0.051	0.39	0.085
IOScore	1.23	0.296	1.26	0.305	1.04	0.868
International Leverage	1.61	0.143	1.56	0.240	1.66	0.224
Electoral Democracy	1.21	0.873	0.95	0.970	0.02	**0.016**
Random Effects						
σ^2	3.29		3.29		3.29	
τ_{00}	$1.04_{\text{country\_x}}$		$1.26_{\text{country\_x}}$		$0.99_{\text{country\_x}}$	
ICC	0.24		0.28		0.23	
N	$116_{\text{country\_x}}$		$116_{\text{country\_x}}$		$116_{\text{country\_x}}$	
Observations	497		497		497	
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.151 / 0.355		0.256 / 0.462		0.226 / 0.404	

(table 3: random intercept model estimates)

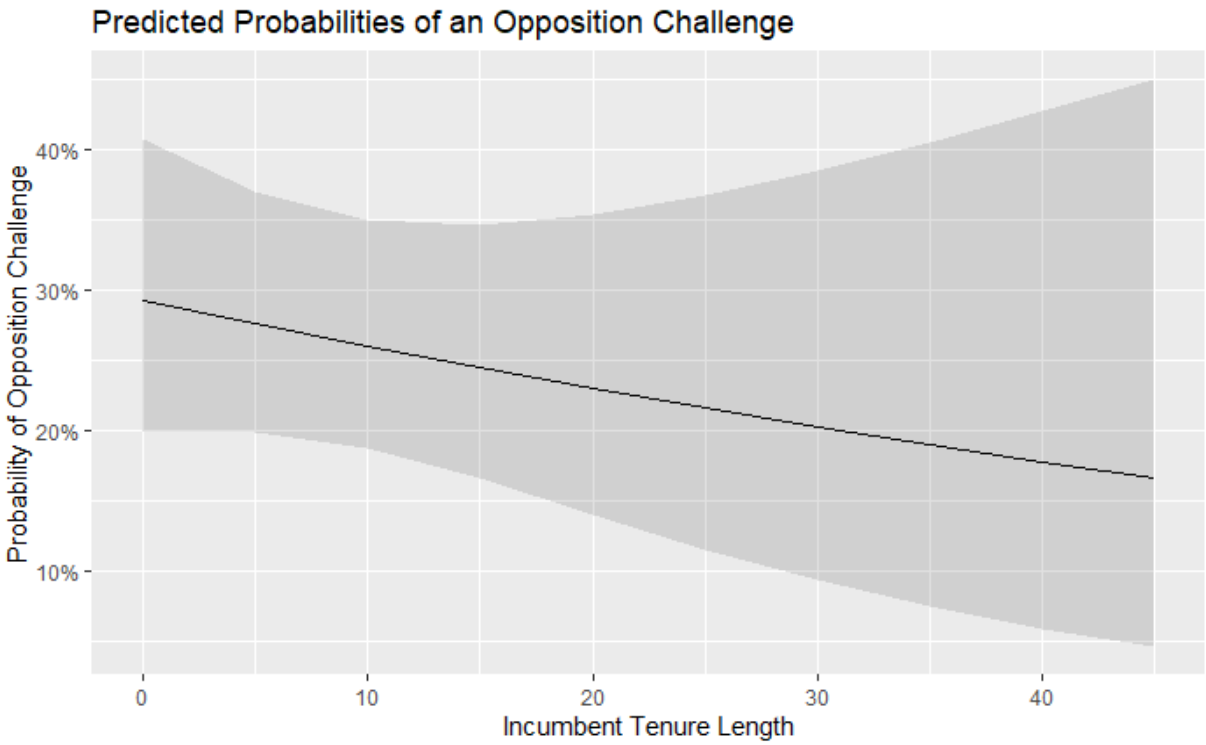
Poor incumbent polling performance has a significant positive correlation with opposition challenges and an even stronger positive association with opposition wins. Its negative effect on the likelihood of an opposition boycott is not statistically significant to the 95th percentile level, but it is close. My model provides mixed evidence for my other hypotheses. Long incumbent tenure

has a strong statistically significant negative effect on the likelihood of an opposition challenge. Figure 2 presents the odds ratios and confidence intervals of each predictor.



(Figure 2: Odds Ratios of Predictors for Opposition Challenge)

I found no statistically significant linear effect of tenure on the likelihood of an opposition challenge. Figure 3 shows the marginal effects of incumbent tenure on the likelihood of an opposition challenge. For the first dozen-or-so years of an incumbent's tenure, all other predictors held equal, the likelihood of an opposition challenge decreases. From there, given the limited number of elections with incumbents of a dozen or more years, (only 19% of elections had incumbents who'd held office more than 12 years) I cannot determine with statistical significance whether the likelihood of an opposition challenge continues to decrease monotonically or slowly increases again.



