5-12-2024

Explaining Authoritarian Populist Behavior During Episodes of Democratic Backsliding

Samantha Call
Syracuse University

Abstract

The world has seen an increase in backsliding states in the past 15 years, with authoritarian populist leaders concentrating power through executive aggrandizement and limitations on civil liberties (Bermeo 2016). Democratic institutions are often targeted by an authoritarian populist during episodes of democratic backsliding either directly through taking away powers from the institutions or indirectly through using rhetoric to weaken public trust in the institutions. Scholars have identified patterns that suggest targeting the court and legislature first is the most common strategy of backsliders, while other institutions are targeted later. However, there is variation among these cases, with not all backsliders following this trajectory. In this dissertation, I investigate this variation to explain why institutions are targeted in the order and magnitude they are. Through an analysis of institutional threat and public opinion in relation to targeting behavior in three countries, Hungary, the United States (US), and Brazil, I find that institutional factors play an important role in backslider decisions about which institutions to target and in which order. On the other hand, contrary to what the literature would expect based on the responsiveness of populists to their voters, I do not find evidence that public trust in institutions impacts the order or type of targeting. These findings have practical applications in helping to identify and safeguard vulnerable but important institutions, as well as theoretical applications in terms of better understanding the observable patterns we see during episodes of democratic backsliding.

Explaining Authoritarian Populist Behavior During Episodes of Democratic Backsliding

by

Samantha Call

B.A., St. John Fisher College, 2017

M.A., Syracuse University, 2021

Dissertation Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.

Syracuse University

June 2024

Acknowledgements

I am lucky to have amazing people in my corner who made it possible for me to complete this dissertation. Biggest thanks go to my advisor, Dr. Seth Jolly, for all of his support and encouragement throughout these years. Not only was he always there to give feedback and advice, he was also very patient when I anxiously emailed, called, and stopped by his office repeatedly, panicking about one thing or the other. He is a great teacher, and his mentorship was instrumental in getting this project to the finish line. I cannot express enough how grateful I am for his guidance.

Thanks also go to my committee members, Dr. Simon Weschle and Dr. Emily Thorson, and the Chair of the oral defense, Dr. Joshua Darr. Simon taught me what it means to be a good colleague and Emily's teaching style made me want to be a teacher, like her. They both shaped my experience in graduate school more than they know. My undergraduate advisor, Dr. Sebastien Lazardeux, also deserves credit for making me believe I can be successful in academia and encouraging me to pursue my dreams. I also want to show my appreciation for the staff of the Political Science Department at Syracuse, specifically Candy Brooks and Jacquie Meyer, who were both incredibly helpful and made my work days brighter.

There are so many of my fellow graduate students that I need to thank, as well. First, Joel Kersting and Brianna MacMahon, who have both been steadfast friends to me over the years. Our Zoom catchups have kept me sane, and I will never find a better conference companion than Joel. Second, my fellow prisoners from Eggers dungeon 024, Almila, Nick, Mahdi, and Hamad, who have kept me laughing despite myself. I hope they all remain unhinged when I am gone. A special thanks to Patrick Xu, who was a great gym buddy and who always reminds me to celebrate the little things. Third, to Kari, Michael, Kirin, Heidi, and Ana, who helped make

graduate school fun and fulfilling, and to members of both the European Politics Workshop and the Syracuse Graduate Employees United Organizing Committee, who helped me find a sense of community here.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the support system I have outside of work. My parents, Cheryl and Mike, and my brother, Alex, supported me in multiple ways throughout graduate school and I do not know if I would have made it through without them. Thanks also to my oldest and best friend, Kelsea Halloran, for always giving me a place to go when I need to escape and for being one of the most consistent people in my life.

All of these people, and more, have my gratitude for believing in and supporting me. I will miss my friends, colleagues, and students greatly, but look forward to my next steps.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Following the fall of the Soviet Union and declarations of independence from former colonies, we witnessed the emergence of dozens of new democracies in various regions around the globe. Throughout the past 20 years, though, we have seen a decrease in the quality of some of these democracies and others have undergone regime change and are now autocracies. Some of these changes, on their own, could be viewed as failures of democratic consolidation. According to some scholars (Svolik 2008), there is a period of time after democratization that new democracies are vulnerable to regime change. There are several factors attributed to this, including a lack of institutional learning, underdeveloped bureaucracies, and public unrest. In this process, regimes that have recently become democratic fall apart and slip (back) into authoritarianism. However, this does not seem to be the case in these newer regime changes for two main reasons. One is that democracies in Eastern Europe underwent significant consolidation during their first 20 years as democracies, as evidenced by several of them meeting the democratic standards set forth for membership by the European Union. They have also demonstrated peaceful transfers of power and successful power sharing among branches of government. This does not reflect the trends in earlier waves of democratic reversals.

The second reason is that it is not only former Soviet states that are experiencing this change. More than a few older and more consolidated democracies have seen this same fate. According to Varieties of Democracy, some of the world's other democracies have undergone episodes of backsliding, with liberal democracy scores significantly declining in India, Greece, and South Korea, to name just a few (Nord et al 2024). This suggests that this decline in democracy is not specific to Eastern Europe. Rather, it is a global phenomenon that should be examined as such.

In most of these cases of democratic decline, backsliding is driven by authoritarian populists. While populism has been defined as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into… 'the pure people 'versus 'the corrupt elite'" (Mudde 2004, p. 543), authoritarian populists are their own subset that focuses on loyalty to the leader and policies that protect the 'the pure people' from other groups. They are also unlikely to have respect for democratic processes and institutions (Norris and Inglehart 2019). This disregard for democratic principles allows authoritarian populists in office to get what they want by breaking down or ignoring democratic institutions that are in place to check the executive's power. Bensaglio and Kellam (2023) reaffirm that, despite differences in institutional structures across countries, populists are the biggest drivers of democratic backsliding.

These authoritarian populists drive democratic backsliding through executive aggrandizement, where, once in elected office, they incrementally erode the checks and balances in place to restrain them (Bermeo 2016; Waldner and Lust 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Kneuer 2021; Carothers and Press 2022). Scholars have built upon this to explain what the process of democratic backsliding looks like in more detail. Some focus on the causes of backsliding, including polarization, economic inequality, international exogenous shocks, and more (Anderson 2019; Mettler and Lieberman 2020; Haggard and Kaufman 2021b; Luo and Przeworski 2021), while others have looked at the sequencing of events during episodes of democratic backsliding to determine what trajectories are common or possible (Coppedge 2017; Kneuer 2021; Cianetti and Hanley 2021; Wunsch and Blanchard 2023).

Coppedge (2017) identifies two paths for democratic backsliding: first is erosion of civil liberties and rights, and second is executive concentration of power. Wunsch and Blanchard (2022) also develop a typology for different trajectories of backsliding, finding four paths that

most backsliding countries follow and sorting countries into categories based on those paths. These paths include democratic reversion (the country transitions to democracy but quickly weakens across all democratic measures), erosion of diagonal checks (freedom of media, civic engagement), erosion of vertical checks (independence and legitimacy of elections), all-out attacks on all aspects of democracy, including erosion of horizontal (courts), vertical, and diagonal checks.

Riaz and Rana (2024) examine these and other studies of backsliding sequencing to identify four patterns described in the literature. They provide an overview of the structural explanation, which focuses on the political context of the country (see Anderson 2019; Kaufman and Haggard 2019), the agent-based explanation, which focuses on the actions of anti-democratic leaders (see Bermeo 2016; Kneuer 2021), the institutional explanation, which focuses on how pieces of the democratic structure are used to weaken other pieces (see Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), and the regime-centric explanation, which is a category for misfit cases that do not fit neatly into the other explanations (Hanley and Vachudova 2019). While all four of these have been able to explain some cases of backsliding, there is no consensus among the literature about which, if any, can explain backsliding in most or all cases. Importantly, Riaz and Rana (2024) point out that there is a heavy lean toward institutional mechanisms in all of the explanations, leading to a high degree of uncertainty about which category different cases fall under. In addition, both within and across these approaches, there is still disagreement about the sequencing of events during episodes of backsliding, and these approaches sometimes are tested in different regions, making it difficult to determine whether there is one particular way in which backsliding occurs.

Given this disagreement, we are left with questions about the process of backsliding. Is there a common way that backsliding occurs? How do we explain the variation in backsliding trajectories across regions? To answer these questions, I build from the literature above, combining elements of these approaches to develop a theory about why and when authoritarian populists target democratic institutions. I specifically focus on the targeting of institutions because in all of the approaches described, there is some degree of institutional breakdown driven by the executive.

Theory Overview

In this dissertation, I identify two key variables that I theorize can explain why authoritarian populists target institutions in the order and manner they do. In so doing, I also attempt to explain why not all cases fit neatly into the sequences of events already described in the literature.

The first variable I identify, institutional threat, is the degree to which institutions have the ability to block the policy and electoral goals of the authoritarian populist. Threat is measured through two indicators. The first is whether the institution has checks that can be used on the executive to hinder the authoritarian populist's electoral or policy goals. Institutions without any checks are low threats because they cannot block the authoritarian populists' actions, and institutions with checks have the ability to check the executive, so they are either a high or medium threat. The second indicator is whether the institution is controlled by the authoritarian populist's party, and this indicator determines whether an institution is a high or medium threat. Because political actors are unlikely to punish co-partisans, any institution that is dominated by the authoritarian populist's party members will likely not punish the authoritarian populist. This makes it easier for the authoritarian populist and their party to achieve their goals. However, the

institution could change hands in the future, which means it is a medium threat. On the other hand, an institution that is not dominated by party members of the authoritarian populist is more likely to use their checks on the executive in the short-term, making those institutions immediate and high threats.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I assess institutional threat level for several relevant democratic institutions and determine whether targeting behavior is more frequent for high-threat institutions than for other institutions. Institutional threat has not been widely addressed or measured in the literature on democratic backsliding, so this is a novel theoretical contribution.

The second variable I evaluate is responsiveness to public opinion. Because populists are responsive to their voters in some cases, I theorize that public opinion of those institutions should impact authoritarian populists' decisions about whether and when to target them. This builds on a wide range of scholarship about the issue positions and rhetoric of populist parties that suggests populists should listen to their voters, especially on issues championed by the populist's party. Therefore, I expect that institutions that are popular among right-wing voters will be targeted rhetorically first to diminish trust in it before directly targeting it. This avoids backlash for directly targeting a popular institution. Unpopular institutions, however, can be targeted directly first because this risk of backlash is already low. The theory behind responsiveness and institutional threat will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2.

Case Selection

I choose the cases of Hungary, the United States, and Brazil for several reasons, which will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2. One of the reasons studying these three cases is important is that it brings together strains of the literature on democratic backsliding that seem to all be focused on understanding backsliding in a particular region rather than understanding

backsliding in a global perspective. I assert that although backsliding follows different trajectories in these different regions, backsliders have a common set of factors they take into account when deciding which trajectory to adopt. I argue, further, that institutional threat and public opinion are two of those common factors.

These three cases are also useful because they have experienced different amounts of backsliding. According to Varieties of Democracy, Hungary under Orbán fell from .68 on the liberal democracy index in 2010 to .52 in 2014, the United States under Trump fell from .84 in 2016 to .73 in 2020, and Brazil under Bolsonaro fell from .61 in 2018 to .54 in 2022 (Coppedge et al 2024; Pemstein et al 2024). While these three countries experienced a decline in their scores, the average score for European Union countries stayed steady around .77 during the same time period, which shows that the changes in Hungary, the US, and Brazil are out of the norm amongst democracies that are functioning as usual (Coppedge et al 2024; Pemstein et al 2024). While some of these decreases in liberal democracy seem relatively small, they have substantive effects, which is demonstrated by the US falling below the EU level of democracy and by Hungary no longer being considered a democracy. This degree of and variation in backsliding gives me leverage to test my theory of institutional threat and public opinion.

Targeting and Targeting Types

To test my theory within each case, I must identify instances in which institutions are targeted by an authoritarian populist. In this project, I define targeting as instances in which an actor uses their power as executive to diminish the power of or trust in institutions. This can happen in two main ways. First is through direct action, which is when the executive takes steps to purposefully eliminate or limit the hard powers imbued in institutions by constitutions, treaties, or other legislation. Many of the actions taken by Viktor Orbán after his second election

to the Prime Minister's office in 2010 constitute direct targeting, including using his Parliamentary supermajority to lower the retirement age for judges. Doing so ensured that Orbán's party, Fidesz, would be able to fill the seats of all those retired judges with judges friendlier to their goals (Gyulavári and Hős 2013). He also used the Parliamentary supermajority of his party to implement strict restrictions on the media, which included taking stations and networks away from news agencies that were critical of Orbán (Polyák 2019). These are clear and direct actions taken with the intent to lessen the power of other institutions.

However, populists are not only defined by their political goals and actions, but also by the way they communicate with the public (Fournier 2019). While rhetoric may not always have direct effects on political behavior of elites or the balance of power among institutions, it can and has influenced how the public thinks about issues and institutions. Elite framing affects how the public perceives issues and affects the issue positions they take (Brader et al 2008; Chong and Druckman 2010). When public trust in an institution is diminished, that institution's mandate is weakened, and it is more difficult for it to be effective in carrying out its duties. Therefore, it follows that populist elites would also try to decrease public trust in institutions that could potentially check the executive. Populism scholars have also found more specific examples of populist rhetoric impacting public opinion or attitudes in the United States (Huber et al 2020), Switzerland (Wirz et al 2019), and several other Western European countries (Wirz et al 2018). From this, it is clear that populist rhetoric and public opinion interact with one another and can impact political outcomes. Therefore, I look at rhetoric as a second form of targeting. While rhetoric does not directly take power from institutions, populist rhetoric is shown to impact the positions the public takes (Cinar and Nalepa 2022), and I argue that this extends to public opinion of institutions.

Both rhetorical and direct targeting have been observed across many cases of democratic backsliding worldwide. In this project, I investigate the relationship between both types of targeting and institutional threat and public opinion by conducting three case studies of countries that have experienced backsliding in the past 15 years. Hungary, the United States, and Brazil have all seen examples of rhetorical and direct targeting, though to different degrees. In Hungary, direct targeting is more common than in the other cases, but rhetorical targeting seems to be more prominent in Brazil than in Hungary, and even more prominent in the United States.

In both the United States and Brazil, authoritarian populist leaders primarily used rhetoric to discredit and delegitimize democratic institutions. This rhetoric is used in speeches, press releases, and in social media. Social media is a major way in which authoritarian populists speak directly to their supporters, and both Trump and Bolsonaro use it extensively. In Chapters 4 and 5, I conduct an analysis on thousands of their tweets from the platform X and find that both use anti-establishment rhetoric in these communications, although Trump uses it to a much larger extent. Their posts target a variety of institutions, but the posts about the media stand out as especially severe cases of anti-establishment rhetoric. For example, on May 24, 2019, Trump posted the following:

> "Wow! CNN Ratings are WAY DOWN, record lows. People are getting tired of so many Fake Stories and Anti-Trump lies. Chris Cuomo was rewarded for lowest morning ratings with a prime time spot - which is failing badly and not helping the dumbest man on television, Don Lemon!"

Bolsonaro is also known for his rhetorical attacks on the media in Brazil, often using frames and phrases made popular by Trump, to the extent that members of the media and scholars have referred to Bolsonaro as "Trump of the Tropics" (Cesarino 2022). On June 8, 2022, Bolsonaro posted the following on the platform X:

> "Lie! It was just the opposite. I argued that if we were to arrest and punish someone for something as subjective as "Fake News", WHICH I AM AGAINST AND EVERYONE KNOWS, it would have to start with the press itself, which often publishes lies and distorted information, like this one."

These examples show how authoritarian populists use rhetoric to disparage the media and attempt to delegitimize these institutions in the eyes of the public. Because of authoritarian populists' consistent use of both rhetorical and direct targeting, I investigate both types of targeting in this dissertation.

Dissertation Plan

In this introductory chapter, I have briefly described key concepts related to democratic backsliding and populism and have outlined my theory for explaining why institutions are targeted in the order they are and why institutions are targeted either directly or rhetorically. I have also introduced three countries I will be using as case studies and have given a broad idea of what democratic backsliding can look like in these countries. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the two types of targeting I identify during episodes of backsliding and an outline of the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 expands on the theory previewed in Chapter 1, providing an overview of relevant literature and a detailed explanation of the theory. First, I review the literature on democratic backsliding, elite political behavior, and institutions. From this review, I build my theory of institutional threat, going into detail explaining the components of threat and developing a categorization of low, medium, and high threat institutions. Using this categorization, I develop expectations about when authoritarian populists should or should not target institutions.

Next, I review the literature on responsiveness and public opinion as it relates to populism and backsliding. Due to evidence showing that populists are responsive to their

supporters, I theorize that public opinion of institutions should matter in authoritarian populist decision-making. I then distinguish between two types of targeting, rhetorical and direct, and hypothesize about how public opinion of institutions should affect the decision about which type of targeting to use against an institution. I build on the case selection presented in Chapter 1, further justifying my use of Hungary, the United States, and Brazil as backsliding countries and my use of judiciaries, media, electoral administrations, legislatures, and state governors as the institutions with which I test my theory. Finally, Chapter 2 describes the methods used in these case studies, detailing how I determine threat level, how I track direct and rhetorical targeting, and which data I use to track public opinion of institutions.

Chapters 3 uses the country of Hungary to test the institutional threat part of the theory in the cases of the Constitutional Court, media, and electoral administration, and to test the responsiveness part of the theory in the case of the media. I first describe the state of democracy in Hungary before 2010 and explain how Orbán rose to power. I then assess threat level for the three institutions, determining that the Constitutional Court was a high threat from 2010 to 2014, the media were a medium threat from 2010 to 2013 and a high threat in 2014, and the electoral administration was a medium threat from 2010 to 2014. Through tracking direct targeting of these institutions, I find that, in line with expectations, high threat institutions were targeted first and more often than medium threat institutions. I also consider public opinion of the media in this chapter, comparing it to the frequency of targeting, ultimately finding no correlation between changes in public opinion toward the media and Orbán's targeting of the media. Note that only Orbán's 2010-2014 term is used in order to make it easier to draw parallels with the other cases, both of which had leaders who only served one term.

In Chapter 4, I test the theory again, this time using institutions in the United States. I begin, again, with an overview of democracy in the country and an explanation of how the authoritarian populist, Donald Trump, came to power. Next, I assess threat level for each institution, determining that the media and the 116th Congress were high threats, while the Supreme Court, 115th Congress, and electoral administration were medium threats. Institutional targeting mostly followed expectations, with targeting occurring more often for high threat institutions, but patterns in targeting also suggest that Trump targeted institutions more when they were actively using their checks on the executive.

In this chapter, I am able to test the responsiveness expectations on Congress, the Supreme Court, media, and electoral administration by using Gallup data to determine public trust in each and comparing public opinion to the frequency of Trump's tweets rhetorically targeting each. Unexpectedly, there does not seem to be a connection between trust in institutions and Trump's decisions to target those institutions. Again, I find instead that Trump's targeting more often coincides with the institutions' use of powers to limit him. For example, Trump rhetorically targeted Congress most when it was impeaching him, and the Supreme Court most when it was rejecting election fraud claims, not when those institutions were more popular among the public.

Chapter 5 then tests these expectations again in Brazil under Jair Bolsonaro's presidency. After outlining the state of democracy in Brazil, I assess the threat level of the Supreme Federal Tribunal, media, electoral administration, legislature, and state governments, and track targeting over time, finding again that the higher threat institutions are directly targeted earlier on in the term and more often. To test whether public opinion had an impact on Bolsonaro's decision-making, I use the Latinobarometer to track public trust in all of the institutions except the state

governments. Similar to Trump, I find that Bolsonaro rhetorically targeted institutions once they were using their checks against his power, not when public opinion changed. Such targeting was directed at the electoral administration once it became clear he would likely lose his reelection bid. Trump and Bolsonaro's rhetorical targeting patterns indicate that institutional threat is a bigger consideration than public opinion for authoritarian populists in deciding which institutions to target and when to target them both directly and rhetorically.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss my findings and compare the results from the three empirical chapters. Given those results, I draw conclusions about the importance of institutional threat in understanding the decision-making of authoritarian populists. I also theorize about why public opinion does not seem to have the expected effect on decision-making and outline several ways to build on this project in the future. Lastly, I describe how this project fits into and contributes to the literature on democratic backsliding and populism, including a discussion of how this work can contribute to safeguarding democratic institutions and to developing cross-regional theories to explain backsliding behavior.

Chapter 2: Theory

In this chapter, I describe the theories which are the bases for this dissertation, namely the role of institutional threat and public opinion in the strategic decisions of authoritarian populists during episodes of backsliding. First, I define authoritarian populism and outline which factors influence the behavior of politicians. Included in this are the ideology, issue positions, and style of political communication wrapped up in authoritarian populism. This definition of authoritarian populism is necessary in identifying the set of relevant cases and setting the base for my theory, which depends largely on the unique political style of authoritarian populists. Next, I discuss the current state of the literature on backsliding and how it unfolds. In this section I also make a distinction between direct actions taken to weaken democratic institutions and degrading of public trust in those institutions via damaging rhetoric.

I then turn to using previous literature and evidence from recent cases of backsliding to explain my theory behind why authoritarian populists select particular institutions for degradation while ignoring others. The first part of my theory is about the threat institutions pose to authoritarian populists. Building from rational choice and institutionalist traditions, I argue that it is in the best interest of authoritarian populists to target institutions that can potentially prevent them from being reelected or that have significant power over their policy agenda. Then, I bring in responsiveness and public opinion literature to discuss the role the public plays in the strategic choices of authoritarian populists. Although not an "issue" like taxation or immigration, antiestablishmentism is owned by authoritarian populist parties, and thus they should be particularly sensitive to public opinion on institutions because the institutions are part of the establishment. If the public does not have a favorable view of an institution, it is easier for populists to rail against it without fear of losing votes in the next election. This is based on the

idea that authoritarian populists are rational and will do what is best for their own interests and longevity in office. Of course, there are mitigating factors which make it sometimes worth it for politicians to ignore public opinion, including the timing of the next election. These types of issues will also be discussed in this chapter.

Finally, I explain the methods I use for the rest of this project. I describe the criteria for selecting cases that I use and justify my selection of Hungary, Brazil, and the United States. Then, I describe how I will test my theory empirically across cases. The inclusion of cases from different regions is essential for this project given that the literature largely compares backsliding countries to their neighbors rather than to a wider range of backsliding countries. This means that we have theories that do not necessarily always apply to all cases and we could be missing an explanation that works across geopolitical contexts. This project seeks to find and support a theory that explains authoritarian populist behavior toward democratic institutions wherever there are authoritarian populists in power, not only in a single region. Other scholars have been thorough in their investigations of what democratic backsliding looks like across contexts, but less has been done to explain the "why" behind their targeting of institutions. I seek to fill this gap and contribute to the discourse by using this approach.

Actors and Democratic Backsliding

Democratic backsliding is a continuing phenomenon that we see occurring across a variety of democracies and regions. Based on a synthesis of the literature on democratic backsliding, Bermeo (2016) defines democratic backsliding as "democratic breakdown or simply the serious weakening of existing democratic institutions for undefined ends" (p. 6). This definition is widely accepted by scholars of democratic backsliding because it clearly establishes what is included in the concept, while leaving room open for disaggregation among the types of

democratic backsliding that occurs. As Bermeo (2016) lays out, there are several ways democratic breakdown occurs, through coups d'etat, executive coups, and direct voter fraud. However, in recent years, a more incremental erosion of democracy has occurred. Bermeo (2016) labels this process as executive aggrandizement, which is when a democratically elected or appointed executive works within the democratic system to slowly eat away at checks and balances. This concentrates power in the hands of the executive and helps them maintain their office (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), which, in turn, allows them to conduct more backsliding.

Beyond this, the literature has identified a subgroup of leaders, authoritarian populists, as the most common drivers of this process. First, though, it is necessary to understand what populism is. According to Norris and Inglehart (2019), populism is "a style of rhetoric reflecting first-order principles about who should rule, claiming that legitimate power rests with 'the people' not the elites. It remains silent about second-order principles, concerning what should be done, what policies should be followed, what decisions should be made" (Norris and Inglehart 2019, p. 17). This definition or similar variations of it are used in most political science research. Another popular definition, that of Mudde (2004), states that populism "considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people 'versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2004, p. 543). These definitions encompass the two most important aspects of populism according to the field; representation of the "pure" people and the style of rhetoric used to express that preference. As Norris and Inglehart (2019) point out in their definition, though, populism itself is not necessarily ideological. Populists exist on the right, left, and center of the traditional left-right economic ideology scale.

However, we do not see all populists taking part in democratic backsliding. Instead, we see that a certain subset of populists, authoritarian populists, are the ones engaging in democratic backsliding. Pure populists do not have an ideological reason to take part in backsliding, but authoritarian populists do. They place their values in security, conformity, and obedience (Norris and Inglehart 2019, p. 19-20) and act in ways to advance those values in society. One of the main ways they do this is by breaking down democratic institutions because they are seen as threats to authoritarian populist values. These types of populists have an ideological motivation for backsliding that other populists do not, and we see this born out in practice. Left-wing and centrist populists have not been perpetrators of democratic backsliding thus far while authoritarian populists have conducted backsliding in a variety of political contexts in democratic countries across regions. These patterns are consistent and have been well-documented by the data-collecting efforts of organizations such as Varieties of Democracy and Freedom House, along with other scholars (Mechkova et al. 2017; Boese et al. 2022).

Sequencing during Episodes of Backsliding

Scholars have now moved toward trying to understand why and when authoritarian populists target particular democratic institutions. In this context, targeting refers to an authoritarian populist taking powers from an institution, making it less able to serve as a check on the executive. Targeting can be through direct action, such as removing a power of the institution or restricting who can be part of that institution. It can also be through rhetoric. Anti-establishment rhetoric is a cornerstone of authoritarian populist politics, and authoritarian populists often use their rhetoric as a tool to turn the public against institutions. The relationship between public opinion and the targeting of institutions will be discussed later in this chapter, but the main takeaway here is that both words and actions have an influence on the strength of

democratic institutions, and authoritarian populists often use one or both of these to achieve democratic backsliding.

After establishing that backsliding is driven by authoritarian populists through attacks on institutions, I now move on to theorize about why some institutions are targeted more often than others. Drawing from regime change literature, scholars have developed models to determine which events are most likely to lead to either a democratic or authoritarian regime. If we know which institutions and powers are most needed for democracy to survive, then we should be able to identify which institutions would lead to its downfall. However, many of these results are mixed. Lindenfors et al (2019) identify these contradictions in the literature, pointing out that while some have identified elections as a necessary early step for democratization (Howard and Roessler 2006), others have found that elections actually help consolidate autocracies (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). Similarly mixed results have been found for other institutions (Lindenfors et al 2019).

Because of these uncertainties, scholars have recently created new models for sequencing events in the process of democratization. Lindenfors et al's (2019) model reveals that the most important steps in the creation of a democracy are the establishment of high court independence, enforcement of free and fair elections, and guarantee of protections for journalists. Sato et al (2022) have expanded upon this work to study sequencing specifically in episodes of backsliding. They find that horizontal accountability mechanisms, such as the courts, are targeted first, followed by diagonal and vertical accountability mechanisms, such as the media and elections. However, this is not how all democratic backsliding happens. Several cases do not fit neatly into these sequencing theories, suggesting more work needs to be done to understand how backsliding happens.

Why do authoritarian populists generally follow the typical pattern of backsliding? Why do some not follow this progression? Why do they choose to target some institutions over others? In the following section, I present two factors that I think might explain these behaviors: institutional threat and public opinion.

Goals and Behavior

Once an authoritarian populist comes into power, they behave in ways that maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative, which is in line with rational choice theory. Rational choice and institutional scholars have been able to identify some of these goals that drive authoritarian populists to break down democratic institutions. In this section, I review the literature on political goals and explain how it applies specifically to the behavior of authoritarian populists.

