

Research Statement

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My research explores the ways in which individual citizens' beliefs about and understandings of democracy can reinforce or undermine authoritarian rule. As an expert in Turkish and Middle Eastern politics, I leverage insights from this region to push forward the broader comparative literature on authoritarianism, migration, transnational activism, and political communication. To extract these insights, I embrace a mix of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, ranging from interviews and surveys to formal modeling and computational text analysis. My work also consistently transcends subfields and even disciplines, as I have found that literature from American politics, sociology, and migration is all informative to my research goals. I therefore seek to foster collaboration and robust debate with diverse audiences throughout the research process.

Book Project

My book project, *Democracy Translated*, considers the mechanisms by which immigrants from authoritarian countries transfer their political beliefs to new, more democratic contexts after migration. I examine this ideological translation process in three stages. First, I consider the impact of identity, especially ethnic or religious minoritization, on an individual's ideological orientation in the country of origin. Second, I explore the ways in which different ideological orientations translate more or less easily to new political contexts. Finally, I identify some impacts of this ideological migration on global democratic resilience. The book focuses in particular on the dynamics of Turkish migration to the US, which is motivated at least partly by democratic decline in Turkey. Beyond this case, I identify the degree to which its features apply more broadly to immigrants from other authoritarian contexts. Overall, the book strives to answer two key questions: (1) How do immigrants translate their political beliefs onto their new contexts? (2) In what ways do the features of their pre-migration contexts, and especially authoritarianism, affect this translation process?

Theory

I theorize a typology of anti-authoritarian ideologies that helps explain the mechanisms of immigrant ideological transfer. Citizens who oppose the ruling authoritarian regime fall into two overarching ideological categories: (1) anti-regime and (2) anti-state. Anti-regime ideologues oppose the current ruling party and/or autocrat and typically believe that if only the current regime could be removed, their country would be restored to a functional democracy. In contrast, anti-state ideologues believe that the problems with their home country extend beyond the regime, i.e. there is something more fundamentally anti-democratic about their country's history or institutions. Anti-state ideologues are also anti-regime, but not vice versa. In other words, anti-state ideologies provide a larger and more all-encompassing way of opposing authoritarian politics than anti-regime ideologies. Citizens fall within these ideological categories long before they make the decision to migrate. As they are politically socialized within the authoritarian environment, they adopt anti-regime and/or anti-state ideologies based on their backgrounds and

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political experiences. Ethnic and religious minorities are particularly likely to adopt anti-state ideologies because they are generally excluded from the country's founding nationalist vision. They therefore see their country as fundamentally exclusive and undemocratic, regardless of the regime in power. Upon migrating, anti-state ideologues are more easily able to translate their political beliefs to their new context. As they gain an understanding of their new country's history and nationalist development, they are able to identify similarities and differences between their country of origin and their new country. This ultimately results in a better understanding of the principles undergirding the political system of the new country, faster political incorporation, and more political participation. In contrast, those who only adopt anti-regime ideologies will struggle to find analogues between their country of origin and their new country, simply seeing one as democratic and one as undemocratic. Without a deeper understanding of the new country's political system, they will tend to remain politically apathetic.

Empirical Findings

Using computational text analysis of over three million Turkish-language tweets, I find support for the idea that ethnic and religious minorities are more likely to see democratic failings in their home country as rooted in historical legacies of oppression. While members of the majority ethno-religious group may oppose the authoritarian regime, they tend to do so in a much more limited way that emphasizes the particular party or person who has seized power (anti-regime). In contrast, minorities argue that even if the current regime were to be removed, their country would remain undemocratic, and that the problems with democracy are much more deep-rooted (anti-state). I then utilize surveys and semi-structured interviews with Turkish immigrants to demonstrate that migrants holding anti-state ideologies can more easily translate their political beliefs to the US context. Qualitative coding of interview transcripts shows a connection between US political participation and involvement and anti-state ideologies. This relationship is especially pronounced for immigrants who choose to pursue citizenship; thus acquisition of citizenship amplifies existing participation trends. In contrast, those who hold anti-regime ideologies demonstrate considerably less integration within the US political system and generally do not participate in politics beyond specific issues that directly affect them. These findings have important implications for democracies that receive large numbers of immigrants from authoritarian contexts and that wish to ensure that these groups are eventually able to participate democratically.

Contributions

Prior work on immigrants' ideological translation has focused on two distinct areas. First, the experiences of Latin American immigrants have been extensively studied. This is natural given the large size of this group within the US and the historical ties between North, Central, and South America. However, research on Latin American immigrants has rarely incorporated authoritarianism as a concept of interest and has focused more on experiences post-migration than prior. Second, existing research that does integrate authoritarianism and migration tends to look at Communist or post-Communist contexts, such as Jewish migration from the USSR to the US and Israel or Cuban migration to the US. Therefore there is little to no variation in regime type within these studies, leaving us with an incomplete understanding of the impact of authoritarianism on migrant attitudes. My book project fills these gaps by focusing on (a) understudied immigrant groups from the Middle East and Turkey who come from (b) non-Communist authoritarian contexts in which they often have some exposure to democratic

processes. In many ways this experience is the modal experience for immigrants moving from the developing world to the West, including many Latin American immigrants. I therefore argue that the my chosen cases are particularly informative for research on the nexus between authoritarianism and immigration.

