

Voting in Authoritarian Elections

Turkuler Isiksel
Department of Political Science
Columbia University
nti2002@columbia.edu

Thomas Pepinsky
Department of Government
Cornell University
pepinsky@cornell.edu

FIRST DRAFT: August 9, 2019
THIS DRAFT: September 20, 2019

Abstract

When accounting for why elections, voting, and political representation are meaningful and valuable practices, political theorists tend to assume that the political system in which these institutions occur is broadly democratic. However, authoritarian regimes also make use of these institutions. Furthermore, recent empirical research shows that elections in “hybrid,” “competitive authoritarian,” or “pseudo-democratic” regimes *matter*. They can stabilize authoritarian regimes by giving them the veneer of popular approval, although they can also provide opportunities for unseating incumbent regimes. Are the ethics of political participation—and, specifically, of *voting*—fundamentally different in non-democratic regimes? Do the same civic imperatives that support voting in democracies come out in favor of boycotts, abstentions, or even civil disobedience under electoral authoritarianism? Can citizens expect elections and electoral participation to increase the chances of a democratic transition? We argue that more complex moral considerations confront voters in authoritarian regimes compared to voters in democratic regimes, since the answers to these questions hinge in part on the role elections play in authoritarian states. We argue that a voter’s judgment must depend not merely on principled justifications for political participation but also on prudential considerations about the impact that electoral participation is likely to have on the regime’s longevity. We enumerate some of these considerations.

Voting in Authoritarian Elections*

Introduction

Many democratic theorists maintain that electoral participation achieves or facilitates some political good: individual and collective autonomy, political equality, justice, peaceful conflict resolution, political stability, better or smarter policies. Accordingly, they argue that citizens have good reasons (or, more strongly, moral duties) to participate in the electoral process. However, these arguments overwhelmingly assume that these elections occur under a democratic regime. Recent decades have seen an increase in the number of authoritarian regimes that make use of elections. Furthermore, these elections have been shown to *matter* in various ways. While elections can sometimes overthrow authoritarian regimes, most contemporary work on authoritarianism and its institutional foundations suggests that elections also serve to further entrench them. As Svobik (2012: 13) pithily notes, “under dictatorship, nominally democratic institutions serve quintessentially authoritarian ends.”

If the latter is true, then the mere act of voting—even when casting a vote for the opposition—may strengthen an authoritarian regime. How should these considerations inform arguments about whether or not citizens ought to vote? Are the ethics of political participation—and, specifically, of *voting*—fundamentally different under non-democratic regimes? Do the same civic imperatives that support voting in democracies come out in favor of boycotts, spoiled ballots, abstentions, or even civil disobedience in electoral authoritarianisms? Can citizens expect elections and electoral participation to increase the chances of a democratic transition?

* For thoughtful comments and discussion, we thank Eric Beerbohm, Anne Meng, Ben Ansell, Simone Chambers, Steph Haggard, Anthoula Malkopoulou, and participants at the 2019 APSA Annual Meeting.

Compelling answers to these questions cannot be purely analytical, since they hinge on the role that elections play in authoritarian states. For instance, although democratic theorists tend to assume that voting will enhance the democratic qualities of a regime, however minimally, under authoritarianism this assumption does not hold. But while most democratic theorists also view elections as necessary but not sufficient for democratic legitimacy, they have had little to say about the legitimacy of elections in regimes that are non-democratic.¹ It is easy enough to conflate elections with democracy, either by treating elections as a defining feature of democracy (what Schmitter and Karl 1991: term “the fallacy of electoralism”) or—an error more prevalent in democratic theory—that elections only occur in democracies. Electoral authoritarianism disrupts these easy assumptions and prompts us to revisit longstanding assumptions about the democratic value of elections. It suggests that elections confer legitimacy on political authority only when certain other conditions are met (Kirshner 2018). Similarly, while democratic theorists acknowledge that abstaining can make citizens complicit in injustices committed by their political institutions (Beerbohm 2012), they rarely acknowledge that the ethical stakes involved in voting might depend on the institutional framework in which elections take place.

In this paper we draw on the growing literature on electoral authoritarian regimes to revisit the ethics of voting in democratic theory. Our core insight is that elections under authoritarianism provide stability to undemocratic regimes, with the consequence that voting—even against an authoritarian regime—may strengthen illiberal and undemocratic forces. This upends our conventional understanding of the ethics of political participation, questioning the assumptions implicit in existing accounts: for instance, that voting in elections increases (if only

¹ Kirshner (2018) is a notable exception. Kirshner’s focus, however, is on the problem of political obligation in electoral authoritarianisms (specifically, whether the outcomes of authoritarian elections are morally binding on citizens. Unlike him, we do not address the complicated question of whether the outcome of an election under authoritarian conditions can or should be considered legitimate.

infinitesimally) the likelihood that one's preferred outcomes will obtain, affirms the political autonomy and equality of citizens, improves the quality of policy outcomes, enables the expression of diverse points of view, or strengthens democratic institutions or liberal civil society. We ask how our ethical considerations must change when we know that many authoritarians count on mass participation for illiberal or undemocratic purposes. Might the stabilizing and legitimating functions of authoritarian elections, for example, create an obligation for citizens who value democracy *not* to vote?

Our analysis has both practical and theoretical implications. As we will show, authoritarian elections are increasingly common, and activists and ordinary citizens alike confront the question of whether to participate in them. We consider a variety of justifications for voting or abstaining from such elections, highlighting tensions that are familiar to citizens of such regimes but which have not been considered from the perspective of democratic theory or the ethics of voting. Although our analysis does not yield sharp conclusions—you *should not* vote in authoritarian elections, or you *must* vote in authoritarian elections—it does provide much-needed insight into how individuals might reason through these ethical questions.

Our consideration of authoritarian elections also helps to clarify our intuitions about the ethics of voting under *democratic* elections. Most directly, our discussion highlights how assumptions about the possibility of political turnover or incumbent defeat have implicitly shaped our understanding of the ethics of voting. Without such assumptions, it may make sense to approach the ethics of voting as similar to other forms of political participation such as protest, boycotts, and activism that may have value even if they do not yield their intended outcomes in the immediate term. Our discussion also invites us to consider the imperfections inherent in otherwise democratic political systems; even though we maintain that there is a meaningful

difference between competitive (yet imperfect) elections and non-competitive elections, we urge greater scrutiny of the assumptions inherent in normative analyses of ideal-type democratic elections.

Conceptualizing Authoritarian Elections

Elections in authoritarian regimes are nominally competitive elections that take place against a background of coercive constraints on dissent, pluralism, and organized political opposition. Authoritarian regimes employ elections to justify and strengthen their rule, while decimating the deep infrastructure of electoral politics, including robust guarantees of freedom of speech, information, and association; the freedom to run for office; equal access amongst electoral contestants to material and informational resources; and others. The act of voting on election day should not obscure these underlying circumstances of authoritarian control. In this section we outline an emerging consensus in the contemporary literature on authoritarian governance about the role of elections in so-called electoral authoritarian regimes.

