Support and Opposition to Undemocratic Politicians

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PhD Dissertation

Contents

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Preface

I summarize my PhD dissertation, *Support and Opposition to Undemocratic Politicians*, in this report. Beyond this summary, the dissertation contains the following five solo-authored articles approaching the topic from different angles:

1. Kristian Vrede Skaaning Frederiksen. 2023a. "Do Partisanship and Policy Agreement Make Citizens Tolerate Undemocratic Behavior?" *Journal of Politics (Just Accepted)*

2. Kristian Vrede Skaaning Frederiksen. 2022a. "Does Competence Make Citizens Tolerate Undemocratic Behavior?" *American Political Science Review* 116 (3): 1147–1153

3. Kristian Vrede Skaaning Frederiksen. 2023b. "Do Two-Party Systems Hamper Defection from Undemocratic Candidates?" *Under review*

4. Kristian Vrede Skaaning Frederiksen. 2022b. "When Democratic Experience Distorts Democracy: Citizen Reactions to Undemocratic Incumbent Behavior." *European Journal of Political Research* 61:281–292

5. Kristian Vrede Skaaning Frederiksen. 2023c. "Does Information About Democratic Vulnerability Make Citizens Punish Undemocratic Behavior?" *Under review*

Chapter 1
Introduction

When I entered the academic stage as a PhD student in 2019, democracy was evidently burning around the world. To name a few examples, former President Donald J. Trump had torn an already pressured democratic system in the United States further apart during his three years in office; the Fidesz and PiS parties led by Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński had regressed democracy in Hungary and Poland, respectively, into crisis; Jair Bolsonaro had just been elected president following a democracy-assaulting campaign in Brazil; and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had effectively destroyed democracy in Turkey (e.g., Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Albertus and Grossman 2021; Przeworski 2019)—or so we thought. Democracy was dying at the hands of its most trusted ally: the people.

But then a number of counter-instances hit. Erdoğan lost his grip on Istanbul after the 2019 mayoral election, Trump lost the White House in 2020 and suffered a massive blow during the 2022 midterm elections, and Bolsonaro left office January 1, 2023 after a disastrous four-year term. The winds of public opposition to undemocratic political leaders were suddenly blowing. Although would-be authoritarians still occupy significant offices in countries such as Hungary and Poland—and Erdoğan recently managed to hold on to power in the 2023 general election—it seems like *Support and Opposition to Undemocratic Politicians*, even in a pessimistic reading, is on a knife-edge balance. This dissertation, carrying the very same title, is a scholarly attempt to shed comparative light on the phenomenon. Re-phrasing the title, I attempt to answer the following research question: *Why do citizens support and oppose undemocratic politicians?*

I have pursued this topic for four years because it is crucial to understanding how democracy—the very foundation for public self-determination today (Cristiano 2008; Beetham 1999)—breaks down and survives in the 21st century. As opposed to in the past where democracy was typically destroyed by elites through violent events such as military

coups (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), ordinary citizens play a significant role in democratic breakdown and survival today (Svolik 2019; Claassen 2020a). They have the option to vote for, or not vote for, politicians who occasionally violate democratic principles, which, in turn, has direct consequences for the risk of democratic breakdown (Svolik 2019). I use phrases such as "violations of democratic principles" and "undemocratic behavior"—the key independent variable of the project, so to speak—interchangeably in this summary report and in the five self-contained articles.

Substantially, these phrases refer to violations of the democratic cornerstones of competitive, free, and fair elections, civil liberties, and/or the rule of law (e.g., Møller and Skaaning 2013; Merkel 2004). I consider behavior undemocratic if it meddles with the fairness of elections by altering the electoral playing field to one's own favor, compromises key democratic rights such as freedom of speech and assembly, or manipulates the judicial system to one's own benefit. This definition of violations of democratic principles captures the behaviors of the aforementioned political leaders. For example, Viktor Orbán and Fidesz have re-arranged both the electoral system and the composition of supreme court justices to the party's benefit, whereas President Erdoğan has ensured individual harassment of his critics (Albertus and Grossman 2021).

The different articles of this dissertation shed light on citizens' responses to such behavior from various perspectives. Articles 1-2 engage factors related to characteristics of politicians that determine citizens' vote choices and potentially interfere with sanctioning of undemocratic behavior: partisanship, policy (1), and competence (2). Likely explanations for support for undemocratic politicians are that partisanship biases how citizens' interpret the behaviors of political elites (Kunda 1990; Gaines et al. 2007; Lodge and Taber 2013; Krishnarajan 2023; Tworzecki and Markowski 2014), policy considerations make citizens willing to trade off compliance with democratic principles (Svolik 2020; Downs 1957), or the material benefits of having competent politicians make citizens tolerate bad behavior in general (Klašnja, Lupu, and Tucker 2020; Breitenstein 2019; De Vries and Solaz 2017; Caramani 2017). In Articles 3-4, I then pay more attention to context in the form of party systems (3) and macro-level democratic experience (4). Possible contextual explanations for support for undemocratic politicians are that citizens' possible vote choices are limited to two, possibly polarized, choices (Sniderman and Levendusky 2007)—where one of these choices might be undemocratic—or that macro-level democratic experience may have discouraged citizens from detecting real dangers to the democratic system

(Runciman 2018). Finally, Article 5 employs a straightforward intervention against support for undemocratic politicians—simply telling citizens that democracy is vulnerable and at risk of breaking down—to shed light on what we can do to improve democratic sustainability going forward.

On the basis of a five-country conjoint survey experiment that I fielded in the fall of 2020 in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Mexico, and South Korea, I show in Articles 1-2 that *Support and Opposition to Undemocratic Politicians* is as much on a knife-edge balance in a survey-experimental setup as it seems to be in the real world. As opposed to my theoretical expectations (see also Chapter 2), neither partisanship, policy interests, nor competent politicians make citizens tolerate undemocratic behavior. They punish it to some extent, regardless of the politicians' characteristics. But at the same time, politicians with certain characteristics—such as being competent, being from citizens' preferred parties, or representing citizens' policy interests—may gain support on the basis of these characteristics even though they behave undemocratically. The technical, statistical way of putting this is that undemocratic behavior on the one hand and shared partisanship between voter and politician, policy agreement between voter and politician, and competence on the other hand are additive factors that do not interfere with each other. Undemocratic behavior fosters opposition, whereas the remaining factors foster support.

Article 2 breaks new ground by engaging the factors of undemocratic behavior and competence—which is a well-known determinant of vote choice and many other things relevant to political scientists (e.g., Dahl 1989; Green and Jennings 2017; Petrocik 1996; Caramani 2017; Bertsou and Caramani 2022)—in combination. Article 1 partly challenges the dominant view in the literature on partisanship, policy interests, and support for undemocratic politicians (e.g., Graham and Svolik 2020; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022; Krishnarajan 2023; Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin 2022) and reconciles the dominant view with more optimistic accounts (e.g., Carey et al. 2022; Wunsch, Jacob, and Derksen 2022; Reuter and Szakonyi 2021). Article 1 sets the boundaries of support for undemocratic, co-partisan/policy-congruent politicians by showing that the different factors are additive rather than interfering with each other (cf., Graham and Svolik 2020). Moreover, the results of Article 1 imply that anti-democratic attitudes—possibly due to phenomena such as expressive responding (Malka and Adelman 2022; Westwood et al. 2022)—do not always translate into voting for undemocratic politicians (cf., Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022; Krishnarajan 2023; Beaulieu 2014).

Articles 3-4 leave us with a contextual factor that matters less than initially anticipated, namely party systems, and a contextual factor that clearly matters for the sanctioning of undemocratic behavior: democratic experience. In Article 3, I offer a novel survey-experimental approach to manipulating the characteristics of party systems by exploiting the characteristics of England's party system with two-and-a-half parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979; Sloman 2020). I then show that voters who identify with either Labour or the Conservatives punish undemocratic behavior by their own party as much when they only have the option to vote for the two major parties as when they have the option to vote for a third candidate from the Liberal Democrats. On the contrary, Article 4 shows that macro-level democratic experience matters greatly for sanctioning of undemocratic behavior. Using observational data from 43 countries and fixed-effects models, I show that undemocratic behavior decreases support for the incumbent severely in young democracies (i.e., low experience) but not in old democracies (i.e., high experience).

Article 3 speaks to the classical debate about party systems and democratic stability (e.g., Sartori 1976; Hermens 1941; Dahl 1971; Lipset 1983; Linz 1978; Lijphart 1999; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Valentim and Dinas 2023), contributing theoretically and empirically by linking party systems to the most frequent cause of democratic breakdown today: support for undemocratic political leaders (Svolik 2019). The findings side with neither those favoring two-party systems (e.g., Sartori 1976) nor with those favoring multi-party systems (e.g., Lijphart 1999). Moreover, the article builds upon the insights from Article 1 as well as other studies of the relation between partisanship and support for undemocratic politicians (e.g., Graham and Svolik 2020; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022; Krishnarajan 2023; Carey et al. 2022; Touchton, Klofstad, and Uscinski 2023; Clayton et al. 2021; Aarslew 2023). Whereas Article 1 and the aforementioned studies focus on the characteristics of options within the party system, Article 3 focuses on the number of options in the system. In combination, this yields an institutional choice set theory of *Support and Opposition to Undemocratic Politicians* (Sniderman and Levendusky 2007), informing us that the characteristics of options within the party system is a stronger—although not dominant, given the insights of Article 1—determinant of support for undemocratic politicians than the number of options in the system.

Article 4 challenges the conventional wisdom that support for democracy strengthens as democracy gains experience (e.g., Norris 2011; Hernández 2016; Cornell, Møller, and Skaaning 2020). The article has the key limitation that it does not permit inferring conclusions about re-

sponses to undemocratic behavior in the utmost experienced democracies such as Denmark—simply because there is not enough variation in undemocratic behavior—but rather provides an explanation of why citizens of countries such as Hungary and Poland have been more likely to elect undemocratic governments in the past decades compared to immediately after the democratic transitions following the fall of the Soviet Union. I suggest that the mechanisms behind this pattern are that citizens lose incentives to punish undemocratic behavior as democracy gains experience because they come to perceive democracy as less vulnerable and not at risk of breaking down, develop stronger ties to political parties, and become less deterred of the autocratic past.

Articles 1 through 4 thus increase our knowledge of why citizens sometimes support undemocratic politicians. Article 5 departs sharply from this logic by diving into how we can intervene against support for undemocratic politicians. Specifically, I employed a broad intervention in 10 countries over two data collections fielded in 2020 (five countries) and 2021 (seven countries, two of which were included in the first data collection). This intervention was employed in the same five-country study providing data for Articles 1-2 and a second study including the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Italy, India, Poland, and South Africa. Substantially, the intervention was heavily inspired by the pattern established in Article 4 and consisted of simply telling people that democracy is vulnerable and at risk of breaking down. However, Article 5 shows that such vulnerability information matters only to a very limited extent for opposition to undemocratic politicians.

Article 5 provides several important insights to the existing literature and this dissertation as a whole. First, it makes it less likely that perceived democratic vulnerability accounts for the pattern established in Article 4. Citizens of young democracies might not punish undemocratic behavior less than citizens of older democracies because they perceive democracy as more vulnerable, but because of other reasons. As I also point out in Article 4, such reasons may be weaker partisanship or stronger recall of autocratic pasts in young democracies (Ezrow, Tavits, and Homola 2014; Tavits 2005; Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Dahl 1971). However, we cannot entirely rule out that perceived democratic vulnerability does account for the pattern established in Article 4, as the treatments employed in Article 5 are informational and may not be strong enough to sufficiently manipulate broader perceptions of the state of democracy. This is not to say that the treatments are weak, but rather that they are better equipped to test the effectiveness of information than the effects of perceptions. Moreover, various manipulation checks employed in Article 5 do show

that the treatments also move vulnerability perceptions to a substantial extent.

With its broad, comparative ten-country scope, Article 5 also contributes theoretically—with a novel theoretical argument, that is—and empirically to the broader literature as interventions against support for undemocratic politicians are rare, and the studies fielding such interventions are limited to the context of the United States (Braley et al. 2023; Voelkel et al. 2023). Moreover, Article 5 shows that support for undemocratic politicians is rather sticky as a straightforward intervention such as informing citizens that democracy is vulnerable does not really move it. This finding is highly consistent with the findings of the remaining articles showing that few factors interfere with sanctioning of undemocratic behavior (Article 4 being the exception). Another implication is that, looking forward, interventions against support for undemocratic politicians should be theorized on different bases, for example by testing whether the hitherto fruitful meta-perception perspective can successfully be implemented outside of the United States (Braley et al. 2023; Voelkel et al. 2023). Simply put, this perspective holds that citizens' willingness to tolerate violations of democratic principles may be lowered by correcting exaggerated perceptions of political opponents' willingness to tolerate such violations. We have good reason to believe that this perspective does not travel well beyond the United States as the context of this country with two polarized camps and two major parties is rather particular. For example, it is not clear what constitutes "political opponents" in many other (multi-party) contexts. I therefore encourage scholars to develop interventions along completely different lines as well.