Schlesinger (1966) made prominent the idea that legislators' behaviors can be explained by examining their goals, which are, mainly, to achieve higher office. Later on, Mayhew (1974) suggests that politicians have one goal, to be reelected, and that one goal can explain their behavior while in office. Strøm (1990) builds on Mayhew's work but describes three (office, vote, and policy) goals of all politicians. Building from a rational choice theoretical perspective, Strøm argues that the actions of all legislators can be explained by these goals and how they prioritize them. Since Strøm's article, scholars have both narrowed these goals and expanded the list of behaviors they can explain. Now, most scholars agree that these goals fall under the umbrellas of vote-seeking goals, office-seeking goals, and policy-seeking goals and that these three goals can be used to explain the behavior of nearly all politicians, not just legislators (Klein 2016; Martin 2016) because, as Strøm (1997) argues, politicians have limited resources, and will use those resources to achieve their highest priority goals.

I follow this line of thinking in terms of the motivating factors behind democratic backsliding. However, I limit the goals to policy and electoral because the subjects of this study, authoritarian populist drivers of backsliding, are already in the highest office possible in their political system. Along with his focus on rational choice theory, Strøm (1997) also borrows from neo-institutional literature, writing that institutions constrain the number and types of actions that are available to politicians. I use these two approaches to explain the behaviors of authoritarian populists because while politicians are strategic, institutions have an impact on what it is possible for them to do and what the consequences of their actions are.

Authoritarian populists have electoral and policy goals, and will use their resources (time, political power, bully pulpit) in order to achieve these goals (Devinney and Hartwell 2020). Unlike other politicians, though, they are willing to use their resources to achieve their goals even if it means going around or destroying institutional constraints. Most other politicians in democratic regimes work within the institutions of their government in order to achieve their goals, but are not willing to rebuke the democratic process, either because of normative pressure or because of ideological opposition to such antidemocratic actions. Other politicians use resources to achieve electoral and policy goals within the confines of institutional constraints, while authoritarian populists use their resources to achieve electoral and policy goals but disregard or find ways to diminish institutional constraints that may stand in their way.

Other scholars have provided further evidence that office and policy-seeking goals affect behavior. Perkins (1980) found that legislators' goals affected how they behaved in the House Judiciary Committee. She found that members of the committee whose priority was policy spent more time on committee activities, while members whose priority was reelection spent more time on non-committee activities. Perkins' (1980) results demonstrate how goals can affect

behavior, which sets the basis for my argument that policy and electoral goals affect how politicians behave in other circumstances. Importantly, this assumption that policy and electoral goals affect behavior has not only been studied in legislatures, but also in other democratic institutions. Scholars of the American Presidency have also found that the actions of the executive are at least partially determined by their goals. They know this because when faced with similar situations both when reelection is possible and when it is not, Presidents tend to make different decisions (Sinclair 1993).

Recent literature suggests that policy goals matter for radical right and populist behavior, as well. Rinaldi and Bekker (2020) find that radical right parties, many of which are populist or use populist tactics, have traceable welfare policy and they actively work in a variety of contexts to achieve those policy goals. Caiani and Graziano (2022), in a comprehensive review of the literature, outline a variety of instances in which populist parties have clear policy goals and act to achieve those goals. Authoritarian populists, like most other politicians, have both electoral and policy goals, and often, these are intertwined. They run on platforms which outline their policy goals, and they prioritize certain policies over others, emphasizing those that are most likely to help with reelection. These policy goals are meant to attract voters to their party's ticket and increase the likelihood the authoritarian populist will achieve their electoral goals.

Some policy positions are not just meant to attract voters, though, they are ideological and power based. Authoritarian populists are to the right of the economic left-right scale, but more significantly for this project, are to the authoritarian side of the authoritarian-libertarian scale. This means they believe in concentration of power in the hands of the executive and the preponderance of law and order over civil liberties. They also own two major positions that are featured highly in their platforms and in the policies they introduce, anti-immigration and

antiestablishmentism. Their anti-establishmentism combined with their ideological belief in the benefits of authoritarianism and their desire to stay in office leads authoritarian populists to advocate for and pass policies that consolidate power in their hands and make it more difficult for others to gain or regain power. From this, it is clear that authoritarian populists have policy and electoral goals, and they act to achieve those goals. The factors that I have identified, institutional threat and public opinion, both impact whether an authoritarian populist can achieve their goals, and thus should explain some of their behavior.

Checks and Institutional Threat

In democratic systems, there are institutional features built in through constitutions and other founding laws and documents that serve to make sure power is never consolidated in the hands of one person. Most democracies come after a period of some sort of authoritarianism, so they want to prevent that system of government from reemerging. This is through two processes, separation of powers and checks and balances. Separation of powers means that one branch or part of government will not have all the responsibilities of government and thus will not be able to monopolize power and act as a despot. Modern democracies all use separation of powers, distributing competences and abilities among multiple institutions rather than centralizing power in one. What this means varies across countries, but it is all meant to spread out responsibilities. Checks and balances go a step further and make sure that each branch of government has some power over the others and those others have power over it to make sure it does not abuse what power it does have. Judiciaries can often declare actions of the legislature and executive unconstitutional or nullify them, legislatures often take part in appointment and removal procedures for the legislature and executive, and the executive often has appointment power over

the judiciary and/or veto over legislative actions. These ensure that no one branch becomes too powerful and can act as a despot.

While all modern democracies have checks and balances, they vary in number and power due to the type of democracy in place, majoritarian or consociational. In order to make democracy work in consociational democracies with cross-cutting cleavages, there are many institutional checks and balances. The ability for everyone to be involved in policymaking means that there are often more cooperative systems and that challenges to new policies are often earlier on in the legislative process in the form of needing approval from other parties and members within large coalitions and the veto power of members of the cabinet who are often from different parties (Lijphart 1999; Andeweg 2000). Meanwhile, policies in majoritarian systems are more likely to be blocked by other branches of government because one party usually holds the majority and can get legislation passed without the consent or inclusion of any minority parties. This difference between systems means that there is variation across countries in the number and institutional location of checks and balances.

Institutional structures also vary, further increasing the differences in distribution of their checks and balances. For example, some judiciaries are stronger than others. The typical example of a strong court is that of Germany's Federal Constitutional Court. This model grants a wide berth of competences to the court, has appointed rather than elected judges, mechanisms for the public to bring cases, and strong judicial review of the actions of other branches and members of government (Lembcke 2018). The German judiciary model is famously strong and breeds activist courts because of its centralized nature, while most American models produce weaker, more passive courts (Finck 1997). These court systems are weaker because all levels of courts are involved in determining whether laws are constitutional, while Germany's centralized model

with abstract review concentrates that power in the hands of the highest court, only, and allows it to take on a wider range of legal and political issues. In the US, courts can deem laws unconstitutional, but also are bound by stare decisis, which means judges should rule based on precedent, and thus have fewer chances than German judges to strike down laws or introduce new interpretations of laws (Finck 1997). In the context of checking others, this means that judiciaries modeled after the German version have more opportunities to block legislative and executive actions, which can be good for democracy because it keeps the other two branches from gaining too much power. However, power also makes these courts a target for authoritarian populists whose goal is to gain "too much power." Because they want to consolidate power, authoritarian populists will try to take away the ability of other branches of government to check their power. Therefore, they will target institutions that are most able to check their power, including institutions that can block their policy goals and their electoral goals. On the other hand, if an institution has no checks, it is a low threat to the authoritarian populist and is unlikely to be targeted.

Threat is not just about which institutions can block the authoritarian populist's goals, though, it is also about who is most likely to follow through on blocking them. In other words, how likely is it that the people running the institution will use the institution's power to put limits on the executive? Part of the explanation lies with the ideological and partisan makeup of those in control of the institution in question. According to Haggard and Kaufman (2021a), polarization is a major driving factor of democratic backsliding. When polarization increases, co-partisans are likely to share most policy positions and loyalty to the party is often valued over compromise with the opposition. Therefore, positions are highly entrenched and unlikely to change in these polarized societies. Animosity toward the out-group and fear of being voted out

or removed from office also make it rare for politicians to go against their own party. There is little benefit to them in punishing members of their party, partly because of partisan attachment and partly because their party is who helps them achieve their own goals.

If we consider that co-partisans of an authoritarian populist may be in charge of some democratic institutions, this means that while an institution may theoretically have the power to block legislation or to keep the authoritarian populist's power at bay, those in control of it may not always or ever choose to use that power (Lieberman et al. 2019; Vegetti 2019). The reason those in control of the institution may not choose to use their institution's power is that they are loyal to the authoritarian populist and share at least some of their goals or need the authoritarian populists to help them achieve their personal goals. If they are also to the authoritarian side of the authoritarian-libertarian ideological scale, they should also believe that the President or Prime Minister has the obligation to consolidate power in order to ensure law and order and guarantee an efficiently run state.

Therefore, an institution controlled by a member of the authoritarian populist's own party, who shares their ideology, or who is loyal to them, is not much of an immediate threat to the populist. The checks and balances built into the institution are unlikely to be activated against the populist, and thus they have less reason to spend time, resources, and political power on diminishing the institution's power than they do for an institution that both has checks on the executive and is controlled by the opposition. The institution's powers could be used in the future, though, which means it still poses some threat to the executive, although less so than institutions that serve as an immediate threat.

This leads to a classification of institutions based on the threat level they pose to the authoritarian populist. This classification depends on the two elements explained above; presence

of checks and likelihood to use checks. The highest threat institutions have checks and balances on the executive and are controlled by the opposition. In this case, there is a high likelihood that the institution and its actors would use the institution's power to check the executive, interfering with the authoritarian populist's policy and electoral goals. Thus, it is in the best interest of the authoritarian populist to target the institution until it either no longer has checks on the executive or control of the institution is taken by the authoritarian populist's party. An example of a high threat institution is a high court with judicial review whose majority is of the opposing party. The court would be likely to use their checks, leading the authoritarian populist to target it.

The next level of threat is medium, which is when the institution has checks on the executive, but it is captured by the authoritarian populist's party. In this situation, it is theoretically possible for the institution to use its checks, but it is unlikely to do so in the immediate future because of polarization and party loyalty. Here, the authoritarian populist has less of a reason to target the institution, but there is still the possibility that the institution could change hands in the future and the opposition would eventually use the institution's checks on the executive. In the long term, these institutions are still a potential threat, so they may be targeted, but not as much as or as consistently as high threat institutions. A medium threat institution could be a court with judicial review whose majority is of the authoritarian populist's party. While the court could rule against the authoritarian populist later on, it is unlikely to do so immediately, making it less of a targeting priority.

Finally, the low threat institutions are those with no checks on the executive, regardless of who is in charge of them. These institutions have no way to block the executive's goals either in the present or future, so they are not a priority at all for the authoritarian populist. For example, a court with mostly ceremonial responsibilities and no/limited judicial review has no way to block

policy or electoral goals, and thus will not be targeted. From this, I expect that high threat institutions will be targeted often, medium threat institutions will be targeted occasionally, and low threat institutions will rarely, if ever, be targeted.

Which Countries and Which Institutions?

This project is built around three qualitative case studies of democracies that have experienced varying degrees of democratic backsliding in recent years and are located in three distinct regions. Hungary, the United States, and Brazil are all cases in which an authoritarian populist was able to come to power democratically and lead the executive. Through executive aggrandizement (Bermeo 2016), Orbán, Trump, and Bolsonaro weakened checks on the executive. These three cases are ideal tests because they allow me to test if the theories I put forward can work in different political contexts.

In addition, these countries were consolidated democracies at the time the authoritarian populist came into power. This does not mean they had to be perfectly democratic in all ways, but that they have established democratic institutions that have endured over time. The purpose of this is to avoid conceptual confusion between democratic backsliding and democratic breakdown. These concepts are similar, but the difference is that breakdown happens during the process of becoming a full-fledged democracy, while backsliding occurs once the transition from another form of government to democracy has already been completed. These processes differ in terms of what and who causes them and their political context. The actions that need to be taken to dismantle a still growing democracy are not the same as the ones needed to dismantle and already formed and consolidated democracy. The former involves only the writing of new antidemocratic legal and political systems, while the latter involves having to break down already existing systems and put new ones in place. Part of the reason democratic backsliding is

so unnerving for many is that it occurs in places which were previously seen as "safe" for democracy.

These are also cases in which an authoritarian populist held the office of the Prime Minister or President. The reason they must hold one of these offices is that while authoritarian populists do not respect the value of democratic institutions, they still must work within those institutions to eventually degrade or dissolve them. Again, this is an important distinction. If they were to work outside of the system, it would not be considered democratic backsliding, it would be considered a coup. These are conceptually different, so it is important to separate them.
For each of the three cases, I include an analysis of the media, electoral administration, and judiciary. I also analyze the legislature in only the United States and Brazil cases because in Hungary, Orbán was Prime Minister, not President, which gave him substantial ties to the legislature, already, since the majority party in the legislature selects the Prime Minister. Significantly, by virtue of (at least at one time) being democracies, all of the countries under investigation in this project had functioning legislatures, media, elections, and judiciaries, all with varying threat levels. The variation in the structure and threat level of these institutions across countries provides leverage to test whether institutional threat (and later, public opinion), has an impact on which institutions are targeted first, and whether one theory can explain sequencing in more than one country. For example, the judiciaries in these countries vary both on the checks they have on the executive and on whether they were captured by the authoritarian populist's party. This variation allows me to determine if my theory of institutional threat is what drives decisions to target institutions. In addition, state governments are included in the analysis of Brazil given their substantial role in policymaking and in checking the federal government.

Public Opinion

Thus far, I have discussed my theory of how institutional threat affects the behavior of authoritarian populists and have identified my realm of cases and institutions. Authoritarian populists are rational actors who seek to get rid of or disempower institutions which stand in the way of their electoral and policy goals, so I have argued that institutions which do stand in the way of these goals are more likely than institutions that do not impact these goals to be targeted. However, institutions are not the only things that constrain or determine politicians' behavior. Public opinion also matters for the achievement of political goals because the public, at least partially, determines who is in office and who controls which branches of government. In this section, I review the literature on how public opinion affects policy and elections. Then, building from that scholarship and from observations of incidents of democratic backsliding, I argue that under some temporal and political conditions, public opinion influences which institutions authoritarian populists target.

As with institutional threat, public opinion's explanatory power comes from how it affects the goals of the authoritarian populist. First, public opinion matters for reelection. Part of authoritarian populists' motivation is to remain in power and continue to consolidate power. To do so, they must win elections, which means they must appeal to the public and sometimes alter their positions or actions. This has been explained and tested by political scientists using models of voting behavior and candidates, including by Downs (1957), who argues that politicians move themselves strategically along the economic left-right axis to capture enough voters to win an election. Others go on to alter the theory to include party identification and affective partisanship (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Merrill and Grofman 1997) or argue that Downs' model is dependent on other institutional arrangements (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008). Although these

and other modifiers and extensions have been made to Downs' theory, they all build off the idea that politicians do make strategic decisions about where to place themselves on issues.

Much work has been done to test whether the basic assumption of this vein of scholarship, that representatives listen to and take into account public opinion. Some scholars provide evidence that the assumption is valid (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Mayhew 2004). Cox and McCubbins (1993) argue that, although also affected by party leadership and legislative inefficiencies, a legislator's issue positions are largely determined by what their voters want. Mayhew (2004) also shows that position-taking on issues affects the likelihood of being reelected, providing evidence that the public's opinion matters to politicians and that those opinions have a substantive impact on the issue positions of their representatives.

Sinclair (1993) outlines the two ways leaders' behavior is affected by public opinion. One is directly through elections. If an authoritarian populist does something the public does not like, the public can vote them out of office. For this reason, it is best for the authoritarian populist not to anger the public. By extension, the authoritarian populist should not anger the public by targeting institutions the public approves of because the public could vote out the authoritarian populist in turn.

Reelection for authoritarian populists relies on maintaining support among their voters and sometimes convincing others to vote for them. In order to do this, they can emphasize issues these voters care about and change their position to be in line with those voters. The most obvious impact of public opinion that matters for authoritarian populists is that politicians with low approval ratings from the public are unlikely to be reelected. Nearly all widely accepted forecasting models include a measure for approval ratings as predictors of reelection, including Sigelman's (1979) presidential approval model, Abramowitz' (1988) time for change plus model,

Campbell and Wink's (1990) trial-heat and economy model, among others. Therefore, rational politicians should and often do care about public opinion in a broad sense.

Additionally, approval of a politician is sometimes based on the perception of their actions while in office, often known as retrospective evaluation (Fiorina 1978; Singer and Carlin 2013; Esponda and Pouzo 2019). Therefore, politicians need to and do consider how their actions will affect public opinion of them (Brody 1991). Because it is likely that backsliding actions will be made salient among the public by opposition parties, the media, or other actors, it is also possible that perceptions of backsliding actions will affect the electoral prospects of the authoritarian populist. Thus, they should care about how the public perceives their actions regarding the targeting of institutions because it affects their reelection goal.

There are two ways I have discussed, though, that authoritarian populists target institutions. The type of targeting authoritarian populists use, direct or rhetorical, depends on public opinion of the institution, I argue. If public opinion of the institution is already negative, the authoritarian populist proceeds with directly targeting it. There is little risk to the authoritarian populist in taking power from an unpopular institution. If public opinion is positive, the authoritarian populist rhetorically targets the institution in an attempt to turn public opinion against the institution. If their strategy works and public opinion is turned against the institution, the authoritarian populist then uses direct action to diminish the power of the institution or dissolve it altogether. If public opinion remains positive, though, the authoritarian populist will continue rhetorically targeting it until a time comes in which public opinion does shift.

If the public has a positive perception of an institution, actions taken by the authoritarian populist to diminish that institution will likely lead to negative evaluations of the authoritarian populist. Therefore, the authoritarian populist is better off targeting institutions of which the

public has a neutral or negative opinion. The public is less likely to vote someone out of office who is taking actions that are in line with their own views of the institutions in question. Public opinion, though, is often affected by elites and the media (Bartels 1993; Gerber and Jackson 1993) and how they frame issues (Iyengar and Kinder 2010; Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010), and thus the authoritarian populist is likely to use their power and influence to try to make the public dislike institutions they would like to target. In places with high levels of partisan polarization, the opinion of elites in an individual's party is often enough to get the individual on board (Slothuus and de Vreese 2010).

Regardless of the level of polarization, elite messaging has been shown to have a significant impact on public opinion. Gabel and Scheve (2007) find that negative elite messaging surrounding European integration decreases public support for integration. This, along with other similar studies (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2021) are evidence that elites can impact public opinion of an institution. A study conducted by Van Duyn and Collier (2019) comes to a similar conclusion, though focused on how elites affect the public's evaluations of the media. Through an experiment, they find that when elites continuously put out negative messages about the media and engage in rhetorical targeting by talking about "fake news", the public has increasingly negative views of the media writ large. Since one of the primary institutions being examined in this project is the media, these results provide empirical backing for my theory about the interplay between rhetorical targeting and public opinion.

Responsiveness and Issue Ownership

This theory is also supported by literature on populist responsiveness and issue ownership. Due to limits on time and resources, along with ideological restraints, authoritarian populists are only ever responsive to a subset of the voting population. By virtue of being

populists, these leaders put an emphasis on representing what they often refer to as the "true" or "real" people, but in reality, the "real" people are often those who have been disaffected by their current political system or globalization and are most often of a lower socioeconomic status (Kriesi et al 2006; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007). In line with Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989), authoritarian populists know that their candidacy for office and their policies are unlikely to be supported by those on the left side of the ideological spectrum (both the traditional left-right model and the more modern multi-dimensional model). Therefore, they focus mostly on persuading copartisans and others who feel disaffected by the system. I argue that rather than being responsive to the electorate as a whole, authoritarian populists should be responsive to their voters and copartisans.

How do authoritarian populists go about persuading these voters? Like other politicians, they attach themselves to issues which most define them and distinguish them from other parties (Rabinowitz and Mcdonald 1989; Iversen 1994). In the case of authoritarian populists, the two issues or stances that define them are anti-immigration and anti-establishmentism. These two positions dominate the platforms of authoritarian populists and serve as their main pull factor for attracting voters (Schmuck and Matthes 2019). Populists' rhetorical style is often effective in promoting these positions, and along with recruiting voters, it also helps increase the political engagement of those voters (Blassnig et al. 2019; Busby, Gubler, and Hawkins 2019), which is how authoritarian populists build up a strong voter base and embed themselves into existing party systems (Koopmans and Muis 2009). For example, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) populist party had a breakthrough set of elections in 2013 and 2014 because of their shift of focus from the Euro crisis onto immigration and xenophobia (Schmitt-Beck 2017). Bringing

public attention to these newer issues allowed AfD to enter into to party system, attract voters from other parties, and win more seats in the legislature (Schmitt-Beck 2017).

This line of research follows Hobolt and de Vries' (2015) theory of issue entrepreneurship. Building on cleavage theory, which posits that new issue dimensions will change party systems (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Kitschelt 1994), Hobolt and de Vries (2015) argue that political elites carve out a place for themselves in politics by introducing issues the other parties have not addressed or for which there is no party already possessing an alternate view (de Vries and Hobolt 2012; Hobolt and de Vries 2015). Populists bring their anti-immigration and anti-establishment positions into party systems, use their rhetoric to attract loyal voters, and base the majority of their platform on these issues.

Parties in general are at least somewhat responsive to their voters because of the electoral incentives involved (Adams et al. 2004), and because there are two issues that are central to their appeal, populists have incentives to make sure they stay in line with their voters on immigration and attitudes towards democratic governmental institutions. This is especially true for authoritarian populists because the far right-wing ideology of the party group makes it difficult to capture voters outside of their original coalition. Therefore, they need to keep their own voters and coalition members happy by being responsive to their opinions. Research shows that this is the case; populist parties are responsive to their voters on issues they own, including immigration and anti-establishmentism (de Vries and Hobolt 2012; Caramani 2017; Plescia, Kritzinger, and De Sio 2019). Hager and Hilbig (2020) also find that when politicians are given information about their voters' preferences, they change their rhetoric by either avoiding some topics or changing positions. The willingness of politicians to change their rhetoric and policy agenda has

also been shown by Spoon and Klüver (2014), Klüver and Spoon (2016), and Bernardi et al (2021).

The work of these scholars provides evidence that authoritarian populists care about the opinion of their voters. Based on the literature, I expect authoritarian populists will be unlikely to directly target institutions that the public has a highly positive opinion of. Instead, they will directly target institutions that are a threat and that their voter does not like, while rhetorically targeting threatening institutions that the voters like. On issues that the public does not care much about or are not salient, the authoritarian populists will not be responsive because there is no electoral incentive to do so.

Testing Theory

To test my theory about the effects of institutional threat and public opinion on the actions of authoritarian populists, I conduct three case studies on Hungary, the United States, and Brazil. The purpose of this approach is to be able to uncover and detail the nuances of authoritarian populists' decision-making processes while also determining whether my theory works across a variety of cases. Most studies of democratic backsliding are region-specific, meaning it is difficult to know whether authoritarian populists behave the same way in different states and what that means for democratic outcomes. In this project, I determine whether it is possible for theories of backsliding and populist behavior to apply in different contexts, including within different institutional configurations and party systems, and in places that vary in public attention and opinion toward politics, the authoritarian populist, and their actions.

Institutional Threat

The first step in each case study is to determine the threat level of the democratic institutions at the beginning of the authoritarian populist's term. This way, I have a baseline of

the institutions' powers and who is in charge of them. For this, I rely on the work of Hungarian, American, and Brazilian academics who describe in detail the institutional context of their respective countries. I also rely on law codes and constitutions, as they often outline the institutional configuration in the government and define (to varying extents) what powers the institutions have. The acting constitution in Hungary before 2012, the new constitution implemented in January 2012, the Brazilian constitution, and the US constitution all include specific sections that describe how different institutions can check the executive branch. I also look at relevant laws passed in each country regarding the powers of the institutions.

To determine the likelihood of using checks, I look at the partisan makeup of those in charge of the institution. Co-partisans of the executive are unlikely to use checks, while others are likely to use checks. When determining likelihood for the judiciary, I consider the proportion of the justices who were appointed by the authoritarian populist's party. If the proportion of copartisans is equal to or greater than the proportion needed to exercise the check (in most cases, a majority needed to exercise judicial review), then they are unlikely to use the check. For example, when Trump was inaugurated in January 2017, the court was split evenly by partisanship, with four justices nominated by Republican presidents, and four nominated by Democratic presidents. With the ninth seat open, Trump was sure to nominate his own justice that was in line with his views. After the nomination and confirmation of Justice Gorsuch in April 2017, the court changed to a staunchly Republican majority, which only grew over the course of Trump's presidency. Due to high levels of polarization and authoritarian populist's emphasis on loyalty, it was unlikely that the Republican justices would vote against Trump's policies, and, therefore, the institution was a medium threat. While the Supreme Court certainly had the power of judicial review, they were unlikely to use it, which means that Trump should

not have had problems implementing his policies. I repeated this process for each of the institutions, focusing on the partisan makeup of legislatures, judiciaries, electoral administrations, and state governors, along with the partisanship of media owners and any personal ties they may have had to politicians.

From this, I assess each institution's threat level, and characterize them as high, medium, or low threats. Based on my theory of institutional threat, I generate expectations about when and how often targeting should have happened. Then, I move on to investigating whether my expectations are what played out in reality.

To do this, I rely on the work of other scholars, online news archives, and organizations such as Varieties of Democracy, Freedom House, and the Democratic Erosion Consortium. These sources allow me to track instances of authoritarian populists taking power from democratic institutions through process tracing. I create timelines to illustrate the targeting that occurred in for each institution, and I also provide a detailed qualitative account of the sequencing of events in each country. I then compare the targeting that occurred to my expectations based on the institutional threat theory.

Public Opinion

Public opinion, in this case, is measured by trust in institutions. This is for two reasons. The first is that trust in the institution is a reliable proxy for positive/negative overall feelings toward an institution. Rohrschneider & Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck (2002) find that trust measures are based on the performance of the institution, confidence in the functioning of the institution, and of political leaders. This provides evidence that the public does have meaningful opinions of institutions and that trust measures capture those opinions. This measure has also been shown to be sensitive to actions of the President or executive, meaning we can expect that an authoritarian

populist leader will influence trust in institutions through their rhetoric or direct actions (Miller 1999). The second reason institutional trust is appropriate is that unlike for most other survey questions, the wording is similar or the same across surveys and throughout different regions. The Eurobarometer, Latinobarometer, and Gallup ask questions about trust in various institutions in Hungary, Brazil, and the Unites States, respectively, although the Eurobarometer and the Latinobarometer are conducted less often than is ideal for this study, which will be discussed more in the chapters on Hungary and Brazil. However, since this project seeks to provide a cross-regional theory of authoritarian populist decision-making in regard to democratic backsliding, it is important to be able to have comparable data, and these surveys come closest to that goal. Therefore, this is the best option for measuring public opinion towards institutions.

In order to test this part of the theory, I track rhetorical targeting as well as direct targeting. To do this, I turn to social media. In particular, I focus on X (formerly Twitter) for Bolsonaro and Trump because both used this platform extensively to rhetorically target institutions and individuals, giving me a large dataset to work with. I was able to obtain just over 26,000 of Trump's tweets, and I coded each tweet based on whether in was a negative statement about an institution and based on which institutions were being targeted. These data stretch over the entirety of Trump's presidency. Unfortunately, due to new limitations in X's rules, I was only able to collect about 6,000 of Bolsonaro's tweets, which I coded in the same way as Trump's. These posts only cover the beginning and end of the Bolsonaro administration, so they allow me to test my theory in a more limited way. Orbán, on the other hand, did not have a particularly active Twitter/X account because most Hungarians relied on Facebook when he came to power in 2010. Due to Facebook's data sharing limitations, I do not have data on Orbán's rhetorical targeting. However, I am still able to test whether direct targeting is impacted by public opinion

of the institutions. While imperfect, these three cases combined allow me to draw conclusions about the viability of my theories.

Dissertation Structure

The three chapters that follow are individual case studies of Hungary, the United States, and Brazil. In each, I begin with a short explanation of how the authoritarian populist came to power and a discussion of the state of democracy in the country at that time. I then clarify if and why there are any methodological differences between the cases and discuss the data collection for the case. Next, following the methods explained above, I test my theories of institutional threat and public opinion. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I will synthesize the results and determine whether my expectations were met.