Typologies of authoritarian regimes

The past twenty years has seen an explosion of research on politics under authoritarianism. The idea that regimes differ based on their decision-making procedures dates at least to Aristotle's *Politics* (2013), but typological approaches to non-democratic politics remained relatively crude, focusing on the broad distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian regimes (Friedrich and Brzezinski 1965; Linz 2000). In an important early contribution, however, contributors to the volume *Elections without Choice* (Hermet et al. 1978) turned their analytical focus on the practice of elections under uncompetitive or semi-competitive conditions, outlining a broad set of functions of authoritarian elections including communication, education, legitimation, and power-sharing (Hermet 1978: 13-7). Each has implications for the

normative evaluation of elections. To take the most basic example, if the function of elections is to provide legitimacy to the ruling party, and yet that party faced no prospect of having been defeated, then that legitimacy must stem from something other than a standard liberal account of electoral legitimacy.

The new literature on authoritarianism, which developed from the seminal contribution of Geddes (1999), has developed a more sophisticated understanding of authoritarian rule that, in broad strokes, distinguishes between regimes with more democratic features (elections, legislatures, and parties) and those without them. Geddes classified authoritarian regimes as “party,” “military,” “personalist,” and mixed types that combined some or all of these features (i.e. “party-military” or “triple-threat”); Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014) add to these the types “oligarchy” and “indirect military.” Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010) classify authoritarian regimes as “military,” “civilian,” or “royal,” with no mixed types. These works are distinctive in their effort to code all or nearly all authoritarian regimes. Other typological classifications that do not aim to exhaustively code all regimes include Schedler (2006) on “electoral authoritarianism” (the term that we adopt in this essay) and Levitsky and Way (2010) on “competitive authoritarianism.”

A separate line of research moves away from nominal classifications and focuses on particular regime features which vary dichotomously or ordinally. Gandhi and Przeworski (2007) classify authoritarian regimes based on whether they have legislative parties (none, one, or more than one). Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018) measure the extent of personalism within the authoritarian regime. And Svobik (2012) collected data on regime features such as opposition party presence in the legislature and whether the head of executive is elected. There are many others. What distinguishes these variable-based approaches from the typological approaches

described previously is the possibility that, for example, military rule, personalism, and electoral competition may all vary independently from one another.

Plainly, there are many ways to conceptualize and classify authoritarian regimes, but there is wide agreement in the contemporary literature on authoritarianism that *one* important dimension along which these regimes vary is whether or not they adopt nominally democratic institutions such as elections.

How authoritarian elections work

Not all authoritarian systems discourage their subjects from political participation. Political movements such as fascism, corporatism, populism, or revolutionary theocracy invite the masses into the political arena, so long as they can control them (Urbinati 2014; Linz 2000). Nevertheless, prior to this recent wave of research on authoritarian rule, elections under authoritarianism were seen as something of a puzzle. Why would regimes subject themselves to elections they have no intention of losing? The orienting assumption in the new literature on authoritarianism is broadly rationalist: regimes do things that maximize their likelihood of remaining in power. It follows from this assumption that elections, like parties and legislatures, *must* serve some useful function from the perspective of the regime. This body of research is now rich and well-developed (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009), and adds to the list of electoral functions proposed by Hermet (1978) the notion that elections allow authoritarian regimes to coopt elites and oppositions, to share power, and to gain information about the strength of the opposition.

All of these functions require authoritarian elections of a particular sort. We can conceptualize electoral competitiveness as a continuum, ranging from sham elections one extreme to perfectly just and competitive elections at the other. Our concern is not with the

entirely managed affairs that allegedly generate 100% turnout and support for the incumbent, as in the 2002 elections in Iraq.² Rather, we are interested elections that are closer to the middle of this continuum, in which it is possible for voters to choose among more than one candidate or party and the outcome is not clearly determined by wholesale fraud (e.g. ballot stuffing or lying about the vote totals) but which fail to meet basic standards of democracy (which we will clarify below). As Thompson (2002: 3) observes, the closer an election, “the harder it is to show that a particular violation or set of violations [of electoral rules] was the factor that makes the difference.” This generates some amount of uncertainty over the outcome of the election, but also allows the regime to identify supporters and opponents, to coordinate expectations about distributive politics and patronage, and claim electoral legitimacy. It also generates deep *moral* ambiguity about whether the elections faithfully represent the will of the (majority) of the electorate and therefore vest the government with a well-founded right to rule.³

Our focus is on just these specific sorts of elections, in electoral or competitive authoritarian regimes. What distinguishes these regimes from other kinds of authoritarian regimes is their electoralism: they hold elections that are not complete shams, they encourage participation without forcing it, and they allow opposition candidates and parties to contest these elections. As a result, it is normally the case that the incumbent’s victory reflects an actual majority of the votes cast. But the elections that they hold fail to meet the minimal standards for democracy, understood as elections that are “*free*, in the sense that there is virtually no fraud or

² “There were 11,445,638 eligible voters—and every one of them voted for the president, according to Izzat Ibrahim, Vice-Chairman of Iraq’s Revolutionary Command Council,” *BBC News*, “Saddam ‘wins 100% of vote’,” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/2331951.stm> (accessed June 20, 2019).

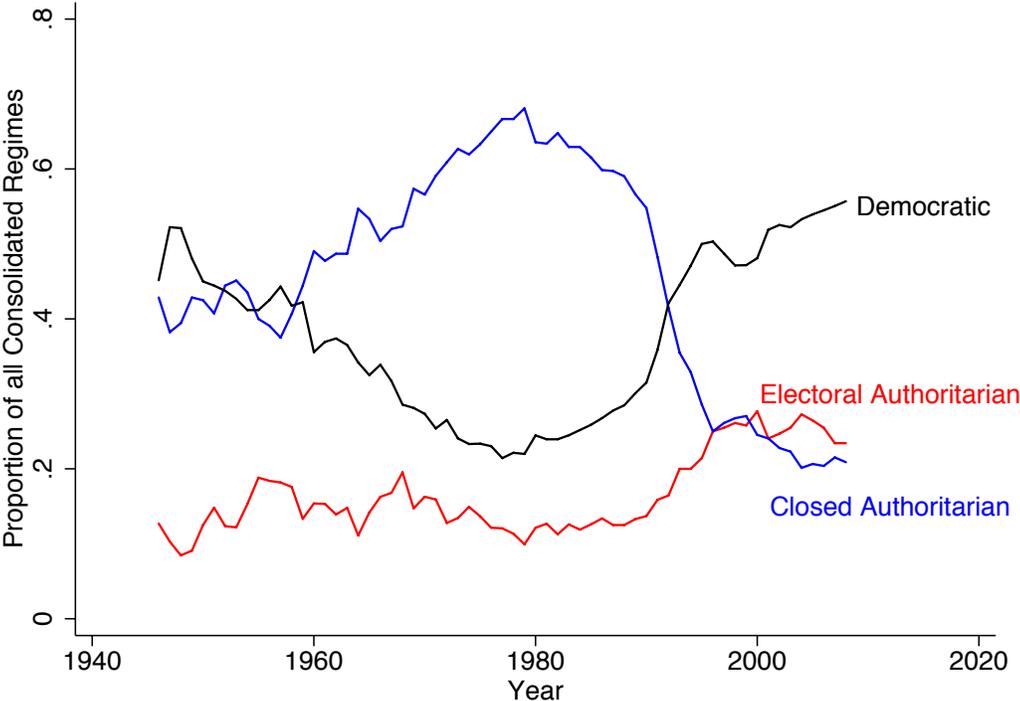
³ The legitimacy claimed by the victors of authoritarian elections is itself ambiguous and contested. We distinguish between electoral legitimacy as a descriptive criterion of a procedurally valid entitlement to hold office, and legitimacy as a normative judgment about whether an incumbent has the right to rule. We do not argue that merely holding elections entitles authoritarian regimes to legitimacy in the latter sense. Electoral authoritarian regimes, however, hold that the former implies the latter.