This dissertation is a source of careful optimism for an evidently challenged democratic world. In combination, the five articles provide ground for pessimistic as well as optimistic interpretations. Co-partisanship, policy congruence (Article 1), and competence (Article 2) may increase support for undemocratic politicians, but none of these factors prevent citizens from sanctioning undemocratic behavior. Citizens punish undemocratic behavior substantially even when their options are limited to the in-party and the out-party, but they become no more willing to do so when the attractiveness of alternatives to the in-party increases (Article 3). They punish undemocratic behavior when democracy is young and such punishment is plausibly needed the most (see also Cornell, Møller, and Skaaning 2020), but we can decreasingly rely on citizens to punish undemocratic behavior as democracy gains experience (Article 4). Finally, although citizens, ceteris paribus, oppose undemocratic behavior, support for undemocratic politicians is sticky and does

not decrease much as a consequence of informing citizens that democracy is vulnerable (Article 5). The knife-edge balance in *Support and Opposition to Undemocratic Politicians* aside, these insights yield more optimistic sentiments than dominant existing studies, which suggest that citizens are "partisans first and democrats only second" (Graham and Svolik 2020), rationalize the meaning of democracy to justify support for undemocratic behavior (Krishnarajan 2023), and tolerate undemocratic incumbent behavior and display "democratic hypocrisy" as long as they support the incumbent (Albertus and Grossman 2021; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022).

The next chapter (2) outlines the overall theoretical framework of the dissertation, consisting of the four explanations of support for undemocratic politicians (Articles 1-4) and the intervention against it (Article 5). I justify the methodological approaches for the dissertation in Chapter 3, consisting of conjoint survey experiments, vignette experiments, an experiment exploiting real-world characteristics, and fixed-effects models using observational panel data. The following chapters then provide a detailed report of the methodological setups and results of the dissertation before I discuss implications for future research and conclude the dissertation in the final chapter.

Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework

As touched upon in the introduction, I employ six factors potentially explaining support for undemocratic politicians: policy agreement and co-partisanship between citizen and politician, the politician's material competences, information about democratic vulnerability, party systems, and macro-level democratic experience. The two latter factors are contextual, macro-level factors, whereas competence, partisanship, and policy agreement are related to politician characteristics and citizens' valuation of these. Finally, I conceive of informing citizens that democracy is vulnerable as an intervention against support for undemocratic politicians—and thus as a distinct theoretical category.

2.1 Politician-Level Factors: Party, Policy, and Competence

Co-partisanship, policy interests, and competence are classical decisive factors for citizens' vote choices and should, thus, also be expected to influence citizens' willingness to support undemocratic politicians (Campbell et al. 1980; Downs 1957; Dahl 1989; Caramani 2017; Green and Jennings 2017; Petrocik 1996; Kunda 1990; Tworzecki and Markowski 2014; Taber and Lodge 2006; Shapiro and Bloch-Elkon 2008). These theoretical factors yield the hypotheses tested in Articles 1-2, which roughly say that partisanship, policy interests, and competence make citizens tolerate undemocratic behavior. As mentioned in the introduction, the two former factors have been touched upon by prior studies already (Krishnarajan 2023; Graham and Svolik 2020; Svolik 2019, 2020). However, beyond the cross-country empirical contributions outlined in the results chapters, I contribute theoretically by disentangling the expected effects of partisanship and policy interests.

The theoretical logics underpinning why these factors should matter are very different. Partisanship is a social psychological factor which we

should expect to matter because it biases citizens' processing of information, including information about undemocratic behavior (Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022; Carey et al. 2019; Ahlquist et al. 2018; Touchton, Klofstad, and Uscinski 2023; Albertus and Grossman 2021; Solaz, Vries, and Geus 2019; Anduiza, Gallego, and Muñoz 2013; Gutiérrez-Romero and LeBas 2020). Simply put, citizens may rationalize that undemocratic behavior carried out by politicians from their preferred party is not undemocratic at all (Krishnarajan 2023). This leads to the expectation that co-partisanship decreases the negative influence of undemocratic behavior on support for the particular candidate.

Although the expected implications are similar, the factors of policy agreement between citizen and politician and the politician's competence are expected to work through different mechanisms. Rather than biases produced by social psychological attachments, I expect policy agreement and competence to matter because citizens may be inclined to rationally trade off democratic compliance when faced with possible competence or policy gains (Svolik 2020; Luo and Przeworski 2023; Solaz, Vries, and Geus 2019; Anduiza, Gallego, and Muñoz 2013; Caramani 2017; Klašnja and Tucker 2013; Breitenstein 2019; Muñoz, Anduiza, and Gallego 2016). If the citizen, for example, agrees with a politician on immigration or tax policy, or the politician seems competent in handling economic matters, the citizen may be willing to tolerate violations of democratic principles from the politician. In sum, I expect partisanship, policy agreement, and competence to suppress the negative effects of undemocratic behavior although the potential mechanisms are quite dissimilar on the theoretical level.

2.2 Contextual Factors: Party Systems and Democratic Experience

I employ a theoretical argument related to party systems that builds directly upon the factors mentioned above. I limit this theoretical argument to the simple case of England as a first-step attempt to link party systems to support for undemocratic politicians. I argue that citizens should be more willing to defect from undemocratic in-partisan politicians when faced with alternative options that extend beyond the out-party. I exemplify this with the case of England: We may expect citizens supporting either Labour or the Conservatives to be more willing to defect from the party as a consequence of undemocratic behavior when they have the option to vote for a Liberal Democrat as well. This theoretical logic fol-

lows directly from the arguments made in the prior subsection as the possible trade-offs between policy gains and democratic compliance decrease in intensity when a party located in between the in- and out-party figures in the party system. Moreover, citizens presumably hold less negative sentiment—that is, negative partisanship (Abramowitz and Webster 2018)—toward the party located in between the in- and out-party than they hold towards the out-party. I document this assumption directly in Article 3 (Figure 1). In sum, I expect citizens to punish undemocratic behavior more when they face three options—the in-party, the out-party, and a party located in between—than when they face only the in-party and out-party.

In Article 4, I provide a novel theoretical argument based on the observation that undemocratic governments and politicians have often been elected many years after democratic transitions rather than in very young democracies in cases such as Venezuela, Poland, Hungary, and Turkey, to name a few (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 16). I argue that citizens lose incentives to punish undemocratic behavior as democracy gains experience for three reasons. First, citizens may perceive democracy to be less vulnerable because political elites increasingly check undemocratic forces as democracy gains experience (Cornell, Møller, and Skaaning 2020), whereas citizens of young democracies due to weak party institutionalization and a generally weaker political system plausibly know that they have to sanction undemocratic behavior in order for it not to pass by unchecked (Tavits 2005). Second, citizens become more distant to and less deterred by the autocratic past as democracy gains experience, which may further decrease incentives to sanction undemocratic behavior (Dahl 1971, 179; Runciman 2018, 44; Hofferbert and Klingemann 1999). Such developments may go hand in hand with increased trust in authorities (Easton 1975), but increased trust is not always beneficial for the prospects of punishing bad behavior by the very same authorities (Meer 2017; Mishler and Rose 1997). In contrast, citizens of young democracies may be more skeptical of political authorities and sufficiently deterred by the autocratic past to be willing to punish undemocratic behavior more severely. The third and final reason builds upon the partisanship factor theorized in the former section. Citizens develop stronger ties to political parties as democracy ages (Ezrow, Tavits, and Homola 2014; Tavits 2005; Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Dalton and Weldon 2007). Given the theoretical reasons for why partisanship should suppress the effects of undemocratic behavior, this adds to the overall expectation that democratic experience makes citizens more tolerant of undemocratic behavior.

2.3 Intervening Against Support for Undemocratic Politicians: Information About Democratic Vulnerability

The theoretical framework of the dissertation culminates with a factor that could possibly lead to stronger resistance against undemocratic forces. Specifically, I argue in Article 5 that informing citizens that democracy is vulnerable and at risk of breaking down should incentivize them to punish undemocratic behavior. The argument builds upon the framework in its entirety. For example, individual-level perceived democratic vulnerability is at the core of the argument related to democratic experience. Moreover, informing citizens that democracy is vulnerable may lead them to put concerns related to competence, policy interests, and partisanship aside and prioritize punishing undemocratic behavior.

The vulnerability argument is best understood from a rational choice perspective: Assuming that citizens value competence (Frederiksen 2022a), policy agreement (Svolik 2020), co-partisanship (which does not work through a rational logic but is mentioned here for simplicity) (Graham and Svolik 2020), and compliance to democratic principles, providing information about democratic vulnerability should increase the priority placed on the latter factor as incentives to seriously consider compliance to democratic principles increase when democracy is at risk of breaking down. This should, in turn, make citizens less likely to trade off democratic compliance for other considerations. A theoretical limitation of the intervention is the rationalizing rather than rational impact of partisanship (Krishnarajan 2023). If citizens do not perceive undemocratic behavior by in-partisan politicians as undemocratic in the first place, it helps little that vulnerability information increases the decision-making weight applied to "objective" undemocratic behavior. This is partly an empirical question to which I return when examining the impact of partisanship; if partisanship does not, in fact, make citizens tolerate undemocratic behavior, then the promise of providing information about democratic vulnerability is greater.

The vulnerability intervention departs sharply from existing interventions against undemocratic forces (e.g., Braley et al. 2023; Voelkel et al. 2023). These other interventions engage the two polarized camps of the United States directly, often by correcting exaggerated misperceptions of out-partisans' willingness to break democratic norms. In contrast, informing citizens that democracy is vulnerable is a straightforward intervention which may be applied across contexts. Additionally, the ef-

fectiveness of the vulnerability intervention holds important implications regardless of whether it indeed is effective. Telling people that democracy is vulnerable and at risk of breakdown seems like an intuitive and straightforward way of making them punish undemocratic behavior. If such common-sense interventions do not work, it shows that support for undemocratic politicians is quite sticky and difficult to move. This would also imply that interventions should be theorized along different lines in future studies.

Chapter 3
Methodological Approaches

I use a diverse set of quantitative methods to examine the effects of the different factors making up the theoretical framework of the dissertation. The designs consist of conjoint experiments (Articles 1, 2, and 5), candidate choice experiments exploiting real-world characteristics (Article 3), country-year fixed-effects models using country-level panel data (Article 4), and vignette experiments (Article 5). I justify these methodological choices in this chapter, which has a more technical tone than the remaining chapters. For those solely interested in the actual methodological setups of the individual studies, which are included in the following chapters, I recommend skipping this chapter.

3.1 Experimental Approaches

I have employed various types of survey experiments in the dissertation to enable making causal inferences about the relations between undemocratic behavior, support for politicians, and the various moderating theoretical factors outlined in Chapter 2. In brief, by randomly assigning information—about undemocratic behavior, competence, democratic vulnerability, etc.—to some groups and not others, survey experiments overcome selection biases related to the fact that people who are and are not exposed to such information in the real world are likely dissimilar and incomparable (Angrist and Pischke 2015). The experimental approach thus enables me to draw conclusions regarding the causal effects of these treatments that are internally valid.

3.1.1 Challenges to External Validity

Some challenges arise from this deliberate choice. Although survey experiments are not by definition inferior to other methods in terms of ensuring high external validity (Mutz 2011), these challenges mostly revolve around the possibilities of making inferences from the experimen-

tal studies to the real world: the external validity of the experiments. It is useful to think about external validity in terms of treatments, outcomes, units, and contexts (Egami and Hartman 2023; Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2002; Findley, Kikuta, and Denly 2021). First, to what extent do the treatments reflect real-world variation in (particularly) undemocratic behavior? Second, to what extent do the measurements of support for politicians reflect relevant real-world scenarios such as elections? Third, are the units (respondents) answering the surveys representative of the populations about which I wish to make inferences? Fourth, do the results travel to contexts about which I wish to make inferences? I discuss challenges related to the four external validity parameters below.

Contexts

In terms of external validity, the perhaps strongest feature of the dissertation stems from the fact that the various survey experiments were fielded across very different contexts. Specifically, the dissertation includes experiments fielded in Brazil, the Czech Republic, India, Italy, Mexico, Poland, South Africa, South Korea, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

As I essentially wish to make inferences about how citizens of contemporary democracies—broadly speaking—respond to undemocratic behavior, the logic behind this case selection was maximizing relevant variation behind which heterogeneous effects could hide. For example, the countries vary tremendously in terms of experience with democracy—including compliance to democratic rules and norms and undemocratic behavior—political polarization, and experiences with economic prosperity and corruption. The latter factors are, of course, particularly relevant for Articles 1-2 shedding light on the factors of policy interests, partisanship, and competence (for contributions documenting such variation among the five countries included in the experiments for Articles 1-2, see Hajek 2017; Langston 2017; Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley 2020; Lee 2016).