(Figure 3: Marginal Effects of Incumbent Tenure on Likelihood of Opposition Challenge)

Bueno de Mesquita and Smith's selectorate theory suggests that the relation between incumbent tenure and the likelihood of an opposition challenge might not be monotonic. In autocracies, they suspect that as rulers age and their health declines, regime insiders begin to question whether they'll continue to receive rents from the incumbent (Mesquita and Smith 2012). Regime backers must choose between the rewards they receive from the current incumbent and the possibility of obtaining better rewards under the rule of a challenger. Normally, backing the incumbent ruler is a safe move and backing a challenger is risky. But for a ruler in decline, the rewards they offer become increasingly uncertain. Their backers look for new patrons who can guarantee them the rewards of loyalty long into the future. Robert Mugabe, for instance, was deposed by his own party after 37 years in power. He was ninety-three and his backers, including

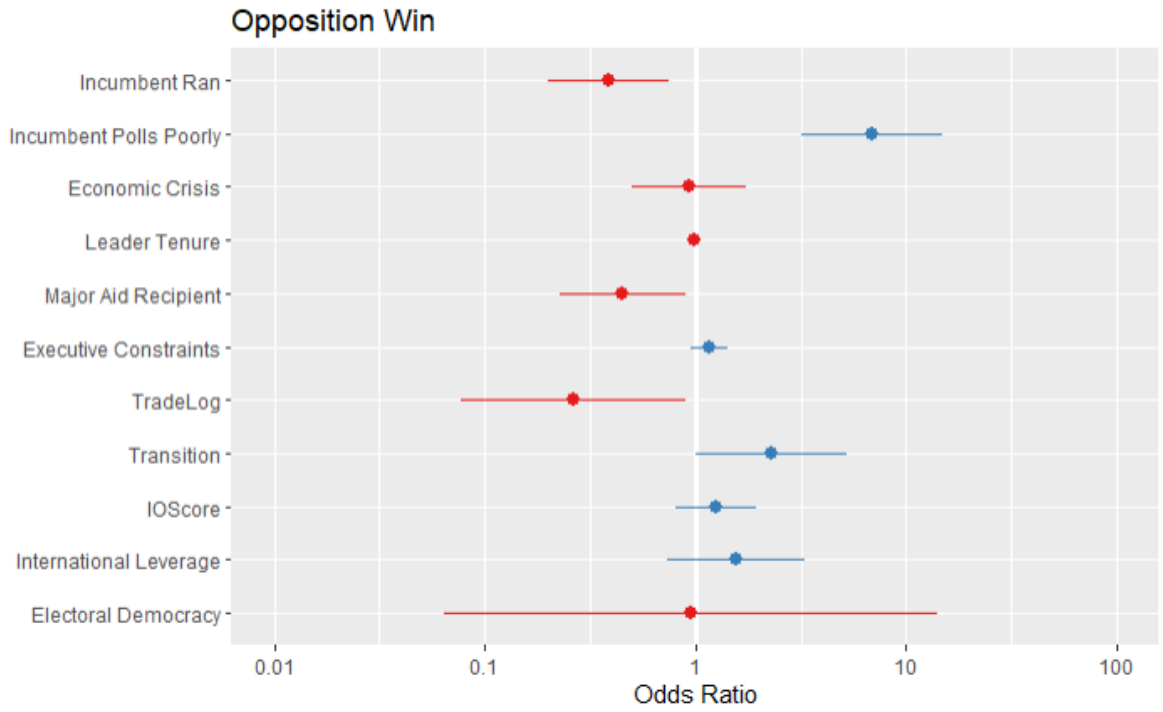
Mugabe's vice president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, were already looking to the future. Mnangagwa had the qualification of being younger than ninety-three and his party lined up behind him to oust Mugabe.

Extending this dynamic to elections, as an incumbent dictator begins to seem past his prime, regime insiders may be more likely to defect to the opposition or become more reluctant to cheat or use violence to keep the incumbent in power. In turn, opposition leaders may more vigorously contest the election. A non-monotonic relationship would follow. Of course, depending on the age at which they took power long serving leaders aren't always old. Young rulers can become severely sick and authoritarian rulers in poor health often try to hide signs of their fragility (Mesquita and Smith 2012). Along with the limited sample size of elections with very long serving incumbents, these complications may explain why I don't observe a clear relationship between incumbent tenure and the likelihood of an opposition challenge.

Similarly, I don't find a statistically significant correlation between incumbent tenure and the likelihood of an opposition win or boycott. If the length of the incumbent's tenure motivated the behavior of oppositions, we'd expect to see a relationship between tenure and those outcomes as well.

My estimates for the impact of external aid on electoral outcomes provide a similarly mixed picture. External aid predicts, at a 95% confidence level, decreased odds of an opposition win. For opposition challenges and opposition boycotts, the respective odds ratios indicate that the likelihood of a challenge is decreased by external aid and the likelihood of a boycott is increased. These results align with my hypothesis that external aid signals regime strength and discourages opposition mobilization. But the evidence of a relationship for opposition boycotts

and opposition challenges is not statistically significant. Moreover, from figure 4, I observe that even for opposition wins, where the effect of aid is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level, the predicted effect of external aid is not quite as large as those of incumbency and polling.