intimidation of voters, and *fair*, in the sense that opposition parties campaign on relatively even footing” (Levitsky and Way 2010: 7). For this reason, elections cannot be interpreted as referenda among parties or candidates because of the “uneven playing field” that systematically favors the incumbents. Levitsky and Way (2010) identify “access to resources,” “access to media,” and “access to law” as three important elements of the playing field. Schedler (2002) elaborates a range of practices that authoritarian regimes may employ to manipulate elections, ranging from efforts to restrict opposition parties’ ability to campaign and deliver their messages, to stacking the voter rolls, to more plainly undemocratic practices such as stuffing the ballot boxes. Under electoral authoritarianism, these practices are both severe enough and biased enough in favor of the incumbent regime that elections are neither free nor fair.

Many electoral authoritarian regimes also restrict what political parties can contest in elections. Under Indonesia’s New Order regime, the ruling Golkar styled itself as something greater than just a political party, and all opposition parties were forced to merge into two legal, “official” opposition parties (Reeve 1985). Even when regimes do not exert such strong control over what parties may contest, they may make it difficult for opposition parties to establish themselves as legal organizations that can contest in elections. Some electoral authoritarian regimes, such as Russia under Putin, nurture “parastatal” opposition parties that form relatively freely but are designed to contain opposition voices (March 2009). Leaders and members of parties that pose a more radical challenge to the regime may be jailed or banned from political activity as they are in Turkey. Still, the essential feature of authoritarian elections for our purposes is that the voter’s activity—cast a secret ballot in a system that allows for universal suffrage, provides some degree of choice among candidates, and some uncertainty about the outcome—is comparable to that we find in an electoral democracy.

Just how common is electoral authoritarianism? In Figure 1 we provide a rough answer to this question, looking at the proportion of all consolidated regimes per year that are democracies, electoral authoritarian regimes, and closed authoritarian regimes. Regimes are “democratic” if coded as such by (Geddes et al. 2014). The remainder are closed authoritarian regimes unless at least one of the following two conditions holds: there is a legislature in which the regime party holds less than all of the seats, or there is an executive who is elected by less than all eligible voters, each as coded by (Svolik 2012). These coding rules are generously inclusive but they differentiate effectively between cases such as the USSR and Iraq under Saddam Hussein, on one hand, and Mexico under the Institutional Revolutionary Party, on the other.

Figure 1: Electoralism, 1946-2008



The red line denoting electoral authoritarian regimes begins to rise at the end of the Cold War, alongside the so-called “Third Wave” of democratization (Morse 2012). Today, electoral

authoritarian regimes are roughly as common as their uncompetitive closed authoritarian counterparts.

Importantly, elections under electoral or competitive authoritarianism *do* sometimes lead to the defeat of the ruling party. Elections are the second-most common way that authoritarian regimes end (the most common is by coup; see Geddes et al. 2018: 179). Because they are not entirely controlled, offering some meaningful (if circumscribed) electoral competition and thereby some uncertainty about the outcomes, authoritarian regimes that hold elections sometimes find themselves unseated by elections that they intended to win through illiberal and undemocratic means. Unsurprisingly, elections held in competitive authoritarian regimes are more likely to result in regime change than are elections in closed authoritarian regimes (Brownlee 2009; Donno 2013; Howard and Roessler 2006).

Comparativists sometimes describe this phenomenon of authoritarian elections that result in regime change as “democratization by elections” (see e.g. Lindberg 2009). And indeed, a common feature of anti-authoritarian backlash from the Arab Spring to the Colored Revolutions has mass opposition to illiberal elections (see Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Tucker 2007). Less dramatically, elections at the local level may produce wins for the opposition, as the 2019 mayoral elections in Ankara and Istanbul demonstrate. Although these typically do not unseat the regime, they can undermine the regime’s power by disrupting patronage networks and revenue streams, tarnishing its image of stability and universal support, and encouraging greater dissent both within and outside its ranks.

On imperfect elections

The literature on authoritarian elections provides a range of insights into the function of elections in regimes that have no intention of losing them. In broad strokes, authoritarian

elections are instruments of top-down control that strengthen the regime, rather than tools through which mass publics can affect meaningful political change through choice of government. One objection to this distinction between the function and conduct of authoritarian and democratic elections is that it romanticizes the latter. After all,

democratic norms are not *perfectly* realized anywhere, even in advanced democracies. Access to the electoral arena always has a cost and is never perfectly equal; the scopes and jurisdictions of elective offices are everywhere limited; electoral institutions invariably discriminate against somebody inside or outside the party system; and democratic politics is never quite sovereign but always subject to societal as well as constitutional constraints (Schedler 2002: 38).

Given these observations, it is reasonable to ask if the distinction between electoral authoritarianism and electoral democracy is a meaningful one, both practically and theoretically.

We think that it is, on both counts. Practically, we can distinguish between irregular, nonsystematic, and incidental cases of uncompetitive elections under democratic regimes and regular, systematic, and deliberate efforts to prevent regime change through electoral manipulation. For example, uncompetitive mayoral elections in American cities where the Democratic Party is dominant and patronage is common are conceptually distinct from uncompetitive presidential elections in countries where opposition parties are unable to campaign freely because the incumbent regime controls the press, intimidates or persecutes opposition candidates, or restricts opposition rallies (but not pro-regime ones). This distinction is not simply one of scale; it is profitable to conceptualize local and state-level elections in parts of the American South under Jim Crow as competitive authoritarian elections (Mickey 2015; Gibson 2012). Low levels of competitiveness and uncertainty about the outcome of an election may have many origins aside from the deliberate efforts of the incumbent to produce an uneven playing field. Uncommitted democrats may lie and cheat in otherwise democratic elections.

Theoretically, this distinction is important because it clarifies the stakes of our argument and the value of our intervention. Consider a strong critical position on the value of electoral democracy. If we were to grant the argument that democratic elections are *merely* tools of top-down control, *only* subject to the whims of powerful incumbents, *functionally equivalent* to authoritarian elections, then we would conclude that there are no moral duties associated with voting (and, indeed, as we discuss below, some have taken this position). Of course, we do not hold this strong position. Rather, we explore how the ethics of *actually existing* elections in democracies might inform how citizens think about political participation under authoritarian conditions, and vice versa.