Admittedly, the case selection does not cover the entire world, and all of the countries are, for example, characterized by having a certain level of socioeconomic development. But given resource constraints and feasibility in terms of where data could be obtained from, I have attempted to maximize external validity in terms of national contexts as much as possible.

Participants

The priority to obtain samples from this diverse array of countries comes with the cost of not being able to provide probability samples (i.e., samples that are fully nationally representative of the population) as that would simply be too expensive. Instead, I have relied on samples collected with the survey platform Lucid. Lucid recruits respondents from a very diverse set of sources—even mobile games (Ternovski and Orr 2022). Respondents on Lucid are, therefore, less professionalized and more similar to respondents of nationally representative surveys than respondents from "traditional" online convenience samples such as Amazon Mechanical Turk (Coppock and McClellan 2019; Ternovski and Orr 2022; Graham 2018; Graham and Svolik 2020). Indeed, the samples for all experiments included in the dissertation also meet nationally representative quotas on gender and age.

However, people completing online surveys are clearly different from people not doing so, which is a particularly relevant point for the countries included where internet penetration is not extensive (i.e., India and South Africa). I have attempted to accommodate such challenges by running heterogeneous treatment effects on observed covariates, for example by documenting that the results are similar among respondents from rural and metropolitan areas, respondents with low and high education, etc. (see, e.g., the online appendix for Article 2). Although online survey takers may still be different from people who do not answer surveys on unobservable parameters, this should dampen concerns of (lack of) external validity in relation to the participants responding to the surveys. Additionally, it should be mentioned that the academic field as a whole faces these challenges as very few studies are based on probability samples.

Outcomes

Turning to outcomes, the greatest advantage as well as challenge arises from the fact that I measure voting intentions. On the one hand, this way of measuring support for politicians is approximately behavioral rather than purely attitudinal. I do ask respondents whether they would vote for a particular politician rather than just state whether they dislike or like the politician, which provides a good approximation of real-world election scenarios (e.g., Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014; Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015; Bansak et al. 2021).[1]

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1. Study 2 in Article 5 constitutes an exception as I employ *both* attitudinal and voting intention outcomes in this study.

This also means that this dissertation departs sharply from prior studies gauging support for democracy by stated support for abstract democratic principles (e.g., Wuttke 2022; Wuttke, Gavras, and Schoen 2022; Norris 2017; Alexander and Welzel 2017; Voeten 2016; Foa and Mounk 2016; Claassen 2020b; Bermeo 2003), which we know is a poor indicator of actual willingness to defend democracy in the voting booth (e.g., Svolik 2019, 2020). Moreover, I employ forced choice as well as scale outcomes across the different studies and show that the results are not sensitive to how exactly voting intentions are measured.

On the other hand, the outcomes are, in fact, based on intentions rather than truly behavioral as I do not measure actual voting behavior. This poses some risk that respondents express cheap talk by stating (socially desirable) intentions to vote differently from what they would truly have done in the voting booth. If we stay within the experimental realm, the alternative would have been linking the experiments—typically by employing field experiments instead of survey experiments—to real-world elections. This is rarely done in studies on support for undemocratic politicians (but see Ahlquist et al. 2018) and definitely something to be done more in future studies. But again, doing so comes at the cost of not being able to include as many countries and with some challenges to reproducibility (e.g., Coppock and Green 2015). Additionally, I have good reason to believe that such cheap talk—which is a challenge that scholars measuring support for abstract democratic principles face to an even greater extent (e.g., Svolik 2019)—did not influence the overall findings substantially. By assigning many attributes to political candidates, the conjoint experiments largely mitigate risks of social desirability bias and cheap talk (e.g., Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014; Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015; Bansak et al. 2021; Jenke et al. 2021). For example, one concern could be that respondents punish undemocratic behavior more in the experiments than they would in the real world. However, it seems unlikely that respondents would consistently fixate on this one factor rather than other factors such as candidate gender to provide socially desirable answers. This point is supported by the fact that the average effects of undemocratic behavior in fact are quite modest, especially as shown by Article 1.

Treatments

Finally, treatment construction arguably constitutes the biggest challenge to external validity for this dissertation. Most importantly, all of the experiments are based on hypothetical scenarios. First, this essentially

means—as I also discuss in Article 2—that the inferences I can make based on the experiments are limited to politicians on whom citizens have relatively low information. Examples of such politicians are state-level politicians in the United States, which make up a substantial part of politics and play a key role in democratic backsliding by exhibiting undemocratic behaviors (Grumbach 2022; Pew Research Center 2014). The experiments are less suited to infer something about citizens' responses to undemocratic behaviors by politicians to whom they have strong personal attachments. However, this limitation is a double-edged sword as one of the aims of this dissertation is to shed light on the isolated effects of factors like partisanship, policy agreement, and competence. Assigning well-known politicians to the scenarios employed in the experiments would distort the estimation of these isolated effects. For example, adding Donald Trump or President Erdoğan's name to the treatment scenarios would have the consequence that I would be unable to make inferences about the effects of undemocratic behavior for other (everyday) politicians.

Second, undemocratic behaviors are likely contextualized and justified differently in the real world than in the experiments of this dissertation. Just like engaging with real-world elections, capturing this variation is rarely done in studies of support for undemocratic politicians (but see Albertus and Grossman 2021), and doing so comes with challenges to cross-country comparison in particular. Justifications for undemocratic behaviors vary tremendously across countries as exemplified by the diverting political stances of leaders like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

The reason why I assess treatment construction as the greatest threat to external validity is precisely the categorical nature of the challenge as illustrated above. Whereas we can discuss whether the results travel to contexts, participants, and outcomes not included in the experiments, treatment construction places clear boundaries on what I can infer something about—that is, the independent effects of "naked" undemocratic behavior and other factors for generic politicians across many countries rather than contextualized, country-specific undemocratic behavior by highly profiled political leaders.

3.1.2 Pre-registration

Pre-registration played a key role in connection to the experimental studies included in the dissertation. In brief, pre-registration entails defining hypotheses and analysis plans in a detailed manner before collect-

ing the data. This ensures that the researcher cannot deviate from the pre-registration without justification and offers readers opportunities to assess what the initial ideas of the research project were. Importantly, pre-registration was an imperative asset to make this a better dissertation. It helped me think carefully about research design before collecting the data. Pre-registration also helped me document my initial research thoughts during the review process and justify not making changes to the different articles that would violate the initial plans.

I pre-registered each and every experimental study included in the dissertation, but the process was imperfect as is often the case. For example, and most prominently, I pre-registered several hypotheses before fielding the five-country study providing data for Articles 1, 2, and 5, and I did not initially have strong expectations as to whether the results should be included in one or several papers. This was my first ever pre-registration. Evidently, the competence hypothesis went into Article 2, the policy and partisanship hypotheses went into Article 1, and the vulnerability hypothesis went into Article 5. As is disclosed in all three articles, I made this choice due to comments on initial manuscript drafts (after the data collection was completed), suggesting that it would be too dense to include all hypothesis tests in one paper. Additionally, I pre-registered three hypotheses suggesting that the moderating effects of competence, policy agreement, and partisanship interact with information about democratic vulnerability. These hypotheses ended up being rather irrelevant since competence, policy agreement, and partisanship did not have the expected moderating effects. I report the tests of these hypotheses in Chapter 6 for the sake of transparency.

It is namely the position of this dissertation that such practices are completely legitimate if transparency is provided. Pre-registration should not prevent writing up digestible research papers (or make the scientific process unnecessarily rigid for junior scholars) as long as complete transparency is provided. Additionally, norms about pre-registration practices in political science are not strong enough to justify a very rigid approach to pre-registration yet (e.g., regarding the legitimacy of splitting up a pre-registration in several papers). The pre-registration process for the remaining papers—after the five-country study, that is—has been substantially less messy as pre-registering, like everything else in research, is a skill to be learned.

3.2   Observational Approaches

Article 4 departs sharply from the remaining studies by making use of observational data—specifically, expert-coded data on undemocratic behavior, factual information about democratic experience, and aggregated survey data on support for governments. I supplement the experimental approaches with this approach to examine how undemocratic behavior is likely to be evaluated outside of the survey experimental context. This is not to say that this approach is more reliable; the observational approach also comes with challenges, and if anything, these challenges are greater than those faced when using survey experiments. As mentioned above, citizens exposed to undemocratic behavior are likely dissimilar to those who are not. For example, they live in different countries since undemocratic behavior is more likely to occur in younger democracies than in older democracies (Cornell, Møller, and Skaaning 2020). Using an observational approach thus comes with substantial challenges to drawing valid causal inferences about the effects of undemocratic behavior, namely to the internal validity of the study (Angrist and Pischke 2015).

I draw on panel data and use two-way fixed-effects models to deal with this challenge. In brief, this enables me to account for stable cross-country factors making undemocratic behavior more likely to occur in some countries than in others, and to account for general time trends across countries. An example is that I compare Hungarian citizens' responses to undemocratic behavior in 2018 with Hungarian citizens' responses to undemocratic behavior in 1992 rather than compare Hungarian citizens to Danish citizens. Moreover, it means that I account for general developments and events affecting most countries such as global economic recessions. However, the observational approach is not without challenges to external validity either. I therefore check whether the results hold across different measures of undemocratic behavior and include as many countries as possible in Article 4.

Chapter 4
Politician-Level Factors: Party, Policy, and Competence

Citizens face many considerations when choosing whom to vote for. Compliance with democratic principles may be one consideration (Svolik 2020), but the powerful forces of partisanship, policy agreement, and competence—as theorized in Chapter 2—undeniably influence vote choices as well (Campbell et al. 1980; Downs 1957; Dahl 1989; Caramani 2017; Green and Jennings 2017; Petrocik 1996; Bertsou and Caramani 2022). The question is whether, as expected, these factors make citizens tolerate undemocratic behavior. Does partisanship blind citizens from punishing undemocratic behavior at all, and do citizens prioritize rewarding policy agreement and competence at the expense of punishing undemocratic behavior?

The five-country conjoint experiment fielded in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Mexico, and South Korea allows me to answer these questions (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014; Bansak et al. 2021; Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015). The experiment was fielded with Lucid and included approximately 14,000 respondents in total. In this experiment, I randomly assigned candidate party, policy positions across typical dimensions of redistribution and a morality/cultural dimension, undemocratic/democratic behaviors, and competence reputations in fighting corruption and handling economic matters along with background attributes to hypothetical political candidates competing for the presidency or role as prime minister in these countries. Table 4.1 shows an overview of the attribute levels randomly assigned to each candidate with Mexico as the example. Candidate construction differs only marginally across countries. Specifically, policy positions and background attributes differ slightly in topic, wordings, and probabilities of assignment for the sake of realism (Cuesta, Egami, and Imai 2022; Abramson, Kocak, and Magazinnik 2022). As Table 4.1 shows, the assigned undemocratic behaviors are violations of the

Table 4.1: Distribution of attributes: Mexico

Attribute	Values (Probability)
Age	39 (0.031), 40 (0.031), 44 (0.063), 45 (0.031), 46 (0.031), 47 (0.031), 48 (0.031), 49 (0.063), 50 (0.094), 51 (0.031), 52 (0.094), 53 (0.031), 54 (0.031), 55 (0.031), 56 (0.063), 57 (0.094), 58 (0.031), 60 (0.031), 61 (0.063), 62 (0.031), 69 (0.062)
Gender	Female (0.062), Male (0.938)
Profession	Accountant (0.125), Business Administration (0.062), Civil Servant (0.094), Engineer (0.125), Self-employed (0.094), Journalist (0.031), Lawyer (0.406), Academic (0.031), Professional Sports (0.031)
Party	MORENA (0.25), PAN (0.25), PRD (0.25), PRI (0.25)
Positions (one per issue)	*Redistribution:* Increase/Decrease public welfare spending (0.167/0.167) Provide/Prevent universal access to public colleges (0.167/0.167) Increase/Decrease income tax on 10 percent richest (0.167/0.167) *Morality Issues:* Legalize/Prohibit same-sex marriage nationally (0.167/0.167) Relax abortion law/Make abortion law more strict (0.167/0.167) Provide amnesty to low-level drug offenders/Punish all drug-related crime harsher (0.167/0.167) *Undemocratic/Democratic Behavior:* Said it is legitimate to fight political opponents in the streets if one feels provoked/Said it is unacceptable to fight political opponents in the streets even though one feels provoked (0.125/0.125) Supported a proposal to reduce polling stations in areas that support opposing parties/Supported a proposal to preserve existing polling stations in all areas (0.125/0.125) Said court rulings by judges appointed by opposing parties should be ignored/adhered to (0.125/0.125) Said it is acceptable to harass journalists that do not reveal sources/Said it is unacceptable to harass journalists even though they do not reveal sources (0.125/0.125)
Reputation (one per issue)	*Economy:* Good/Bad at handling economic matters (0.333/0.333), Neither good nor bad reputation on economic matters (0.333) *Corruption:* Bad/Good at fighting corruption (0.333/0.333), Neither good nor bad reputation on fighting corruption (0.333)

Figure 4.1: Conjoint example: US

Imagine that the following two candidates run for the 2024 presidential election. Please read the candidate profiles carefully, and tell us how likely you would be to vote for each of the two candidates at the election.