Chapter 3: Hungary

In this chapter, I apply my theory of institutional threat and public opinion to the case of Hungary under Orbán (2010-2014). First, I explain the state of democracy in Hungary, focusing specifically on the timeline for democratic backsliding in the country. Then, I lay out background information on Orbán, his party, and his ideology over time. Following this is the bulk of the chapter in which I test whether my theory fits the actions of Orbán, ultimately finding that this case provides substantial backing for the theory. This chapter is split into four main sections which address each of the institutions being investigated in this project: the judiciary, electoral administration, legislature, and media. For each, I determine the level of threat the institution posed to Orbán at the beginning of his term. Then, I track his actions and rhetoric over time to determine whether and how the institution is targeted. Throughout, I use content analysis of speeches, statements, and platforms, along with process tracing to provide evidence that institutional threat and public opinion are truly the driving force behind Orbán's decisions about whether to target the institution. Additionally, I use data from V-Dem and Freedom House to provide quantitative evidence of backsliding and of how public opinion of Orbán and the institution contributes to backsliding.

I find that Orbán does behave in the expected manner with respect to institutional threat, directly targeting the institutions that had the greatest ability to keep him from being reselected for the Prime Minister's office and to keep his policy goals from being implemented, the judiciary and the media. He also rhetorically then directly targeted Hungary's electoral administration, which was initially popular among the public, and did not target the legislature, which posed almost no threat to him due to his party's supermajority.

Democracy in Hungary

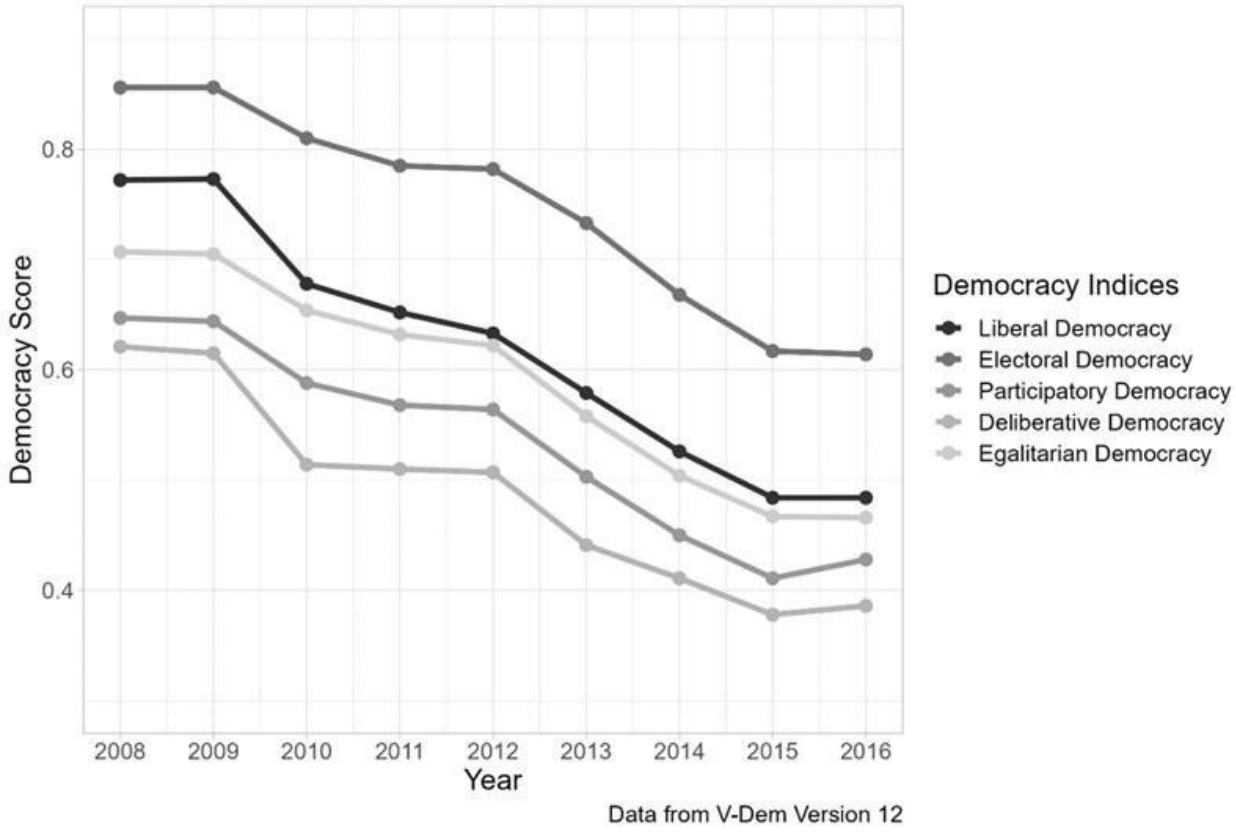
Hungary's transition to democracy started before the official collapse of the Soviet Union, with the implementation of some liberal reforms in the late 1980s (Bozóki 1994; Magyar et al. 2019). The official transition did not start, though, until 1989 with the establishment of multiple parties and democratic institutions (Bozóki 1994, 44). This was formalized further with the alterations to the 1949 Constitution. The Constitution provided a legal framework for the new democracy, Basic Law, and a seemingly solid foundation for the development of democracy and included most of the hallmarks of democracy: separation of power, checks and balances, civil liberties, and free and fair elections (Hung. Const. Amendment XX of 1949). Despite problems with ratification and the lasting issue of reaffirming the new constitution in the parliament, the country experienced nearly 20 years of relative democratic stability. During this time, Hungary remained a liberal democracy and achieved a level of democracy sufficient to be added as a full member to the European Union. By most common metrics, Hungary was a successful case of democratization.

However, these two decades of relative democratic stability were followed by a decrease in democracy scores due to democratic backsliding. According to Varieties of Democracy data, after Viktor Orbán was selected as Prime Minister of Hungary for the second time in 2010 and implemented some of his policies, Hungary's democracy scores fell (Coppedge et al 2022; Pemstein et al 2022). There are several measures of democracy provided by Varieties of Democracy, and all show marked decreases over Orbán's time in office. As Figure 1 indicates, over the three main indices measuring democracy (polyarchy, deliberative, and egalitarian), scores skyrocketed after the changes made in 1989, but decreased immediately after the 2010 Constitution was implemented and continued to decrease as Orbán continued to reform

democratic institutions (Coppedge et al 2022; Pemstein et al 2022). This is consistent with patterns of democratic backsliding that we have seen in other countries and regions in the past two decades.

In the following sections, I investigate each institution in turn from 2010 to 2014, Orbán's first term in which he conducted backsliding. I limit the analysis to this time period for consistency across cases since the United States and Brazil's backsliding was limited to one term. I begin by analyzing the highest threat institution to Orbán, which is the Constitutional Court. While technically separate from the judicial branch in the Constitution, the Constitutional Court plays a similar role to the highest courts in other systems and is therefore considered in this project to be part of the judicial branch. Then, I turn to the media and electoral administration, which were also targeted by Orbán, but under different circumstances than the Court.

Figure 1: Democracy Scores in Hungary by Year



Constitutional Court

In this section, I test the theory of institutional threat using the Constitutional Court in Hungary. First, I provide background on the powers of the Constitutional Court along with evidence that it was a high threat institution in 2010 and throughout the 2010-2014 term. Then I determine whether it should have been targeted. I hypothesize that because the Constitutional Court was a high threat throughout the term, Orbán should have targeted it consistently. I test the hypothesis by tracking Orbán's targeting of the Court and find that, in line with expectations, Orbán targeted it throughout the term.

Constitutional Court Threat Assessment

According to Bankuti et al (2012), "the most crucial check on power in this unicameral parliamentary system was the Constitutional Court" (p. 249). The largest check in this institution

was the power of judicial review (Spuller 2014), which was used consistently throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In many cases, the Constitutional Court was able to dictate changes to the language of laws, something that makes it stand out as a powerful political body. For example, the Court changed the language of Act LXXIX of 1997 to eliminate a 30-day waiting period between when a Prime Minister resigns and when they leave office (Curia of Hungary 884/B/2004), and it decided on the constitutionality of ministerial decrees (Curia of Hungary 132/B/2008). That these decrees are reviewable proves that the Court had a way to check the Prime Minister.

The Court also showed its power by forcing Parliament to create new laws, declaring legislative omissions if they found that Parliament had not acted on an essential issue. In one case, the Court ordered Parliament to create a new law about record-keeping in government within one year of the decision (Curia of Hungary 656/E/1999). The fact that the Court could mandate Parliament to act means that the Court had an indirect impact on the Prime Minister's legislative agenda and, therefore, the powers of the Court are clearly sufficient to constitute checks on the Prime Minister.

The makeup of the Court also made it a threat. There were 11 judges, each nominated by a multi-party committee and voted on by Parliament with input by the Prime Minister (Hung. Const. 1989). Judges were supposed to be non-ideological, but because the governing coalition held the reins in the appointment procedure, most judges did have a party affiliation or at least a traceable ideology. In 2010, there were four judges elected by left-wing governments, four by right-wing governments, and one by a bipartisan majority (Szente et al 2015). This means that there were enough judges on the ideological left and center to be able to overturn legislation Orbán might put through. Therefore, the ideological makeup of the court did not lend itself to the

Fidesz agenda. In addition, a supermajority of 2/3 of Parliament was needed to make any changes to the court system, further insulating the Court from the Prime Minister. The ideological balance of the Court made it likely to challenge Orbán and his policies, and thus the second criteria for a high threat institution is fulfilled.

This characterization is supported by the Court's actions at the beginning of Orbán's term. When Orbán tried to impose a retroactive 98% severance-pay tax in 2010, the Court blocked it (*Hungary: 98%*, 2011). Orbán reintroduced the tax in 2011, but the Court ruled against it again (Curia of Hungary 1747/B/2010; Kovács & Tóth 2011). This is evidence that not only could the Court check the executive, it was also willing to. Because it was a high threat, I expect that Orbán should have targeted the Court.

Because the Constitutional Court had checks on the Prime Minister and was likely to use those checks, I argue that it was a high threat institution (see Figure 2). Therefore, I posit that Orbán should have targeted the Constitutional Court so he could achieve his goals. In the next section, I track the targeting of the Court to test this hypothesis, building from secondary sources detailing backsliding in Hungary, along with laws and decrees implemented during the term.

Figure 2: Threat level of the Constitutional Court

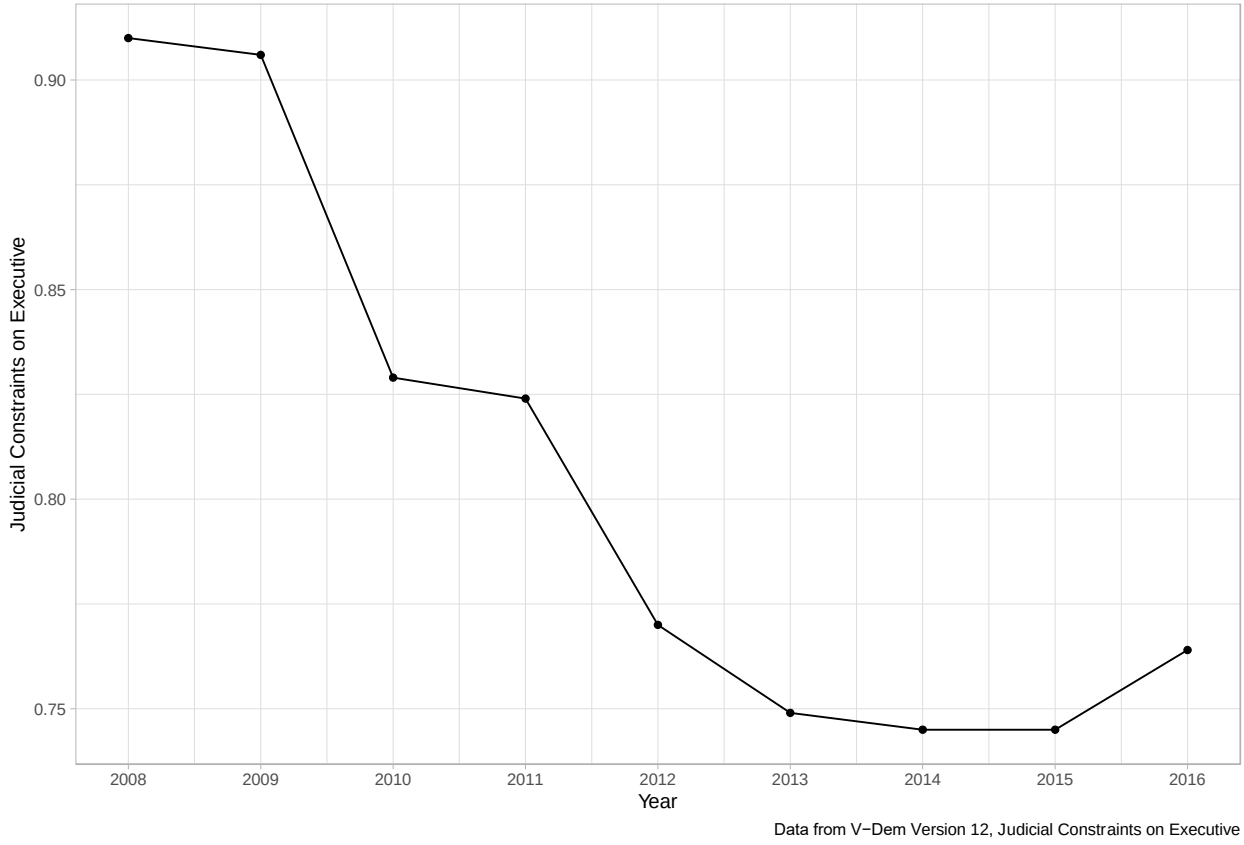
		Institutional checks on the executive	
		Yes	No
Likelihood of using checks	High	High Threat **Constitutional Court** **2010-2014**	Low Threat
	Low	Medium Threat	Low Threat

Targeting of the Court

Consistent with expectations, Orbán targeted the Court immediately once he came into power. With a constitutional amendment in 2010, the nomination process for justices changed, allowing the ruling party to nominate justices without consent from other parties (Amendment XX, 2010). However, this took some time to have a substantive impact, with the Court still invalidating some of Orbán's policies, including the retroactive tax. This demonstrated that the Court was still a high threat institution. On the day of the Court's first ruling against the law, Fidesz' Parliamentary leader and ally of Orbán, János Lázár, put forth a new version of the law and argued that the Court's "broad role" in deciding on budgetary matters "is no longer appropriate" (as cited in Lembcke & Boulanger, 2014). Later, he introduced an amendment to remove the tax from the competences of the Court (Kovács & Tóth 2011). These early changes

are reflected in a decrease in judicial constraints on the executive, as measured by Varieties of Democracy (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Judicial Constraints on the Executive in Hungary



In another attempt to limit the Court's willingness to use checks, Fidesz passed an amendment in September 2011 that increased the number of justices from nine to fifteen (Amendment XXXII, 1989). This, combined with the new appointment procedure, made the Court ideologically friendly to Fidesz, and thus less likely to block its policies (Scheppele, 2011).

The implementation of the Fundamental Law in January 2012 further changed the Court, causing another decrease in the judiciary's constraints on the executive (see Figure 3). *Actio popularis,* which allowed anyone to submit any law to the Court for review, was eliminated, making the democratic process less accessible (Bánkuti et al 2012). Now, only Parliament, the

Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, or the government can ask for a review, unless an individual is tangibly harmed by the law.

The Fundamental Law also guaranteed Court seats for 12 years (Bánkuti et al 2012). Combined with the 2/3 requirement in Parliament for appointments, this means that if any other party won power in the future, they would not have many seats to fill and even if they did, it would be difficult to garner the support needed to fill the seats. In addition, these judges have been loyal to Fidesz and rarely vote against the party's interests (Szente et al 2015; Krekó and Enyedi 2018). Szente (2016) finds that only one Orbán-appointed judge regularly ruled against the government, while the rest ruled with the government in 72-97% of cases. This contrasts with earlier appointees, who ruled in favor of the government in only 3-45% of cases.

Despite the loyalty of the newly appointed justices, the Court ruled against Orbán in key cases, including the decision to invalidate a voter registration requirement in 2012 (Bozóki 2013). Although the Court was weakened, it remained a high threat because only seven justices (less than half) were Fidesz appointees, and it was still using its powers to block policies. Consistent again with expectations, attacks on the Court continued. A series of judicial reform amendments passed forced lower court justices into retirement, put restrictions on who could be a judge, and put strict term limits on justices (Bánkuti et al 2012).

In 2013, Parliament passed the Fourth Amendment, which invalidated all Constitutional Court decisions issued before 2012 (Szente 2015; Grzymala-Busse 2019). Fidesz was no longer bound by previous Court decisions and could reinstall policies that had been struck down.

Following these changes, targeting slowed down in 2014, which indicates that the Court had been so weakened by that point that it was no longer a high threat. The changes to Court powers and procedures from 2010-2013, though, support my theory that authoritarian populists

target high threat institutions for democratic backsliding. Because the Court had been the most powerful check on the government when Orbán came into office and the composition of justices was ideologically mixed, it was a threat and thus was targeted immediately (Szente 2015). Orbán and Fidesz used their supermajority to change almost every aspect of the Court and continued to make changes whenever the Court ruled against them. This prolonged targeting of the Court supports the theory that a high threat institution will be targeted consistently until it is no longer a threat. Because the Court continued to use its power to block Fidesz' goals, it remained a target from 2010 through 2013, and became a low threat in 2014.

Media

In this section, I investigate the role of the media in Hungary. I argue that due to limited media independence and the ability to criticize the government, the media was a medium threat from 2010 to 2013. I also argue that, due to a change in media ownership, independence increased in early 2014, making the media a higher threat. I expect that when threat level increased in 2014, there should be more targeting.

Media Threat Assessment

During the transition to democracy, the media in Hungary developed its own checks on power, breaking from the legacy of communism. Journalists had more freedom to criticize politicians and provide alternative viewpoints (Bajomi-Lázár 1999) and there was a significant privatization of the industry (Vásárhelyi 2012).

The media were not completely free, though, in part because ownership of media sources was concentrated among several rich elites (Bajomi-Lázár 1999). In addition, partisan oversight of media organizations made them even more susceptible to elite influence. While journalists enjoyed freedom from direct threats, according to a survey conducted by the Communication

Theory Research Group in 2006, only 38% agreed that the press was completely free (as cited in Vásárhelyi 2012). Although media freedom was improving in Hungary throughout the 1990s and 2000s, there were still limits to it.

Orbán proved adept at dealing with this media landscape, maintaining high access to media since his breakout anti-communist speech in 1989. The media attention Orbán received after this speech led Fidesz to develop an extensive media strategy earlier than other parties, extending their coverage in newspapers and television for years (Gulyas 2004). According to Szilágyi and Bozóki (2015), Orbán's "annual state of the nation speeches regularly occupied the first two pages of Hungary's most popular liberal daily" throughout the 1990s, even when he was in the opposition (section 3, para. 5). Many of Orbán's speeches were also aired on Hír TV, which was unusual "because live coverage of political speeches was not general practice either for Hír TV or for any other broadcaster" (Szilágyi & Bozóki 2015, p. S157).

Given these circumstances, the media were a medium threat to Orbán in 2010. The media were free enough to allow for some dissenting voices and other parties could still access it, so the media's largest check on the executive, its watchdog function, remained intact by 2010. However, the media were not completely free and there were ways for politicians to influence the rich elite, making it less likely they would share negative news about Orbán.

In fact, some of the few private media companies were owned by friends of Orbán, including owner of Lánchíd Rádió, Lajos Simicska (Polyák 2019). Orbán met with Simicska frequently at the beginning of his term, asking for input on government appointments and spending of development funds. Even further, "over the next four years, not a single government contract involving EU development funds was awarded without Simicska's knowledge and approval" (Kovács 2015). During this time, right-wing channels and papers dominated the media

landscape, pushed pro-Fidesz stories, and received billions of Hungarian Forints in advertising revenue (Vásárhelyi 2016). This is evidence that the media had checks on the executive but were unlikely to use them due to the media owners' ties to Orbán, making it a medium threat.

However, the threat level changed in 2014 as Orbán's relationship with Simicska soured. Once their friendship dissolved, Orbán could not rely on Simicska's stations to continue publishing favorable stories (Polyák 2019). Sources within Fidesz said "Orbán deemed that Simicska had acquired too much influence and independence on the media market and made key decisions affecting the media market without consulting or getting approval from the prime minister" (Vásárhelyi 2016, p. 520). This increase in independence made the media a higher threat. In line with my theory, I expect Orbán to moderately target the media from 2010 to 2013 and to increase targeting in 2014 due to an increase in threat level.

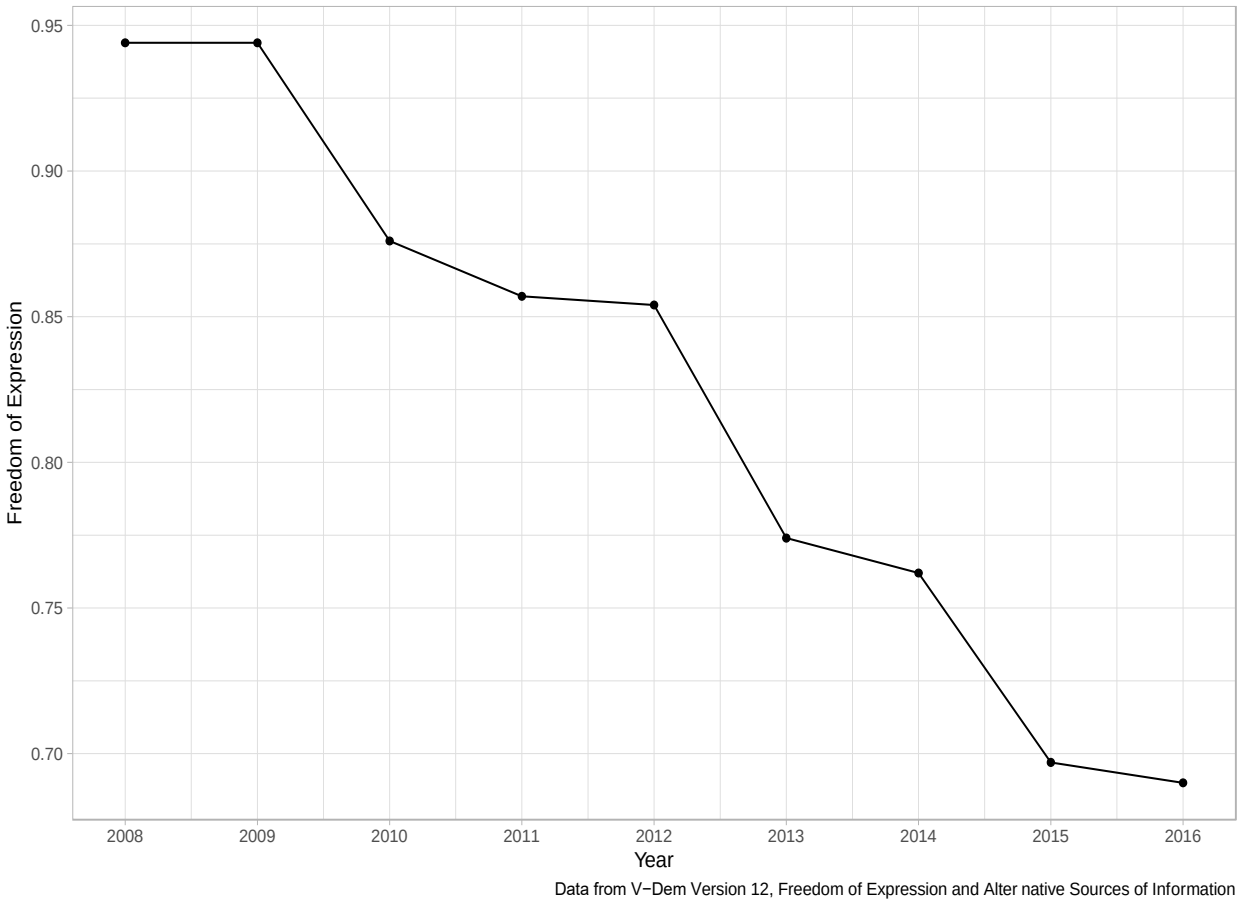
Targeting of the Media

Targeting began in 2010 when Orbán came to power and continued throughout the term, as seen in Figure 8. Targeting began with Constitutional amendments and the 2010 Media Act, which directly limited press freedom. In July of 2010, an amendment required the media to be responsible for fostering a national and European identity, along with being responsive to the needs of ethnic and religious communities (Amendment XX of the 1949 Constitution). This was followed by a series of Acts about the media, the most substantial of which was the Media Act (Law CLXXXV of 2010 Law). This Act created a powerful Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund led by the Media Council to enforce regulations, which would become one of the largest restraints on press freedom because the Media Council decides who receives funds and what is appropriate to air in the media (Bajomi-Lázár 2012; Štětka 2019; Polyák 2019).

The Media Council also threatened the future of media freedom due to the appointment procedures for its members. Members are appointed for nine-year terms and all appointments to the Council were all controlled by Fidesz in 2010, including the chairperson (Scheppele 2011; Polyák 2019). This guaranteed that even if Fidesz lost either the 2014 or 2018 parliamentary elections, the party would still have complete control over the regulation and oversight of media without any recourse from the new majority party or coalition. This was pushed further in July 2011, when the Media Act was amended to allow members to stay on the Council after their term expires if the new candidate put forth cannot get the 2/3 support of Parliament required for appointment (Brouillette and van Beek 2012). Even if Fidesz loses its majority in Parliament, it will be difficult for any other future governing coalition to get the 2/3 of Parliament's support necessary to replace members of the Media Council. This is a way for the party to maintain at least some power despite the check elections usually place on politicians and parties.

In addition, from 2011 to 2013, the Media Council made several decisions about media freedom that limited access for anti-government outlets. When the group allocated radio frequencies, about half were given to pro-government stations, while the remaining opposition station was not given a frequency (Bajomi-Lázár 2012). Beyond this, the government used state advertising as a reward for friendly stations and channels (Bajomi-Lázár 2017). According to Bátorfy and Urbán (2020), Népszabadság, a newspaper critical of Orbán's government, saw its share of state advertising revenue decrease from almost 20% in 2009 to less than 6% in 2013. Meanwhile, Simicska's paper, the Magyar Nemzet, saw its share of state advertising increase from about 27% in 2009 to more than 50% in 2013, which is evidence that the government was using informal means to disproportionately support Fidesz-friendly media.

Figure 4: Freedom of Expression in Media



Targeting continued at this relatively steady pace throughout 2012 and 2013. In 2013, for example, a change to the civil code was introduced that made it easier to receive damages for defamation (Bodrogi 2017). During this time, the Media Council also continued to collect large fines from media organizations (Human Rights Watch 2013). Even greater targeting followed in 2014, though. Several changes to the media landscape changed the threat level from medium to high, and they were followed by an increase in use of regulatory powers by the Media Council, supporting expectations that when threat levels change, so does the amount of targeting.

In 2014, Fidesz created the National Bureau of Communications, tasked with determining which stations would receive advertising revenues from government organizations (Polyák 2019). This was a way to control media outlets by making them even more reliant on government

advertising revenue. This worked in the intended manner, with some stations reporting negatively on the opposition upwards of 80% of the time, and negatively reporting on the governing party only 5% of the time (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2018). Relatedly, Fidesz also passed a law which placed a heavy tax on advertising revenues (European Commission Report 2015).

The owner of Lánchíd Rádió, Lajos Simicska, had been close with Orbán in previous years, but in 2014 the relationship started to erode (Polyák 2019; Bátorfy and Urbán 2020). Simicska had a large media empire, which was to the benefit of Orbán when they were friends. Once the pair's relationship fell apart, though, Orbán could no longer rely on the media to remain favorable toward Fidesz. At this point, the media became more willing to use their checks on the government, changing the threat assessment from medium to high. Orbán acted to eliminate the threat, starting with the 2014 decision to take away stations from Simicska's media conglomerate, and resulting in the dissolution of part of Simicska's media empire and limitations on its growth (Mertek Media Monitor 2016). Once the media were no longer under Orbán's control via his own power sharing with Simicska, they became a high threat institution and Orbán directly targeted Simicska and a wide array of media organizations.

Further evidence showing targeting increased during 2014 is the number of radio and television frequencies that were distributed to Orbán's friends. When Simicska and Orbán were allies, the Media Council gave Simicska's station 13 additional frequencies. In contrast, Andrew Vajna, far-right media owner and Hungary's film commissioner, was given 31 frequencies for his station, Rádió1. Another example of increased targeting in 2014 was the consolidation of privately owned media in Hungary under Heinrich Pecina. From 2010 to 2014, a merger was pending under Pecina, who was pro-Fidesz. The Media Council did not act until 2014, approving

the merger and showing that 2014 again was the mark of a new wave of media targeting (Polyák 2019).