The Ethics of Voting in an Authoritarian Context

The voting ethics literature reveals a curious paradox. Democratic theorists tend to agree that “[e]lections play a distinctive and important role within a broader framework of democracy” (Chapman 2018: 102), even though many advocate more robust forms of political engagement (Barber 1984; Chambers 2012). Although virtually everyone acknowledges that elections have a special role in modern democratic life, and even though the value of elections presupposes that individual citizens actually do turn out at the polls, some democratic theorists have reasoned that the individual act of voting is irrational. Modern elections take place in large constituencies, where the chance that one person’s vote will be decisive is vanishingly small. Since no individual voter has any chance of deciding the outcome of an election, the utility of virtually any other activity outweighs the time and energy any individual would spend at the ballot box. The inconsequentiality of one’s vote also undermines any “claim that one is producing some public good through exercising the franchise” (Lomasky and Brennan 2000: 67), which means

that there can be no ethical obligation to vote, at least on a broadly consequentialist view (see Lomasky and Brennan 2000).

It is, of course, possible to challenge this dyspeptic view by arguing that the fault is not in the rational or cognitive processes of individuals, but in theories that fail to explain why people still insist on turning up at polls in such large numbers (Elster 1986). As Elster warns, there is a “very strong presumption for rationality, and a strong case for not imputing irrationality lightly” (Elster 1986: 27). Many democratic theorists have provided alternative accounts of rationality of voting. First, as Beerbohm points out, the standard irrationality argument against voting presumes a model of causation that “places exclusive weight on us as pivotal actors” (Beerbohm 2012: 81; Mackie 2014). But “[v]oting is, by its nature a social activity, a problem of collective, not individual action” (Hill 2002: 83). Nobody goes to the polls seriously expecting their vote to swing the result. However, neither is it misguided for an individual to assume that her vote has some influence on the outcome, however minimal. In his “contributory account” of voting, Gerry Mackie (2014) contends that the influence of the individual vote may be imperceptible, but it is not nonexistent. The individual voter understands herself to be engaged in a collective effort and is justified in valuing “her effective contribution to the effort” (Mackie 2014: 44). In this respect, voting is unlike consumer choice, where the standard transaction “is the pivotal choice of one alternative over another” (46). Rather voting “is a *contribution* to a decision to be made by some collective of individuals over one alternative or another” (46). Unlike the marketplace, “politics is fundamentally a team sport which yields collective goods” that ultimately redound to the individual (Hill 2002: 89). Accordingly, voting should be understood not simply as a form of individual utility maximization but as a form of “joint agency” (Beerbohm 2012: 74) that is “dependent on the actions of other individuals” (Beerbohm 2012: 66).

Thus, while it is “irrational for a single voter to hold the intention that *her ballot*—determines the outcome” (Beerbohm 2012: 74), each citizen is justified in “viewing [his or her] vote as an action in concert to bring about certain ends” (Beerbohm 2012: 81). Voting, Maskivker (2016: 232) contends, is better understood as an act of “collective, rather than strictly individual, rationality.” If I have strong indications that others will show up to bring about the jointly hoped-for outcome, I have good reasons to turn out. These reasons may include contributing to the overall stability and accountability of the democratic system (Mackie 2014: 35-7), winning by a larger margin or lose by a smaller one (Mackie 2014: 23-4), publicizing a cause, or to building support for one’s preferred candidate / policy / party over multiple electoral cycles.

As this discussion suggests, democratic theorists have found ways to counter the idea that voting is individually inconsequential and therefore irrational. However, theorists on both sides of this debate often neglect to acknowledge the institutional conditions that their arguments presuppose. For instance, if individual votes are unlikely to “make a difference” under a perfectly competitive democratic system, they are even less significant under authoritarianism, where the prospects of an electoral alternation of power are slim indeed. Under such circumstances, there can be no strong moral obligation to act in one way or the other on election day, because what Beerbohm calls “the contributory nexus” between voters and political outcomes is simply too weak (Beerbohm 2012: 73). As Kirshner (forthcoming) observes, the control that authoritarian regimes exercise over political outcomes eliminates the political agency that elections normally give citizens. What voters have is a false choice, because the only choices available to them are ones sanctioned by the regime. If this is indeed the case, then the individual decision about whether to turn out is morally irrelevant. Put differently, voters’ lack of influence

over political outcomes excuses them from any ethical or civic duty to vote that they might have under a fully democratic system.

We think that this way of thinking overstates the control that authoritarian regimes exercise over political outcomes and, perhaps more importantly, over their citizens. The ethics of voting and the circumstances of electoral authoritarianism are considerably more complex. In what follows, we reflect on the ways in which the circumstances of electoral authoritarianism affect some of the reasons that might motivate citizens to turn up at the polls. These reasons include, but are no means limited to, sincere concern for the good of one's political community; the desire to have one's voice heard or to show solidarity with one's fellow citizens and/or partisans; to engage in collective action; and to protest an incumbent, a policy, or even the regime itself.⁴ In particular, we consider two key ways of reasoning about the ethical stakes of voting, one justice-based and the other epistemic. When applied to the circumstances of elections under authoritarianism, both approaches are capable of supporting opposing conclusions. However, on balance, we conclude that voting can still have some democratic value in authoritarian contexts, although the individual decision to turn up at the ballot box is likely to be tempered by prudential considerations and does not rise to the level of a categorical duty.

Before proceeding, we note that we do not argue that the fact that an authoritarian regime conducts elections mitigates its willingness to exercise violence or to perpetuate injustice. Electoral authoritarian regimes usually are seen as engaging in "selective and intermittent repression" (Schedler 2013: 92), in contrast to the more systematic repression of their harder authoritarian counterparts. But although there is some evidence that electoral authoritarian regimes are less repressive than are other types of regimes (Rivera 2016; Gandhi 2008: 122-3),

⁴ While we do not stake any strong claim that there is a freestanding ethical or civic duty to vote, we do believe as a general matter that people often have good reasons to turn up at the ballot box, including those just listed.

we do not hold that elections *cause* these regimes to be less violent.⁵ For this reason, we do not entertain a family of arguments that holds that one should vote in electoral authoritarian regimes in order to forestall even greater violence under a hard authoritarian regime. We do, however, consider below whether the uncertainty associated with regime change provides an argument in favor of voting to foster political stability.