(Figure 4: Odds Ratios of Predictors for Opposition Win)

Somewhat contrary to the findings of existing literature on competitive authoritarianism and democratization, I find that only a few of my control variables predict election outcomes. Contrary to scholars who have emphasized the importance of short-run economic performance on regime stability, I find that the presence of economic crisis has no statistically significant effect on electoral outcomes. This finding doesn't suggest that economic crises don't undermine the health of authoritarian regimes. But their effect isn't observable in election outcomes.

Surprisingly, given the evidence presented by Levitsky and Way (2013), I find that my proxies for international linkages, TradeLog and IOScore, don't predict a higher likelihood of opposition wins or opposition challenges. In fact, trade predicts a lower likelihood of an opposition win to a statistically significant degree. However, this result doesn't run directly counter to Levitsky and Way as they analyze long-term democratization, not short-run electoral results. In the same vein, I don't find evidence that opposition victories or challenges were more likely in the post-cold war international environment.

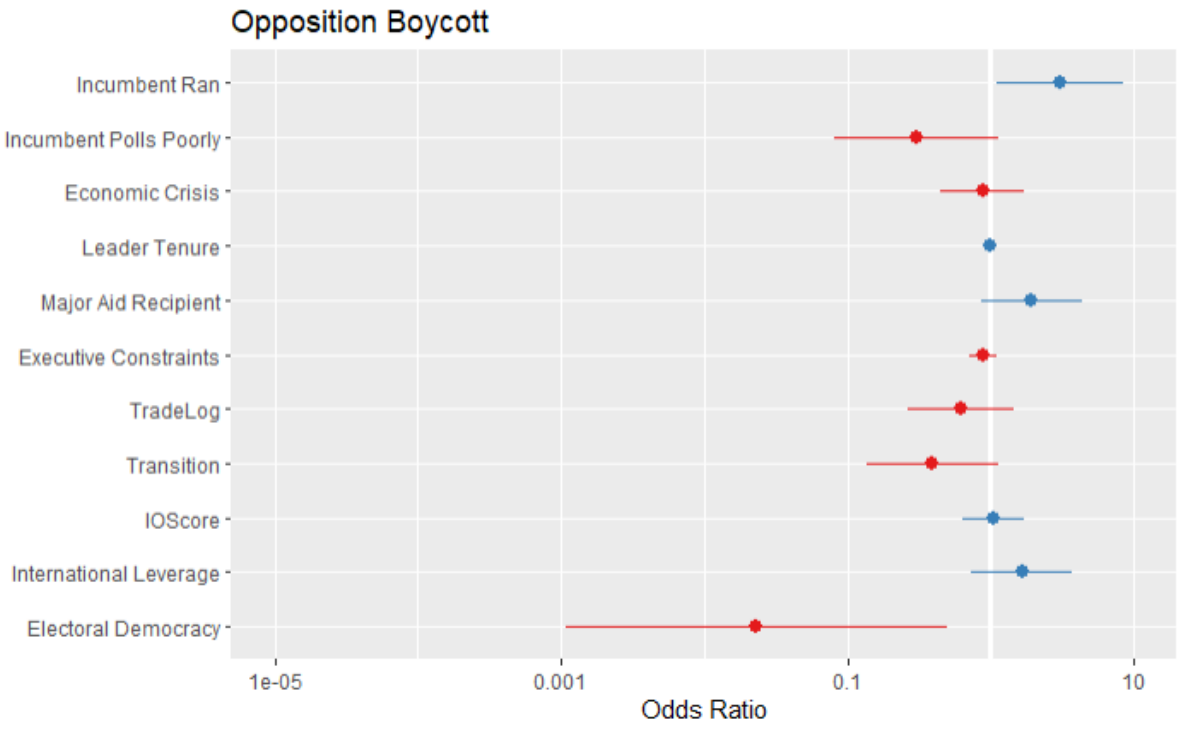
Meanwhile, I also don't find evidence for the impact of international leverage on electoral outcomes. That said, my findings focus narrowly on electoral outcomes not on the effects of international leverage on improved election procedures.

My model also finds no strong correlation between executive constraints and electoral outcomes.

Two of my control variables have important implications for my model. My model estimates with slightly less than 95% confidence that transitions magnify the probability of electoral victory for the opposition and slightly less than 92% confidence that transitions lower the odds of an election boycott. This result matches my expectations. Transitions are not predictive of election challenges, but that may be because election fraud is less likely to occur under transitional governments.

Finally, vDem's electoral democracy index offers little information about the likelihood of opposition wins and opposition challenges. In plain wording, this finding suggests that all else held equal, in the authoritarian context, opposition parties aren't more likely to win "more-fair" elections than "less-fair" elections.