It is important to note that many measures of media freedom do not capture the decline in press freedom in 2014 fully because substantively, the media market looked much the same at the end of the year as it did at the beginning, with several large media conglomerates owned by friends of Orbán. This is largely due to how quickly Orbán began targeting the media after Simicska and others turned against him. As Orbán himself mentioned, these news organizations had become more independent during 2014. Normally, this would lead to an increase in press freedom score. However, Orbán took away all of that independence even before the end of the year, which means the overall press freedom scores stayed about level despite the fact that Orbán targeted the media severely during that time.

Orbán's targeting of the media is consistent with expectations based on my theory of institutional threat. When the media were a medium threat at the beginning of Orbán's term, he did target them, but not as much as he did once they became a high threat in 2014. This is in line with my expectations that authoritarian populist leaders will target institutions more when they are a higher threat.

Public Opinion of the Media

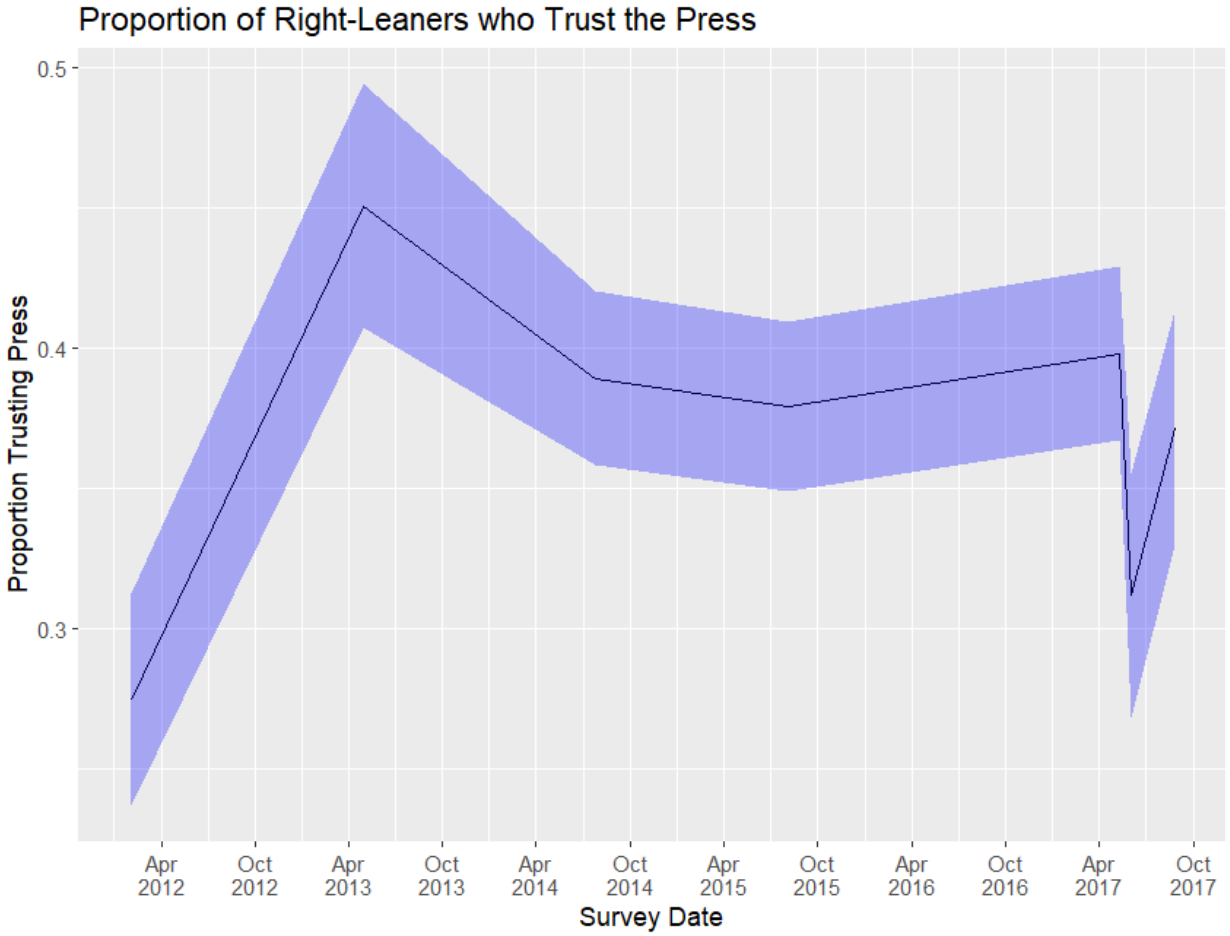
Due to Facebook and X restrictions regarding their APIs, I am unable to gather enough social media posts from Orbán to test whether public opinion impacts decisions to rhetorically target democratic institutions. However, I do have the data needed to test whether public opinion impacts decisions to directly target those institutions.

The Eurobarometer has asked a variety of questions regarding trust in institutions in the past 20 years. These questions were not asked every year and in some cases the wording of the

questions slightly changes over the years. Fortunately, other scholars have worked to combine the Eurobarometer waves and harmonize some variables. Through a dataset put together by Dr. Marton Medgyesi and Dr. Zsolt Boda, I have access to data on trust in the press from February 2012 to December 2014 (Hungary Social Report 2019). This is a binary variable, coded 1 for “trust” and 2 for "no trust”. I first filter out “NA” responses and anyone on the left of the political spectrum (on a left-right scale of 1 to 9, I consider left to be those who answered 5 or below) because I expect Orbán to be responsive to his own supporters, not all voters. Next, I calculate the proportion of trust over time with 95% confidence intervals and graph the results. Then, I compare changes in public opinion of the institution to changes in targeting of the institution to determine if patterns emerge to support my theory. Finally, I analyze the results for the institution and discuss the implications of the results.

Periodically through the 2000s, the Eurobarometer has asked whether people have trust or no trust in a variety of domestic and international political institutions. These questions are not asked in every wave of the survey, but, in some cases, they are asked often enough to help me test my theory. The first institution I address is the press. The Eurobarometer asked about trust in the press in Hungary in February 2012, April 2013, July 2014, and August 2015, which gives me about three years of data about trust to compare to targeting activity. Figure 5 displays the proportion of right-leaning Hungarians who reported that they trusted the press during this time period.

Figure 5: Right-Leaners' Trust in the Press in Hungary



Data from Eurobarometer

As seen in Figure 5, in early 2012, less than 30% of self-identified right-leaners in Hungary reported that they trusted the Hungarian media. In early to mid-2013, that proportion got closer to 45% and stayed steady around 40% until 2017. Because the media were a medium threat from 2010 to 2013 and a high threat in 2014, and based on my theory, I would expect direct targeting to be most prevalent when the institution was least trusted among right-leaners. That means I would expect direct targeting to occur the most in 2014. However, the data show that the change in threat level does not correspond with changes in public trust for the media. While the proportion of right-leaners who trust the press significantly increased from the

beginning of 2012 to 2013 by about 15% and significantly decreased in late 2013 and early 2014 by about 5%, those changes do not correspond to the timing of targeting.

Figure 8 shows that targeting did occur throughout the entire term, and that targeting increased when institutional threat increased in 2014. If public opinion were to play a role in Orbán's decision-making as I expect, we should see a change in targeting at the end of 2012 or early 2013. However, that is not the case, suggesting that Orbán did not consider his supporters' opinion of the media when deciding when to target the media. The media were targeted based on how able they were to block Orbán's goals, not based how the public felt about the media. The evidence, therefore, indicates that Orbán is more worried about institutions checking his power than about the public checking his power. It could be the case that public opinion of institutions does not have an impact on likelihood of Orbán being reelected, and thus he does not need to worry about it. Due to high polarization, it is also possible that Orbán believed he would be able to persuade his supporters not to care about these institutions through his rhetoric, which would have reduced the risk of backlash from targeting popular institutions. Either way, Orbán does not respond to public opinion in the expected way, and future research will focus on determining if there are other avenues in which public opinion somehow affects backslider behavior. In the next section, I return to investigating the role of institutional threat through analysis of Hungary's electoral administration.

Electoral Administration and Elections

Electoral Threat Assessment

For an authoritarian populist, an election which allows fair choice between competing options is of concern. However, some electoral administrations lend themselves well to authoritarian populists and are more likely to help them get in and stay in power. Hungary's is

one such electoral institution. In this section, I argue that Hungary's electoral administration was a medium threat institution throughout the 2010 to 2014 term because while it had the ability to check Orbán, its partially majoritarian nature and emphasis on party control made it unlikely to carry that check out.

In 2010, Hungary had a complicated mixed-member, hybrid electoral system that, while still free and fair, had elements that were favorable to Orbán. In this system, seats were allocated in three ways (Hung. Const. 1989). The first was through single member districts in which individual candidates could run either affiliated with a party or independently. If no candidate got more than 50% of the votes in the district, there was a runoff and whoever won a plurality of the votes got the seat. The second was through different districts that voted for party lists. There were twenty districts in this system and all were multi-member with the number of seats awarded to them proportional to their share of the population. These seats were allocated based on the proportion of votes the party received in a district.

Many of the mechanisms in place here were beneficial to Fidesz. Although there was proportional representation for about half of the seats in Parliament, the other rules for allocating seats and the composition of the districts leant themselves more to a two-party dominated system. By law, there was a 5% vote threshold to earn seats in the multi-member districts, but in practice, any party with less than 10% of the vote was unlikely to get any seats at all (Enyedi and Tóka 2007). This means that the larger parties, including Fidesz, had a substantial advantage even in the proportional representation multi-member districts. Fidesz was able to gain its footing early in the transition by positioning itself as the adversary to the unpopular outgoing government. Once it became the leading right-wing party, it was difficult for any other parties to win a substantial number of seats due to the de jure and de facto vote thresholds.

The existence of single-member majoritarian districts is beneficial to Fidesz as well because, as Duverger posits, these types of districts lead to two-party systems (Duverger 1959). This is indeed the case in Hungary, where the two major parties are likely to go head-to-head in many districts. As one of the two largest vote-earning parties, Fidesz was well-placed to win elections. Beyond this, the election administration and electoral rules in Hungary benefited Fidesz because it resulted in the largest majority in Parliament the country had seen since its transition to democracy 20 years prior (Ilonszki and Várnagy 2016).

Due to Fidesz' dominance along with the already beneficial electoral system for larger parties with more advanced party institutionalization, Hungary's electoral administration was a medium threat to Orbán. While it had a check on Orbán, the distribution of Fidesz support and the electoral rules made it unlikely that the check would be used. According to my theory, because the electoral administration was a medium threat to Orbán's goals, he should not have targeted it as much as more threatening institutions, like the Constitutional Court. In the next section, I argue that the changes Orbán made to the electoral administration before the 2014 Parliamentary elections constituted only a small amount of direct targeting and did little to affect the results of the election.

Figure 6: Institutional Threat Level in Hungary

Likelihood of using checks	Institutional checks on the executive: Yes	Institutional checks on the executive: No
High	High Threat **Media 2014** **Constitutional Court 2010-2014**	Low Threat
Low	Medium Threat **Electoral Administration 2010-2014** **Media 2010-2013**	Low Threat ***Constitutional Court 2014***

Election Administration Targeting

From 2006 to 2014, Freedom House's scores for Hungary's electoral process remained steady at 12, signaling that the electoral administration was only occasionally targeted during this time (Bogaards 2018). Some targeting occurred in the form of unfair redistricting and Fidesz gaining control over the local and national boards charged with overseeing elections, but other changes made to the system are not considered backsliding.

The first major law changing electoral rules was in 2011. Act CCIII reduced the number of single-member districts, made seats determined by proportional representation reliant on centralized party lists rather than regional lists, and led to redistricting, which created more favorable single-member districts for Fidesz (Bogaards 2018). While this did make the system more majoritarian, which is to the benefit of larger parties, scholars studying electoral institutions often argue that majoritarian institutions are not less democratic, they are just based on a different model of representation (Andeweg and Louwerse 2020; Ferland and Golder 2021). There are trade-offs with the choice between consensual and majoritarian electoral institutions, each providing some benefits and drawbacks. Scholars have tested which is better for democracy using citizen-elite linkages and citizen contentedness with the system, but there is no consensus (Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Golder and Stramski 2010; Ferland and Golder 2021).

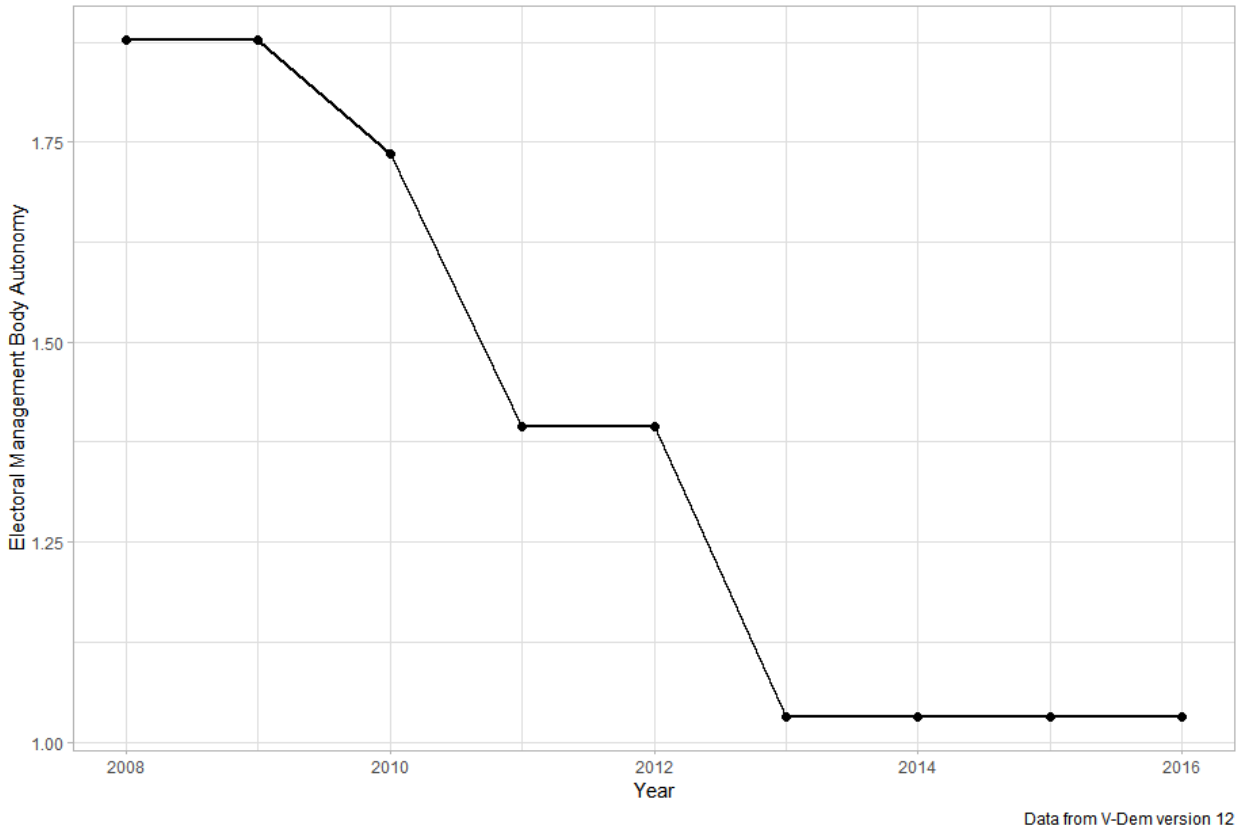
The redistricting part of the law is more indicative of targeting, with scholars modeling that if the redistricting had occurred before the 2010 election, Fidesz would have earned 8% more seats than they did (Bogaards 2018). Simulations modeling redistricting in Hungary based on the distribution of voters in 2010 also show that it is nearly impossible to draw districts with the same number of voters due to other laws requiring electoral district lines to follow county lines (Biró et al 2012; Kovalcsik et al 2019). This evidence suggests that the redistricting part of the law was intended to directly benefit Fidesz without being able to deliver on the benefits of compactness and efficiency that were promised. The change served no other purpose than to increase Fidesz vote share, and therefore is considered targeting.

Other laws, however, do not rise to the level of targeting. A 2012 law required all citizens to register to vote, but this was overturned by the Constitutional Court and rewritten in 2013 to only require voters abroad to register (Kubas 2017). Even if it had not been repealed, voter

registration is not uncommon among democracies, and it is not considered democratic backsliding. Also in 2012, ethnic Hungarians living abroad were enfranchised. Although it is true that the majority of these voters support Fidesz, there is little evidence to suggest that this makes the system less democratic overall (Ilonszki and Várnagy 2016). In fact, many describe any extension of voting rights as inherently democratic. Overall, the changes to electoral rules in 2011 and 2012 did not severely weaken the democratic process, and, therefore, the electoral administration remained a medium threat. It still had a check on Orbán, but it was still unlikely to be used due to the geographical distribution of Fidesz voters and redistricting.

A moderate amount of targeting continued as expected in 2013 and 2014. Act XXXVI of 2013 gave Parliament the duty of electing members of regional electoral commissions and the national electoral commission with a 2/3 vote. The change to parliamentary selection of members of the electoral administration is indicative of backsliding because it is unlikely any party will earn a 2/3 majority in the future, ensuring the members Fidesz elected in 2013 will not be replaced for years even if Fidesz loses its majority. Although the law dictates that the members of the Commission should not have a party affiliation, Fidesz has incentives to elect members friendly to the party. Data from Varieties of Democracies support this, showing that the Electoral Commission has become less independent over time (Pemstein et al 2022; see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Electoral Management Body Autonomy



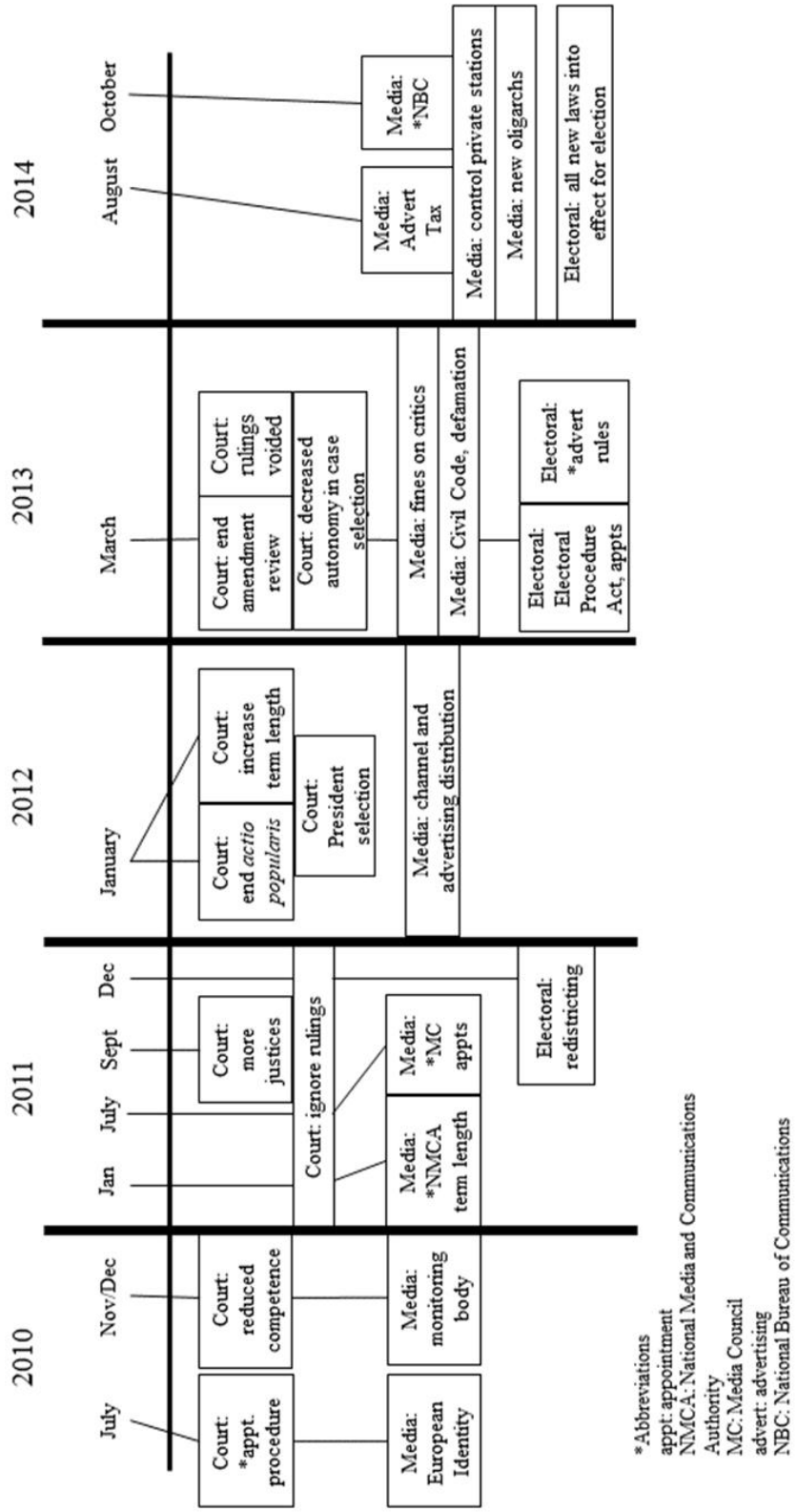
Another incidence of targeting in 2013 was the passage of a law dictating that commercial stations could not charge parties for advertising. Most decided to not air any political advertising at all because they would not earn any money from it, and it took airtime away from advertisers who would pay for the time (Ilonszki and Várnagy 2016). Because public media organizations were largely controlled by Fidesz, challenger parties had almost no way of advertising on television, giving Fidesz a major advantage (Szelényi 2019). This weakened competition, which is a major part of a fair electoral process.

One other election law in 2013 increased how much parties can spend on campaigns (Ilonszki and Várnagy 2016). Some scholars identify problems with increasing spending limits, a major one being that it encourages wealthy politicians to stay in politics longer, making less room for newer viewpoints to enter the system (Avis et al 2017; Weschle 2019). However, there

is not a consensus in the literature about the impact of campaign finance laws because effects vary across countries (Gulzar et al 2021). Nonetheless, taken in their entirety, the changes to the electoral administration made it easier for Orbán to hold onto power, making it possible for Fidesz to keep hold of Parliament with only 44.9% of the vote (Magyar 2019).

Based on the data and evidence provided here, I find that Orbán targeted the electoral administration in the expected manner. As a medium threat institution, I expected it to be slightly weakened, but to not have all of its powers taken away, and that was the case. Some of the changes to electoral law cannot be confidently characterized as backsliding based on literature from institutional scholars, but redistricting, increased control of the Electoral Commission, and changes to campaign rules clearly constitute democratic backsliding.

Figure 8: Targeting Timeline



Discussion and Conclusion

This analysis of democratic backsliding under Orbán from 2010-2014 supports my theory that institutional threat explains which institutions are targeted by authoritarian populists but does not find support for the public opinion part of the theory. I will discuss each part of the theory, in turn.

Figure 8 shows the targeting incidents in each year, which allows for a comparison among the institutions. As expected, the Constitutional Court, which was a high threat from 2010-2013, was consistently targeted by Orbán. Although there were a similar number of targeting incidents for both the Court and the media in 2010 and 2011, the consistency of Court targeting over the years indicates that Orbán continued to view it as his largest obstacle. In 2014, though, it was so severely weakened by these attacks that it became largely unable to stop or block any of Orbán's actions, which led to a steep decline in targeting.

Patterns of media targeting also support the institutional threat theory. The media were a medium threat from 2010 through 2013 and, as predicted, Orbán did constrain the media during this time. There were slightly fewer incidents of targeting the media than the Court, consistent with expectations about the differences in targeting between high and medium threat institutions. Additionally, some of the changes made to the media in earlier years were not used immediately but were capitalized on later when the media landscape changed in 2014. At that point, the media had become a high threat and targeting increased significantly.

In contrast, the electoral administration, a medium threat institution, was targeted the least. However, it is important to note that there were significant changes to the ways elections were run and decided, including making it more majoritarian, increasing campaign funding limits, and introducing voter registration. These changes are considered backsliding by some

scholars, but the lack of consensus in the literature makes it unclear, and therefore they are excluded from the list of targeting. Even if these were included, though, the Court from 2010 to 2013 and the media in 2014 were targeted more, which provides further evidence to support the prediction that high threat institutions will be targeted more than medium threat institutions.

On the other hand, the timing of direct targeting of the media and changes in right-leaners' trust in the media do not suggest that backsliders take public opinion of institutions into account in the way I anticipated. If the theory were to work in this circumstance, I would expect direct targeting to happen most when the institution is least trusted among right-leaners. If this were the case, direct targeting of the media would have occurred in 2012 (see Figure 8), but the most targeting actually occurred in 2014.

This evidence suggests that institutional threat plays a more apparent role in decision-making about direct targeting than does public trust in the institution. There are several reasons why this may be the case, with one being that in highly polarized countries, like Hungary, co-partisans in the electorate are unlikely to punish co-partisans in the government (Luo and Przeworski 2019; Aarslew 2023). In a large multi-country analysis, Orhan finds that as affective polarization increases, it becomes too costly for individuals to punish co-partisans at the ballot box, which lessens accountability and allows undemocratic behavior to continue (2022). If this is the case in Hungary, then this could explain why I do not find that public trust in institutions does not impact Orbán's targeting decisions in the expected way.

However, it is important to note again that due to data limitations, these public opinion findings and discussion are based only on trust in the media, not in the other institutions of interest. Other studies are needed to clarify the relationship between trust and direct targeting, as well as the relationship between public opinion and rhetorical targeting. In the following chapter,

I will be able to investigate these relationships in the case of the United States and determine whether institutional threat has the same impact in different contexts.

Chapter 4: The United States

In this chapter, I investigate whether institutional threat and public opinion influence the order of institutions that were targeted and the type of targeting during the Trump Presidency in the United States. To test the first part of my theory about institutional threat, I assess the threat level of the Supreme Court, media, electoral administration, and Congress during the Trump Presidency. The judiciary, electoral administration, and 115th Congress were medium threats, and the media and 116th Congress were high threats. I then track both rhetorical targeting and direct action to determine if they fit my expectations based on the theory presented in Chapter 2. To find the dispersion of rhetorical targeting throughout the Trump presidency, I read and coded about 26,000 of Trump's tweets from the Trump Twitter Archive to determine if they targeted the institutions or not (see Appendix 1). To track direct actions aimed at impeding each institution or taking away its powers, I use the Democratic Erosion Event Dataset (DEED) (Bairey et al 2023; Gottlieb et al 2023) and France 24's Trump archive, which includes stories from Reuters, the American Press, and the American Foreign Press, to identify stories about Trump's actions related to each institution. I then read the entries and stories to identify instances where Trump directly took power from an institution or hindered its ability to check his power.

I find that targeting, for the most part, follows expectations. The medium threat 115th Congress was rarely rhetorically or directly targeted for democratic backsliding, while the high threat 116th Congress was targeted both rhetorically and directly. I also find that the high threat media was targeted often, while the judiciary and electoral administration are targeted less than expected. I also do not find evidence to support the theory that public opinion of institutions affected whether Trump used rhetorical or direct targeting against them.

Democratic Backsliding in the United States

With the election of Donald Trump as President, the United States became part of two (related) trends occurring in democracies across the world: the rise of populism and the rise of democratic backsliding. As countries like the United States have started to address postmaterialist issues, such as environmental and racial justice, there has been a backlash against this shift among those who feel they will or have lost out due to societal changes (Inglehart and Norris 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Esen and Yardımcı-Geyikçi 2019). This has led to the rise of authoritarian populists who are characterized by their anti-establishment rhetoric, claims to represent the "true" people, willingness to shirk democratic norms, and preferences for concentrated executive power (Lieberman et al 2019; Norris and Inglehart 2019). According to Inglehart and Norris (2017) and others, Trump is one such authoritarian populist who participated in the breakdown of democratic institutions in the United States while he was President from 2017 to 2021 (Gricius 2022; Imran and Javed 2024).