Voting is a matter of fulfilling our duty to strive for a just political community

According to some, the duty to vote derives from our general moral obligation to establish just political institutions (Maskivker 2016). Building on a Kantian intuition, Rawls argues that we are obliged to “further just arrangements not yet established, at least when this can be done without too much cost to ourselves” (Rawls 1971: 115). Of course, saddling individuals with a general duty to establish just political institutions is too onerous and, in any case, unassured of success (Korsgaard 2008). A more reasonable demand is that citizens avoid supporting *unjust* political institutions. As Beerbohm (2012) argues, the state exercises coercive force in our name. After all, we enable public institutions by paying the taxes that finance them and observing the rules that they make. As such, when we disagree about how the state deploys its coercive power and its resources, we must use the opportunities available to us to change the practices we find morally problematic. This perspective is particularly relevant when considering repressive political regimes. As Beerbohm observes, the general duty to avoid complicity in injustice is institutionally mediated; that is to say, its requirements will vary according to “the

⁵ Using the regime codings we presented in Figure 1, we have investigated the correlations between electoral authoritarianism and a wide range of indices of state repression using a difference-in-differences framework. We find that electoral authoritarian regimes grant their citizens greater civil liberties and political rights (Freedom House 2019) than do nonelectoral authoritarian regimes (but fewer than do democracies). At the same time, we find no difference between electoral and nonelectoral authoritarianism in the prevalence of mass killings, torture, disappearances, or a general index of physical integrity (Cingranelli et al. 2014), although both types of authoritarian regimes fare worse than democracies. Full results are available upon request.

kind of relation that we bear to our elected officials and our state institutions” (Beerbohm 2012: 11-2). In electoral regimes, voting is the most basic practice that allows citizens to shape the exercise of political power. Voting is therefore a matter of avoiding complicity with any injustice that the state undertakes in our name and with our contribution—not merely in the sense of keeping our hands clean, but in the more meaningful sense of monitoring, mobilizing against, and thwarting morally objectionable acts.

Using Beerbohm’s account, one might reason that the morally obligatory course of action is to turn out to vote against an authoritarian incumbent whenever one has the opportunity to do so. But our discussions of the stabilizing effects of authoritarian elections—that elections seem to be associated with longer-lived authoritarian regimes (Frantz and Morgenbesser 2019)—complicate the moral stakes of voting in such contexts. Authoritarian leaders can harness the normative power of elections in a number of ways. For instance, elections signal that those who occupy positions of political authority are subject to majority approval and therefore enjoy the right to rule (Chapman 2018). High turnout rates might serve authoritarian incumbents particularly well, given a background assumption that “the more completely the preferences of the majority are registered, the more democratic the system will be” (Hill 2002). By contrast, low turnout is often taken as a signal of popular disaffection with the regime, undermining its claim to represent the views of all citizens. By employing elections and encouraging turnout, authoritarian regimes can create the impression that citizens exercise political authority through their representatives. This explains why these regimes are reluctant to cede the rhetorical mantle of democratic legitimacy even when they jettison traditional liberal institutions (Isaac 2017).

Furthermore, the stabilizing dynamics of elections that democratic theorists extol can also be advantageous to authoritarians. Elections channel the opposition’s energies toward a

convenient, “civil” outlet, lessening the risk that the regime’s opponents will resort to violence. They thereby help societies to avoid violent revolution and civil conflict. The prospect of a future victory (however remote) incentivizes losers to observe established rules instead of trying to win power by overthrowing the regime through irregular means (Schumpeter 1976; Przeworski 1999). However, the value of these outcomes—peace, order, stability, nonviolence—assumes the legitimacy of the system that produces them. There is no general obligation to support a stable but unjust, orderly yet repressive, peaceful but unrepresentative political regime.

All of this suggests that elections can perform what Hermet (1978: 14) termed an “anesthetising function” in authoritarian regimes. By participating in them, dissidents are coopted into a system controlled by the incumbent regime, keeping in check political forces that might otherwise engage in civil disobedience in search of a new, more just political order. Of course, critics have long argued that elections perform this anesthetic function even in the healthiest of democratic regimes. To explain why so many people turn up at the polls despite the manifest irrelevance of an individual vote, rational choice theorists have argued that the subjective satisfaction that voters draw from “compliance with the ethic of voting” makes up for the low instrumental value of their vote (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Since an ethical duty to commit an essentially insignificant act makes little sense, this belief is itself said to be irrational. According to Lomasky and Brennan, “belief in a duty to vote is the opiate of democratic masses” (Lomasky and Brennan 2000: 86). Although there is no philosophically sound way to justify this purported duty, they contend, *belief* in its moral rectitude gives citizens a soothing if false sense of agency, a “balm for their democratic anxieties” that distracts from the essential elitism of politics, where the rewards of power accrue to a small minority (Schumpeter 1976: 85).

What Lomasky and Brennan really seem to mean, then, is that *voting* is the opiate of the masses. Seen through this lens, Aytaç and Stokes's (2019) recent finding that the harder a regime makes it for opposition groups to prevail, the more avidly the latter participate in elections suggests that the ruse works all too well. Once again, however, we suggest treading lightly when characterizing the behavior of large numbers of people—as the opiate metaphor implies—as irrational, misled, or deluded. Is the surge of energy (for instance, in the form of increased election turnout) that opposition groups seem to display in the face of repressive measures (Aytaç and Stokes 2019) a display of collective foolishness? Before we explore alternative answers to this question, note that understating the efficacy of voting in this way throws into question the very distinction between electoral authoritarianism and democracy. Ultimately, both types of regime rely on the illusion of citizen control, and in both, the role of elections is to keep that illusion alive.

If the individual decision to turn out helps authoritarian regimes reap the strategic benefits of mass political participation while negating any democratic value added of elections, then it does seem to ensnare citizens in an ethical dilemma. On the one hand, their loyalty to democratic institutions may motivate citizens to cast a ballot and not engage in other, extra-legal means of regime change. On the other hand, their willingness to turn out can easily be misrepresented as implicit approval of the incumbent's right to rule once she wins reelection. In such circumstances, withdrawing from the public arena (including abstaining from voting) can be a morally justified means of resistance, perhaps even an effective one.⁶ In fact, if elections are advantageous *only* for the authoritarian incumbent, not only does this remove any ethical

⁶ Beerbohm writes that “Individuals whose share of political power has been seriously diluted—by a system where material wealth tracks political power—retain a prerogative to refrain from voting” (Beerbohm 2012: 11). In authoritarian regimes where the electoral arena is heavily tilted toward the incumbent, this applies to everyone who opposes the regime.

obligation to vote, but might create a contrary duty to *refrain* from exercising one's right to vote. The most civic-minded course of action may be to boycott elections altogether, or else to convey one's dissatisfaction in the form of "blank ballots, spoiled ballots, protest votes, ballots marked with slogans and political rhetoric" (Hill 2002: 86).⁷ In other words, the same democratic principles that nudge us toward the ballot box under a democratic system might, in an authoritarian setting, require that we deny the regime the political advantages it would reap from elections.

Viewed through the justice-based conception, elections under authoritarianism force civic-minded citizens to choose between two different forms of complicity. Either they are enabling an authoritarian regime by participating in a flawed election (and tacitly accepting its results), or they are passing up an opportunity (perhaps their sole peaceful option) to challenge the regime by withdrawing from the electoral process altogether. The ethical dilemma is exacerbated by the fact that political outcomes are uncertain: citizens cannot know which course of action, even if it could be undertaken on a collective scale, would be most likely to alleviate injustice. Below, we offer some prudential reasons why citizens of authoritarian regimes might nevertheless be morally justified in participating in the electoral process so long as they do not vote for the incumbent (a qualification we discuss below).