However, the Vdem electoral democracy index has a strong negative relationship with electoral boycotts. That is to say, the more democratic a regime is, the lower the chances are of the opposition boycotting an election. This finding matches those of Lindberg (2006). Observe in figure five below that electoral democracy is a very strong predictor of the likelihood of an opposition boycott. In short, oppositions are likely to boycott elections when they're likely to be highly manipulated. Beaulieu (2014) notes that before an election occurs, oppositions don't know how much electoral manipulation the government will engage in. Opposition parties may bargain with the government for fairer elections, but if the government lacks the credibility to persuade opposition leaders of their commitment to relatively fair elections, the opposition may decide to boycott. Beaulieu finds that boycotts are more likely when the incumbent faces lower levels of constraints. I don't find a relationship between Executive Constraints and the likelihood of electoral boycott. However, I do find a strong relationship between overall electoral democracy and the likelihood of an opposition boycott. Low electoral democracy scores indicate that the government has manipulated past elections or engages in egregiously undemocratic behavior, likely making their promises or fair elections less credible.



(Figure 5: Odds Ratios of Predictors for Opposition Boycotts)

Finally, I note that the R^2 coefficients of my models are relatively low. Even including random country-effects, the estimated total R^2 of my model for opposition challenges is 0.355, the estimated total R^2 of my model for opposition wins is 0.462, and the estimated total R^2 of my model for opposition wins is 0.404. In each case, the model explains less than half of the variance in election outcomes. The intraclass correlations (ICCs) of my models are also relatively low. Thus, neither my model or random country effects explain most of the randomness of election outcomes.

V. Analysis: Peacocks and Vipers

I must first emphasize the limits of my model. Fortune and circumstance matter in elections. So do the unexpected turns of history that emerge from the social world of individual personality and interpersonal relationships. National elections aggregate the preferences of millions of people. Some of them have preferences that can only be understood in the context of a particular time and society. Political science and psychology each possess a vast literature on the reasons that people vote--they differ from person to person and national context to national context (Ahuja and Chhibber 2012). In particular, the question of voter motivation in electoral autocracies is a complex subject deserving further study (Wantchekon 2003; Blaydes 2014; Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009). Without an understanding of the reasons people vote, predicting electoral outcomes is extremely challenging.

Moreover, crowd psychology matters in electoral politics. Charismatic leaders, ethnic or religious group loyalties and a certain mob mentality of voters all complicate the problem of modeling elections. Sometimes a particularly vivid or outrageous injustice brings millions into the streets and breathes life into the opposition. In Ukraine, tapes connecting then President Kuchma to the kidnapping and murder of Georgiy Gongadze, a journalist, sank his approval rate to 9%, launched an opposition movement and brought about his party's overthrow in the next election. In South Korea, a student named Lee Han-yeol became a symbol of the country's protest movement after being badly injured by a tear-gas grenade. When he died of his injuries, over a million South Koreans attended his funeral.

Besides, just as voters vote for different reasons, authoritarian leaders find support for different reasons. Some leaders, like Venezuela's Huga Chavez held onto power with personal charisma. Others, like Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew are skilled managers. And some leaderships rely on psychopathic cruelty.

The low R^2 statistics of my models highlight these complications. Most of the structural control variables I added to my model (including trade flows, membership in international organizations and economic conditions) weren't strong predictors of electoral outcomes. Those patterns were only weakly visible in my results. Of course, strong evidence exists for the effects of those structural variables on democratization. But I find no pattern at the level of individual elections.

Interestingly, I found very limited evidence of a correlation between the relative authoritarianism of a country and the likelihood of opposition electoral victory or post-election protests. Neither PolityV's executive constraints nor VDem's electoral democracy index correlated strongly with electoral outcomes. This is a counterintuitive result. Theorists have identified peaceful government turnover as a key benchmark of democracy (Huntington 1991). The unpredictability of elections that I observe in my results, irrespective of the international environment or authoritarianism of the government, also suggests that elections which satisfy my minimal threshold for competitiveness always have the potential to threaten an authoritarian government. This evidence argues for more minimal conceptions of competitiveness, like that of Hyde and Marinov (2012) that I adopted. More restrictive criteria risk leaving out relatively more autocratic governments, which despite their heavy-handed use of repression, are vulnerable to challenges. Even when elections are comprehensively rigged, as with Belarus' 2020 election, those elections can become a rallying point for protests. Thus, even the most minimally

competitive elections deserve our scrutiny. And amidst an international environment where democracy appears to be in retreat, my findings suggest that elections, even in unfavorable international conditions and even when they don't lead to democratic rule, can change governments.

However, I find a strong association between relative authoritarianism, operationalized through VDem's electoral democracy index, and the likelihood of an opposition boycott. My empirical results link hardened dictatorship and opposition participation but not hardened dictatorship and opposition success.

Meanwhile, as I hypothesized, polling performance and incumbency were the most reliable predictors of electoral outcomes. Incumbency and polling also predict results outside of the authoritarian context. But unlike in democracies, incumbency and opposition polling were also tied to the likelihood of opposition boycotts. This finding provides evidence for my hypothesis. Opposition parties are more likely to contest the election when they know that the government isn't popular or there will be turnover in leadership. While incumbency and popularity matter to both dictators and democrats, the mechanism behind that advantage may differ. My results suggest that widespread belief in the popularity and invincibility of an electoral authoritarian regime does more to secure its continued rule than repression and force.