Selected Working Papers

Theme 1: Democratic Norms in Comparative Perspective

My research agenda centers around the concept of democratic norms in comparative perspective. Along with my book project, I have three additional working papers that engage with this topic. Along with a co-author, I examine democratic narratives expressed and promoted by ordinary citizens on Facebook during the period leading up to the 2020 presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire. I show how a clear signal of democratic backsliding (term limit subversion) can accentuate differing democratic norms held by regime supporters and opposition supporters. In an additional paper with the same co-author and social media dataset, I also demonstrate an alarming trade-off between discussions of democracy and discussions of electoral violence on social media. In another single-authored paper on democratic norms in Turkey, I leverage Twitter data to demonstrate that Erdoğan supporters employ a new definition of democracy rooted in neo-Ottoman nationalism in their online rhetoric. These three papers together help to apply concepts of democratic norms developed in the American politics literature to non-Western contexts. In doing so they expand our understanding of democratic norms and demonstrate a relationship between diverging democratic norms and authoritarianism.

Theme 2: Transnational Political Advocacy

A key focus of my research agenda is the extent to which political advocacy has become a transnational phenomenon. In a single-authored paper stemming from my dissertation research, I consider the motives of Turkish citizens who live in the US but vote in Turkish elections at their nearest consulate. I situate this individual-level decision within the larger institutions-level literature on transnational voting rights and the ways these rights are manipulated by autocrats. My work with social media data also emphasizes the importance of transnational political activity. I currently have two working papers, one single-authored and another co-authored, that focus on the spread of political narratives on social media. I especially consider the role of diaspora communities in influencing political messaging in their home countries via online activism. In an additional single-authored paper, I work to quantify the role of regime-funded bots in spreading particular narratives about democracy. The significant influence of bots on social media confirms the pitfalls of these platforms for promoting democracy and the ways in which autocrats can utilize them to monitor, interfere with, and repress democratic movements. Overall, these papers utilize novel measurement strategies to analyze illustrative cases of transnational political phenomena, and in doing so they reinforce the wider developing literature on the importance of transnational political advocacy, especially pro-democratic advocacy.

Theme 3: Careful Measurement of High Dimensional Data

My research is informed by rigorous training in quantitative methods, especially statistical measurement and computational text analysis. My applied use of these methods has inspired me to contribute to the methods literature in order to improve both theoretical knowledge of research design and practical techniques for better method application. I contributed extensively to my

advisor's recent publication, *Social Science Research in the Arab World and Beyond*, acting as a peer reviewer for his explanations of research design, regression, and statistical testing. Additionally I have a single-authored working paper, recently featured at the Emerging Methodologists Workshop, in which I argue that computational text analysis can be improved by borrowing principles of concept development and validity from qualitative research. Continuing my work in quantitative text analysis, one additional co-authored paper works to modify traditional latent Dirichlet allocation in order to collect stopwords within multilingual texts. Together these projects solidify my robust participation in ongoing debates about using text and other high dimensional data as a measure of political science concepts. In particular, I embrace a conservative approach informed by the value I place on mixed-method and qualitative research as a key means of validating and refining quantitative methods.

Summary And Future Research

As outlined above, my book project and various working papers collectively encompass the themes of democratic norms in comparative perspective, transnational political advocacy, and careful measurement of high dimensional data. At least three of the working papers discussed in this statement are at an advanced stage and will be submitted to top disciplinary journals within the next six months. I plan to continue working within these areas for the next five to ten years, as they are emerging topics with rapidly developing bodies of literature. More specifically, I hope to conduct additional research on the role of the information environment in perpetuating authoritarianism using new forms of high dimensional data, such as videos shared online. Such analysis will require continued work in statistical measurement, and I anticipate making further contributions to the methods literature as I refine these methods in practice. Additionally, I plan to incorporate US political developments into my work in the future, using insights from the comparative literature on authoritarianism to better understand democratic backsliding in Western contexts. Finally, I will continue collecting data on immigrants from authoritarian contexts transitioning to life in the US. I am currently piloting a survey of immigrants participating in the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program (Green Card Lottery). By surveying Green Card Lottery applicants every year I ultimately plan to create a longitudinal dataset with a randomized component, the first of its kind in immigration research. This dataset will allow me to further develop and test the ideas presented in my book, and I hope to be in contact with potential presses by mid-2026. Finally, as my research agenda and body of work develop, I look forward to incorporating discussions of democratic resilience into my teaching practice and to engaging in public facing scholarship that elevates the work of pro-democracy activists across the globe.