First, it may be that voting in an electoral authoritarian regime is the only low-risk way to participate in civic life (or what remains of it). Voting skeptics like to argue that citizens of democratic regimes can more effectively further their civic and political ends by doing almost anything *besides* voting: volunteering, organizing, leafletting, protesting, petitioning, etc. But

⁷ Since refusal to turn out is a passive form of abstention that might be indistinguishable from politically neutral apathy, spoiling ballots or leaving them blank may be more effective in communicating voters' refusal to play by the regime's script. On this distinction, see Elster (1985: 138).

such activities are risky under authoritarianism, whereas voting is typically far less risky by comparison (although of course, if voting entails high personal risk, citizens are morally entitled to refrain from it). Compared to the citizens of democratic regimes, citizens of many electoral authoritarian regimes have few alternative avenues of political participation whose personal costs are similarly modest.

Second, voting does offer a non-violent means to destabilize an electoral authoritarian regime. Skeptics are correct that voting in elections is not a particularly efficacious way to bring about policy change. Full-scale democratization in an authoritarian state is difficult to bring about by any means, much less the ballot box alone. We do not mean to overestimate the efficacy of voting, even considered as a collective rather than individual act. However, even though authoritarian regimes do exercise great control over political outcomes, including the electoral process, their control is rarely total. As the literature on democratization by elections makes clear, electoral authoritarian regimes are sometimes defeated—this happened in Mexico in 2000, in Malaysia in 2018, and in numerous other occasions. This means that in conducting elections, authoritarians take a risk, however minimal. A skeptical view of the efficacy of electoral participation under authoritarianism also ignores interstitial forms of political agency which, in conjunction with voting, can help pave the path to an eventual transition to democracy. For instance, dissidents may win local election victories, develop more effective strategies of cooperation, chart alternate paths of peaceful mobilization, or use elections to disseminate information.

In other words, even short of unseating authoritarian incumbents, elections can create risk and uncertainty for regimes whose strength hinges on their ability to control political events. Unexpectedly strong showings for the opposition, for instance, may expose a leader's eroding

support over time, trigger a leadership struggle, or spawn new alliances among opposition groups, as happened in Malaysia following the “political tsunami” of 2008 (Pepinsky 2009). Some choices, if made by a significant number of people, can destabilize the regime’s preferences or shift the balance of power, for instance by robbing the regime of a supermajority that might allow it to enact constitutional changes or by keeping it from securing or retaining key political offices. Narrow or contested election results can bring people out into the streets, producing pressure on the regime and amplifying demands for accountability and reform.

Another way in which elections can destabilize an authoritarian regime is by undermining its claim to representativeness. In recent years, political theorists have pointed to the ways in which populist leaders use elections to eliminate pluralism from the public arena (Müller 2016). These leaders often argue that their electoral mandate makes them the sole legitimate representatives of the people and/or the nation (Müller 2016: 37-8; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013: 153). Once populists are in power, they treat elections as plebiscites, that is, occasions for reauthorizing their leadership and dismissing dissenting viewpoints from the political arena (Urbinati 2014; 2019). Even when they enact measures to drastically reduce the chances of an alternation of power, a strong showing by the opposition (or a strengthening trend over time) can discredit the incumbent’s attempt to monopolize popular representation.

Third, even if elections under authoritarianism defang the opposition, participation may nevertheless be less objectionable than apathy. A disengaged citizenry is more convenient for an autocrat than an engaged one that jealously guards its prerogative to vote. If isolated and quiescent citizens are even less likely to mobilize around abuses of power, making it easier for the regime to retain power, then electoral participation may be desirable because it nurtures the types of anti-authoritarian citizens who are best able to press for liberalization. Furthermore, the

chances of peaceful regime change might be even more slim if dissidents *give up* on elections as a means of effectuating regime change. When this happens, turnover can only come through violence, revolution, coup, or some sort of extra-institutional event such as leader death. The counterintuitive implication here is that high turnout under authoritarianism may serve the interests of *both* the regime and of the opposition. An authoritarian regime may benefit from regime-legitimizing elections in the immediate term (with low risk of turnover), whereas the opposition may benefit over the longer term (with higher probability of peaceful rotation of power than under any feasible alternative political strategy).

This brings us to our fourth and final point: skewed elections might nevertheless help to keep civic practices alive under authoritarian conditions. Democratic theorists have hypothesized that abstaining contributes (however imperceptibly) to a risk of democratic collapse, while voting contributes (equally imperceptibly) to upholding a democratic system (Mackie 2014: 35-7, 46). Consequently, it is rational for people to vote in order to advance democracy itself, even if there are no dramatic substantive differences between particular candidates, parties, or policy options (Downs 1957; Mackie 2014). So stated, of course, this argument assumes a functioning democracy as the status quo. If the status quo is electoral authoritarianism, things are slightly different. For a voter whose exclusive motivation is to uphold an *existing* democratic system (rather than to endorse one electoral option over another), the material choice is between voting and abstaining rather than between alternative parties. Under authoritarianism, simply turning out to vote is not necessarily a democratic gesture; *which way* people vote is more important.

That said, keeping up habits of political participation may make an eventual peaceful democratic transition more likely. Indeed, the new literature on authoritarian successor parties—former hegemonic authoritarian parties like Indonesia’s Golkar Party, Mexico’s PRI, or the

Hungarian Socialist Party that persist after democratization—suggests that strong authoritarian parties accustomed to holding elections can facilitate successful democratic transitions (Loxton 2015; Riedl 2014). Electoral participation may therefore be valuable even if the regime exercises significant control over the who is permitted to run on what platform and how freely they may disseminate their message. Seeking change exclusively through the ballot box may be ineffectual in the short term, but in the long term it may ease the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, as citizens understand the practice and function of voting and accept it as the sole legitimate way to allocate political authority, and ruling parties understand that they may transition to democracy without losing access to power (Slater and Wong 2013). A committed democrat may choose to participate in flawed elections on the belief that doing so strengthens the institutions and nurtures the habitus that will sustain democracy sometime in the future.

The ethics of voting according to the epistemic conception

Another set of ethical considerations concerning electoral participation comes from the epistemic democracy literature. These observers value electoral democracy for producing better-than-random political outcomes (Estlund 2008; Landemore 2013). Majority rule derives its legitimacy not merely from being a procedural method of aggregating preferences or adjudicating among competing interests, Landemore argues; rather, it has “its own distinct epistemic properties” (Landemore 2013: 11). Some argue that these epistemic advantages depend on citizens’ being willing and able to “vote well.” If there is any moral obligation associated with voting, Brennan argues, it cannot be a duty to vote *simpliciter*, but is rather a duty to “vote well” (Brennan 2012). After all, voting in favor of a genocidal leader or an apartheid regime is not morally meritorious; it implicates us in injustice. Put differently, voting can only function as “a mechanism to support and erect just institutions and a just social order more generally”

(Maskivker 2016: 225) if voters are conscientious about how they cast their ballots. Proponents of this view disagree about what “voting well” requires, but most require that citizens should be willing and able to vote in conformity with certain standards of rationality, epistemic competence, and civic spiritedness. Failing to fulfil their duty to vote well contributes to “denying democracy the epistemic properties that come with the aggregation of (good) votes” (Maskivker 2016: 225).