Most biologists now accept Amotz Zahavi's theory that peacocks evolved their famously rich plumage as an expensive way to signal their genetic-fitness to potential mates. Some electoral authoritarian regimes adopt the same tactic. They eagerly seek international legitimation, take pains to appear as democratic as possible, showcase all the ways they work for the welfare of their citizens, and make sure not to reveal any hint of instability. They stay popular and make sure

everyone knows how popular they are. Like a peacock's feathers, these impressive adornments are hard to fake. Only regimes with deep-pockets and a cohesive ruling coalition can afford to send such expensive signals. Media control, narrowly targeted repression, (Dragu and Przeworski 2018) genuine popular support and their carefully cultivated appearance of invincibility help them avoid depending on brute repression too much. Incumbency, the flow of external aid and strong polling all help maintain that show of invulnerability. My results show that those strategies work. Peacocks often stay popular enough to win convincingly (with a healthy dose of fraud).

On the other hand, when an electoral authoritarian regime's popularity or invulnerability fades, odious repression becomes necessary. Bunce and Wolchik (2009) found that each regime they studied became more oppressive in the lead-up to challenging elections. Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski (2013) found that regimes were more likely to resort to violence when threatened. My results are also consistent with this line of thinking. Highly authoritarian regimes win by making the costs of opposition electoral participation too high for them to sustain. The strong relationship between the relative authoritarianism of a regime and the likelihood of boycotts supports this connection. Like vipers, these regimes rely on venom to subdue their challengers. But they aren't less vulnerable to defeat than less repressive regimes, as the lack of correlation between authoritarianism and electoral victory evidences.

Generally, when a regime's invincibility fades, opponents of the government pounce and former insiders break away from the ruling coalition. During the final stretch of Serbia's 2000 election, the opposition covered over a million posters of Milosevic with stickers that said "gotov je!" (he's finished!). Milosevic used every trick in his authoritarian toolkit, but he couldn't hang on to power. Meanwhile, in the waning years of PRI hegemony in Mexico, Magaloni (2006) argues that the PRI's loss of popular support incentivized ambitious PRI politicians to split away and get

elected with the backing of opposition parties. My results are consistent with the importance of the appearance of strength and popular support for the success of autocratic leaders.

The Game of Authoritarian Elections

Building on my results, I hypothesize that opposition parties face one major choice of strategy: they may aggressively contest the election, or play it safe and stagger forward, sometimes running candidates but not making much effort to criticize the government or fight for voters. The former approach may involve entering into a coalition with other opposition parties, holding mass rallies, holding post-election protests against fraud or using strategies like voter-registration drives or parallel vote counting (Bunce and Wolchik 2009). It's also an approach that could invite repression from the government. In my model, I used opposition challenges as a proxy for the choice by opposition parties to significantly contest the election. The second approach, not seriously contesting the election, comes in two forms. The first involves obtaining whatever benefits possible out of the existing system. This might mean collaborating with the government, although Gandhi (2016) shows that this only happens under certain strategic conditions and Magaloni (2006) points out that ideologically proximate leaders are more likely to be co-opted. Russia's official opposition parties and Turkey's MHP party are examples of parties that are thoroughly co-opted by those governments. Beaulieu (2014) reports that small, unthreatening opposition parties are sometimes paid by authoritarian governments to field candidates in an election. Those parties pose no threat to the regime and help it legitimize their election victory. Other parties may not be explicitly co-opted but only put up limited opposition by either denouncing the regime but boycotting the elections or contesting the election but restricting themselves to limited criticisms of the government. The behavior of Belarus' opposition in the 2015 election offers an example of parties that put up only limited opposition. Tatiana Korotkevic,

the only opposition candidate allowed on the ballot, ran a relatively non confrontational campaign. Other opposition leaders viewed Korotkevic with suspicion and called for a boycott of the election. None of the debates between opposition leaders gave Lukashenko's government much to worry about.

Meanwhile, regimes must decide how much repression and fraud to employ. As I've described, a substantial literature covers the many strategies dictators employ to manipulate elections. But more generally put, I propose that each regime has some maximum amount of repression and electoral manipulation, M, that they can use. The regime also pays a cost, in terms of both international reputation and domestic popularity, for its use of repression. I assume these costs increase monotonically.

Given the choices available to the opposition and regime, if the opposition actively contests the election they get a payoff of:

b_1 (W * P(W|M=m)) - b_2 * m

If they choose not to seriously contest the election, the likelihood of opposition victory is zero. The opposition's payoff function becomes:

- b_2 * m

m is the amount of repression chosen by the regime, which the opposition will bear much of the brunt of. P(W|M=m) is the probability that the opposition will win the election given the strategy chosen by the government. I assume that it decreases as the value of m increases. W represents the utility that the opposition receives from winning the election. b_1 and b_2 are coefficients that represent how heavily the party weighs the benefits they might receive from

winning against the harm they'll suffer. Intuitively, a higher b_1 coefficient means that a party is more prone to taking risks and a higher b_2 coefficient indicates that a party is risk-averse.