Once in office, Trump clashed with institutions and individual actors over the extent of his power and others' ability to check that power. He used social media, his extensive television news coverage, and formal statements to publicly delegitimize the media (Carlson et al 2021), members of Congress, and various courts (Conley 2020 p. 155-156). He also worked to directly take powers from these institutions, as I will show in the analysis later in this chapter. The consequences of these actions are demonstrated by the decline in Varieties of Democracy's liberal democracy index score for the United States from .84 in 2016 to .73 in 2020 (Coppedge et al 2022; Pemstein et al 2022).

Based on my theory, I anticipate that institutional threat and public opinion impacted Trump's decisions about which institutions to target and how to target those institutions. Like in

Hungary, the United States had a media, Supreme Court, and electoral administration that could check the executive, but it also had a legislature that was not captured by the executive for the entirety of Trump's term in office. This variation means that including the legislature in this analysis, along with the other institutions, will be valuable in determining whether changes in institutional threat not directly caused by the backslider impact targeting decisions.

These institutions also give me multiple avenues to test my expectations about public opinion's role in backsliders' targeting decisions. In general, politicians have an electoral incentive to be responsive to their voters (Adams et al 2004) and in the United States, we do see some degree of responsiveness of elites to public opinion (Soroka and Wlezien 2010). The literature on populism has provided evidence that populists specifically take into consideration the opinions of their voters when making decisions, especially with regard to their defining issues, such as anti-establishmentism and anti-immigration (de Vries and Hobolt 2012; Caramani 2017; Plescia, Kritzinger, and De Sio 2019). This makes sense because those who voted for the authoritarian populist have a large role in determining if they will be reelected and are more likely to vote them out if they do something the voters disagree with (Sinclair 1993). Kwak et al (2020) indicate further that a decline in public trust in democratic institutions severely increases the likelihood that democratic backsliding will occur. I expect that both institutional threat and public trust in institutions had an impact on Trump's targeting decisions.

Methods

To test my theory, I first assess the threat level of the judiciary, media, electoral administration, and each Congressional term based on the checks and balances it has on the executive and who is in charge of the institution. These factors will determine whether each is a high, medium, or low threat to Trump. The next step is gauging public opinion to determine

whether I think, based on my theory, that Trump should have targeted the institutions rhetorically or should have directly taken away their powers. To do this, I look at Gallup data over the course of the Trump presidency for the Supreme Court, media, and electoral administration. Gallup asks questions about trust or confidence in these institutions ever year and allows me to distinguish between Republicans and Democrats, which is useful because I expect only Republican opinion to impact Trump's decision-making. For Congress, I use YouGov data collected weekly in which people are asked about approval.

To assess rhetorical targeting, I used the Trump Twitter Archive to code every tweet based on whether it targeted one of the institutions. Because not everyone interprets Trump's tweets in the same way, my coding scheme includes three categories. The "Yes" category indicates that the tweet is clearly targeting. In these tweets, Trump is clearly referencing the institution and is criticizing the use of its Constitutional and legal powers. The "Maybe" category includes tweets that, given the time the tweet was sent and the context of the tweets immediately before and after it, are likely referencing the institution, although it is not explicit, and/or are criticizing the institution. Finally, the "No" category includes tweets that are not about the institution or are about the institution but do not criticize it. Appendix 1 contains the codebook for the variables along with examples for each category. The more "Yes" and "Maybe" tweets there are, the more Trump is rhetorically targeting the institution. I compare the frequency of these tweets to the public opinion data to determine whether rhetorical targeting lines up with my expectation that Trump will rhetorically target popular threatening institutions until they become unpopular enough to target directly.

Next, I determine whether Trump directly targeted the institutions by examining news stories and scholarly sources. Direct targeting is when Trump used the powers of his office or

any informal or extralegal powers to take away some institutional power or to limit its ability to fulfil its Constitutional and legal obligations. This will help test both of my theoretical expectations. Firstly, it will either provide evidence to support or not support my assertion that Trump will only target high threat institutions. Secondly, when compared to public opinion data, it will test whether Trump rhetorically targets popular institutions and directly targets unpopular institutions. I then conclude with an assessment of the overall fit of my theory to the case of the United States.

Supreme Court

Threat Level

In the United States, there are several levels of courts, but I will focus on the Supreme Court because they are most directly involved in the operations of the executive branch, and therefore of Trump during his presidency. The Supreme Court's largest check on other branches of government is the power of judicial review, with which it can overturn laws and executive orders (Epstein et al 2021). This is unlike appellate courts, which can overturn lower court rulings and overturn state and local laws but have no direct power over federal laws. Local and state court systems similarly do not have a say in federal law.

Ruling on the constitutionality of executive orders is one way in which the Supreme Court checks the President (Thrower 2017). The Supreme Court has used this power at varying rates during various eras of US history, although overturning executive orders is rarer than overturning laws. Few executive orders have been overturned since Franklin Roosevelt's Presidency in which several were deemed unconstitutional by the Court (Dodds 2013) but there are several examples. One such example was in 1952, when the Supreme Court declared Truman's executive order regarding government seizure of means of production to be

unconstitutional in the Steel Seizure Case (Fletcher 2017). Many more pieces of legislation have been overturned (Epstein et al 2015, Table 6-7; Epstein et al 2021, Table 6-20). Throughout Trump's term, the Supreme Court held onto these powers, even if sometimes used sparingly, and thus is coded as having the ability to check the authoritarian populist.

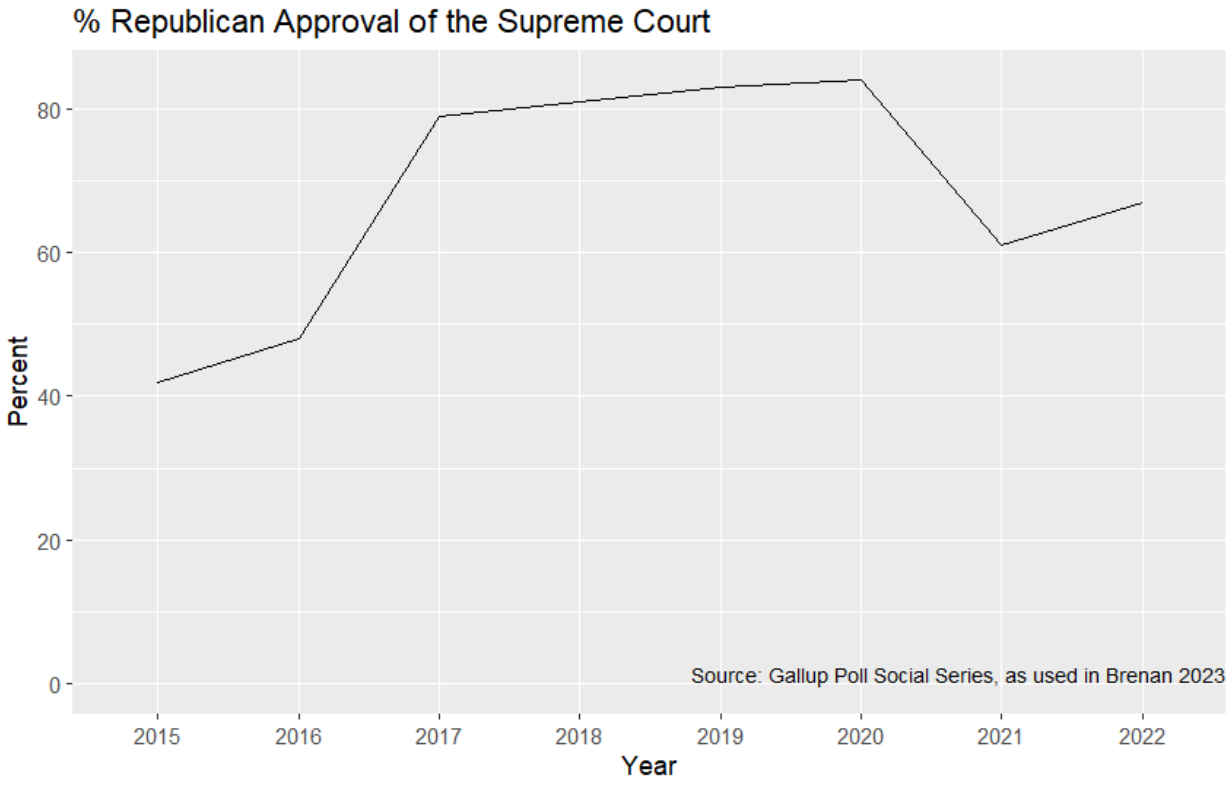
However, the partisan makeup of the Court from 2017-2020 helped to soften the threat of these powers being used because partisanship of justices is highly predictive in the case of the United States Supreme Court. We can often count on how each member of the Supreme Court will decide on an issue based on the partisanship of the president who appointed them (Devins and Baum 2017), meaning they are unlikely to rule against the president on any issue that might come before the Court.

When Trump became President, the Court consisted of only 8 members due to the Republican-led Senate refusing to schedule hearings for a nominee to replace late justice Scalia during the Obama administration. Four of those members, Roberts, Kennedy, Thomas, and Alito, were appointed by Republican presidents, and four of those members, Ginsburg, Breyer, Sotomayor, and Kagan, were appointed by Democratic presidents (Epstein et al 2021, Table 4-1). All these justices demonstrated ideological leanings and issue positions that mostly align with the party of the president who appointed them, so the Court was split down the middle ideologically (Epstein et al 2021, Table 6-1). However, because of the open seat, the winner of the 2016 election would be able to swing the Court in their party's ideological direction. Therefore, when Trump took office, it was clear the Court would become more Republican-friendly, which it did when Justice Gorsuch took his seat (Epstein et al 2021). This means that ideologically, the Court posed little threat to Trump because it would most likely rule in his favor on any policy issues.

The Court continued to be controlled by Republicans and further changed to their benefit after the replacement of Clinton-appointed Justice Kennedy with conservative Justice Kavanaugh in 2018 and the replacement of the late liberal Justice Ginsburg with the conservative Justice Coney Barrett in 2020 (Epstein et al 2021). Therefore, throughout Trump's term, the Supreme Court was controlled by conservatives, which was to his benefit. Because of this control, the Supreme Court is coded as a medium threat institution to Trump at the beginning of and throughout his Presidency.

Public Opinion

Figure 9:Republican Approval of the Supreme Court



According to data from Gallup over the period of 2015 to 2022, Republican trust in the Supreme Court was relatively high throughout the Trump Presidency when compared to other institutions. Trust stays high at about 80%, giving too little variation to test the theory. Therefore,

I am only able to test expectations of targeting based on institutional threat for the Supreme Court, not expectations based on public trust in the institution.

Expectations

1. Trump will sometimes target the Supreme Court, but less often than high threat institutions.

Direct Targeting

As predicted by my theory, there is little evidence that Trump participated in direct targeting toward the Supreme Court. However, he did attempt to subvert several lower court rulings. In 2017, Trump introduced the "Muslim Ban", an Executive Order barring people from several majority-Muslim countries along with refugees from entering the United States. Despite being struck down by Courts, Trump reissued an altered version of the Executive Order later in 2017, which was also struck down by an appeals court in 2018 (Gottlieb et al 2022).

Despite these actions, there was relatively little direct targeting of the Supreme Court during Trump's Presidency, suggesting that he did not see it as a high enough threat to target before other institutions. Due to the heavy Republican majority on the Court, Trump had little reason to expect they would strike down the laws he supported and Executive Orders he signed. The other consideration, public opinion of the Court, also suggests that Trump was not willing to target an institution that was more popular than the other branches of government, including Congress and the Presidency.

Rhetorical Targeting

Although public trust is not varied enough to test my theory, it is still important to note that rhetorical targeting of the Court did occur occasionally. Trump's style of rhetoric and his wide range of targets makes it somewhat complicated to ascertain whether he especially targeted

the institution of the Supreme Court. However, looking at his tweets, public statements, and speeches, a pattern emerges which indicates that he largely targets individual justices, but rarely targets the institution.

He repeatedly leveled personal attacks on liberal-leaning justices, especially the women on the Court. Trump repeatedly spoke about the unfairness of Justices Sotomayor and Ginsburg, and called for their recusal from cases (Brennan Center for Justice 2017). While most of the attacks were directed at individuals, some of his criticisms of these individuals led to some rhetorical targeting of the Court itself. For instance, in the February 2020 tweet calling for Sotomayor and Ginsburg's recusal from cases, he wrote "I only ask for fairness, especially when it comes to decisions made by the United States Supreme Court!" (Trump Twitter Archive). This statement hints at degrading trust in institutions but is first and foremost about the individual justices he is attacking.

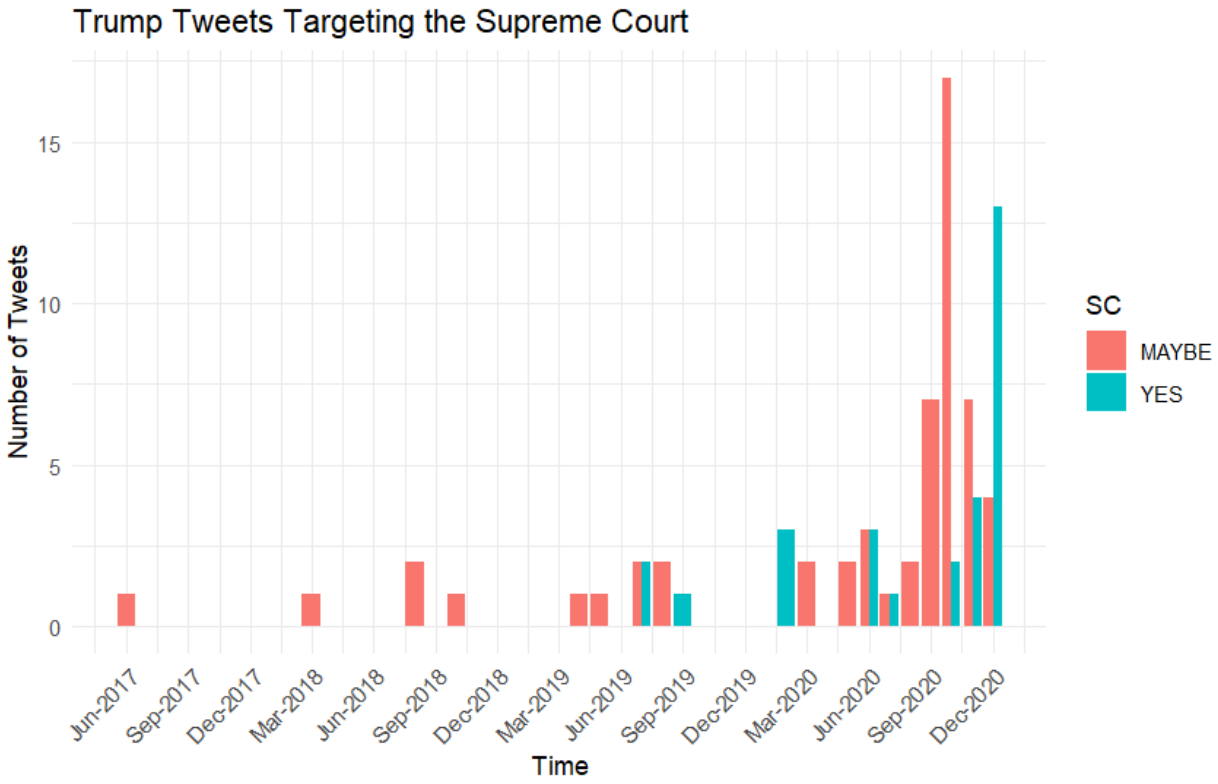
Further evidence of this is in other statements he makes expressing his confidence and trust in the Supreme Court. Many times, he praised the Supreme Court and looked to it as a legitimizing tool for himself (Barnes and Dawsey 2019). In April 2019, Trump tweeted:

> "The Mueller Report, despite being written by Angry Democrats and Trump Haters, and with unlimited money behind it ($35,000,000), didn't lay a glove on me. I DID NOTHING WRONG. If the partisan Dems ever tried to Impeach, I would first head to the U.S. Supreme Court." April 24th, 2019. (Trump Twitter Archive)

This tweet shows that Trump was supporting the Supreme Court and that he believed it was squarely in his corner despite the presence of liberal justices who he attacked individually. His attacks on these members were not based on trying to sow seeds of doubt in the institution as a whole, but rather in those individuals. By saying he would go to the Supreme Court if subjected to partisan attacks, he is insinuating that the Court is above partisan attacks and if anything, is

attempting to increase confidence and trust in it. His other tweets and statements from 2017 through early 2020 provide further evidence for this.

Figure 10: Trump Tweets Targeting the Supreme Court



As seen in Figure 10, Trump rhetorically targeted the Supreme Court far less often than he did the 116th Congress or the media. This suggests that he viewed the Supreme Court as extremely unlikely to rule against him. Although judicial review remained intact, the Republican supermajority on the Court made it likely that the Court would not use it against him in most cases.

Media

Threat Level

Determining the likelihood of the media and electoral system using their powers to check the authoritarian populist is less clear. Evidence from comparative media studies suggests that a friendly media source can go a long way in reinforcing the power of an authoritarian populist, especially when they are covering issues considered to be "owned" or specialized by the authoritarian's party (Thesen, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2017). In some cases, the political affiliations of the owners of the media organizations have an impact on what information the public receives. We can see this occurring in cases outside of the United States. For example, Prime Minister Orbán of Hungary took steps in 2013 and 2014 to consolidate media organizations under the leadership of oligarchs friendly to his party, Fidesz (Polyák 2019), which led to better coverage for Orbán.

However, there is an overall higher level of press freedom in the United States than in Hungary (Reporters Without Borders 2020), and a greater diversity in and availability of sources with different ideological or partisan leanings. That means that there are always channels and organizations that are allowed to and do criticize Trump, leaving the media as constant threats. This threat comes through their ability to agenda set, prime, and frame (Iyengar and Kinder 2010; Scheufele and Tewksbury 2006). Through these mechanisms, research has shown that media in the United States do have an impact on politician, issue, and Presidential evaluations, increasing the potential threat they may pose to a politician's reelection prospects (Iyengar and Kinder 2010; Brody 1991). Therefore, the media are a high threat throughout Trump's term.

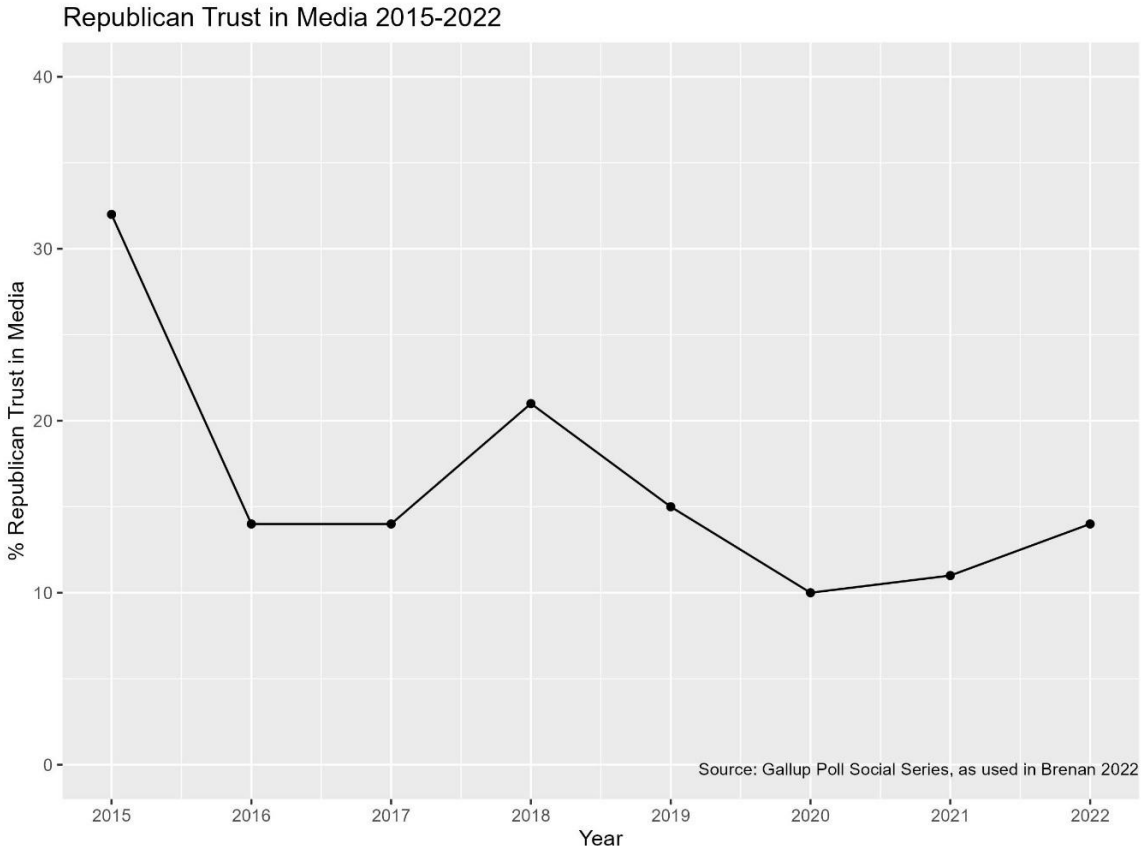
Public Opinion

Figure 11 shows the proportion of Republicans who have a great deal or fair amount of trust or confidence in mass media over time. The question was asked by Gallup once a year during the Trump Presidency. Although this means monthly changes in public trust in the media are not captured, we can still determine whether larger trends in public trust impact the proportion or frequency of tweets targeting the media.

While there is generally low Republican trust in the media throughout the Trump Presidency, there is a slight increase in trust from 14% in 2017 to 21% in 2018. The percentage who trusts the media then decreases through 2019, reaching a low of 10% in 2020. This means that the theory expects direct targeting will occur more in 2017, 2019, and 2020 because the risk of backlash is low and will occur less in 2018 because the risk of backlash is higher.

Rhetorical targeting is expected to change based on Republican trust in the media, as well. Because direct targeting would be riskier in 2018 due to higher trust in the media among Republicans and because the media were still a high threat to Trump, I would expect him to target them more rhetorically in 2018 than in other years.

Figure 11: Republican Trust in Media



Expectations

1. The media will be targeted throughout the Trump Presidency.
2. The media will be rhetorically targeted slightly more in 2018 than other years.
3. The media will be directly targeted slightly less in 2018 than in other years.

Direct Targeting

Much of Trump's rhetoric was incendiary, leading to actions taken against journalists by third parties not directly managed by Trump. As discussed in the previous section, Trump used his rhetoric to diminish trust in the media and journalists. These verbal attacks led some followers to violently attack and harass journalists and generally heightened tensions between law enforcement and journalists, especially during the protests for racial justice which occurred

in 2020 (Reporters Without Borders, 2021, United States). Reporters Without Borders reports that “during President Donald J. Trump’s final year in-office... nearly 400 journalists [were] assaulted and more than 130 detained” (Reporters Without Borders, 2021, United States). According to the press freedom index, the United States dropped from having the 41st most free press in the world in 2016 to a low of 48th most free press in 2019 (Reporters Without Borders, 2021, United States). This indicates that these incidents, along with the other changes enacted by Trump, contributed to a substantial decrease in press freedom during his term.

While there is a plethora of examples of Trump’s rhetorical targeting of the media, there are fewer examples of direct actions aimed at taking power from the media. Aside from declaring war on the media (“‘War with media’” 2017), posting an edited video of him beating up a reporter (“US - Trump launches” 2017), and calling the media the “enemy of the people” (“Trump deems” 2019), Trump also took more concrete actions to sideline reporters and repress stories. In January of 2018, Breitbart personality and former White House Chief Strategist, Steven Bannon, was set to publish a book about his time in the White House. Trump publicly called for publication of the book to be cancelled and for charges to be brought against Bannon (“Trump seeks” 2018).

Trump showed a willingness to punish other journalists, as well. In December 2018, he also withdrew CNN reporter Jim Acosta’s White House Press Pass in retaliation for Acosta’s line of questioning in a press briefing about what Trump characterized as a “caravan” of migrants (“White House suspends” 2018). CNN filed a lawsuit against the White House for infringing on Acosta’s First Amendment right to free speech and his right to due process, and a judge ordered for his pass to be temporarily reinstated based on the due process claim. Despite the White House indicating they would revoke the pass again, they ended up not doing so and CNN

dropped the lawsuit ("White House restores" 2018). The White House also implemented a new rule restricting follow-up questions from reporters.

Along with these actions, Trump also consistently called for the firing of journalists. In September 2020, Trump called on Fox News in a tweet to fire journalist Jennifer Griffin who reported about a trip Trump was supposed to take to the US military cemetery in France but was cancelled ("Trump calls on Fox" 2020). While she was not fired, the attempt to silence journalists was part of a larger pattern of actions against the media.

Contrary to expectations, the media were directly targeted, but not as much as the theory would suggest for a high threat institution. Rather, Trump used rhetoric more often to reduce trust in the media. This could indicate that Trump was simply unable to punish channels and journalists as much as he wanted to. As in the case of Acosta's press pass, legal challenges and elite pressure caused Trump's direct actions to be largely ineffective. This could indicate that Trump was using negative rhetoric as the next best option for him to achieve his goals.

Based on this analysis, I find that there was a great deal of targeting of the media throughout Trump's term, generally, which supports the first expectation. However, direct targeting is less common than would be expected throughout the term.

Rhetorical Targeting

As demonstrated in Figure 12, Trump constantly rhetorically targeted the media throughout his Presidency. However, there were many more tweets targeting the media in 2019 and 2020 than there were in 2017 and 2018, with the most active times for targeting coming in August-September 2019, May-June 2020, and October-November 2020. However, when we look at the proportion of tweets targeting the media per month to the total number of tweets per

month, we see that Trump sent roughly the same proportion of tweets targeting the media each month throughout his presidency (see Figure 13).

Both counts of tweets and proportion of tweets rhetorically targeting the media do not follow the expected trend. Rhetorical targeting of the media as a count of tweets suggests that rhetorical targeting of the media increases during times of scandal for the Trump administration. For example, the number of tweets targeting the media was high in May and June of 2020, which is when Trump was being scrutinized heavily for his handling of COVID-19. This is also true of the months leading up to the election in November 2020.

Figure 13, which shows the proportion of tweets targeting the media per month, suggests a different explanation. While there are peaks and valleys some months, there is not a clear pattern. This might mean that rhetorical targeting is affected more by institutional threat than by public opinion. However, more fine-grained data is needed to determine whether this is the case. It is also possible that public opinion does not change enough during this time period to create a change in rhetorical targeting.