One objection to this line of argument is that it leaves unanswered the all-important question of how to judge the sufficiency of voters’ knowledge, rationality, or civic mindedness. Many people are bad judges of their own level of competence (Dunning 2011), and voters who take the trouble of turning out are likely to believe they *are* voting well. Furthermore, modern societies are characterized by deep disagreement over values and facts (or, if not the facts themselves, then about the policy conclusions to be drawn from them). As a voter, I am unlikely to be persuaded by an epistemic yardstick that impugns my political choices as mistaken, irrational, or vicious. Democracy is indispensable precisely as a means of arriving at a collective judgment about *what counts* as the best option for us as a political community, not because alternative (and perhaps more reliable) standards do not exist, but because they are unlikely to garner widespread acceptance.

Perhaps surprisingly, the epistemic muddle that critics of democracy decry is less problematic for the citizens of authoritarian regimes. For example, there may not be a single, objective epistemic standard by which to judge whether affluent societies are better served by more or less immigration, or whether trade protectionism is the best way help domestic manufacturers. Under authoritarianism, however, the stakes of political choice can be (though are not necessarily) starker. The incumbent often runs on a record of repression, corruption, or

incompetence, and stands for more of the same. The opposition may or may not offer a viable or desirable alternative, but it has plenty of room to distinguish its agenda from that of the incumbent. It is not just that what Downs called the “expected party differential” can be far greater for voters under authoritarianism (Downs 1957: 39). Depending on what the candidates or parties in opposition stand for, there may only be one way to vote well, in the sense of avoiding grave political harms or supporting injustice.

In other cases, however, voters may have tradeoffs to make. Electoral authoritarian leaders often present themselves as moderates with records of good performance in office: during an era of strong growth and relative political openness in the 2000s, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey could claim credit for strong economic growth while contrasting himself favorably to both a repressive Kemalist establishment and a hardline Islamist opposition. It is less certain that there is objectively only one way to “vote well” in such contexts (particularly given uncertainty about how the leader will act in the future). In other contexts, voting against an authoritarian incumbent—given even a plausibly democratic and competent opposition—may be the only morally defensible option.

This point also helps to counter one of the assumptions behind the argument that voting is an individually irrational act. Modern elections, Lomasky and Brennan (2000: 69) contend, offer citizens a choice between sides that “typically... concur to a considerable extent concerning which items are to be valued and which disvalued.” In other words, not only do individual votes have virtually zero impact on the outcome, but the stakes of elections are too low (Brennan 2012; cf. Barry 1978).⁸ This argument assumes that electoral competition takes place against a background of stable democratic institutions and between catch-all parties converging toward the

⁸ This argument strikes us as glib even in the context of a US election, where parties clash on issues like the future of the planet and the civil rights of women, racial minorities, and immigrants.

median voter. The circumstances of electoral authoritarian systems are, of course, markedly different. As we have argued, even if the chance of alternation is small, the choices can be starker and the stakes of elections higher. In the best-case scenario, citizens may have the option to vote for an opposition party or candidate that signals a strong commitment to political liberalization. Even then, of course, such signals do not eliminate uncertainty over whether the opposition, if victorious, would deliver on such a difficult promise. The challengers may be authoritarians in democratic garb.⁹ Or they may be inept, corrupt, or thwarted by circumstance. But the injustice of the authoritarian incumbent is known with certainty. So, even though democratization through electoral alternation is unlikely, turning out to vote can matter *especially* when other avenues of dissent are closed.

At the extreme, one might argue that the very conditions of authoritarian rule make it impossible to vote well. Epistemic democrats acknowledge that institutional pathologies—such as party polarization or elite capture—might dilute the epistemic advantages of vote aggregation by distorting public opinion and coloring voters’ perceptions (Maskivker 2016). Such pathologies tend to be more severe under authoritarianism. For instance, authoritarian regimes often hamper citizens’ ability to make informed and rational decisions (among other things) by subjecting them to propaganda, blocking access to diverse information sources, and controlling the available electoral choices. If the conditions of authoritarianism vitiate any and all epistemic advantages that might be expected of elections, then citizens have one less reason to turn up to vote. In its most extreme articulation, it could be that the circumstances of repression rob the majority of its competence to decide basic political questions, undermining the epistemic value and moral legitimacy of elections altogether. This objection would apply to dissidents as well as

⁹ In fact, they are often dissatisfied former members of the incumbent authoritarian regime itself.

supporters of the regime, since they are equally subject to the same institutional and structural conditions.

We consider this epistemic objection to voting under authoritarianism to be unpersuasive. While there is no doubt that authoritarian regimes do their best to skew their citizens' political compass and limit their ability to meaningfully participate in political life, their attempts to do so are rarely as successful as they might wish. Furthermore, contemporary information and communication technologies allow the circulation of information that contradicts officially sanctioned narratives. Skeptics of the regime can often find their way into epistemic communities that escape state control, and a strong electoral showing by the opposition can help disseminate their views. This suggests that voters under authoritarian regimes usually retain the option and the ability to vote well.

Conclusions

Electoral authoritarianism raises important challenges to the way that political theorists have traditionally understood elections and political participation. In this paper we have brought the comparative politics of authoritarianism into conversation with the ethics of voting in political theory. The basic challenge to existing accounts—which assume elections to be democratic—is that elections are protean. Under democratic conditions, they deliver a range of democratic goods. Under authoritarianism, they often serve authoritarian ends. The dilemma for the ethical voter is whether participation in an election that the regime has no intention of losing, and which does not approximate a fair contest among candidates or platforms, does more to sustain an illiberal and undemocratic status quo than does staying home or spoiling one's ballot. This dilemma is complicated by the observation that sometimes authoritarian regimes *do* lose elections.

We have reasoned through this dilemma through two broad approaches: one that frames the ethics of participation in terms of creating a just society or avoiding complicity in injustice, and an epistemic democrat's view of elections as a means of harnessing majority wisdom. In neither case does our analysis provide strong or unconditional conclusions, for instance that one has a *duty to participate* in authoritarian elections, or that one *must not participate* in authoritarian elections. On balance, we argue, participating in authoritarian elections can be morally permissible, particularly if elections create unwelcome risks for the regime, erode the control it exercises over political outcomes, and keep alive habits of democratic political life and engagement.

This conclusion is in tension with a point of emphasis shared by normative theorists and empirical scholars alike. The emphasis conventionally placed on the democratic value of uncertainty and alternation would lead us to conclude that voting in elections under authoritarianism is futile. We challenge this implication, contending that even when short-term prospects of alternation are slim and uncertainty is low, voting might still make sense as a collective expression of dissent. Judging by the civic energy that repressive measures have been shown to unleash (Aytaç and Stokes 2019), dissidents are alive to the democratic potential of civic engagement under adverse conditions. Far from giving up, they make good use of whatever contestatory opportunities the regime allows them.

More speculatively, we can use this approach to think through some of the challenges confronting established democracies. Much of the literature on the ethics of voting assumes that voters choose between candidates whose differences are at the level of policy, not regime characteristics. In other words, they presume that all contestants are loyal to the basic framework of democracy. Even in what are conventionally considered established democracies, however,

this is often not the case. Even under broadly democratic conditions, voting is not merely a matter of choosing between alternate policy platforms, but can be a matter of choosing to preserve democracy (just as in the authoritarian context it is not merely a matter of endorsing the opposition but demanding one type of regime over another). Democracy itself is at stake when a voter confronts a segregationist platform (as in the Jim Crow era South), a democratically elected president who signals that he might not to leave office if he loses an election, or a party that promises to dismantle essential liberal safeguards if elected. In such instances, the ethics of voting are not independent of the content of one's political choice; there is at least a *civic* obligation, if not a moral one, to show up for team democracy.