	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Age	66	44
Gender	Male	Male
Background	Lawyer	Company Founder/Director
Party	Republican	Democrat
Positions	- Decrease public welfare spending - Make it harder for women to get an abortion - Supported a proposal to reduce polling stations in areas that support opposing parties	- Decrease public welfare spending - Make it easier for women to get an abortion - Said it is legitimate to fight political opponents in the streets if one feels provoked
Reputation	- Good at handling economic matters - Good at fighting corruption	- Bad at handling economic matters - Good at fighting corruption

|	How likely is it that you would vote for **candidate 1**?	How likely is it that you would vote for **candidate 2**?
Very likely	○	○
Somewhat likely	○	○
Neither likely nor unlikely	○	○
Somewhat unlikely	○	○
Very unlikely	○	○
Don't know	○	○

→

35

democratic cornerstones of free and fair elections, civil liberties, and the rule of law, corresponding to the definition provided in Chapter 2 and to how undemocratic behaviors are typically undertaken in contemporary democracies (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Svolik 2019). Figure 4.1 then illustrates how a (randomly constructed) conjoint scenario appears to respondents with the United States as the example. As Figure 4.1 shows, voting intentions were measured on a five-point scale. Each respondent faced 10 conjoint tasks.

Figures 4.2-4.4 show the findings as to whether policy agreement, partisanship, and competence make citizens tolerate undemocratic behavior. Policy agreement is measured as the numerical distance between respondent and candidate across the two policy dimensions, whereas partisanship is measured as the respondent's attitude toward the candidate's party, which provides a neat, comparative measure of partisanship (Wagner 2021). Respondent partisanship and policy preferences were measured before the conjoint scenarios. I employ two measures of policy agreement in Article 1, but I only include the distance measure here as the two measures yield similar results. Competence is measured on a five-point scale representing the candidate's combined skills in fighting corruption and handling economic matters. I estimate all models using OLS regression with interaction terms between undemocratic behavior and the three moderating factors, clustering standard errors on the respondent level.

As the three figures illustrate, I find no toleration of undemocratic behavior as a consequence of policy agreement, partisanship, or competence in Articles 1-2. As the lower panels of all three figures show, the effects of undemocratic behavior differ little across the three factors, and when the effects differ, it is such that competence and policy agreement make citizens punish undemocratic behavior *more*. However, it is also clear that—judging from the upper panels showing levels and marginal means of support (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020)—undemocratic candidates may gain support through policy agreement, co-partisanship, or competence. In sum, the different factors impact vote choices as they usually do, but not in a way that suppresses the effects of undemocratic behavior. The rational choice-based factors of Downsian policy agreement and competence even bolster punishment of undemocratic behavior, whereas the social psychological factor of partisanship largely does not moderate the effects of undemocratic behavior.

These findings hold several important implications for the existing literature as well as the remainder of this dissertation. First, the findings reconcile prior studies that are either pessimistic or optimistic about the

Figure 4.2: The upper panels show the marginal means of support for undemocratic and democratic candidates across competence. The lower panels show whether the effects of undemocratic behavior for incompetent and competent candidates differ from those among Average competence (3) candidates (positive values signal smaller effects).
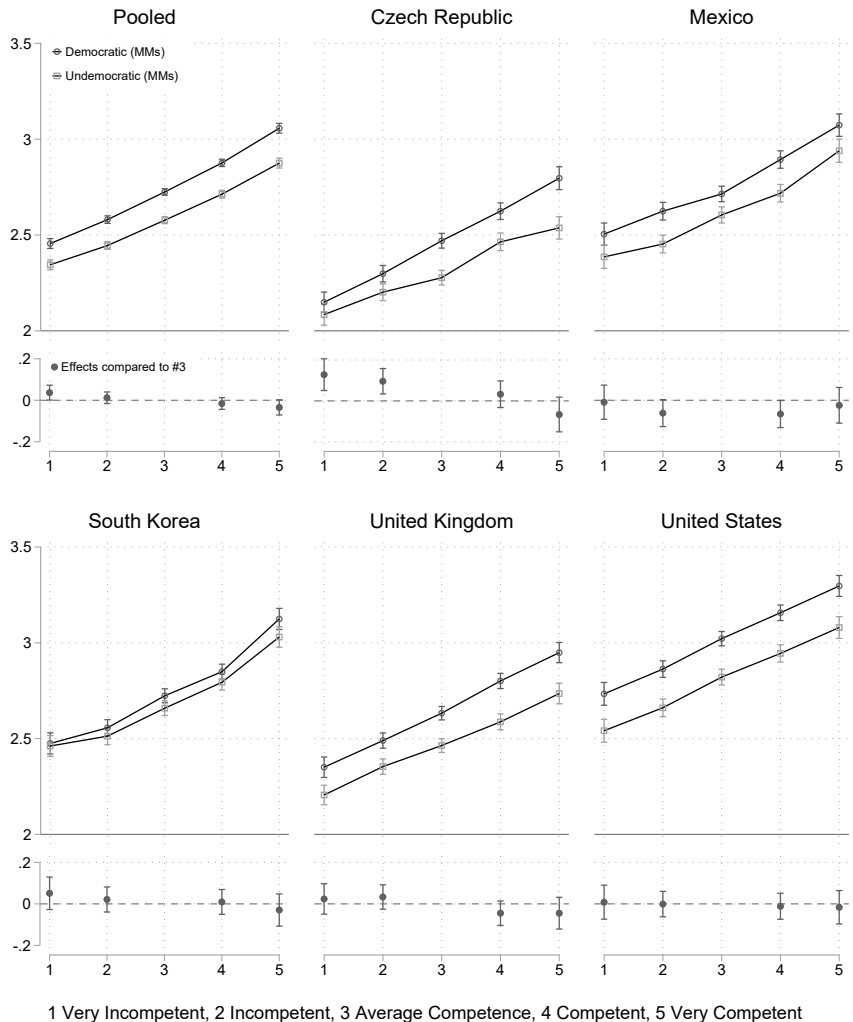
1 Very Incompetent, 2 Incompetent, 3 Average Competence, 4 Competent, 5 Very Competent
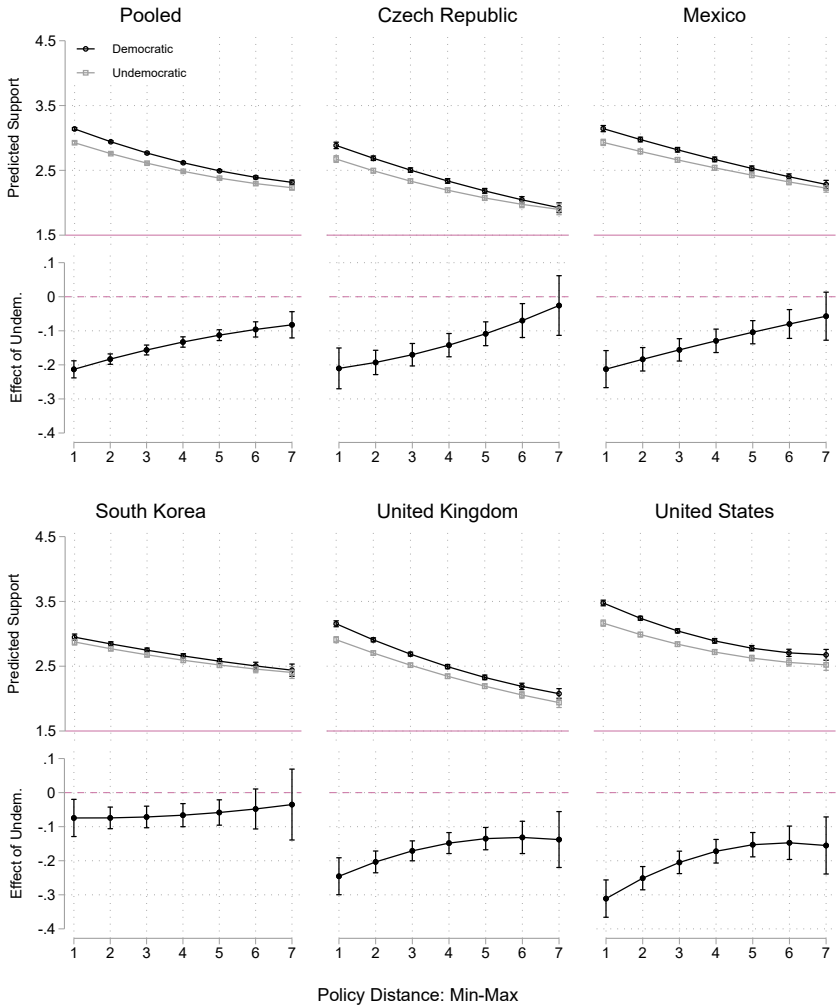
Note: OLS regression including an interaction term between undemocratic behavior and competence. 2,481–3,159 respondents and 47,221–60,106 candidates in each country (14,058 and 267,795 in the pooled sample).

Figure 4.3: The upper panels show the marginal means (levels) of support for undemocratic and democratic candidates across partisanship measured as the voter's attitude toward the candidate's party. The lower panels show the conditional effects of undemocratic behavior across partisanship.

Partisanship (Attitude to Party): 1 Strong Dislike, 2 Dislike, 3 Neutral, 4 Like, 5 Strong Like
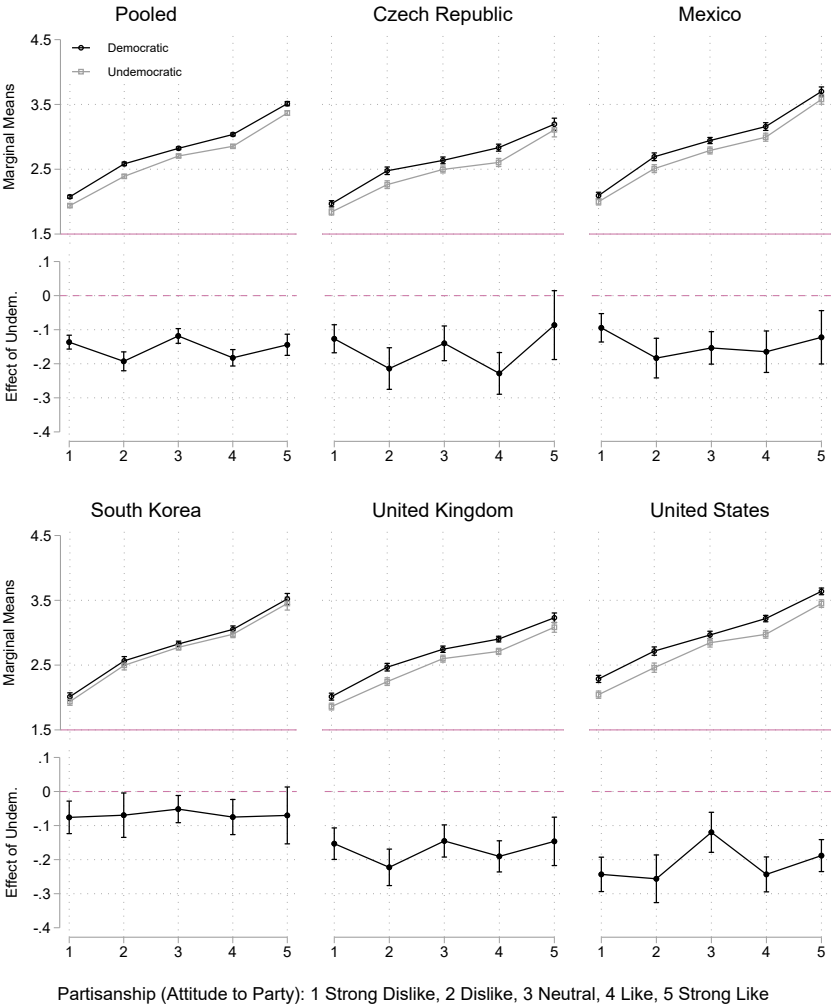
Note: OLS regression including an interaction term between undemocratic behavior and partisanship. Standard errors clustered on the respondent level. 2,350–2,999 respondents and 41,788–53,417 candidates in each country (13,308 and 239,356 in the pooled estimate).