Meanwhile, regime payoffs depend on whether the opposition chooses to seriously contest the election. If the opposition mounts a threatening electoral campaign, the regimes gets a payoff of:

a_1 (L * P(L|M=m)) - a_2 * C(m)

Like in the opposition's utility function, m is the amount of repression chosen by the regime. L represents the utility that the regime receives from continued rule. P(L|M=m) is the probability that the opposition will lose (and hence that the government wins) the election given the regime's strategy. Since the opposition either wins or doesn't win an election,

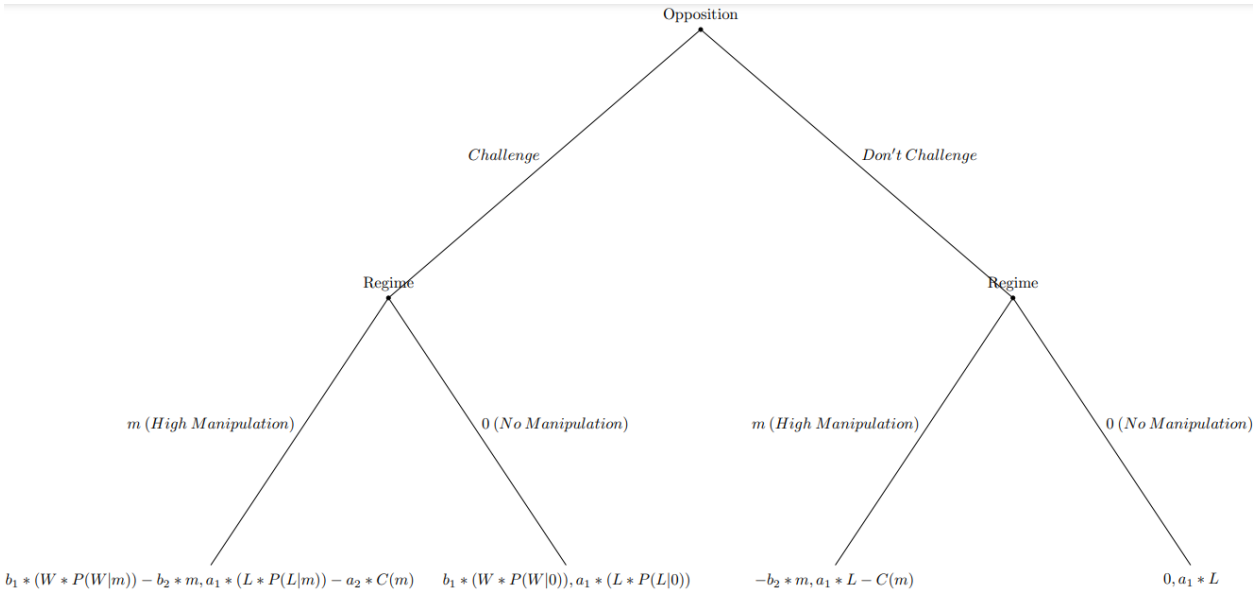
P(W|M=m) + P(L|M=m) = 1.

a_1 and a_2 are coefficients that represent how heavily the government weighs the benefits they receive from winning against the reputational costs they'll suffer for cheating. Intuitively, a higher a_1 coefficient means that a government will take risks to hold onto power and a higher a_2 coefficient indicates that a government is risk-averse, or particularly sensitive to their international reputation. C is the cost function for government repression. It is positive and increases as m increases.

Generally, each individual opposition party possesses a payoff function with values for b_1 and b_2 that depend on the ideology and leadership of the party. Moreover, P(W|M=m), the likelihood of a win for the opposition coalition generally depends upon the likelihood that each party participates in that coalition. Given the constraints of my data however, I analyze only the

case where the opposition parties are united and model them as acting as one agent. I represent my model as an extensive form game in figure 6.

In my game, I assume that the opposition first decides whether to seriously contest the election and the regime then decides how much electoral manipulation to employ. Opposition parties must publicly urge their supporters to participate in the election or justify their non-participation to international audiences, making their choice of strategy "easily observable" (Beaulieu 2014). Meanwhile, incumbents often attempt to manipulate elections in secret. Opposition parties must decide whether to participate without knowing exactly how much fraud and repression they'll have to weather.



(Figure 6: extensive form election game)

I list each outcome at the bottom of figure 6. Each outcome is represented as the payoff for the opposition followed by the payoff for the regime. I only list the payoffs for two of the regime's strategies: choosing not to use electoral manipulation and committing as much repression as

possible. The regime could choose any amount of manipulation between 0 and m. There are two possible subgame perfect equilibria to this game:

(1) If $b_1 * (W * P(W|\hat{m})) < b_2 * \hat{m}$ for the value of $\hat{m}$ that maximizes $a_1 (L * P(L|M=m)) - a_2 * C(m)$, the regime can make an electoral campaign more costly to the opposition than it is worth to them. The opposition will either boycott the election or avoid a serious campaign. The regime will then avoid the need to cheat or significantly repress the opposition. The opposition will get a payoff of 0 and the regime will get a payoff of $a_1 * L$, which represents continued rule.