Figure 12: Trump Tweets Targeting the Media

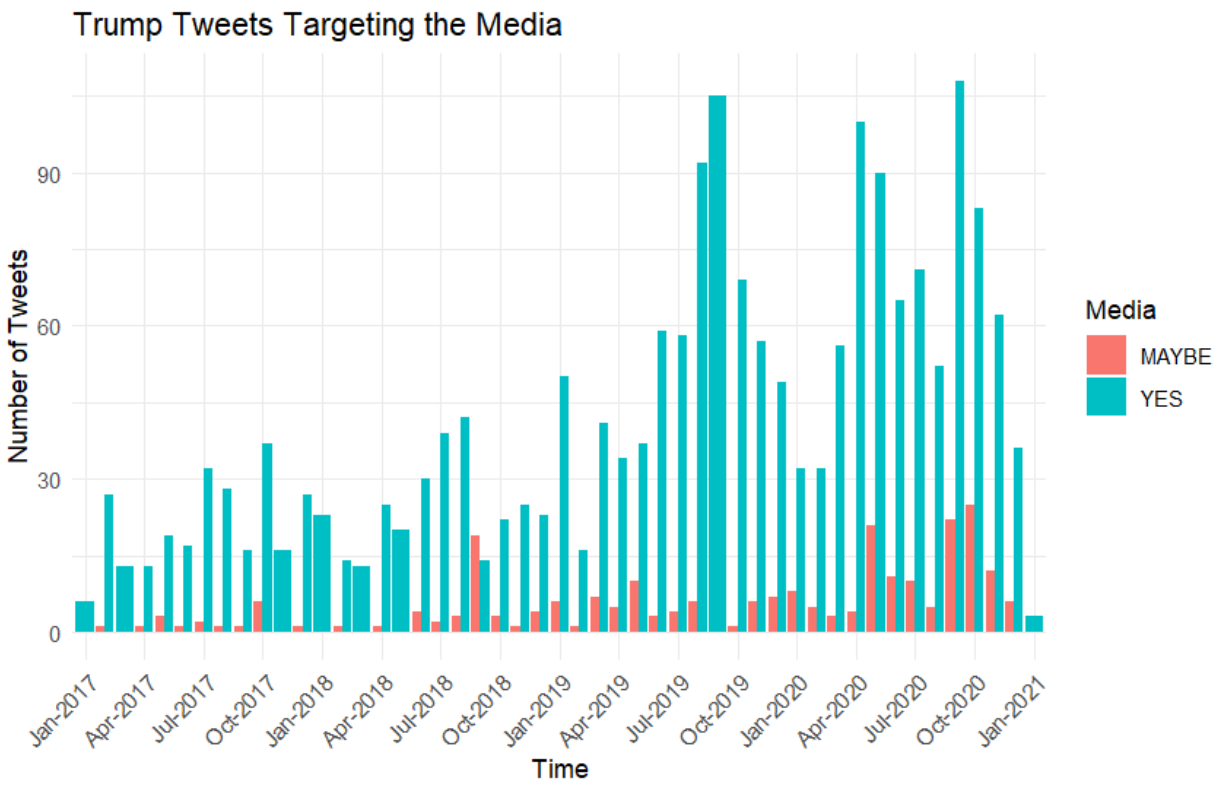
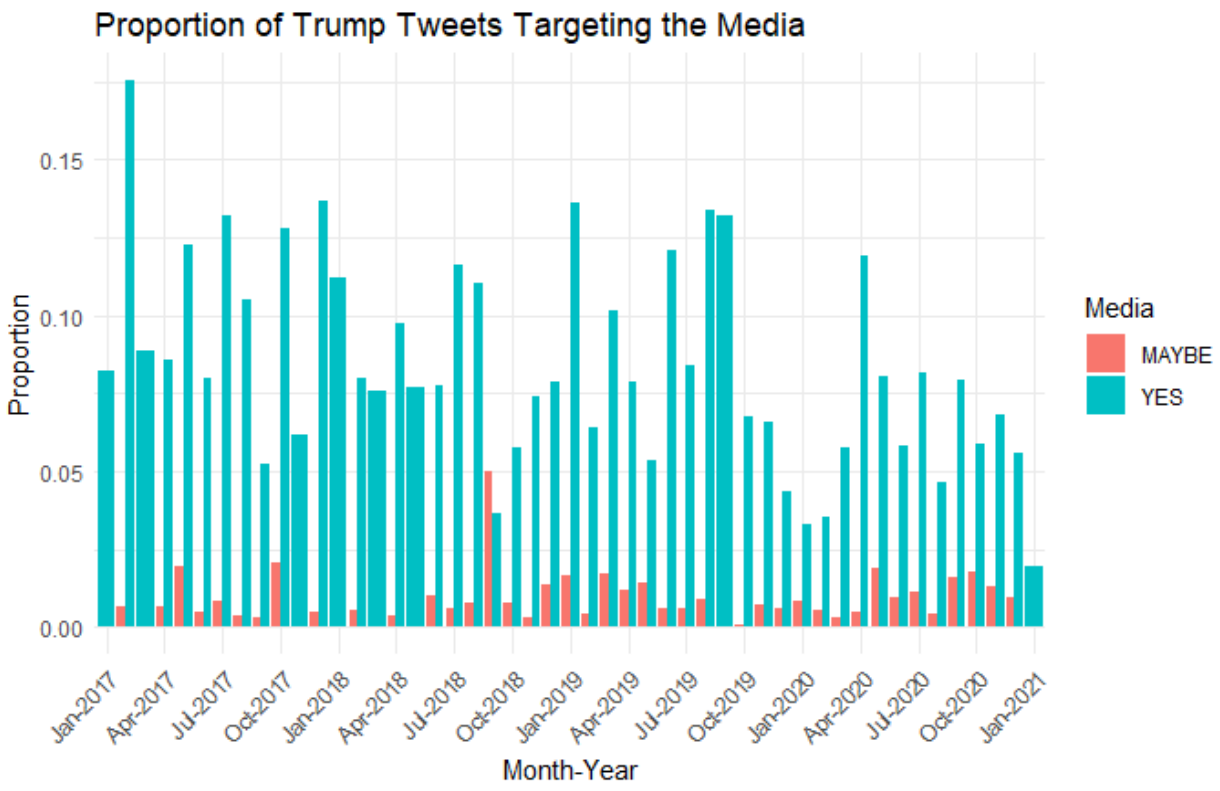


Figure 13: Proportion Trump Tweets Targeting the Media



Electoral Administration

Threat Level

The electoral administration is a potential threat because it could lead to the authoritarian populist not being reelected. The key, though, is how likely it is to do that, which I assess based on how friendly the electoral rules are to the authoritarian populist. Some electoral rules are helpful for authoritarian populists in their bid for reelection. For instance, in Hungary, the electoral rules in place before 2010 were partly majoritarian based and partly proportional representation based. The majoritarian rules benefited Orbán in 2010 because of the geographical dispersion of his supporters, and in order to boost his chances of reelection, he made the electoral system even more majoritarian. This led to a strong showing for Fidesz in 2014, allowing the party to maintain its status of party in government despite waning public support (Biró et al

2012; Ilonszki and Várnagy 2016; Bogaards 2018; Kovalcsik et al 2019). From this, it is clear that some electoral administration are more beneficial to authoritarian populists than others, and that the rules that govern elections should be considered when determining threat level based on potential benefit to the reelection efforts of the authoritarian populist.

Electoral administrations are built on a complex set of rules that interact with each other. While all elections are inherently threatening for an authoritarian populist because they could lead to their ousting, there are some that make it easier for authoritarian populists to be elected. One example is the case of the electoral system in Hungary and how it was changed to benefit the authoritarian populist in charge, Orbán. Because Hungary has a Parliament, Orbán was able to become Prime Minister once his party won a large majority leading into 2010. In 2013, Orbán was able to change the electoral rules to make them more majoritarian. According to some scholars, this did help him stay in office despite his decreasing popularity (Biró et al 2012; Kovalcsik et al 2019). From this, we know that electoral rules have an impact on whether an authoritarian populist can achieve their electoral goals.

There are several electoral institutions that the literature has identified as helpful for the election of authoritarian populists. Firstly, scholars have found that it has been easier for authoritarian populists to come into office in parliamentary systems with proportional representation (Broz, Frieden, and Weymouth 2021) because these systems are friendlier to the emergence of more than two parties, meaning populist parties can get their foot in the door in the legislature and potentially be part of governing coalitions. Later, they can build their own power relative to other coalition partners and can get to the point where they have the power to put someone from their own party into the Prime Minister's chair. This would seem to indicate that a majoritarian, two-party system like that in the United States would not lend itself to the election

of someone like Trump and would therefore be a threat to him. Yet, he did get elected in such a system, and scholars have identified at least two other factors that actually make the US electoral administration more hospitable to authoritarian populists, which are the electoral college and rules surrounding access to voting.

The electoral college was purposefully created to put a layer of insulation between the public and the President. In the case of Trump, it was clear from his first election in 2016 that he benefitted greatly from this electoral rule. Majoritarian rules tend to help authoritarian populists get into office, and the electoral college is not an exception. Without the aid of the electoral college, he would not have been President, as he received nearly 3 million fewer votes than his opponent but because of the way the electoral college gives enhanced voting power to smaller states, many of which are Republican leaning or Republican controlled, he was able to win by a substantial number of electoral college votes. The electoral college as an institution clearly benefitted Trump and overall made it more difficult for opponents to beat him.

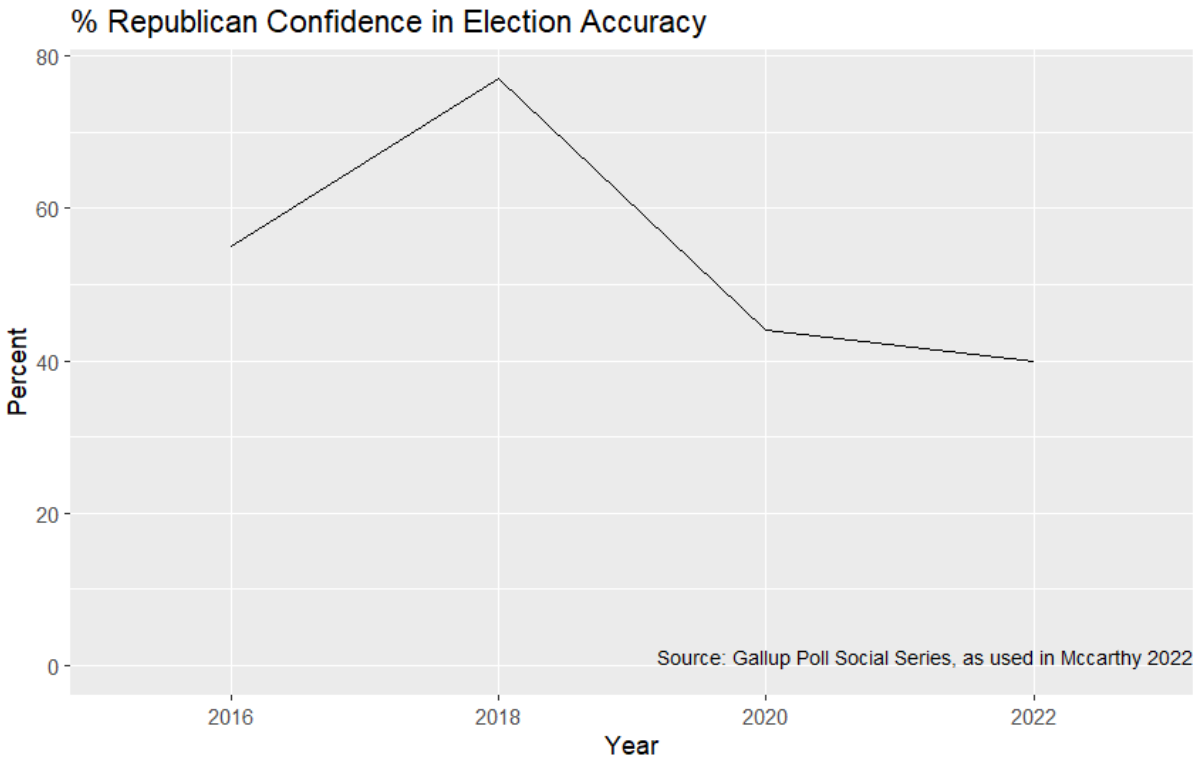
Electoral rules that affect who can vote also made the electoral administration in 2016 and through most of Trump's term friendlier to him and less of a threat. Each state is in charge of administering its own elections, so not all the rules I discuss here apply everywhere, but still can have an effect on the outcome of presidential elections. The rules that make it harder to vote often have the greatest effect on marginalized communities, which tend to vote for Democrats. Therefore, although an election did have the potential to oust Trump, there were several aspects of the electoral administration that favor Republicans, making it a medium threat institution. Thus, I expect it should be targeted less than high threat institutions. However, I also expect that as the election becomes closer, the threat of being ousted will become a short-term rather than

long-term, and in response, Trump will target it more as the 2020 Presidential election gets closer.

Public Opinion

Consistent data about trust in electoral administrations generally are difficult to find across years, but Gallup has asked a similar question in all years needed for this analysis. Rather than asking for trust or confidence in the electoral administration generally, they ask about confidence in the accuracy of the results. This is also limited because the question is only asked during Presidential and Congressional election years. Figure 14 demonstrates the percent of Republicans who are very or somewhat confident their votes will be counted from 2015 to 2022. Confidence increases in 2018, so according to the theory, Trump should have targeted the electoral system more rhetorically in 2018 than in other years, and less directly than in other years.

Figure 14: Percent Republican Confidence in Election Accuracy



Expectations

1. The electoral administration will be sometimes targeted throughout the Trump Presidency, but less so than high threat institutions.
2. Rhetorical targeting will be greater in 2018 than in other years.
3. Direct targeting will be less in 2018 than in other years.

Direct Targeting

Similar to rhetorical targeting, Trump did not directly target the electoral administration much in 2017 or 2018. In 2019 and 2020, Trump started taking concrete action to change the voting system, though. In late 2019, journalists reported that Trump called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to discuss potentially investigating Trump's rival for President, Joe Biden, and Joe Biden's family (Rascoe 2019). According to individuals on the call, Trump offered continued military assistance to Ukraine in exchange for investigating the Bidens (Rascoe 2019) (although Trump and others refute this characterization). This kind of pressure weakens electoral institutions both in terms of perceived legitimacy and in actual power to oust the executive. By attempting to use a foreign power to investigate a political opponent in the run-up to a Presidential election, Trump called into question the independence and reliability of the electoral administration in the US. Democrats in the House of Representatives (along with several Republicans) impeached Trump for this effort, but he was acquitted by the Republican-majority Senate ("Trump tried" 2020).

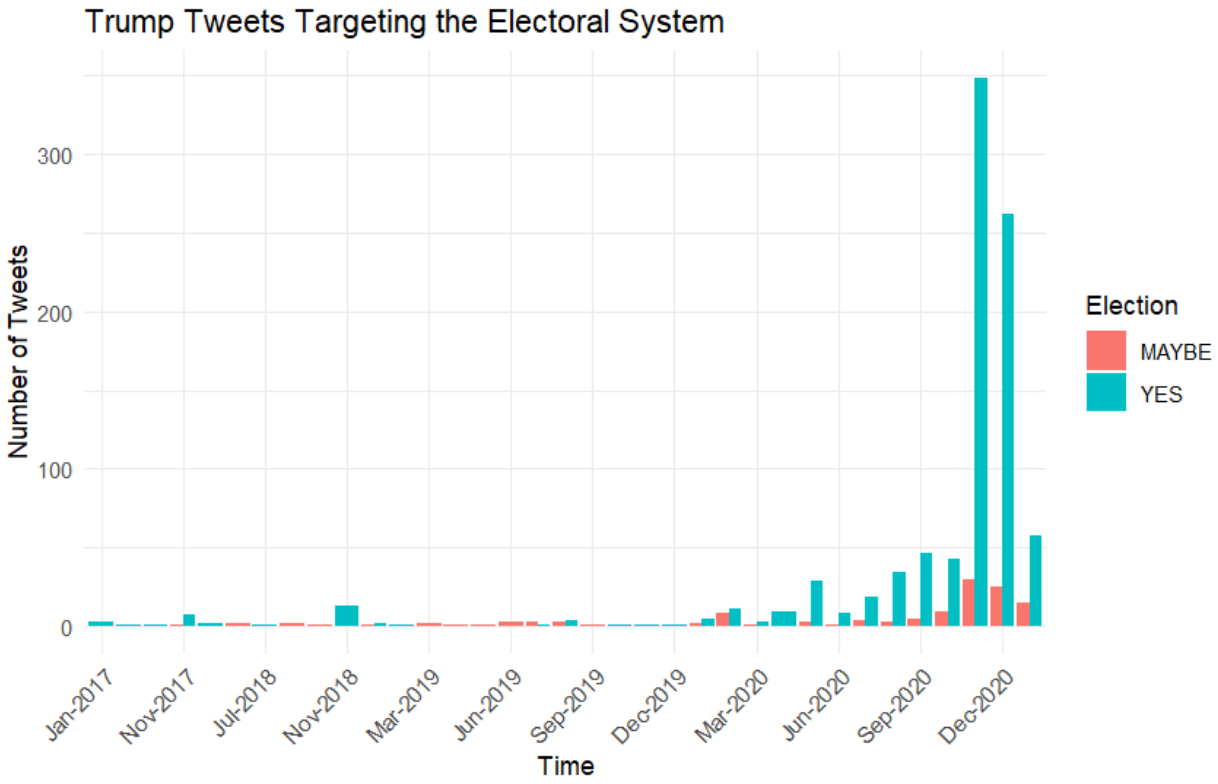
The impeachment trial did not dissuade Trump from further targeting the electoral administration in 2020. Trump communicated in September and October that he would not commit to handing over power if he lost the election, a clear attack on the institution's checks on the executive that suggests Trump does not think the electoral administration should have a

check on his power ("Trump refuses" 2020). After the election, Trump continued refusing to acknowledge that he lost, and spread disinformation about the election. Beyond that rhetoric, he again tried to influence another political figure to help him achieve his goals, this time the Secretary of State of the state of Georgia, Brad Raffensperger. In a phone call, Trump pressured Raffensperger to "find" him the votes he needed to win the state (Shear and Saul 2021). He went on to say, "You know what they did and you're not reporting it…You know, that's a criminal — that's a criminal offense. And you know, you can't let that happen. That's a big risk to you and to Ryan, your lawyer. That's a big risk." (as cited in Shear and Saul 2021). Asking to find the votes he needed and hinting at legal action against Raffensperger and his lawyer directly undermined the electoral system's independence and ability to check the President.

Even further, Trump instructed his followers to prepare to physically push back against a future "illegitimate" government. This culminated in the attack on the Capitol on January 6th, 2021. Acting on Trump's orders, his supporters stormed the Capitol in an attempt to stop the certification of the election, which is an obvious direct attack on the electoral administration and on democracy generally. Although the election was eventually certified, there was a physical attempt to not allow the electoral administration or Congress to perform as intended. This trajectory of targeting fits expectations. Although some state governments instituted laws making it more difficult to vote during the 2018 Midterm election, Trump himself did not take many direct actions against it until the threat was imminent. Therefore, direct targeting of the electoral administration does not fit expectations because the immediacy of an election that could oust him in 2020 seems to matter more for Trump's decision-making. This suggests that perhaps Trump perceived the electoral administration as a higher threat as the election approached. In future

projects, timing of elections should be taken into consideration while studying institutional threat.

Figure 15: Trump Tweets Targeting the Electoral System



Rhetorical Targeting

Trump's rhetorical targeting of the electoral administration was minimal in the first three years of his Presidency, with a slight increase in November of 2018 during the midterm elections (see Figure 15). The increase did not continue, though, and rhetorical targeting remained limited until early 2020. Rhetorical targeting then escalated in the latter half of 2020, peaking in October to December. This coincides with the timing of the election in early November and the period between the election and President Joe Biden's inauguration.

This does not fit expectations of rhetorical targeting based on public confidence in the accuracy of the elections. As seen in Figure 14, Republican confidence in the electoral accuracy

was highest in 2018, which, according to the theory, would suggest that Trump should have rhetorically targeted it more in 2018. However, that is not the case. Rather, Trump seems to have been reacting to short-term instead of long-term threats. Not until the election was imminent and it looked like Trump could lose did he attack the electoral administration in earnest. This indicates either a misunderstanding on his part earlier on in his Presidency about the chances of the electoral system being able to help oust him, or a choice to target other, more immediate threats first while leaving the electoral administration until the threat was so obvious it could not be ignored. Either way, Trump's rhetorical targeting demonstrates that he was not being responsive to his voters' perceptions of elections, but was responding to his own perception of threat, which increased as the election got closer.

Legislature

Threat Level

As stated in my theory, to be a high threat, an institution must be both imbued with checks and balances that can get in the way of the authoritarian populist's goals and the people controlling the institution must be likely to use those checks and balances. The dual chamber model complicates this because each chamber has different powers over the President and, as is often the case, the two chambers can be controlled by different parties (Bolton and Thrower 2021). Therefore, I discuss each chamber separately. I also assess threat level separately for each Congressional term because the majority party changes from the 115th Congress (2017-2019) to the 116th Congress (2019-2021).

To determine Congress' likelihood of using checks on the President, I examine its partisan makeup. Even before Trump, the trends surrounding partisanship support the idea that party members do not turn against each other. Before the Trump administration, Democrats in

Congress were often unified and in support of former President Obama, their co-partisan, while members of the Republican party in Congress were often unified against Obama. Voting along party lines has always been prominent in Congress but has been increasing over the last century (Mayhew 1966). Shipan (2008) finds that over time, Senators' votes on judicial nominations are increasingly based on partisanship. Even considering changes in agenda setting over the years (Crespin, Rohde, and Vander Wielen 2013; Stecker 2015), we can, for the most part, expect members of Congress to vote with their party (Theriault 2008; Pearson 2015). Therefore, partisan control is a good way to measure how likely it is that Congress uses its powers to check Trump.

The House of Representatives

The House has several powers to check the President, some which were written into the Constitution and some which were later codified into law. Some of the checks explicitly given to the House over the executive are the ability to impeach the President, control over the budget (which impacts spending and allocation in the executive branch), the veto override, and the power to investigate and issue subpoenas (U. S. Const. art. I). The House has regularly exercised most of these powers in recent decades, meaning they had the legislative capacity necessary to curtail executive overreach during both Congresses within Trump's term (Bolton and Thrower 2021).

The next step is determining who controlled the House during the Trump administration. During the 115th Congress, Republicans controlled the House ("Party Divisions", *History, Art & Archives, United States House of Representatives*). Because party loyalty is strong in the United States, we can assume that most House Republicans are unlikely to use their powers against their co-partisan in the executive. Loyalty to the party leader is due to partisan and ideological

polarization, which scholars confirm has increased over time (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006; Zhang et al. 2008; Neal 2020). This is evidence that members of Congress will, most of the time, behave consistently with their party. Therefore, the 115th House was a medium threat institution because it had power to check the President, but it was controlled by Republicans who were unlikely to stray from their party to use that power. However, the threat level changed in 2019 when the Democrats took over the majority in the 116th House ("Party Divisions", *History, Art & Archives, United States House of Representatives*). Because the House had the ability to check the President and the Democrats were in control, it became a high threat institution in 2019.

The Senate

Like the House, the Senate has powers over the executive that have been codified by the Constitution and subsequent laws. The Senate is in control of the removal part of the impeachment process, shares investigative responsibilities with the House, is part of the veto override process, ratifies treaties, and confirms Presidential appointments. Although some of these powers are used more than others, this list shows that the combined House and Senate have many checks on the executive branch, and according to some scholars, these checks make the US Congress one of the most powerful legislative institutions among democracies (Lieberman et al 2019, 473). Given this, it is clear that the Senate has the ability to get in the way of some presidential actions.

The makeup of the Senate has the potential to change with every election cycle, though not every member of the Senate is up for reelection every election year. From 2017 to 2019, Republicans held a majority with 51 seats, and this majority grew to 53 seats in the 2019 to 2021 term ("Party Division", *United States Senate*). This means that in both time periods under

investigation, Republicans had nearly full control over the Senate. One caveat is that cloture votes to end a filibuster take 60 votes, so Democrats could exert some control by stopping Trump-friendly policies from coming to a final vote. Even though the Senate does have powers that can be exercised with a simple majority, it was under Republican control and thus it is unlikely they would use their powers to hinder Trump's political agenda.

Combined House and Senate

When both chambers are considered together, the 115th Congress presented a medium threat to Trump. Although both chambers have powers to check the President, both were also controlled by the Republican party and therefore they were not likely to use those powers. The case of the 116th Congress is more complicated due to both chambers having power to check the President, but with the Senate being controlled by Republicans and the House by Democrats. Although some of the House's powers to check the President are partially dependent on the Senate, not all of them are. Some, including the power of oversight and investigation, are not dependent on the Senate and can be exercised by the House alone. Therefore, I consider the 116th Congress to be a high threat institution because at least some its powers are likely to be used to check the President.

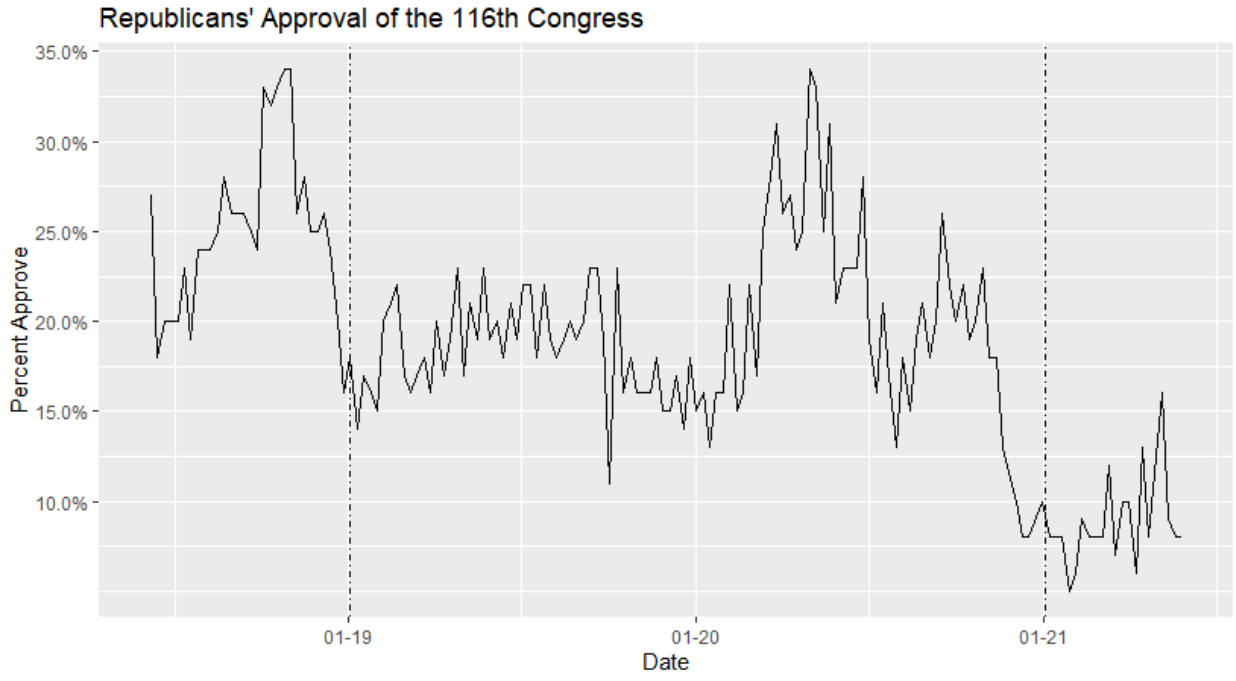
Public Opinion

The 115th Congress was a medium threat to Trump, so I would expect relatively little targeting (compared to the 116th Congress) regardless of public opinion. Thus, I focus on the public opinion of the 116th Congress, and more specifically Republicans opinion because that is what my theory predicts should matter. Figure 16 shows Republican's approval of the 116th Congress. At the beginning of the session, which began on January 3rd, 2019, and for about the first year of the session, the approval rating hovered between fifteen and twenty-three percent.

Because of this low approval rating, I would expect Trump to both rhetorically and directly target Congress during that time.

I expect this to change slightly around March of 2020 because there is an increase in Republican approval of Congress to about twenty-five percent, with a high of thirty-four percent at the end of April 2020. Because Congress still had the ability to check Trump during this time, I expect that he continued to want to diminish its power, but because approval had slightly increased, we should see more rhetorical targeting of Congress from around March to October 2020, and little to no direct targeting. After October 2020, approval decreased to the fifteen to twenty-five percent range again and dropped further by the end of session. When approval dropped at the end of the session is when I expect there to be the most direct targeting of Congress because Trump would lose little support from the Republican base for doing so. Due to the frequency of Gallup's survey, I am able to identify month-to-month changes in public opinion and compare it to the number of targeting tweets Trump posted during the same month.

Figure 16: Republican Approval of the 116th Congress



Expectations

1. The 115th Congress will be rarely targeted either rhetorically or directly.
2. The 116th Congress will be rhetorically targeted the most between March and October 2020, coinciding with an increase in Republican approval of Congress.
3. The 116th Congress will be targeted directly most between January 2019 and March 2020. It will also be directly targeted between November 2020 and January 2021.

Direct Targeting

To track Trump's direct targeting of Congress, I rely most on France 24's archive and supplementary material from other sources and the Democratic Erosion Event Dataset (DEED) for two reasons. One is availability of data. France 24 has an archive specifically dedicated to all stories about Trump published by the organization and its American partners, the AP, AFP, and Reuters, while many other sources only have selections of stories written about Trump. The second reason I use this source is that it is a non-U.S. based news organization, which helps lessen the impact of partisan bias in which stories were published. First, I use headlines to identify stories about Trump's relationship with Congress. Then, I read the articles to find any instances of Trump working to directly take away the power of the institution or to impede its ability to do its job. Within each story, I search for any actions taken by Trump that have a direct impact on the functioning of Congress. This excludes any instances of verbal altercations between him and members of Congress because that would be considered rhetorical and while it has the potential to distract from the work Congress is doing, it does not actually stop it from conducting its business. In addition, actions taken that fall within his rights as President do not count as direct targeting. For example, Trump's refusal to sign budget deals, which prolonged a

government shutdown, is not considered to be direct targeting because he was exercising his Constitutional checks on the legislative branch ("Trump says US government" 2018).