Figure 4.4: The upper panels show the predicted levels of support for undemocratic and democratic candidates across policy distance between voter and candidate. The lower panels show the conditional effects of undemocratic behavior across policy distance.

Policy Distance: Min-Max

Note: OLS regression including an interaction term between undemocratic behavior and squared policy distance. Standard errors clustered on the respondent level. 2,350–2,999 respondents and 41,788–53,417 candidates in each country (13,308 and 239,356 in the pooled estimate).

relation between punishment of undemocratic behavior and such classical factors (e.g., Graham and Svolik 2020; Carey et al. 2022). Pessimistic conclusions may stem primarily from a focus on the relative effects of factors such as policy agreement and partisanship vis-à-vis undemocratic behavior (see Article 1 for a detailed discussion of this). Additionally, the findings show that partisan hypocrisy and rationalizations do not always translate into voting decisions (Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022; Krishnarajan 2023), plausibly because such malpractices partly consist of needs to express partisan allegiances (Malka and Adelman 2022; Westwood et al. 2022). Finally, the findings illustrate that the factors work largely along similar lines: as additive factors which increase support for politicians but do not make citizens tolerate undemocratic behavior completely. For the remainder of this dissertation, this brings optimism in terms of designing interventions against support for undemocratic politicians as citizens, for example, actually do sanction undemocratic behavior even if it is performed by their own party. Citizens are not completely blinded by partisanship and may therefore be susceptible to information favoring stronger punishment of undemocratic behavior.

Chapter 5
Contextual Factors: Party Systems and Democratic Experience

5.1 Party Systems

Article 3 picks up on the findings from Articles 1-2 showing that undemocratic behavior, competence, policy agreement, and partisanship are additive factors feeding into citizens' voting decisions. Although none of the factors make citizens tolerate undemocratic behavior completely, citizens seem unwilling to defect from a party they like, a very competent politician, or a politician they agree with on policy to a party they strongly dislike, a very incompetent politician, or a politician they outright disagree with on policy as a consequence of undemocratic behavior. Following this logic, diversifying the options available to citizens through the party system might increase defection from undemocratic candidates as the trade-offs citizens have to make when defecting decrease in intensity. Speaking to the classical debate about party systems and democratic stability (e.g., Sartori 1976; Hermens 1941; Dahl 1971; Lipset 1983; Linz 1978; Lijphart 1999; Anderson and Guillory 1997), this is exactly the argument that Article 3 tests: Does adding a party in between the in- and out-party increase defection from undemocratic in-partisan candidates?

I exploit the characteristics of the English party system—with two major parties and a center party in between—to test this argument experimentally. How does it impact defection from undemocratic candidates from Labour and the Conservatives when the Liberal Democrats figure as a(n) (effective) party in the system? I answer this question using two candidate choice experiments fielded with Lucid in England in 2022 (2,100 respondents). I make use of recent advances in three-profile designs to implement these experiments (Jenke et al. 2021). First, I employ a design—the "increase-in-profiles" design—simply adding the Liberal Democrats in a three-party condition compared to a two-party condition only including the two major parties. Second, I design the "constituency-

Figure 5.1: Two experimental designs manipulating the (effective) number of parties.

a1) Increase-in-profiles:
Two parties

Imagine that the following two candidates compete for a seat in parliament.

	CANDIDATE A	CANDIDATE B
Party	Labour	Conservatives
Age	38	41
Gender	Female	Female
Policy	Reinvest in local schools	Support local businesses more
Recent behavior	Proposed to appoint Supreme Court Justices loyal to Labour	Said the rights of media platforms should be protected

Which candidate would you be most likely to vote for?

Candidate A	Candidate B	Abstain
○	○	○

To what extent do you like or dislike each of the candidates?

	Dislike very much	Dislike somewhat	Neutral	Like somewhat	Like very much	Don't know
Candidate A	○	○	○	○	○	○
Candidate B	○	○	○	○	○	○

a2) Increase-in-profiles:
Three parties

Imagine that the following three candidates compete for a seat in parliament.

	CANDIDATE A	CANDIDATE B	CANDIDATE C
Party	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal Democrats
Age	38	41	53
Gender	Female	Female	Male
Policy	Reinvest in local schools	Support local businesses more	Establish basic income
Recent behavior	Proposed to appoint Supreme Court Justices loyal to Labour	Said the rights of media platforms should be protected	Said that vote buying is never acceptable

Which candidate would you be most likely to vote for?

Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C	Abstain
○	○	○	○

To what extent do you like or dislike each of the candidates?

	Dislike very much	Dislike somewhat	Neutral	Like somewhat	Like very much	Don't know
Candidate A	○	○	○	○	○	○
Candidate B	○	○	○	○	○	○
Candidate C	○	○	○	○	○	○

b1) Constituency-information:
Two effective parties

Imagine that the following three candidates compete for a seat in parliament in the constituency described below the profiles.

	CANDIDATE A	CANDIDATE B	CANDIDATE C
Party	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal Democrats
Age	38	41	53
Gender	Female	Female	Male
Policy	Reinvest in local schools	Support local businesses more	Establish basic income
Recent behavior	Proposed to appoint Supreme Court Justices loyal to Labour	Said the rights of media platforms should be protected	Said that vote buying is never acceptable

- This is a constituency where Labour and the Conservatives are the strongest parties
- The Liberal Democrats have never won an election in this constituency

Which candidate would you be most likely to vote for?

Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C	Abstain
○	○	○	○

Which candidate do you think would win this election?

Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C	Don't know
○	○	○	○

b2) Constituency-information:
Three effective parties

Imagine that the following three candidates compete for a seat in parliament in the constituency described below the profiles.

	CANDIDATE A	CANDIDATE B	CANDIDATE C
Party	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal Democrats
Age	38	41	53
Gender	Female	Female	Male
Policy	Reinvest in local schools	Support local businesses more	Establish basic income
Recent behavior	Proposed to appoint Supreme Court Justices loyal to Labour	Said the rights of media platforms should be protected	Said that vote buying is never acceptable

- This is a constituency where Labour, the Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats are equally strong
- All three parties have won several elections in this constituency

Which candidate would you be most likely to vote for?

Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C	Abstain
○	○	○	○

Which candidate do you think would win this election?

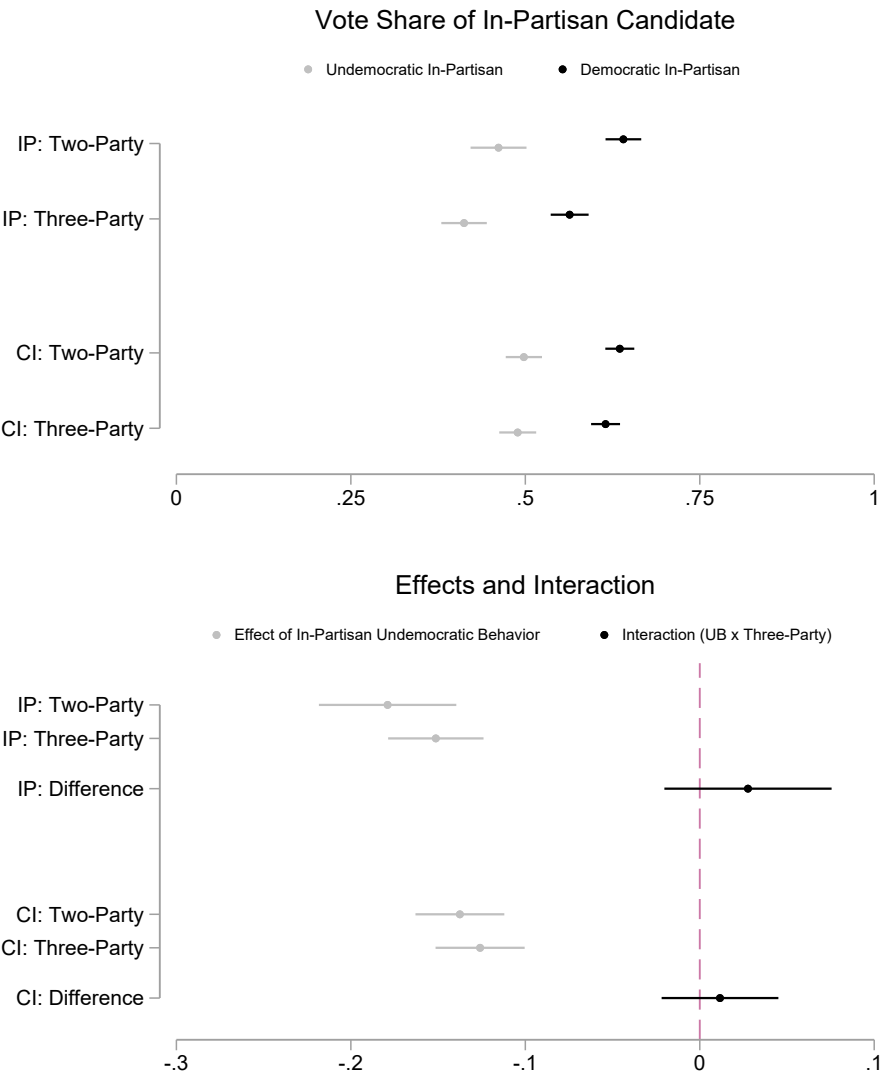| Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C	Don't know
○	○	○	○

information" experiment where I add information about whether the Liberal Democrats figure as an effective party with real chances of winning elections in the three-party condition, while presenting the Liberal Democrats as a chanceless party in the two-party condition.

In both designs, undemocratic behaviors are randomly assigned to one or none of the candidates from the two major parties, allowing me to assess whether including the Liberal Democrats as a(n) (effective) party in the system increases defection from undemocratic in-partisan candidates. The undemocratic behaviors assigned are not illustrated here but follow a similar logic to those in the five-country experiment, although they are slightly more tailored to the English context. Respondents' partisanship was measured pre-treatment. Figure 5.1 illustrates the two designs. As for the five-country conjoint experiment, background attributes are assigned, but unlike in the conjoint experiment, these were not randomized but instead constructed based on 18 real-world constituency races from the 2019 General Election.

Figure 5.2 illustrates the main result from Article 3, showing the effects of undemocratic in-partisan behavior in the two- and three-party scenarios across the two designs. I used linear OLS regression with an interaction term between undemocratic behavior and the party systems treatment and respondent-clustered standard errors. The main quantities of interest are the two black interaction coefficients in the lower panel, which show the differences in effects of undemocratic behavior between conditions. These should be significantly negative for the argument to gain support. In contrast to this expectation, voters do not defect more from undemocratic in-partisans when there are three (effective) parties. Two-party systems therefore do not appear to hamper defection from undemocratic politicians. Additionally, I show in Article 3 that defection from undemocratic in-partisans relocates from the out-party to the Liberal Democrats when the latter figures in the system.

Beyond the obvious implication that these findings do not side with either those arguing that two-party systems are most beneficial for democratic stability (Sartori 1976) or with those favoring multi-party systems (e.g., Lijphart 1999), the findings of Article 3 build upon the insights from Articles 1-2. Although competence, partisanship, and policy agreement do not suppress the effects of undemocratic behavior, these factors characterizing the options within the party system evidently matter more for *Support and Opposition to Undemocratic Politicians* than the number of options in the system. Additionally, having three parties rather than two appears to be no panacea for increasing defection from undemocratic candidates. If anything, at least when focusing on electoral first-past-the-

Figure 5.2: The upper panel shows vote shares of undemocratic and democratic in-partisan candidates in two- and three-party scenarios across the increase-in-profiles (IP) and constituency-information (CI) designs. The lower panel shows the effects of undemocratic behavior and the interactions with the number of (effective) parties. Approximately 14,000 candidate observations in each design.