(2) On the other hand, if $b_1 * (W * P(W|\hat{m})) > b_2 * \hat{m}$ for the value of $\hat{m}$ that maximizes $a_1 (L * P(L|M=m)) - a_2 * C(m)$ then the opposition will run a serious, sustained electoral campaign. It may or may not win. If the optimal regime strategy given such a challenge, $\hat{m}$ is very low, then the regime will essentially allow fair elections. If $\hat{m}$ is high, the regime will try to win by fraud or violence, judging the costs worth the risk. Still, the regime prefers equilibrium outcome 1 to equilibrium outcome 2 because $a_1 * L > a_1 (L * P(L|M=m)) - a_2 * C(m)$.

Because of widespread preference falsification in dictatorships, neither the opposition nor the regime itself knows the true value of $P(W|\hat{m})$, the probability of the opposition winning the election, for the optimal regime strategy $\hat{m}$. Since the regime prefers equilibrium 1 to equilibrium 2, it will attempt to convince the opposition that $P(W|\hat{m})$ is very low. If $P(W|\hat{m})$ is zero and $\hat{m}$ is greater than 0, the opposition will always pick equilibrium 1. Regimes that are popular or convince the world of their invulnerability can avoid dramatic repression and persuade the opposition to run uneventful campaigns. Thus, my game explains the observed empirical effects of

incumbency and polling on the likelihood of the opposition seriously contesting the election. Incumbency, strong polling and the right tenure length are all signals that $P(W|\hat{m})$ is low. It also explains why less-repressive regimes are as successful at winning elections as more repressive regimes.

If the regime cannot persuade the opposition that $P(W|\hat{m})$ is low, it will attempt to persuade the opposition that the optimal regime strategy in the event of a serious electoral campaign, $\hat{m}$ (and therefore $b_2 * \hat{m}$, the cost of that campaign to the opposition) is very high. To do so, the regime must convince the opposition that its a_1 coefficient, the importance it attaches to remaining in power, is high and its a_2 coefficient, the importance the regime attaches to its domestic popularity and international reputation are low. The regime will bluff by clearly demonstrating its authoritarian nature. If the regime does so successfully, the opposition will likely boycott the election. In this way, my game explains the strong empirical correlation I found between relative authoritarianism and the likelihood of an opposition boycott. Because my election game is a repeated game, authoritarian leaders will sometimes manipulate elections they could win without obvious fraud to demonstrate that they care far more about absolutely assuring their hold on power than the costs they incur from their abuse.

These two strategies for maintaining equilibrium 1 explain why some autocrats go to great lengths to masquerade as democratically elected rulers and cultivate public opinion while others clearly broadcast their authoritarian nature with outrageous displays of violence and over the top pageantry. Singapore's People's Action Party typifies the first kind of electoral authoritarian regime. These authoritarian incumbents are peacocks. Mugabe's Zimbabwe, which brutally murdered opposition supporters before elections, exemplified the second kind of regime. They're the vipers.

Of course, my election game is a simplification. Unlike in my extensive form game, the opposition does not always have to choose a strategy and stick to it no matter how the regime responds. Occasionally, the opposition may choose to boycott an election only after violence intensifies in the weeks before an election. The process by which the opposition and regimes decide on strategies is dynamic and influenced by information about the other's response.

Furthermore, like the opposition, regimes are not unitary agents. An authoritarian ruler depends on her subordinates to actually carry out fraud or repression. Those subordinates are often local officials or party members many rungs down on the chain of command (Rundlett and Svolik 2016). They are most incentivised to manipulate elections when they can safely expect the incumbent to win and least incentivised to do so when an opposition victory seems possible. As a result, subordinates tend to gauge the mood of their neighbors, estimate the likelihood of an incumbent winning and commit either too much or not enough fraud. Authoritarian regimes struggle to perform an optimal amount of electoral manipulation. In practice, regimes may have to choose between a high amount of manipulation and little to no manipulation, the choice of strategies presented in figure 6. And if the probability of an opposition victory, P(W|m), is high enough, the regime may struggle to deploy any significant amount of electoral fraud.

Still, these complications reinforce my core conclusion that electoral authoritarians win elections by appearing unstoppable. Highly autocratic regimes aren't less vulnerable to losing elections. When cracks appear in any regime's front of invincibility, they can be swept off their feet by a sudden wave of opposition.