On the other hand, actions that directly interfere with Congress' duties or are outside of the President's Constitutionally given powers are considered direct targeting. This includes ordering employees to ignore subpoenas because it directly interferes with Congress' ability to investigate, which is one of its checks on the President ("Trump bars key witness" 2019). I also cross reference these events with those listed in the Democratic Erosion Event Dataset. While not all direct targeting events I list are in this dataset due to the uniqueness of the country systems being compared and the uniqueness of some backsliding events, the DEED provides a good starting point for evaluating the most major instances of backsliding. The France 24 archive and other academic sources fill in some of the more specific instances that are not able to be captured by the DEED.

115th Congress

There are few clear examples of Trump directly targeting the 115th Congress. In early 2017, Congress began to investigate ties between Trump's 2016 campaign and Russian actors. During this time, Trump fired investigators and encouraged his allies in Congress to disrupt the investigation ("Trump announces shock firing" 2017; Kaufman and Haggard 2018). One of Congress' responsibilities is oversight over the executive branch, and through his actions, Trump weakened Congress' abilities to check the executive. Relatedly, in June 2017, Trump ordered White House Counsel, Don McGahn, to tell the Attorney General to fire Special Counsel Mueller (Crowther 2019). These limits on Congressional oversight are also recognized by Varieties of Democracy (Lührmann et al 2018, p. 27-28, 31) as having an impact on US democracy. However, it is important to note that even with this obstruction, Congress was able to

carry on with the investigation, indicating that Trump's targeting was not to a level sufficient to take Congress' investigative power away (Kaufman and Haggard 2018). Overall, the evidence shows support for my expectation that little direct targeting of the 115th Congress would occur.

116th Congress

As expected, direct targeting did occur during the 116th Congress, and most targeting also occurred during the time frame predicted (January 2019 to March 2020 and November 2020 to January 2021). Even before the 116th Congress was seated, Trump vowed to block the House's democratic majority from investigating him ("Trump reaches out" 2018). Once seated, Trump also threatened to go around Congress in the budget process by using emergency powers to fund his border wall ("At Mexican border" 2019).

Trump continued his attempts to thwart Congress' investigations when the Mueller report was released in late April 2019, which outlined Special Counsel Robert Mueller's findings following an investigation into potential ties between Russia and the Trump 2016 campaign. Trump initially used his power to block the release of the report, meaning members of Congress did not have access to it ("House panel votes" 2019; "US Senate panel subpoenas" 2019).

Also in May 2019, Trump ordered several people and organizations to ignore subpoenas from Congress, including the Treasury Secretary and IRS Commissioner, who received subpoenas from the House Ways and Means Committee ("US House committee chairman" 2019), and White House Counsel Don McGahn, who received a subpoena from the House Judiciary Committee ("Trump tells ex-White House" 2019). Taken together, all these incidents indicate that Trump was attempting to interfere with the power of Congressional oversight by withholding information necessary for the committees to carry out their investigations.

Another round of direct targeting began in September 2019 after a complaint was filed that accused Trump of threatening to withhold aid to Ukraine if its leaders did not investigate Joe and Hunter Biden for corruption. Some legal experts argue that the act of withholding aid to Ukraine was a violation of the checks and balances between Congress and the executive ("US Senators sworn" 2020). Congress has the power to pass the budget, and when its members created and voted "Yes" on the budget, it included aid money to Ukraine. By holding up that aid, Trump was taking power from Congress and purposefully weakening it. There is also evidence that Trump was attempting to hide evidence of the call early on to keep others, including Congress, from being able to pass judgement on it ("Trump impeachment inquiry" 2019).

When investigations into the interaction between Trump and Ukraine began in Congress in September 2019, Trump continued with the strategy used during the investigations into Russia ties, ignoring requests and subpoenas from Congressional committees and ordering others to do the same ("Calls for impeachment" 2019). Further, Secretary Pompeo gave orders to several U.S. officials who were scheduled to testify in front of Congress that they should not participate. This is further indication that there was an effort to keep people from cooperating with Congress and that Congress' power of oversight was being directly challenged ("Trump calls Ukraine probe a 'coup'" 2019). Soon after, Trump barred US Ambassador to the European Union, Gordon Sondland, from testifying in front of Congress. Sondland had agreed to testify without a subpoena, but Trump overrode that decision. Meanwhile, the State Department was withholding materials relating to Sondland's communications with Ukrainians which had been subpoenaed by Congress. Ultimately, the White House Counsel sent a letter to Congressional leaders saying Trump and the White House will not cooperate in any way going forward ("Trump bars key witness" 2019).

At the same time, though unrelated to the impeachment inquiry, Trump sought to block other Congressional investigations, including one which subpoenaed Deutsche Bank, at which Trump was a client ("Judge orders release" 2019).

The last instance of direct targeting that occurred during the expected time frame was the attempt to stop Congress' certification of the 2020 Presidential election results. At a rally on January 6, 2021, Trump encouraged his supporters to use force to stop the processions in Congress. Many took his words as an order and violently seized the US Capitol building ("As it happened" 2021). Although some argue that Trump was not ordering his supporters to use violence, his actions and words were still the direct catalyst for the action against Congress, and thus the attack on the Capitol is viewed as direct targeting by Trump.

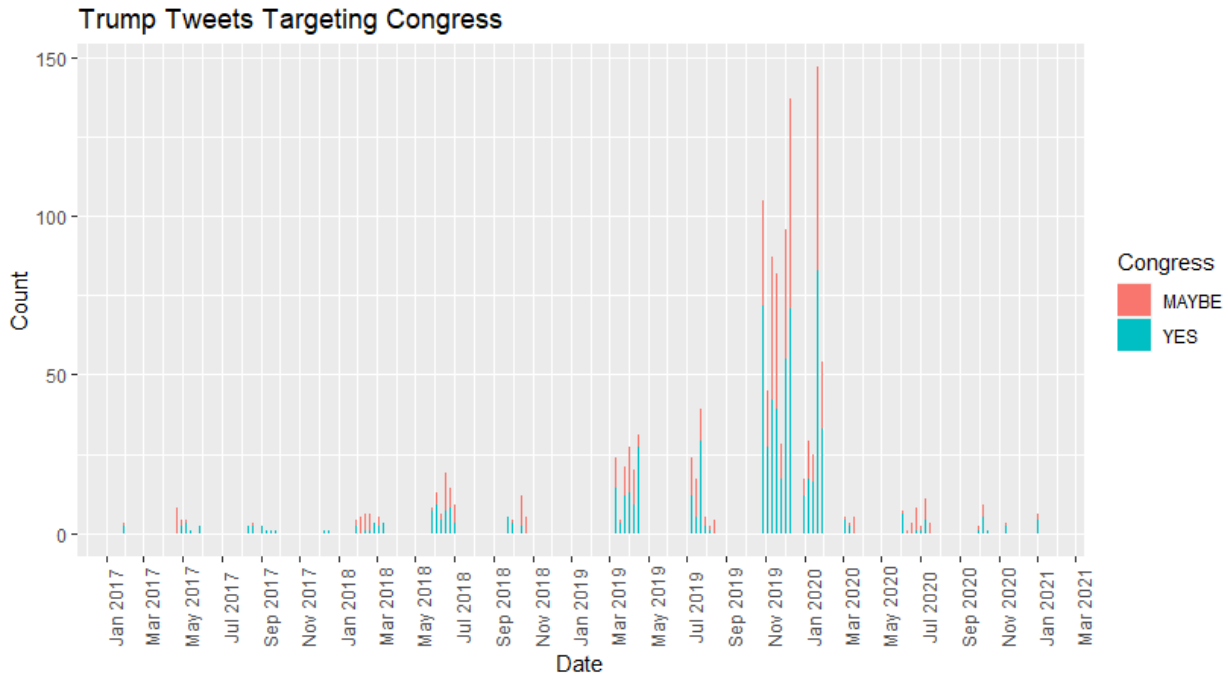
All the instances of direct targeting detailed above occurred during the expected time period, but there is one instance of direct targeting that occurred in May 2020, a time when I expected there to be no targeting due to high Congressional approval ratings. This was when Anthony Fauci, a top medical official, was scheduled to testify in front of Congress about the Trump administration's COVID-19 response, but Trump blocked him from testifying ("White House blocks" 2020). Similar to the cases of Trump blocking witnesses during the Russia and Ukraine investigations, this kept Congress from gathering the information required to carry out an investigation into the U.S. government's response to COVID-19. Although this action occurred outside of the expected time frame, the rest of the evidence supports my theory that direct action will happen when public opinion of the institution is low. Overall, there is mixed support for my three expectations.

Rhetorical Targeting

Trump's rhetorical targeting of Congress through tweets is displayed in Figure 17. Through this analysis, I find support for my first expectation that there will be little to no rhetorical targeting of the 115th Congress. From January 2017 to January 2019, there are several pockets of increased tweets targeting Congress, but they are relatively small compared to later periods of time.

There is less support for my second expectation. I predicted that most rhetorical targeting should occur between March and October 2020. The data show, however, that most of the tweets targeting Congress were posted in March through April 2019, in July 2019, and between November 2019 and February 2020. These all line up with times Congress exercised its power to check the President. March 2019 tweets coincided with the release of the Mueller report, July 2019 tweets coincided with Mueller's (along with other's) testimony in front of Congress, and November 2019 through February 2020 tweets coincided with the impeachment investigation into Trump's interaction with Ukraine's President Zelenskyy.

Figure 17: Trump Tweets Targeting Congress



These results indicate that Trump rhetorically targeted Congress when its powers were actively being used rather than as a way to lessen public trust in the institution. His rhetorical targeting often occurred when Republicans already had a negative opinion of Congress. For example, in the months leading up to March 2020, Republicans approval of Congress hovered around the same level (15-25%) as it was during most of 2019. That means that Republicans already disapproved of Congress when Trump increased his rhetorical targeting of it in March 2020.

My theory predicted that an institution would be rhetorically targeted if it was both a threat and popular. The purpose of that would be to make it unpopular so it could be targeted directly later on without backlash from supporters. However, it turns out that Trump's rhetorical targeting was based more on short-term assessments of threat without as much consideration for public opinion. Instead, the data suggest Trump rhetorically targets Congress when it is an immediate threat to his position, not when it is most popular among supporters. While this does

not provide support for my theory, it does give us insight into how this populist used his rhetoric. Instead of using it to set up long-term goals for taking its power, he used it as a way to achieve short-term goals, such as remaining in power while his position was under immediate threat and discrediting the institution to increase his own approval among Republicans.

Discussion and Conclusion

Through analysis of tweets to track rhetorical targeting and news stories to track direct targeting, I have found some tentative support for my predictions based on institutional threat. I find that in line with my theory, there was very little rhetorical or direct targeting of the 115th Congress because it was a low threat institution. There were no direct actions against the 115th Congress and far less rhetorical targeting of the 115th Congress than of the 116th Congress, which was a medium threat and was targeted directly, as well. I similarly find that Trump rarely targeted the judiciary, a medium threat, and frequently targeted the media, a high threat institution. Finally, he does not consistently rhetorically or directly attack the electoral administration, a medium threat, but does ramp up direct and rhetorical attacks during the 2020 election. The patterns of direct targeting for Congress, the Supreme Court, and the media fit expectations based on institutional threat, but direct targeting of the electoral administration does not. This suggests that Trump either did not view it as a threat until the election was imminent, or he was aware of the threat, but was focusing on targeting other institutions.

I also find mixed support for my prediction that rhetorical targeting should be higher when public opinion of the institution is higher. While most of the targeting rhetoric toward Congress occurred during the expected time frame, the tweet distribution suggests that rhetorical targeting more specifically coincides with Congress' active use of its powers to check the executive. He rhetorically targets Congress when it is using powers that could have negative

consequences for him. The highest concentration of tweets targeting Congress, for example, came in March 2019, July 2019, and November 2019 through January 2020. During those time periods, Congress conducted major investigations into Trump's behavior that could have led to his impeachment and potential removal from office. Similarly, rhetorical targeting of the electoral system occurred mostly when the system had a high short-term likelihood of ousting Trump in 2020. Only when the possibility of him not winning the election became pressing did he focus his attention on rhetorically targeting the institution.

The distribution of direct and rhetorical attacks on the institutions provides some more support for the idea that immediate goals of staying in power led to Trump's backsliding behavior rather than long-term goals of passing authoritarian-friendly policies and being reelected. Most of the direct attacks Trump made against Congress were related to the Congressional investigations and were meant to keep him safe from being removed from office in the short-term. It is also important to note that the evidence provided here suggests Trump's direct targeting of Congress was largely driven by electoral, not policy goals, which would be expected given authoritarian populists' desire for concentration of power and Trump's relative lack of a cohesive ideological platform. Targeting of the electoral system similarly suggests an emphasis on electoral goals.

Trump's rhetorical targeting and direct targeting are in line with the first part of my theory which states that an authoritarian populist will target institutions when those institutions have power and are likely to use that power. Trump's rhetorical and direct targeting, do not, however, seem to be linked with public opinion in the way I predicted. Contrary to my theory, he did not rhetorically target Congress when it was most popular in order to weaken trust in before

directly targeting it. In fact, he directly targeted Congress when it was most popular by blocking Fauci from testifying.

In this chapter, I tested the theory of institutional threat and public opinion to explain why and how authoritarian populists target institutions for democratic backsliding. I argued that high threat institutions are most likely to be targeted by authoritarian populists and that the type of targeting (rhetorical or direct) depends on public opinion of the institutions. In the case of the United States Congress, there is some evidence to support the theory. Data from the Trump Twitter Archive and France 24's Trump Archive indicate that Trump did target high threat institutions the most. This provides a framework for thinking about which institutions may be vulnerable to democratic backsliding. Knowing which institutions are vulnerable can be useful to political scientists and constitution builders because it could help them determine which institutions need additional safeguards against executive aggrandizement.

Chapter 5: Brazil

In 2019, Jair Bolsonaro became President of Brazil. He was next in the global trend of authoritarian populists rising to power, following others such as Viktor Orbán of Hungary and Donald Trump of the United States. Like his predecessors, he railed against the corrupt elite in his country and convinced enough voters that he was the only person who could fix the country. He borrowed and adapted the strategies of Donald Trump to gain media coverage, with some of the lines from his speeches, press releases, and social media feeds coming directly from Trump's lexicon.

Bolsonaro fits in with other authoritarian populists in terms of rhetorical style and willingness to diminish democracy, but does he also conduct backsliding in the same way as the others? Thus far, I have provided evidence that both Orbán and Trump targeted high threat institutions the most, medium threats next, and low threat the least. One of the goals of this project is to see if patterns of backsliding are consistent across contexts, so in this section, I apply the institutional threat theory to another region of the world. Bolsonaro is another good test for my theory because he is a contemporary authoritarian populist who drove democratic backsliding and he did so in Brazil, which is not often considered in other studies of backsliding.

This chapter will begin by providing a brief background of democracy in Brazil. Then, I will test the institutional threat theory with five institutions, the court, the media, the electoral administration, the state governments, and the legislature. For each, I will determine what their threat level was when Bolsonaro came to power and whether that threat level changed while he was in power. I then track what changes Bolsonaro made to them during his term and determine if powers were taken from them. Then, I assess whether the direct targeting I identify matches my expectations based on threat level.

I also test the public opinion part of the theory by comparing public opinion data from the Latinobarometer, which conducted survey waves in 2018, 2020, and 2023, to Bolsonaro's tweets targeting each of the institutions in 2019 and 2022. Due to data limitations, some of the institutions are only assessed for direct targeting and some are assessed based on what data were available. Both direct and rhetorical targeting are analyzed for the National Congress, Supreme Federal Court (STF), media, and electoral administration, although for the electoral administration, not all expectations could be tested due to lack of tweets available in 2020 and 2021. Because the Latinobarometer does not consistently ask questions about trust or confidence in state governments, analysis of the state governments is limited to direct targeting. At the end of the chapter, I conclude by discussing whether the results are in line with my expectations and if not, why that might be.

Democracy in Brazil

Brazil's political history is defined by a long series of regime changes, mostly triggered by military coups. Although there were several short-lived republics in its past, they were always replaced by another regime relatively quickly. After a particularly bumpy dictatorship in the 1960s to 1980s, though, a more lasting democratic republic began in 1985 with the embrace of universal suffrage, legalization of left wing parties, and change to direct elections for Presidents, state Governors, and Mayors (Bethell 1994; Reid 2014).

The next step was developing a Constitution to structure and codify new democratic institutions. Following the election of 1985, political elites, labor organizations, business representatives, the military, and civil society organizations all tried their best to be part of the building of the new Constitution (Martínez-Lara 1996). These multitudes of interests came together to eventually agree on a semi-presidential system based on separation of powers. They

also strengthened the existing Federal Supreme Court, increased the autonomy of states on budgetary and taxation issues, identified and protected an expansive list of civil rights, and enforced compulsory voting for those aged 18-70, among other changes (Martínez-Lara 1996). The Constitution came into effect in 1988 and 1989 saw Brazil's first direct Presidential election.

The transition to democracy was not complete, though. Not only are new democracies already fragile due to low levels of institutionalization, but scholars also pointed out several other key challenges for the new regime. Brazil was facing staggering income inequality, was socially divided, had a fast-growing population, and was characterized by a weak party system (Bethell 1994). It was difficult to form legislative coalitions during this period, leading to gridlock and political instability (Ames 2018). Brazilian elites and the public took notice of these shortcomings and pushed for reform. In 2005, Constitutional Amendment 45 expanded the powers of the Federal Supreme Court, giving the judges more control over their docket and the ability to use precedent to decide on cases (Desposato et al 2015).

Other attempts at reform have been less successful, but despite its shortcomings, the new democratic system proved resilient enough to survive several high-profile scandals in the 2000s and 2010s. For example, the court system and legislature were able to deal with the Mensalão scandal in which members of former President Lula's inner circle bribed legislators for policy support. In 2012, 25 people were fined or imprisoned for their role in the scandal (Melo and Pereira 2013). Many understood this to be a signal of the resilience of Brazilian democracy, but the regime was soon put under strain again, first with several other high-profile scandals, and then again with the election of authoritarian populist Jair Bolsonaro. While the scandals were certainly tests of the resilience of democratic institutions, Bolsonaro's election proved to be a

more direct challenge to the legitimacy and functioning of the entire system, with Bolsonaro promising in his campaign to pack the courts, limit civil rights, and strengthen the role of the military (Levitsky 2018).

While Bolsonaro promised throughout his campaign to make sweeping changes to many democratic institutions, limits on time and resources means he could not focus on all of them all at once when he entered office in 2019. In the rest of this chapter, I determine, based on my theory, which institutions should have been targeted and when they should have been targeted. I do this by first assessing the threat level of each institution at the beginning of Bolsonaro's term using primary and secondary sources, then determining whether that threat level changed at any time during the Bolsonaro administration. Next, I investigate the changes Bolsonaro made to each of the institutions to determine whether they were targeted at the time and to the extent expected. Finally, I assess the overall fit of my theory and discuss the implications of my findings.

Judiciary

According to Da Ros and Ingram, "The Brazilian STF is widely regarded as one of the more powerful high constitutional tribunals in Latin America" (2018, p. 345). The Supreme Federal Court (STF) has several checks on the executive branch, primary among them being judicial review. Heavily modeled after the US system, judicial review in the Brazilian system allows the court to determine whether legislative and executive actions are in line with the Constitution (Rodrigues, Lorencini, and Zimmermann 2017; Toffoli 2017; Santiago Lima et al. 2017). Both provisional decrees and ordinary legislation introduced by the President can be reviewed and annulled by the court, giving the court a direct way to block the policy goals of the executive.

The Court can also limit the President through its role as decider in conflicts between the legislature and executive. Throughout the New Republic, the court has exercised this power, clarifying the extent to which the President can act without authorization of Congress and determining what type of checks the legislature can have on the executive (Toffoli 2017). This role is also extended to disputes between the central, state, and municipal governments, although the Court is known to reaffirm the supremacy of the central government in most cases (Rodrigues, Lorencini, and Zimmermann 2017).

While these roles are similar to those of the US Court system that largely inspired the Brazilian system, there are several elements from the European tradition that further empower the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court. One is the extension of judicial review beyond the simple declaration of constitutionality or unconstitutionality. The Brazilian Constitution allows the Court to identify cases of omission (Basic Law of Hungary, 1989; Toffoli 2017). If there is a subject area not covered by legislation but is relevant to the general rule-of-law, the Court can order the legislature to fill the gap and pass legislation on the topic. Because the executive branch initiates most legislation, this means that the Court is also directing the President's agenda, another check on the President's policy goals.

Another imported feature from the European tradition is the role as a criminal court as well as a constitutional court. The Supreme Federal Court is responsible for trying members of the government indicted for criminal offenses or abuse of office, making it a true check on the individual power of politicians (Constitution of Brazil, Article 102, Section I(b); Toffoli 2017). The STF has used these powers in the past, punishing prominent politicians involved in the Mensalão scandal who bribed legislators for support of Lula's policy goals (Melo and Pereira

2013). Lula was also eventually convicted in another scandal in which he was accused of giving the state's oil company contracts to firms in exchange for gifts (Neuman 2021).

Aside from its work in punishing corruption, the STF has also been active in policy issues. In 2011, the court changed Brazilian policy by establishing the right of same-sex couples to be in civil unions (ADI No. 4, 277; ADPF No. 132; Caulfield 2011). The STF again reaffirmed its ability to impact policy in 2015, ruling against a law that allowed private companies to donate to political parties and campaigns (Law No. 9,504/1997). According to Arguelhes and Ribeiro (2018), "the threat of a judicial decision in the near future can already shape the strategies of actors outside the court" (239). In all, the STF struck down more than 200 federal statutes by 2018 (Da Ros and Ingram 2018). These decisions and analysis confirm the ability of the STF to threaten the executive's policy goals. The next question is whether the Court was willing to use those checks at the time Bolsonaro assumed the presidency, which is related to the independence of the STF (Santiago Lima et al 2017).

There are several passages in the constitution that affirm the independence of the judiciary. One way that the STF is insulated from politics is through their lifetime tenure (Article 95). They cannot be removed except under unusual circumstances, making it difficult for the executive to punish them for their rulings.

While the Constitution mandates that judges on the STF should be apolitical, reforms have made the STF more explicitly political over time (Article 95, Sole Paragraph). Amendment 45 to the Constitution increased the policy-making powers of the STF in 2005 by allowing it to set precedents and requiring that cases be of the general interest. Scholars argue that this reform was a "major incentive for STF judges to think more programmatically about their jurisprudential positions across all cases" (Desposato et al 2015, p. 544).

Further evidence of the politicization of the STF came during the selection of justices during the Cardoso and Lula administrations (Rodrigues 2022). One of Cardoso's selections, Ellen Gracie, was selected partially for her ideology, and even registered with Cardoso's party after she retired, providing evidence that judges are not apolitical. Interviews with political actors also reveal that most nominees are brought to the President's attention through members of the President's party (Rodrigues 2022, 8-9).

Even when Presidents do not nominate someone who aligns with them ideologically, the nominee usually has personal ties to the President or members of their party. Justice Eros Grau, for example, considered himself most closely tied to PSDB, but he had a cousin who was a member of PT and the Minister of Education during the Lula administration. He acknowledged that this personal tie did help his nomination (Rodrigues 2022, 9). Even more directly related to partisanship, Justice Dias Toffoli worked as an attorney for PT and as Solicitor General to Lula before Lula nominated him to the STF (Desposato et al 2015). In total, four of Lula's nominations to the STF were not judges, but those who had served as elected officials before, and most of Lula's nominees showed clear left-leaning ideologies once they began ruling on cases (Desposato et al 2015). This demonstrates the close ties between Presidents and their nominees for the Supreme Federal Court, discounting the idea that justices are apolitical and completely independent.

Even further than this, individual justices have power within the Court that can impact the executive's agenda. No cases can be tried by the STF unless it is approved by the President of the STF, which means that individual has extraordinary agenda-setting power (Santiago Lima et al 2017; Arguelhes and Ribeiro 2018). They also control the number of lower court judges and

oversee administrative tasks. Therefore, the ideology of the Chief Justice matters greatly, and I consider it alongside the overall ideological makeup of the STF.

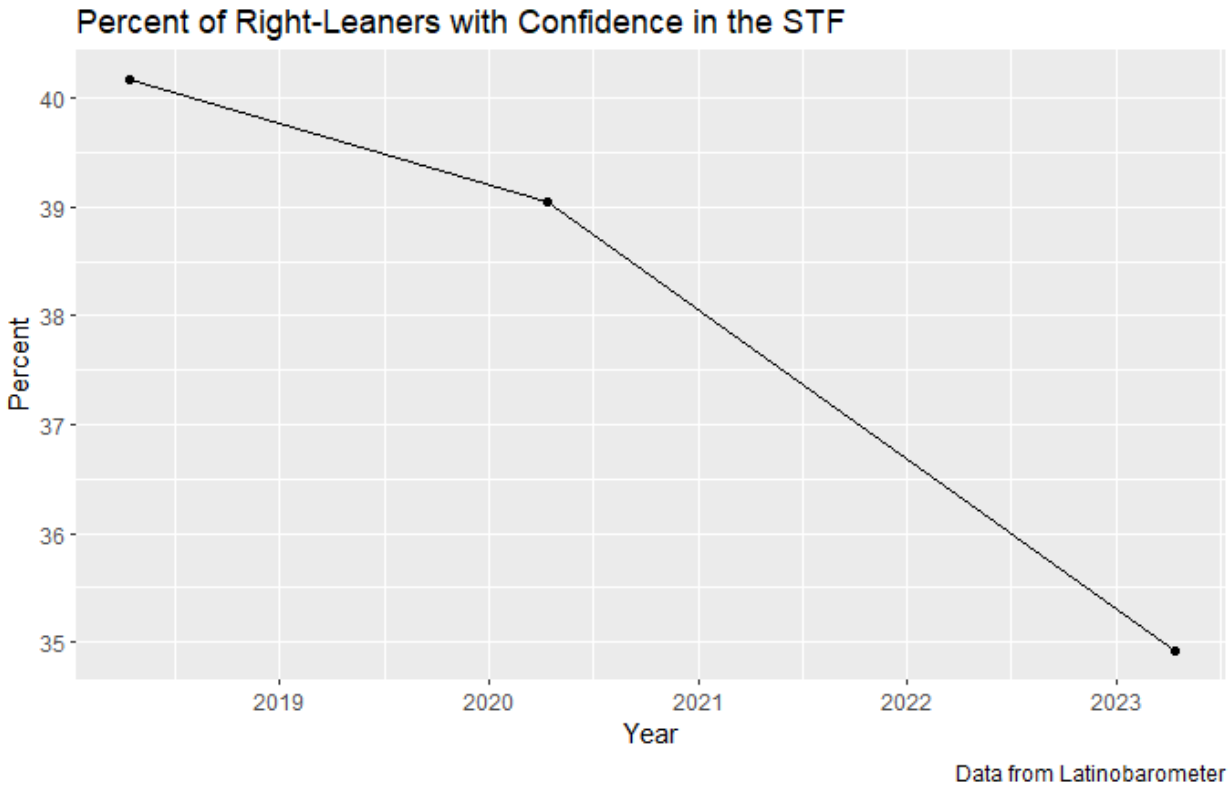
During Bolsonaro's term as President, there were three different Presidents of the STF, José Antonio Dias Toffoli (September 2018-September 2020), Luis Fux (September 2020-September 2022), and Rosa Maria Pires Weber (September 2022-present). Toffoli was originally appointed to the STF by President Lula, while the others were appointed by President Rousseff. As established previously, Presidents usually nominate individuals whose ideology is in line with their own. Because both Lula and Rousseff were left leaning ideologically, their appointments were, as well. This puts them ideologically at odds with Bolsonaro, and means they were likely to use their agenda setting powers to challenge him.