Vote Share of In-Partisan Candidate

○ Undemocratic In-Partisan   ● Democratic In-Partisan

Effects and Interaction

○ Effect of In-Partisan Undemocratic Behavior   ● Interaction (UB x Three-Party)

post systems such as those of the United Kingdom or the United States, having three parties may even relocate defection away from strong democratic parties to weak democratic parties.
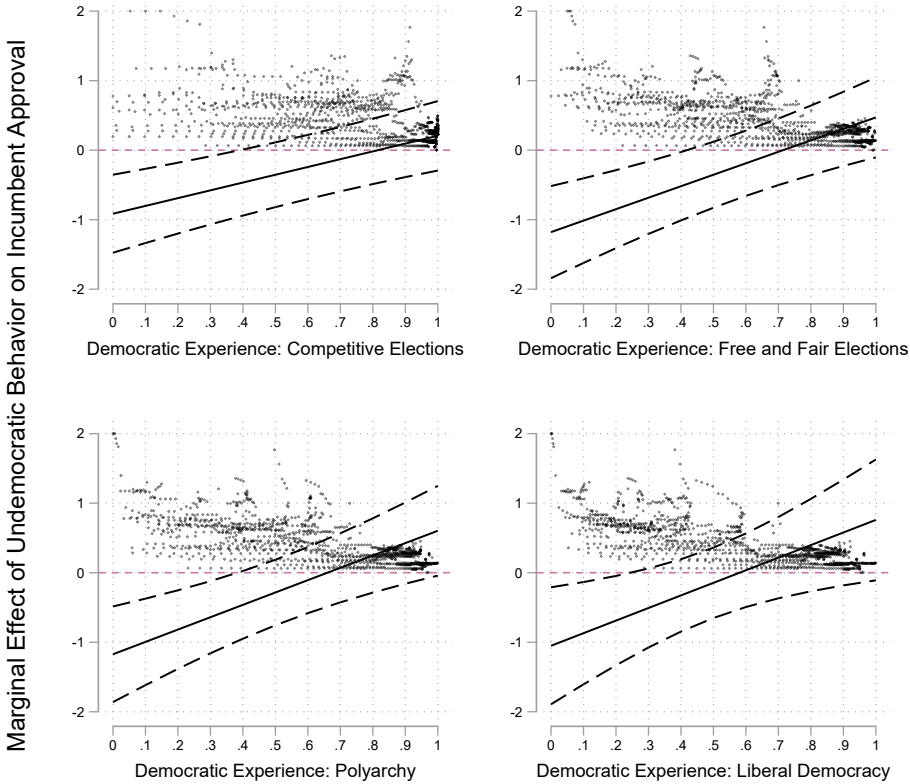
5.2   Democratic Experience

Another contextual factor expected to matter for sanctioning of undemocratic behavior is the country's experience with democracy historically. Specifically, I argued in Chapter 2 that democratic experience decreases incentives to sanction undemocratic incumbent behavior as this factor decreases perceived democratic vulnerability because political elites increasingly safeguard democracy (Cornell, Møller, and Skaaning 2020), decreases the share of citizens who recall the autocratic past (Dahl 1971; Runciman 2018), and increases the relevance of partisanship (Ezrow, Tavits, and Homola 2014; Tavits 2005; Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Dalton and Weldon 2007). This contextual factor plays a key role in the dissertation as it inspires and provides a bridge to the vulnerability intervention presented in the next chapter.

To test this proposition, I draw on an expert-coded measure of undemocratic incumbent behavior from the Varieties of Democracy dataset (Coppedge et al. 2019), a stock measure of democratic experience based on various democracy indicators—measuring competitive democracy, electoral democracy, polyarchy, and liberal democracy—from V-Dem and the Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy (Gerring, Thacker, and Alfaro 2012; Persson and Tabellini 2009; Grundholm and Thorsen 2019; Skaaning, Gerring, and Bartusevicius 2015), and an aggregated survey indicator of support for incumbents from the Executive Approval Project (Carlin et al. 2016). The final dataset consists of country-year structured panel data from 43 countries, covering all regions of the world except Africa. I utilize this data structure to include country and year fixed effects in otherwise simple linear OLS models and also include time-varying control variables.

Figure 5.3 illustrates the main result of Article 4. It shows that regardless of whether democratic experience is measured based on electoral or liberal definitions of democracy, citizens punish undemocratic behavior when democracy is young but decreasingly do so as democracy gains experience. This finding challenges the conventional wisdom that support for democracy strengthens as democracy gains experience (Norris, Frank, and Coma 2014; Hernández 2016). While this conventional wisdom may very well be true, strengthening of democratic support does not

Figure 5.3: Marginal effect of undemocratic incumbent behavior across democratic experience.

Note: The dots represent an underlying scatterplot of the variation in undemocratic behavior—rescaled from 0–1 to 0–2 in this underlying plot only—across democratic experience. Thus, elevated dots mark severe undemocratic behavior while the closeness of the dots marks the density of observations across democratic experience.

seem to go hand in hand with sanctioning of undemocratic behavior (see also Svolik 2019). A broader implication is that different actors seem to act as the backbone of democracy depending on democratic experience. In old democracies, political elites largely safeguard it (Cornell, Møller, and Skaaning 2020), whereas citizens seem to be particularly crucial for democratic survival in young democracies. Article 4 therefore does not by any means suggest that young democracies are more resilient than old democracies, but instead highlights variation in how citizens matter. Finally, Article 4 does not permit testing which individual-level mechanisms account for the observed pattern. The next chapter partly fills this gap by testing whether information about democratic vulnerability is an effective intervention against undemocratic politicians.

Chapter 6
Intervention: Information About Democratic Vulnerability

Recent support for undemocratic politicians in contemporary democracies has sparked scholarly interest in interventions against such support (Braley et al. 2023; Voelkel et al. 2023). However, these interventions are limited to the United States and typically focus on correcting exaggerated meta-perceptions about the willingness of political opponents to subvert democracy. In Article 5, I test the intervention of telling people that democracy is vulnerable and at risk of breaking down. This, in turn, should incentivize citizens to prioritize punishing undemocratic behavior more severely at the expense of considerations about competence (Frederiksen 2022a), policy interests (Svolik 2020), and partisanship (Graham and Svolik 2020).

I included two treatment conditions in the five-country experiment presented in Chapter 4 and an additional vignette experiment fielded in the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Italy, India, Poland, and South Africa to test the vulnerability intervention. I term these two studies Study 1 and Study 2 in Article 5. Table 6.1 shows the conditions that were assigned to respondents just before the conjoint scenarios included in the five-country experiment. The conditions include a democratic vulnerability condition and a democratic robustness condition. Table 6.2 shows treatment construction for Study 2, which included information about democratic vulnerability and violations of democratic principles similar to those in the remaining studies. The outcomes for Study 2 consisted of five-point scales measuring support for the undemocratic proposals, support for the candidate making the proposal, support for the candidate's party, support for alternative candidates, and turnout. For the vulnerability intervention to be tested properly, it is imperative that these treatments are sufficiently strong and attended to by respondents. I therefore employ several factual and subjective manipulation checks in Article 5 documenting that this is the case (Kane 2023; Kane and Barabas 2019).

Table 6.1: Treatment Conditions of Democratic Robustness and Vulnerability for Study 1

DEMOCRACY IS ROBUST
Recent developments in countries around the world have shown that democracy is generally strong and that it is hard to undermine even though some political leaders may wish to do so. On this basis, experts predict that no or only very few democratic breakdowns will occur during the next 10 years around the world.

DEMOCRACY IS VULNERABLE
Recent developments in countries around the world have shown that democracy is generally fragile and that it is easy to undermine for political leaders who wish to do so. On this basis, experts predict that many democratic breakdowns will occur during the next 10 years around the world.

Table 6.2: Treatment Scenarios for Study 2

Imagine that a candidate from your preferred party runs for the 2028 presidential election. The years before the election were characterized by normal economic conditions. [Robustness/Vulnerability/Baseline].
One month before the election, the candidate from your preferred party proposes to [Undemocratic behavior/Placebo]. Would you support this proposal?

Vulnerability/Robustness (baseline includes no information):
However, both the public and experts voiced their fears of democratic breakdown, and national newspapers published articles with headlines like **"OUR DEMOCRACY IS VULNERABLE"** frequently.
Additionally, both the public and experts praised the stability of democracy, and national newspapers published articles with headlines like **"OUR DEMOCRACY IS ROBUST"** frequently.

Undemocratic behaviors and placebos (probability in parentheses):
permanently close polling stations in areas not supporting the party (0.215)
put permanent restrictions on media channels critical of the party (0.215)
purge existing public officials and replace them with party loyalists (0.215)
replace existing supreme court judges with party loyalists (0.215)
make changes to the tax scheme in the country (0.07)
make changes to the level of welfare spending in the country (0.07)

Figure 6.1: Effects of undemocratic behavior and interaction between undemocratic behavior and democratic vulnerability in the Czech Republic, Mexico, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Study 1).
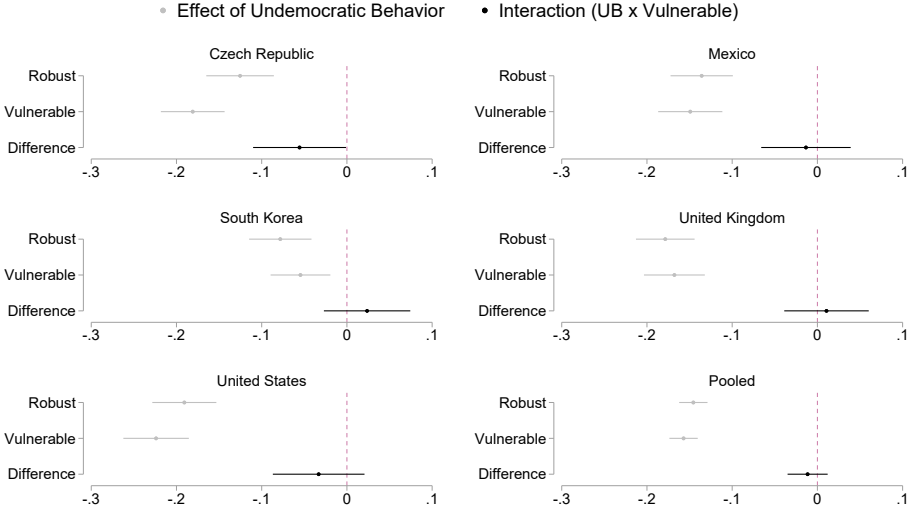
Note: 2,350–2,999 respondents and 41,788–53,417 candidate observations in each country (13,308 and 239,356 in the pooled estimate). Brackets indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Figures 6.1-6.2 show the results of Studies 1-2. The estimation technique differs slightly between the two studies as I interact undemocratic behavior with democratic vulnerability in Study 1 but estimate the average effects of vulnerability *when* democratic principles are violated in Study 2. Beyond this difference, I use OLS regression in both instances and again cluster standard errors on the respondent level when employing conjoints (Study 1). Significantly negative interaction coefficients ("Difference") signal support for the vulnerability hypothesis in Study 1, whereas negative average effects signal support for the hypothesis in Study 2. The two studies yield much the same conclusion: The effects of vulnerability information are very limited. The intervention increases sanctioning of undemocratic behavior only in the Czech Republic in Study 1, and to some extent, I find significant effects in the expected direction only in South Africa, Poland, and the United States in Study 2.

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Figure 6.2: Effects of democratic vulnerability—compared with the baseline and robustness categories—on undemocratic proposal support, candidate support, and party support (Study 2).
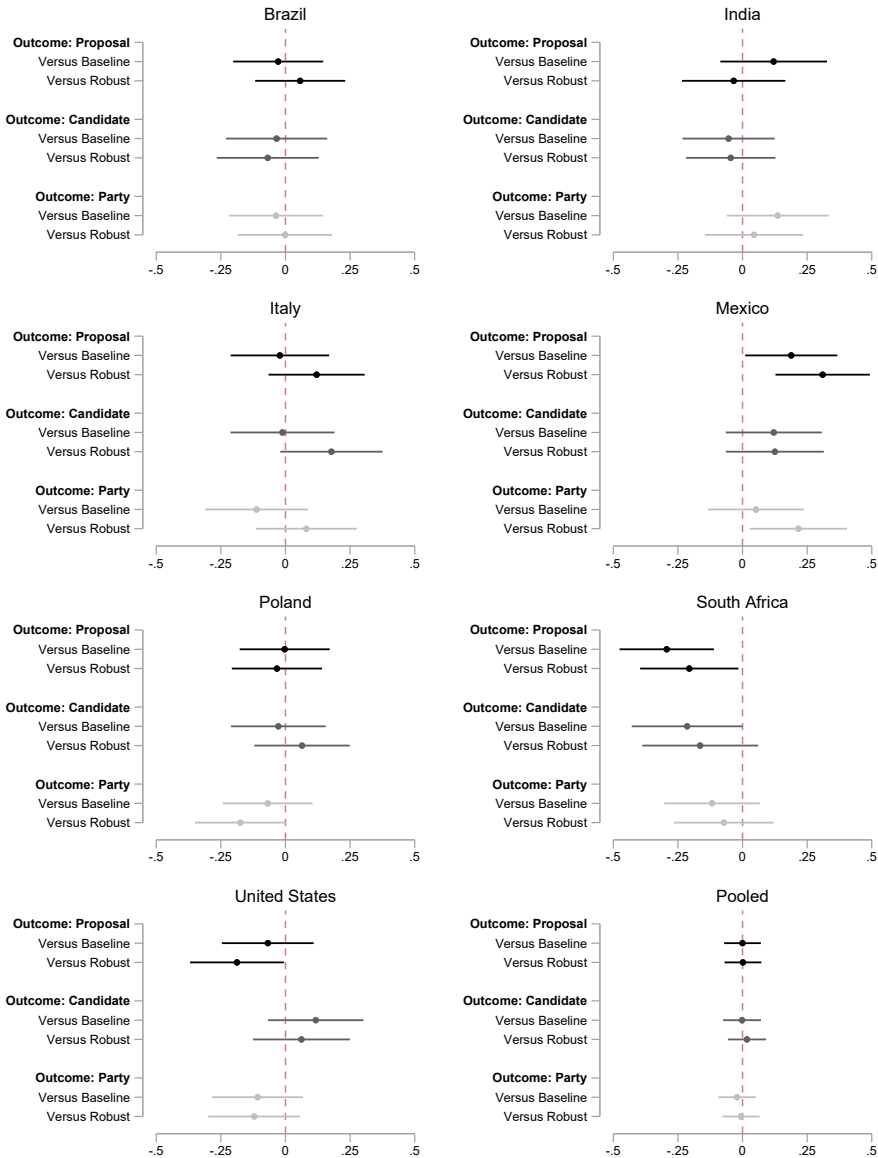
Note: 785–878 respondents in each country estimate and 5,782–5,969 in the pooled estimate. Brackets indicate 90% confidence intervals.