References

- Aristotle. 2013. *Politics*. Translated by C. Lord. Second ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Aytaç, S. Erdem, and Susan C. Stokes. 2019. *Why Bother? Rethinking Participation in Elections and Protests*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Barber, Benjamin. 1984. *Strong Democracy. Participatory Politics for a New Age*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Beerbohm, Eric. 2012. *In Our Name: The Ethics of Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Barry, Brian. 1978. "Comment." In Stanley Benn, *Political Participation. A Discussion of Political Rationality*. Canberra: ANU Press.
- Brennan, Jason. 2012. *The Ethics of Voting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brownlee, Jason. 2009. "Portents of Pluralism: How Hybrid Regimes Affect Democratic Transitions." *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (3):515-32.
- Bunce, Valerie, and Sharon Wolchik. 2010. "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *World Politics* 62 (1):43-86.
- Chambers, Simone. 2012. "Deliberation and Mass Democracy." In *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*, ed. J. Parkinson and J. Mansbridge. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Chapman, Emilee Booth. 2018. "The Distinctive Value of Elections and the Case for Compulsory Voting." *American Journal of Political Science* 63 (1):101-12.
- Cheibub, José Antonio, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Raymond Vreeland. 2010. "Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited." *Public Choice* 143 (2-1):67-101.
- Cingranelli, David L., David L. Richards, and K. Chad Clay. 2014. "The CIRI Human Rights Dataset." Version 2014.04.14. Available online at <http://www.humanrightsdata.com>.
- Donno, Daniela. 2013. "Elections and Democratization in Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (3):703-16.

- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Dunning, David. 2011. "The Dunning–Kruger Effect: On Being Ignorant of One's Own Ignorance." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 44:247-96.
- Elster, Jon. 1985. "Rationality, Morality, and Collective Action." *Ethics* 96 (1):136-55.
- . 1986. "Introduction." In *Rational Choice*, ed. J. Elster. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Estlund, David. 2008. *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Frantz, Erica, and Lee Morgenbesser. 2019. "Smarter Authoritarianism: The Survival Tools of Dictators." Working paper.
- Freedom House. 2019. "Freedom in the World 2019." Available online at <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world>.
- Friedrich, Carl J., and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski. 1965. *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*. New York: Praeger.
- Gandhi, Jennifer. 2008. *Political Institutions under Dictatorship*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gandhi, Jennifer, and Ellen Lust-Okar. 2009. "Elections Under Authoritarianism." *Annual Review of Political Science* 2:403-22.
- Gandhi, Jennifer, and Adam Przeworski. 2007. "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats." *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (11):1279-301.
- Geddes, Barbara. 1999. "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2:115-44.
- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz. 2014. "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set." *Perspectives on Politics* 12 (2):313-31.
- . 2018. *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibson, Edward L. 2012. *Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Federal Democracies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hermet, Guy. 1978. "State-Controlled Elections: A Framework." In *Elections Without Choice*, ed. G. Hermet, R. Rose and A. Rouquié. London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd.
- Hermet, Guy, Richard Rose, and Alain Rouquié, eds. 1978. *Elections without Choice*. London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd.
- Hill, Lisa. 2002. "On the Reasonableness of Compelling Citizens to 'Vote': the Australian Case." *Political Studies* 50 (1):80-101.
- Howard, Marc Morjé, and Philip G. Roessler. 2006. "Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (2):365-81.
- Isaac, Jeffrey C. 2017. "Is there Illiberal Democracy? A problem with no semantic solution." *Public Seminar*, July 17. Available at <http://www.publicseminar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Isaac-Jeffrey-Is-There-Illiberal-Democracy-Public-Seminar.pdf>.
- Kirshner, Alexander. forthcoming. *Legitimate Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kirshner, Alexander S. 2018. "Nonideal democratic authority: The case of undemocratic elections." *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 17 (3):257-76.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. 2008. *The Constitution of Agency. Essays on Practical and Moral Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Landemore, Hélène. 2013. *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lindberg, Staffan, ed. 2009. *Democratization by Elections: A New Mode of Transition*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Linz, Juan J. 2000. *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Lomasky, Loren E., and Geoffrey Brennan. 2000. "Is There a Duty to Vote?" *Social Philosophy & Policy* 17 (1):62-86.
- Loxton, James. 2015. "Authoritarian Successor Parties." *Journal of Democracy* 26 (3):157-70.
- Mackie, Gerry. 2014. "Why It's Rational to Vote." In *Rationality, Democracy, and Justice: The Legacy of Jon Elster*, ed. C. López-Guerra and J. Maskivker. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- March, Luke. 2009. "Managing Opposition in a Hybrid Regime: Just Russia and Parastatal Opposition." *Slavic Review* 68 (3):504-27.
- Maskivker, Julia. 2016. "An Epistemic Justification for the Obligation to Vote." *Critical Review* 28 (2):224-47.
- Mickey, Robert. 2015. *Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Morse, Yonathan L. 2012. "The Era of Electoral Authoritarianism." *World Politics* 64 (1):161-98.
- Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. 2013. "Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America." *Government and Opposition* 48 (2):147-74.
- Müller, Jan-Werner. 2016. *What is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Pepinsky, Thomas B. 2009. "The 2008 Malaysian elections: An end to ethnic politics?" *Journal of East Asian Studies* 9 (1):87-120.
- Przeworski, Adam. 1999. "Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense." In *Democracy's Value*, ed. I. Shapiro and C. Hacker-Cordon. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Reeve, David. 1985. *Golkar of Indonesia: An Alternative to the Party System*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Riedl, Rachel Beatty. 2014. *Authoritarian Origins of Democratic Party Systems in Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Riker, William H., and Peter C. Ordeshook. 1968. "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting." *American Political Science Review* 62 (1):25-42.
- Rivera, Mauricio. 2016. "Authoritarian Institutions and State Repression: The Divergent Effects of Legislatures and Opposition Parties on Personal Integrity Rights." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61 (10):2183-207.
- Schedler, Andreas. 2002. "The Menu of Manipulation." *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2):36-50.
- . 2013. *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- , ed. 2006. *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Schmitter, Philippe C., and Terry Lynn Karl. 1991. "What Democracy Is...and Is Not." *Journal of Democracy* 2 (3):75-88.
- Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1976. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. Revised ed. Vol. Routledge: New York.

- Slater, Dan, and Joseph Wong. 2013. "The Strength to Concede: Ruling Parties and Democratization in Developmental Asia." *Perspectives on Politics* 11 (3):717-33.
- Svolik, Milan W. 2012. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, Dennis F. 2002. *Just Elections: Creating a Fair Electoral Process in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tucker, Joshua A. 2007. "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (3):535-51.
- Urbinati, Nadia. 2014. *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- . 2019. *Me the People: How Populism Transforms Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.