VI. Conclusion: Looking for Unity

I explored the dynamics of elections in electoral authoritarian regimes with the aim of identifying the conditions under which those elections were meaningful and hotly contested. I also sought to understand the incentives that drive the behavior of dictators and influence the choices of the discontent. In chapter I, I outlined the defining characteristics of electoral authoritarianism, and highlighted its growing importance. I concurred with scholars who emphasize the importance of electoral authoritarianism as its own phenomenon and not merely as a stepping stone to eventual democratization and noted some of the ways in which elections are useful to dictators. I followed my introduction with a review of the existing literature on elections in authoritarian regimes. Conscious that I hoped to explain electoral outcomes, I split the literature into three broad categories: studies which emphasized the importance of structural conditions, those which focused on opposition and regime strategies, and those that emphasized the collection action dilemma and understood elections as mechanisms for people opposed to the regime to coordinate their efforts. Aware that structural conditions could lack explanatory power at a per-election level of granularity and that strategic insights may not hold up in other contexts, I chose to focus largely on the collective action approach.

I hypothesized that signals of regime strength might deflate and derail an opposition's efforts to challenge an electoral authoritarian regime. I identified incumbency, polling, tenure length and international support as potential signals of regime strength. I then identified my universe of cases, which included all minimally competitive national elections where the office of the incumbent leader was contested and the incumbent or a chosen successor was running. I used random intercept logistic regression models to predict the likelihood of opposition victories,

protests and boycotts and control for the international environment, economic circumstance and the repressiveness of the regime. My quantitative results established correlations between incumbency and a lower chance of opposition victory or post-election mobilization, and a higher chance of election boycotts. Poor incumbent polling, as predicted, had the opposite effects for each electoral outcome I considered. Short and excessively long incumbent tenures, meanwhile, predicted higher likelihoods of an opposition challenge, while medium-long tenured incumbents fared much better. However, I couldn't find the same result, with 95% statistical confidence, for outright opposition victory or boycotts. Similarly, I found an association between external aid to autocrats and lower likelihoods of opposition breakthroughs. On the other hand, I didn't find significant evidence for the predictive power of the international environment or the relative authoritarianism of a country on electoral wins for the opposition. For boycotts, the relative authoritarianism of countries drove most variance in results.

Drawing on my results, I proposed a two-player game of authoritarian elections. In my game, the opposition leaders decide whether to risk a confrontational campaign against the regime. They make their choice by weighing the likelihood and benefits of victory against the costs they expect the regime to inflict upon them. I use my game to explain the association between signals of incumbent vulnerability and electoral outcomes. I propose that differences in the behavior of authoritarian rulers depend on whether they aim to discourage the opposition by cultivating public support and making opposition victory seem less likely or discourage the opposition by raising the costs of participation. I also acknowledge the limitations of my results and note that it suffers from low R^2 values.

Further Research

Unfortunately, one major limitation of my study is the lack of data on opposition coalitions. Howard and Reussler (2006) and Donno (2013) find that at least under some circumstances, opposition coalitions make "liberalizing electoral outcomes" more likely. Gandhi and Reuter (2013) and Van De Walle (2006) both suggest that opposition coalitions become more likely when victory is believed to be a strong possibility. Drawing from my results, I'd also expect that opposition coalitions become more likely when the opposition picks up on signals of the regime's vulnerability. However, while Gandhi, Reuter, Wahmann (2012) and Donno all coded for opposition coalitions, no dataset on opposition coalitions comparable to NELDA in historical and geographical scope exists. Given the limits of the available data, I chose not to model opposition coalitions. A comprehensive model of authoritarian elections must explain why opposition parties cooperate and how important that collaboration is to electoral outcomes. In this study, I could not answer those questions empirically.

Further evidence for my hypothesis that signals of incumbent vulnerability snowball into major challenges of a regime could be found by studying the consequences of other hints of vulnerability. For instance, poor performance by the regime in local or parliamentary elections might fatally undermine the incumbent's prospects in following elections. The PRI's defeat in local elections, for instance, (Magaloni 2006) presaged its eventual national defeat. Does the loss of support in key industries or professions undermine a dictator's rule? How about the relationship between protests and turnout in subsequent elections? More fine-grained data on electoral authoritarian regimes would allow for empirical answers to these questions. For instance, data on elite defections, ruling party recruitment, and grassroots ruling party membership could offer really useful insight about rising or waning public enthusiasm for authoritarian parties. Data on civil society strength, voter registration and turnout, opposition campaigns and protests, and more

labor-intensive work like poll-monitoring or parallel tabulation could allow us to measure the vitality of anti-government movements. This sparsity of available data on electoral authoritarian politics highlights a broader opportunity for research.

Finally, our understanding of electoral authoritarianism could benefit from a better understanding of the reasons people vote, especially their reasons for preferring the opposition. Dubiously-democratic governments often use tribal loyalty, vote-buying and patronage to gin up turnout on their behalf (Blaydes 2010; Brusco, Nazereno and Stokes 2004; Giné and Gazala 2018). But the reasons that people take risks to work or turn out for the opposition seem underexplored in the context of modern electoral authoritarian regimes. What motivates regular people to show up to protests and put themselves at risk of harm? When their friends and neighbors bite their tongue and accept injustice, why don't they? Their bravery, their poise and sometimes their tragedy speak to a deeply held faith in the human spirit. Their tenacity and hope deserves our attention.

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