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Figure 6.3: Three-way interactions testing additional hypotheses stating that information about democratic vulnerability diminishes the moderating effects of partisanship, policy agreement, and competence. Country-pooled estimates from Study 1.
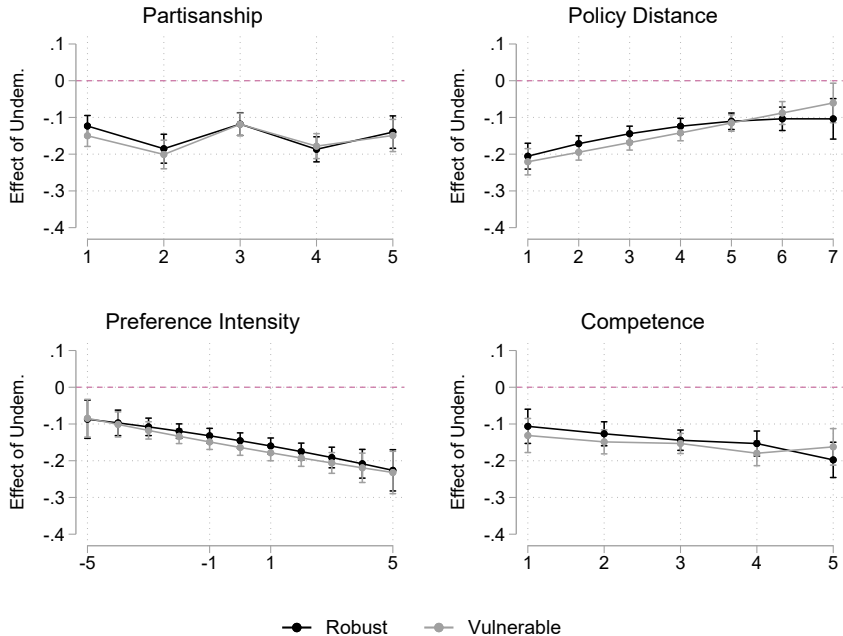
Note: 13,308 respondents and 239,356 candidate observations (country-pooled sample). Brackets indicate 95% confidence intervals.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, I pre-registered additional hypotheses for Study 1 stating that vulnerability information diminishes the moderating effects of partisanship, policy agreement, and competence. Given the results of the dissertation, this essentially entails three-way interactions including moderating factors that turned out to have neither the expected moderating effects nor substantial moderating effects in general (i.e., vulnerability as well as partisanship, policy agreement, and competence). For this reason, the importance of the additional hypotheses is marginalized, which led me to not include the relevant tests in any of the articles of the dissertation. However, for the sake of transparency, I report the tests here. Figure 6.3 therefore illustrates the three-way interactions

between vulnerability and the remaining factors for the country-pooled sample. I include both measures of policy agreement here—intensity in disagreement as well as numerical distance—for completeness as the tests have not been reported in the individual articles. Specifically, the figure shows the effects of undemocratic behavior across the remaining factors for each of the robustness and vulnerability conditions of Study 1. The marginalized relevance of these hypotheses aside, Figure 6.3 testifies to the fact that the effects of vulnerability information are limited as we see that the results are largely similar for each of the two conditions. Partisanship does not moderate the effects of undemocratic behavior in any of the conditions, whereas policy agreement and competence, if anything, increases the negative effects of undemocratic behavior in both conditions.

The general failure of the vulnerability intervention holds important implications for our knowledge about interventions against support for undemocratic politicians. The findings suggest that quite straightforward and intuitively powerful interventions such as telling people that democracy is vulnerable and at risk of breaking down may be ineffective. Future studies would, therefore, benefit from theorizing interventions along different lines, for example by implementing the meta-perceptions perspective outside of the United States (Braley et al. 2023; Voelkel et al. 2023). As we may question the expected effectiveness of such interventions outside of this country, and support for undemocratic politicians by no means is limited to the United States, documenting how well such interventions generalize seems extremely important.

In terms of the implications for this dissertation, the results imply that perceived democratic vulnerability is less likely to account for the pattern observed in Article 4. Even though the vulnerability treatments are better suited to test whether information rather than perceptions have effects, the treatments do manipulate perceived democratic vulnerability to a substantial extent as documented by the manipulation checks employed in Article 5. As the moderating impact of partisanship seems limited based on the results presented in Chapter 4, this leaves us with one last of the three theoretical reasons listed in Article 4, namely deterrence by an autocratic past. This factor is distinct from perceived democratic vulnerability as it relates to awareness of undemocratic behavior sparked from past events rather than current risks of breakdown. Although it is very plausible that a fourth, unknown reason accounts for the pattern established in Article 4—and we cannot completely rule out perceived democratic vulnerability as a potential mechanism—a recent study has indeed shown that providing information about prior auto-

cratic regimes can bolster support for democracy (Finkel, Neundorf, and Rascón Ramírez 2023).

Chapter 7
Conclusion and Discussion

A citizenry punishing overt undemocratic behavior by politicians provides better conditions for democratic survival. This is particularly important in current times where democratic breakdowns most often happen as a consequence of citizen support for incumbents eroding democracy from within (e.g., Svolik 2019). In this dissertation, I have shed comparative light on *Support and Opposition to Undemocratic Politicians*. The five individual articles contribute with new insights on this phenomenon, building upon important prior work on the topic (e.g., Svolik 2019; Carey et al. 2019; Carey et al. 2022; Touchton, Klofstad, and Uscinski 2023; Bartels 2020; Albertus and Grossman 2021; Ahlquist et al. 2018; Braley et al. 2023; Voelkel et al. 2023; Clayton et al. 2021; Graham and Svolik 2020; Krishnarajan 2023; Lewandowsky and Jankowski 2023; Saikkonen and Christensen 2023; Mares and Visconti 2020; Reuter and Szakonyi 2021; Şaşmaz, Yagci, and Ziblatt 2022). In this section, I summarize the key findings and contributions of the dissertation, along with a few limitations and suggested points of departure for future research.

Articles 1-2 have shown us the moderately optimistic finding that citizens are not blinded completely by their partisanship, policy preferences, or politicians' competences when facing undemocratic politicians, although such politicians may still gain support by representing political interests or appearing as competent. Co-partisanship, policy agreement, and competence increase support for politicians regardless of whether they are undemocratic, but these features do not suppress punishment for behaving undemocratically. First, these two articles contribute with the hitherto comparatively broadest evaluation of the relation between undemocratic behavior and vote choice by examining this relation across five countries varying in their political systems and democratic legacies (e.g., Kang 2017; Lee 2016; Langston 2017; Hajek 2017; Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley 2020). Second, Article 2 is the first of its kind to relate punishment of undemocratic behavior to competence, which is one of the most celebrated factors in the discipline historically (Green and Jennings

2017; Petrocik 1996; Dahl 1989; Caramani 2017; Bertsou and Caramani 2022).

Third, Article 1 reconciles several missing links in the literature up until its conception. It disentangles the effects of social psychological partisanship and Downsian policy preferences in relation to the sanctioning of undemocratic behavior theoretically and empirically (Campbell et al. 1980; Downs 1957); shows that undemocratic attitudes or hypocrisy may occasionally be expressive and do not always translate into vote choices (Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022; Krishnarajan 2023; Malka and Adelman 2022; Westwood et al. 2022; Beaulieu 2014); and highlights the fundamental difference in partisanship and policy agreement suppressing the effects of undemocratic behavior versus (less dramatically and as turned out to be the case) impacting support for undemocratic politicians merely as additive factors (Graham and Svolik 2020; Carey et al. 2022). As I highlight in Article 1, the latter point flags the importance of moderate voters for democratic sustainability and is particularly important because the relative effects, which are largely decided by treatment strength, of the different factors essentially are in the hands of the researcher (Fowler et al. 2022; Levendusky 2010; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Chen and Luttig 2021; Chong and Druckman 2007).

Articles 3-4 shed light on contextual factors (potentially) affecting sanctioning of undemocratic behavior. Article 3 shows that the number of parties in the party system only have limited effects and, hence, that two-party systems evidently do not hamper democracy in that sense, whereas Article 4 shows that democratic experience matters substantially such that citizens of young democracies punish undemocratic behavior the most. Article 3 carries two crucial contributions. First, it links party systems to support for undemocratic politicians, the most frequent cause of democratic breakdown today (Svolik 2019), thereby contributing to the classical debate about democratic stability and party systems (e.g., Sartori 1976; Hermens 1941; Dahl 1971; Lipset 1983; Linz 1978; Lijphart 1999; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Valentim and Dinas 2023). Second, it provides a novel methodological approach to manipulating party systems experimentally. The specific approach exploiting the structure of the party system in England is rather simple, but it may carry the potential to be generalized across different countries and systems if going beyond the three-profile designs employed here (Jenke et al. 2021). Article 4 contributes theoretically and empirically by bringing in the factor of democratic experience, which also links directly to the actual pattern of

incumbent-driven subversion of democracy in countries such as Hungary, Turkey, and Venezuela (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

Building upon the insights of the remaining articles, I design a straightforward intervention against support for undemocratic politicians in Article 5: telling people that democracy is vulnerable and at risk of breaking down. I fielded this intervention across 10 different democracies, resulting in the conclusion that information about democratic vulnerability matters little, if at all, for punishment of undemocratic behavior. This is quite striking, given the straightforwardness of the intervention, and shows that support for undemocratic politicians is rather sticky. The article carries the theoretical contribution of the vulnerability argument, the empirical contribution in showing that it matters only to a limited extent, and the contribution of doing so across many countries as opposed to prior interventions focused on the United States (Braley et al. 2023; Voelkel et al. 2023).

These contributions naturally come with a few limitations as well. Most notably, and as also touched upon in Chapter 3 as well as Article 2, the four articles based on experiments set up hypothetical scenarios for citizens to assess. This is not a fundamental problem for inferring something about citizens' responses to undemocratic behavior (see e.g., Mutz 2011), but it sets some limits to which types of politicians we can infer something about citizens' responses to. Specifically, the articles based on experiments are particularly useful to infer citizens' responses to undemocratic behavior from politicians to whom they do not have strong personal attachments. Examples of such politicians are state-level politicians in the United States, who both undertake undemocratic behaviors occasionally and constitute a large part of politics (Grumbach 2022; Pew Research Center 2014). This does not undermine the contributions of the dissertation since I have claimed to infer conclusions about the respective effects of, for example, competence, policy agreement, and partisanship on punishment of undemocratic behavior as isolated factors and not in combination with personal attachments to politicians. Indeed, isolating these factors from specific, prominent politicians was necessary to provide the insights of this dissertation.

Another related limitation is the scope of the variation examined in the five articles. For example, the factors of partisanship, policy agreement, and competence in Articles 1-2 only go as far as the measures and manipulations allow. Undemocratic behavior is, for the most part, examined as quite incremental undemocratic behavior; party systems are manipulated as the subtle difference between having two and three parties; there is almost no variation in undemocratic behavior in the utmost ex-

perienced democracies; and the vulnerability intervention carries natural limitations in terms of how strong it is. These boundaries limit possible inferences. However, I have examined and sparked variation where it is most relevant. For example, undemocratic behaviors are indeed very incremental in the real world (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Svolik 2019); the most critical distinctions in party systems are arguably between having two or (slightly) more parties; and stronger vulnerability interventions than the simple information provided in Article 5 may be unrealistic to implement in the real world. Moreover, I have implemented measures such as varying the intensity of undemocratic behaviors (see the replication study presented in Appendix K to Article 1) and employed extensive manipulation checks to document the necessary level of strength of the vulnerability intervention (Kane 2023; Kane and Barabas 2019).

The third and final limitation I wish to highlight here concerns the types of data examined in the different articles. As presented earlier, the dissertation consists of conjoint experiments, candidate choice experiments exploiting real-world characteristics, country-year fixed-effects models using country-level panel data, and vignette experiments. The missing category is arguably designs exploiting sharp variation in undemocratic behavior—or any of the other factors of theoretical interest here—induced by real-world events. The challenge is, as also highlighted above, that real-world undemocratic behaviors are largely incremental (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Svolik 2019). Simply put, the vast majority of undemocratic behaviors do not entail strong enough variation for exploitation as observational data in sharp regression discontinuity or difference-in-differences designs (Valentim, Ruipérez Núñez, and Dinas 2021; Angrist and Pischke 2015). That said, a few studies have succeeded in doing this, focusing on the January 6 Capitol Hill insurrection incited by Donald J. Trump or the election of Jair Bolsonaro (Eady, Hjorth, and Dinesen 2023; Noort 2022; Cohen et al. 2022). This helps us understand how citizens respond to abrupt undemocratic behavior in the real world. However, such events are extremely rare, and we do get to understand them quite well on the basis of contributions such as those just cited.

Given these limitations, making suggestions for future research is a relatively straightforward endeavour. The limitation regarding which types of politicians we can infer something about begs the question of how voters respond to undemocratic behavior by politicians to whom they have strong attachments, especially as other contributions have the same limitation (e.g., Graham and Svolik 2020; Aarslew 2023; Krishnarajan 2023). Some contributions, observational and experimental

(e.g., Eady, Hjorth, and Dinesen 2023; Noort 2022; Touchton, Klofstad, and Uscinski 2023; Şaşmaz, Yagci, and Ziblatt 2022), partly touch upon this issue, but there are still gaps to be filled in terms of the interplay between responses to undemocratic behavior and attachments to specific prominent politicians. Contributions inducing stronger variation in party systems or exploiting hitherto overlooked, sharp real-world variation in undemocratic behavior should also be encouraged. However, the greatest encouragement of this dissertation for future research shall be developing further on interventions against support for undemocratic politicians. We have gotten to know quite a bit about why voters support undemocratic politicians, but we know far less about what to do about it.

This encouragement is given based on the careful optimism that this dissertation brings. At least relative to the state of the art (e.g., Graham and Svolik 2020; Svolik 2019; Krishnarajan 2023; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022), the presented findings mostly supply good news for democracy. Important factors such as partisanship, policy preferences, and competence do not prevent citizens from punishing undemocratic behavior, and citizens punish undemocratic behavior substantially even when the electoral choice set is limited to the in- and out-party. However, there are downsides. Citizens may still be lured to support undemocratic politicians if they outperform competitors on other parameters than undemocratic behavior, democratic experience may disincentivize citizens from punishing undemocratic behavior, and support for undemocratic politicians seems very sticky and resistant to intervention. Looking forward, it is imperative that we rethink how to design interventions that turn citizens away from undemocratic politicians for democracy to thrive and prosper.

Summary

Why do voters support and oppose undemocratic politicians? I provide answers to this question because the world has seen the rise and fall of several undemocratic presidents, prime ministers, and governments during recent decades. For example, Donald J. Trump has been voted in and out of office, yet being one of the main contenders for the 2024 presidential election in the United States. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has won several presidential elections in Turkey but lost control over Istanbul at the 2019 mayoral election. Support and opposition to such undemocratic politicians is key to understanding democratic sustainability in the 21st century: While historical democratic breakdowns often resulted from violent events such as military coups, contemporary democratic erosion is mostly driven by elected leaders' subversion of democracy.

I answer the overarching research question in five self-contained, solo-authored articles. In Articles 1-2, I examine whether politician-level factors such as party, policy, and competence make citizens tolerate undemocratic behavior. Specifically, I explore whether undemocratic politicians garner support due to alignment with citizens' policy preferences, due to partisan loyalty blinding voters, or due to potential prioritization of competent leadership over democratic adherence. Employing conjoint survey experiments in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Mexico, and South Korea, I show that neither partisanship, policy preferences, nor competent politicians make citizens tolerate undemocratic behavior entirely. Citizens sanction politicians for behaving undemocratically regardless of these characteristics. However, politicians—undemocratic or democratic—may still gain support by promising policies in line with citizens' preferences, by representing citizens' preferred parties, or by appearing as competent. Articles 1-2 thus show that *Support and Opposition to Undemocratic Politicians* is as much on a knife-edge balance in an experimental, scientific setup as it is in the real world.

Shifting the focus to contextual factors in Articles 3-4, I examine the role of party systems and democratic experience. One contextual explanation of support for undemocratic politicians is that citizens' electoral

choices sometimes are constrained to two options, as for example seen in the United States. Such constraints demand citizens to make greater sacrifices in terms of policy preferences or partisan loyalty in order to punish undemocratic behavior, particularly if the two choices are politically polarized. However, using a novel candidate choice survey experiment fielded in England, I show in Article 3 that partisan voters punish undemocratic behavior as much when they only have two options—the party they like and the party they dislike—as when they also have the option to vote for a third party located in between. Another contextual explanation is that citizens lose incentives to detect and punish undemocratic behavior as countries gain democratic experience, because citizens get used to the fact that other political actors hold anti-democratic forces in check. I find support for this argument drawing on observational data from 43 countries in Article 4. Specifically, citizens punish undemocratic behavior severely when democracy is young, but decreasingly do so as it gains experience.

Having covered different explanations of support for undemocratic politicians, I dive into how we can intervene against support for undemocratic politicians in the fifth and final article. Specifically, I examine whether telling people that democracy is vulnerable and at risk of breaking down makes them punish undemocratic behavior more severely. Using this intervention across two data collections conducted in 2020 and 2021 in a total of 10 countries, I show in Article 5 that vulnerability information matters only to a very limited extent for opposition to undemocratic politicians.

The findings provide cautiously optimistic insights for democracy. Citizens are not blinded by crucial politician characteristics such as party affiliation, policy, or competence. Moreover, undemocratic behavior is sanctioned irrespective of the typical constraints of a two-party system. However, we can decreasingly rely on citizens to punish undemocratic behavior as democracy gains experience, and support for undemocratic politicians seems to be hard to intervene against since a straightforward intervention such as telling citizens that democracy is vulnerable does not prove effective. In combination, these insights nevertheless provide more optimistic sentiments than most existing studies.

The dissertation contributes with novel investigation of the relationships between toleration of undemocratic behavior and competence, democratic experience, and party systems; a thorough, comparative, and reconciling examination of the relationships between toleration of undemocratic behavior and the factors of partisanship and policy preferences; and a comprehensive, cross-country test of a novel and straight-

forward intervention against support for undemocratic politicians. The results of the dissertation highlight the need to further develop such interventions.

Dansk Resumé

Hvorfor støtter vælgere nogle gange udemokratiske politikere? Hvorfor undlader de ofte at støtte dem? Jeg fokuserer i afhandlingen på at besvare disse spørgsmål, da vi i de seneste årtier har set adskillige eksempler på både elektoral succes og fiasko for udemokratiske præsidenter, premierministre og regeringer. Eksempelvis er Donald J. Trump både blevet stemt ind og ud af præsidentembedet og er desuden stadig en af hovedkandidaterne til præsidentvalget i 2024 i USA. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan har vundet flere præsidentvalg i Tyrkiet, men mistede kontrollen over Istanbul efter borgmestervalget i 2019. Støtte og modstand til sådanne udemokratiske politikere er afgørende for at forstå demokratisk tilbagegang i det 21. århundrede: Mens demokratiske sammenbrud historisk set oftest har skyldtes voldelige begivenheder som militærkup, er nutidig demokratisk tilbagegang primært drevet af valgte lederes underminering af demokratiet.

Jeg besvarer de overordnede forskningsspørgsmål i fem separate, eneforfattede artikler. I Artikel 1 og 2 undersøger jeg, om bestemte politikerkarakteristika såsom parti, ført politik og kompetence får borgerne til at tolerere udemokratisk adfærd. Konkret undersøger jeg, om udemokratiske politikere nyder støtte fordi vælgere er enige med dem på andre politiske områder (fx skatte- eller immigrationspolitik), fordi partitilhørsforhold hæmmer vælgernes kapacitet til at identificere og straffe udemokratisk adfærd eller fordi vælgerne prioriterer kompetent lederskab over overholdelse af demokratisk principper. Ved at anvende såkaldte conjoint-eksperimenter i USA, Storbritannien, Tjekkiet, Mexico og Sydkorea viser jeg, at hverken partitilhørsforhold, politiske præferencer eller kompetente politikere får borgerne til at tolerere udemokratisk adfærd fuldstændigt. Vælgerne sanktionerer politikere for at opføre sig udemokratisk, uanset disse karakteristika. Dog kan politikere—både udemokratiske og demokratiske—stadig opnå støtte ved at repræsentere vælgernes politiske interesser eller foretrukne partier eller ved at fremstå som kompetente. Artikel 1 og 2 viser derfor, at støtte og modstand til udemokratiske politikere afbalancerer hinanden lige så

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meget i en eksperimentel, videnskabelig opsætning som i den virkelige verden.

Ved at skifte fokus til kontekstuelle faktorer i Artikel 3 og 4, undersøger jeg betydningen af partisystemer og demokratisk erfaring. En oplagt kontekstuel forklaring på støtte til udemokratiske politikere er, at vælgernes valgmuligheder ofte er begrænset til to muligheder, som det for eksempel ses i USA. Sådanne begrænsninger kræver, at vælgerne gør sig større ofre med hensyn til politiske præferencer eller partitilhørsforhold for at straffe udemokratisk adfærd, især hvis de to valgmuligheder er politisk polariserede. Jeg viser ikke desto mindre ved hjælp af et originalt survey-eksperiment i England i Artikel 3, at vælgere faktisk straffer udemokratisk adfærd lige så meget, når de kun har to muligheder—det parti de kan lide, og det parti de ikke kan lide— som når de også har mulighed for at stemme på et mellemliggende tredje parti. En anden kontekstuel forklaring er, at borgere mister incitamenter til at opdage og straffe udemokratisk adfærd, når deres land opnår demokratisk erfaring, fordi de vænner sig til, at andre politiske aktører holder antidemokratiske kræfter i skak. Jeg finder støtte til dette argument i Artikel 4, hvor jeg anvender observationelle data fra 43 lande. Konkret straffer folk i høj grad udemokratisk adfærd, når demokratiet er ungt, men gør det i mindre grad, når det får erfaring.

Efter at have dækket forskellige forklaringer på støtte til udemokratiske politikere, dykker jeg ned i, hvordan vi kan intervenere mod støtte til udemokratiske politikere i den femte og sidste artikel. Konkret undersøger jeg, om det at fortælle folk, at demokratiet er sårbart og risikerer at bryde sammen, får dem til at straffe udemokratisk adfærd i højere grad. Jeg tester i Artikel 5 interventionen i 10 lande over to datasamlinger gennemført i 2020 og 2021. Resultaterne viser, at information om demokratisk sårbarhed kun har en meget begrænset indflydelse på sanktionering af udemokratisk adfærd.

Afhandlingen bringer forsigtigt optimistiske nyheder for demokratiet. Vælgerne er ikke blændet af ellers vigtige politikerkarakteristika såsom parti, ført politik og kompetence. Desuden sanktioneres udemokratisk adfærd på trods af de typiske begrænsninger i topartisystemer. Dog kan vi i mindre grad stole på, at borgere straffer udemokratisk adfærd, når demokratiet får erfaring, og støtte til udemokratiske politikere synes at være svært at intervenere imod, da en simpel intervention som at informere vælgere om, at demokratiet er sårbart, ikke synes at være effektiv. Ikke desto mindre har disse fund samlet set mere positive implikationer end de fleste eksisterende studier.

Afhandlingen bidrager med de første undersøgelser af sammenhængene mellem tolerance af udemokratisk adfærd og kompetence, demokratisk erfaring og partisystemer; en grundig, tværnational og opklarende undersøgelse af sammenhængene mellem tolerance af udemokratisk adfærd og partiidentifikation og politiske præferencer; samt en omfattende, tværnational test af en original men enkel intervention mod støtte til udemokratiske politikere. Resultaterne af afhandlingen fremhæver behovet for yderligere at udvikle sådanne interventioner.

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