The overall ideological balance of the STF during Bolsonaro's Presidency also allowed the institution to challenge him. When he entered office at the beginning of 2019, the ideological balance of the STF was clearly against him, with 8 of the 11 Justices having been appointed by left-leaning Presidents. During his Presidency, two of the center or center-right justices retired, and Bolsonaro appointed two squarely right-wing justices. Even so, all of the more left-leaning justices remained on the STF throughout the term, allowing the balance to stay at eight left-leaning justices, and three center or right-leaning justices. Bolsonaro acknowledged during the 2018 campaign and during his presidency that the ideology of these justices placed them in conflict with him (Hunter and Vega 2022). STF justices also approved investigations into alleged corruption by Bolsonaro and after Bolsonaro removed statistics related to COVID-19 from the Brazilian government website, the STF ruled that he must put them back up, which Bolsonaro ended up doing (“Brazil Resumes Publishing” 2020; Haggard and Kaufman 2021, Appendix).

Due to this ideological makeup and consistent use of checks, the STF remained a high threat to Bolsonaro throughout his Presidency.

Public Opinion

Figure 18: Percent of Right-Leaners with Confidence in the STF



The Latinobarometer question about confidence/trust in the judiciary is structured similarly to the question about the National Congress, with the same scale and frequency it was asked. It also switched from the word "confidence" to the word "trust" in 2023. As seen in Figure 18, confidence in the STF declined over the course of Bolsonaro's Presidency, from just over 40% in 2018, the year of his election, to just under 35% in 2023, the year after he left office. Based on this, I expect rhetorical targeting to be highest at the beginning of the term because the STF was more trusted among right-leaners. In contrast, I expect rhetorical targeting to decrease and direct targeting to increase as the term goes on.

Expectations

1. Because it was a high threat, the STF should have been consistently targeted throughout Bolsonaro's term.
2. The STF should have been rhetorically targeted most and directly targeted least at the beginning of Bolsonaro's term.
3. The STF should have been rhetorically targeted least and directly targeted most at the end of Bolsonaro's term.

Direct Targeting

Starting during his 2018 campaign, Bolsonaro defied orders from the STF, including sending out automated mass messages, which was illegal (Lamensch 2022). It continued to rule against Bolsonaro on several key issues. Importantly, the STF approved several investigations into Bolsonaro's conduct while in office, continuing in its role as a safeguard against authoritarian overreach (Haggard and Kaufman 2021, Appendix; Meyer et al 2023).

It also served as a major check at the beginning of COVID-19 from March to July 2020, "with the Supreme Court in particular emerging as a key counter to the president's lax response to the pandemic, repeatedly making judgments that ran counter to the president's political agenda" (BTI Brazil Country Report 2022).

Bolsonaro did attempt to influence the justice system several times, though. Notably, he did so in 2020 by appointing family members and friends to important positions in the Federal Police and Prosecutor's office, which works closely with the STF (Guedes-Neto and Peters 2022). When the court blocked his appointments, he would replace the appointee with another close friend, side-stepping the STF and still increasing his influence within the justice system. When the STF authorized an investigation into Bolsonaro's son, Bolsonaro fired and replaced the

person in charge of the investigation (Machado and Pimenta 2022; Hunter and Vega 2022). Because these positions have some oversight over the judicial system, appointing Bolsonaro's family and friends means the judiciary will be slightly less independent from executive influence (Sader 2022). For example, the Attorney General has the power to investigate and charge the President with common crimes, but Bolsonaro appointed a close ally, Augusto Aras, who is unlikely to do so. Similarly, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Arthur Lira, could have advanced impeachment articles to a vote, but was unlikely to do so due to his personal ties to the President (Peries 2021).

Beyond these measures, Bolsonaro insisted that the STF was illegitimate. In March of 2020, he announced that the Federal Police should not follow the rulings and carry out the orders of the STF (Andreoni et al 2020; Birle 2021). Bolsonaro further attacked the STF by insisting the Senate impeach justices Luis Roberto Barroso and Alexandre de Morae, partially for their roles in investigating Bolsonaro's family members and close allies (Gottlieb et al 2022; Melo and de Carvalho 2023). Even further, he joined protests calling for the dissolution of the STF, one of the most serious occurring in September 2021, with protestors attempting to break into the STF building (Birle 2021). This evidence suggests that, in line with the institutional threat theory, Bolsonaro constantly targeted the high threat STF throughout his term. There is also a slight increase in direct targeting at the end of Bolsonaro's term, providing some evidence that public opinion may impact backsliding decisions.

Rhetorical Targeting

Despite the patterns observed in direct targeting, rhetorical targeting of the STF through tweets was rare in both 2019 and 2022. If Bolsonaro were to care about right-leaning voters' opinions of the STF, we should have seen rhetorical targeting occurring most at the beginning of

the term. However, we only see two tweets targeting the STF in all of 2019, suggesting that Bolsonaro was either not considering public opinion in the way expected or was using other mediums. In 2022, there were also just two tweets targeting the STF. The STF was therefore directly targeted in accordance with expectations based on institutional threat but was not targeted in accordance with expectations based on public opinion.

Media

In the Brazilian Constitution, there are several provisions which affirm the independence of the media from the government. To ensure foreign oligarchs are not running Brazilian media, Article 222 creates rules about who can lead media organizations and where they must have their headquarters. In addition, Article 220, paragraph 5 says that "The media of social communication may not, directly or indirectly, be subject to monopoly or oligopoly". These rules were intended to keep the media from being unduly influenced by elites and foreign powers who could undermine their credibility and their checks on the government. There are also broader protections for the media in the Constitution, which affirms freedom of speech and press (Article 220). These provisions have been relatively successful in maintaining a media environment in which outlets can publish stories largely free from intimidation and serve as a watchdog of the government.

The media have exhibited their checks throughout the past two decades, but especially during scandals, like the Mensalão scandal and the Sanguessugas scandal, both of which involved corruption of government officials. Despite Lula's positive interactions with the media through the first several years of his Presidency, the media had no qualms with publishing negative stories about Lula, his cabinet, and his party during the scandal (Melo and Pereira 2016; Kitzberger 2016). These scandals altered the relationship between the media and the government,

with the media now more emboldened to publish stories critical of the President. It is following these scandals that the media and elites would become increasingly adversarial (Kitzberger 2016).

In 2016, the media again exercised their powers over a President, aiding in turning public opinion against President Rousseff and validating her impeachment (van Dijk 2017). Conservative-owned media company, Globo, attacked Rousseff for alleged financial impropriety and shifted public opinion against her. During Rousseff's time in office, the media proved they have a check on the President through their influence on public opinion and through their agenda-setting power.

The willingness of the media to use their checks is less clear due to challenges in privatization and media ownership. Since the Constitution came into effect, the Brazilian media have seen substantial changes. 10 years after the democratic transition, the telecommunications industry was privatized, putting more distance between the media and the government (Wimmer and Pieranti 2008). As time went on, these privately owned media companies became powerful, with several companies owning most of the outlets in Brazil. In 2017, the year before Bolsonaro's presidential campaign, 26 companies owned the top 50 media outlets in Brazil, and of these top companies, 5 of them owned more than 50% of the outlets (Media Ownership Monitor, Brazil 2017). However, this is not unheard of in other democracies. In the United States, seven companies own over half of the daily newspapers (The Future of Media Project, Index of Seven Big Owners of Dailies).

One result of this concentrated media ownership is that "Since they concentrate control over key resources...they potentially influence effective policymaking and, eventually, the ability of a government to stay in power" (Kitzberger 2016, p. 450). The ownership of these media

conglomerates matters to the government because they have the power to set their own agenda regardless of the President's goals. For example, conservative-owned media companies were instrumental in President Rousseff's impeachment in 2016, which scholars attribute to the differences between media company Globo's conservative ideology and Rousseff's relatively progressive ideology (Saad-Filho and Boito 2016; van Dijk 2017). The media were willing to use their checks on a President who they disagreed with. Therefore, it is appropriate to examine the independence of media owners from the government to determine their willingness to use their checks.

Several constitutional provisions and laws bring into question the independence of the media. In the Constitution, the executive is given power to renew broadcasting permits and authorizations (Article 223), and an agency called the Social Communications Council was created to oversee media regulations and compliance (Article 224). The former gives the President some power over which media outlets are allowed to operate in Brazil, but it also requires approval from 2/5 of the National Congress (Wimmer and Pieranti 2008). The executive, therefore, does not have unilateral control over the granting and renewing of permits. The latter turned out to be largely ineffective and had little impact on the independence of media organizations. The Council was meant to bring together government and civil society as stakeholders with interest in what is covered by the media but struggled to assert any real power. The Council was largely controlled by the National Congress, and therefore did not ensure any additional safeguards to keep the media independent from the government (Wimmer and Pieranti 2008; Moreira et al. 2016). As a result, Brazilian media were largely unregulated.

This became a major point of contention in Brazilian politics in the late 2000s and early 2010s, with a large debate ongoing about the benefits of regulation (Matos 2012). A 2009

conference established to put forward recommendations for regulations was criticized heavily in the media, which accused the government and other conference participants of censorship. This is despite the common understanding that an independent regulatory agency and increased regulations would help with the democratization of the media (Paiva et al 2015). While this failure of media democratization means that individuals do not always have access to unbiased, fair information, it also means that the media were largely able to publish what they would like without undue influence from the executive.

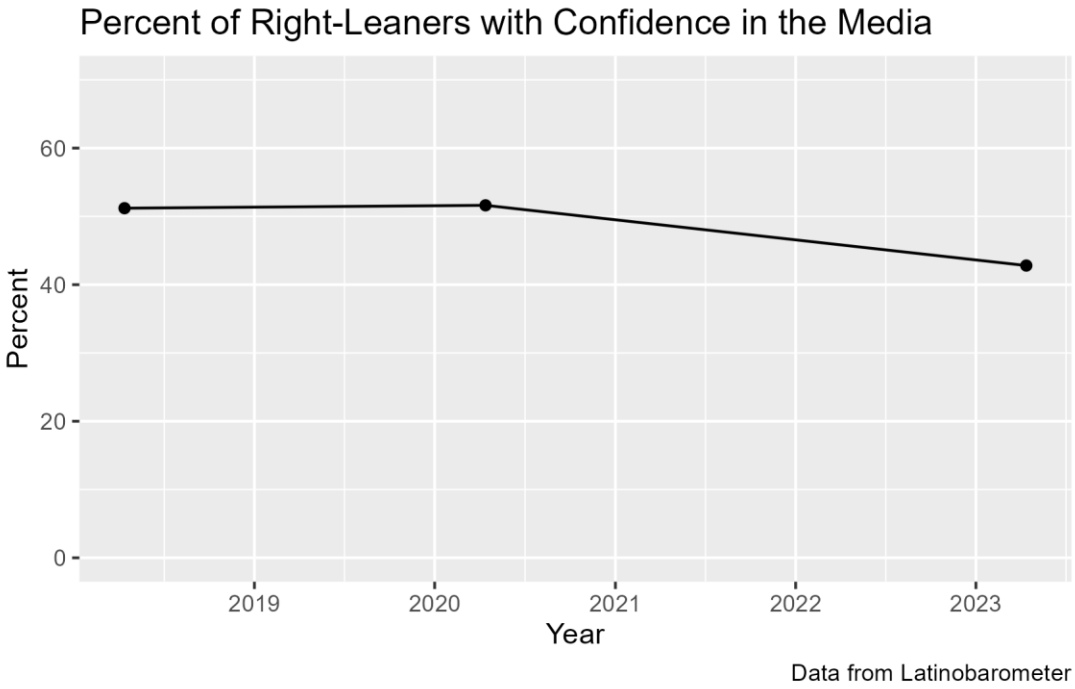
Through a series of scandals and the impeachment of President Rousseff in 2016, the media became increasingly powerful. With newly seated President Temer stumbling though failed cabinet appointments and policies, "The main center of political power was no longer the presidency but the mainstream media" (Goldstein 2019, p. 251). Although much of the bad press Rousseff received was due to her left-leaning ideology, media criticism of Temer shows that criticism of elites was not just ideological. The media continuously covered scandals within the more right-leaning Temer administration, suggesting that the media were not only willing to punish those on the left side of the ideological spectrum, but also willing to punish those on the right.

In addition, there were some media outlets in place when Bolsonaro became President that were not in line with the far-right agenda. One in particular, Folha de S. Paulo, was accused of having a left-leaning, anti-Bolsonaro agenda at the beginning of his term (Goldstein 2019). During his campaign, the media were publishing critical stories of Bolsonaro, as well. These factors indicate that the media were willing to use their platforms to check the President. Therefore, I argue that the media were a high threat to Bolsonaro. Given the high threat level, I expect Bolsonaro should have intensely targeted the media throughout his term.

Public Opinion

The 2018 and 2020 Latinobarometers ask a question about confidence in media, and the scale of the question matches the scale used for the National Congress and STF questions. In 2023, though, the question is changed to ask questions about particular types of media, including, television, social media, and print media. These all use the same scale as the National Congress and STF questions, as well. I conduct an analysis with each of the three media questions identified above, and find that trust in the print media is close to the trust level of the media in 2018 and 2020, but trust in television and social media are significantly lower, with about half as many people reporting some or a lot of trust. Therefore, I use the most conservative of the three, trust in print media. If anything, this underestimates the change in public opinion of the media. This means that further research will be needed to get more consistent data, but I am less likely to get false positive results.

Figure 19: Percent of Right-Leaners with Confidence in the Media



As seen in Figure 19, confidence in the print media among right-leaners only slightly decreased during Bolsonaro's term. Given this consistency, I do not expect there to be large differences in frequency of rhetorical or direct targeting. However, there is a small decrease in confidence, so I would expect a small, if any, increase in direct targeting and decrease in rhetorical targeting because when confidence decreases, the risk of backslash for targeting an institution is lower.

Expectations

1. Bolsonaro will constantly target the media throughout his term in office because it was a high threat.
2. Bolsonaro will rhetorically target the media more often earlier in his term, and less often later in his term.
3. Bolsonaro will directly target the media less often earlier on in his term, and more often later in his term.

Direct Targeting

For the most part, Bolsonaro was unable to make large, direct changes to the power of the media. While he constantly attacked journalists and media sources rhetorically, few laws or executive decrees targeted the independence of the media. Rhetorical targeting resulted in physical attacks on and intimidation of journalists by Bolsonaro supporters, and this will be discussed in more depth in the public opinion section.

There were, however, some incidents that did directly target members of the media. One of the most high-profile examples was in 2019, when Bolsonaro directly threatened the biggest TV network in Brazil, Globo. Although it was ultimately unfulfilled, he pushed for their broadcasting license to be revoked due to the network's reporting of his ties to a police officer

accused of killing a Councilwoman ("Brazil's Bolsonaro" 2019; Gottlieb et al 2022; Bairey et al 2022). In reference to the next time licenses could be reviewed, Bolsonaro said to Globo, "You'd better hope I'm dead by then" ("Brazil's Bolsonaro" 2019). This is only one example of Bolsonaro's self-proclaimed war on the media.

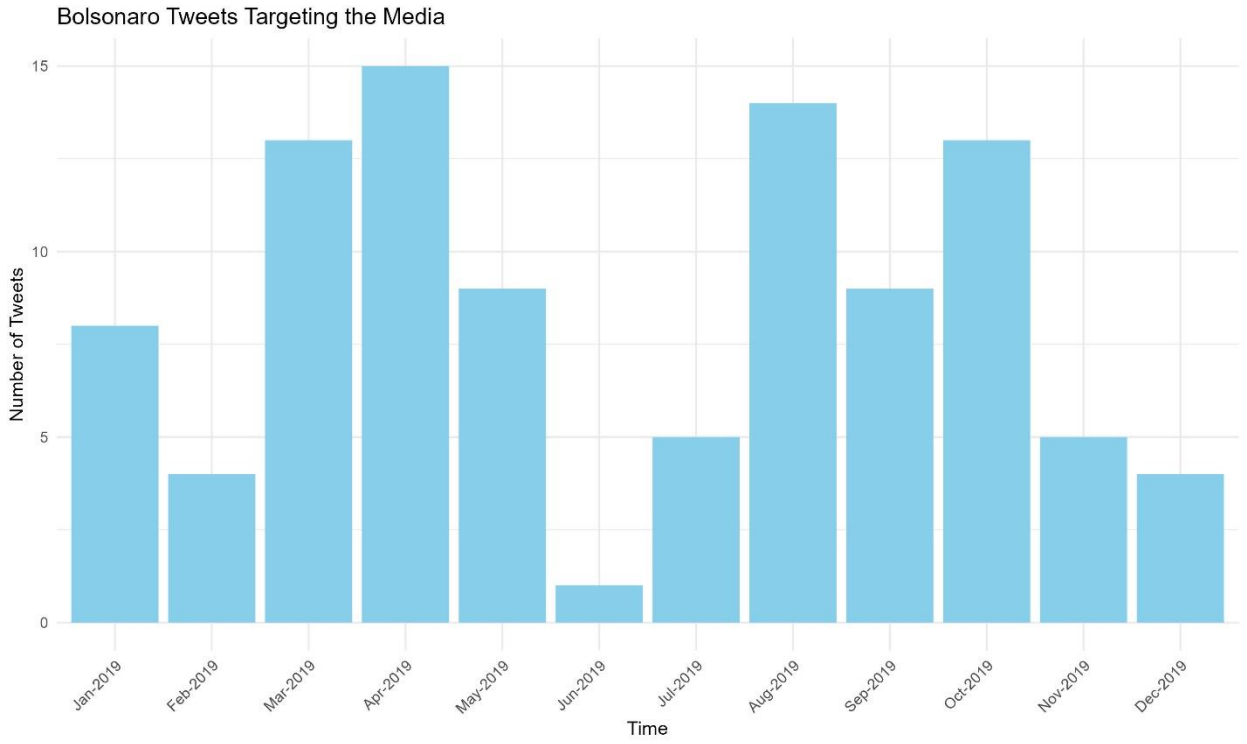
Another instance of targeting came with the investigation into American journalist Glenn Greenwald and his husband, Brazilian politician David Miranda. In January of 2020, Bolsonaro encouraged the Federal Prosecutor's investigation into Greenwald and Miranda for their reporting surrounding corruption in Brazil (Greenwald and Miranda 2020; Haggard and Kaufman 2021; Dash 2023). Investigations into and threats against journalists continued throughout Bolsonaro's presidency (Lamensch 2022; Freedom House Freedom on the Net 2022).

In May of 2020, a provisional executive measure, the Brazilian Law of Freedom, Responsibility and Transparency on the Internet, was introduced to the National Congress by Bolsonaro. The bill intended to limit free speech on the Internet by making it illegal to share or post content that is a threat to "social peace or to the economic order" (Lamensch 2022). Similarly, in September 2021, Bolsonaro issued an executive decree limiting the ability of social media networks to monitor and remove misinformation (Measure 1068/2021; Lamensch 2022; Gottlieb et al 2022). Although eventually struck down, the decree benefitted Bolsonaro and his supporters, who used misinformation throughout his campaigns, his presidency, and post-presidency to delegitimize political institutions, the opposition, international organizations, and the media (Peries 2021).

Overall, the high threat media were directly targeted more often and consistently than the medium-then-high threat state governments and the medium-then-high-then-medium threat legislature. Direct targeting of the media is similar in timing and intensity to the STF, which was

also a high threat institution, providing some evidence that institutional threat does impact backslider decision-making. Direct targeting did not, however, fit the expectations based on public opinion. It remained at consistent levels throughout Bolsonaro's term, showing that institutional threat may play a more consistent role than public opinion in backslider decision-making.

Figure 20: Bolsonaro Tweets Targeting the Media 2019

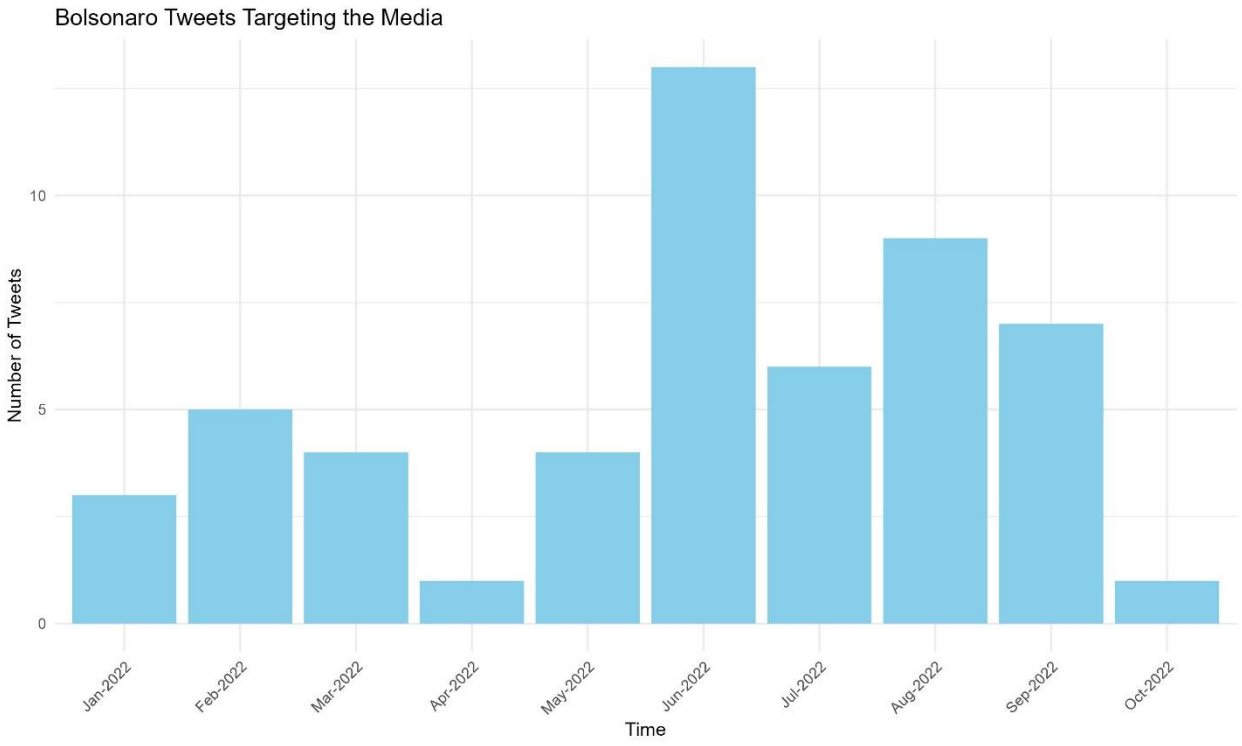


Rhetorical Targeting

Figure 20 shows the number of tweets Bolsonaro sent rhetorically targeting the media each month in 2019. Rhetorical targeting of the media varied over the course of 2019, with the most tweets targeting the media coming in April, and the least in June. While this does demonstrate some variation in rhetorical targeting, the number of overall tweets is lower than for Trump, making it harder to determine whether the size of the difference between months like April and June is significant. According to the theory, there should be little difference in

rhetorical targeting during 2019, so I also look at the proportion of total tweets targeting the media, which yields similar results to the pure counts (see Appendix 3).

Figure 21: Bolsonaro Tweets Targeting the Media 2022



A similar pattern is also seen in 2022, with rhetorical targeting of the media changing month by month, although all are still under 20 tweets per month, and most under 10 tweets per month. Like for 2019, the relatively consistent number of tweets and the lack of a concrete pattern among months suggests that public opinion of the media is not influencing backslider decision-making in the expected way. In addition, the lack of rhetorical targeting could suggest that Bolsonaro was confident that even if there was backlash to his targeting, he would be able to gain back support and avoid any negative long-term consequences. Overall, the targeting of the media follows expectations based on institutional threat rather than public opinion, suggesting institutional threat is the more pressing concern of backsliders.

Electoral Administration and Elections

Amidst a contentious shift to democracy in the late 1980s, Brazil held its first direct Presidential election since the military regime took over (Roett 2011). Over the next three decades, parties became more institutionalized and a duopoly of the PT and PSDB emerged (Mainwaring, Power, and Bizzarro 2018). In this section, I outline the rules for Presidential elections, how they have changed over time, and how they affect the threat assessment of the electoral administration as an institution.

Brazilian Presidential elections have different rules than Brazilian National Congress elections. Presidential elections are majoritarian and rely on a two-round system. If no candidate receives a majority of votes in the first round, the top two vote receivers compete in a second round to decide the winner. Large parties benefited from this system because they are much more likely to have a candidate advance to the second stage than smaller parties as a function of this more majoritarian system. They also benefited from several rule changes in the 1990s and 2000s.

One such rule, the Law of Political Parties, passed in 1995, increasing public funding for parties and giving them access to free advertising on television. Part of this law allocates funding based on the proportion of seats a party has in Congress, which means larger parties get an advantage in resources. These resources allowed larger parties to set up permanent offices and build stronger organization structures (Mainwaring, Power, and Bizzarro 2018; Avelino and Fisch 2018). This has been the case, with PT and PSDB dominating nearly all Presidential elections since the 1990s.

Further changes occurred in later years. In 2007, an Electoral Supreme Court ruling limited the ability of politicians to switch parties. Three years later, the number of signatures required to be on the Presidential ballot increased, and in 2015, restrictions were placed on

merging parties. All these changes made it even more difficult for smaller parties to win the Presidency (Mainwaring, Power, and Bizzarro 2018). This should have made the electoral administration a more challenging obstacle for Bolsonaro, who joined the Social Liberal Party (PSL) and became its Presidential candidate in 2018. Low barriers to entering the party system mean that small parties often emerge, but they are often defunct by the next election due to resource imbalances and lack of coherent ideology (Carreirão and Rennó 2019). Despite the existence of these parties and even if they win seats in the National Congress, they are unlikely to translate that into winning a Presidential election. Therefore, as a member of PSL, the electoral rules were a larger threat to Bolsonaro's electoral goals than if he was a member of a larger party. Bolsonaro dropped the PSL party label after his election and became an Independent. Although for the 2022 election, Bolsonaro's time in office made him better known, his status as an Independent likely made the election difficult due to lack of party support, making the electoral administration a threat.

An additional mechanism the electoral administration has to punish elites is campaign finance reporting. Due to multiple scandals involving the abuse of power by political elites, there has been an increasing focus on stamping out corruption. One of the ways this was done was through requirements to report all donations and spending during campaigns (Avelino and Fisch 2018). The STF played a hand in this shift, as well, by banning corporate donations in 2015 (Lima and Bodet 2023). Finally, the National Congress created a new public fund for campaigns. While these measures have been successful at decreasing spending in some elections, it has also benefitted some wealthier candidates who can self-fund (Lima and Bodet 2023) and candidates with ties to wealthy individuals, who personally donate rather than going through their company. This was the case during Bolsonaro's 2022 campaign, in which 33 of Bolsonaro's top 50

contributors were connected to agribusiness (Figueiredo 2022). Given the mechanisms outlined above, the electoral administration had checks on Bolsonaro.

Now I turn to assessing the willingness of the institution to use those checks. In the case of electoral administrations, that means determining how free and fair the elections were and how independent they were from political entities. According to Varieties of Democracy, elections were free and fair in Brazil in 2014, the election prior to Bolsonaro's rise in popularity. In 2018, Bolsonaro's misinformation campaign made the election slightly less free and fair, but experts assert that any fraud or manipulation in the campaign was not large enough to impact the results. This followed a similar pattern to the United States case, which saw a nearly identical decrease in free and fairness of elections in 2016 with the candidacy of Donald Trump. According to the Organization of American States (OAS) Election Observation Mission, "the electoral authorities have demonstrated that they have a professional and robust voting system," and despite misinformation about voting machines, "they proved to be an efficient tool that ensured, once again and as for the past 22 years, rapid and reliable results with lower rates of human error and the assurance of peaceful transfers of power" (OAS 2018).

Turning to the independence of the election, I look toward measures of Electoral Management Body independence. In the case of Brazil, this includes looking at the independence of both the National Election Board and the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) due to the unusual amount of cooperation that occurs between the two entities during elections. The TSE "investigates electoral crimes, inspects electoral advertising and decides on registration of candidates... assuming the executive, managerial, operational and normative administration of the electoral process" (STJ International). Some scholars point to the TSE as a driving force behind democratic consolidation in Brazil (Marchetti 2012). Likewise, experts have touted the

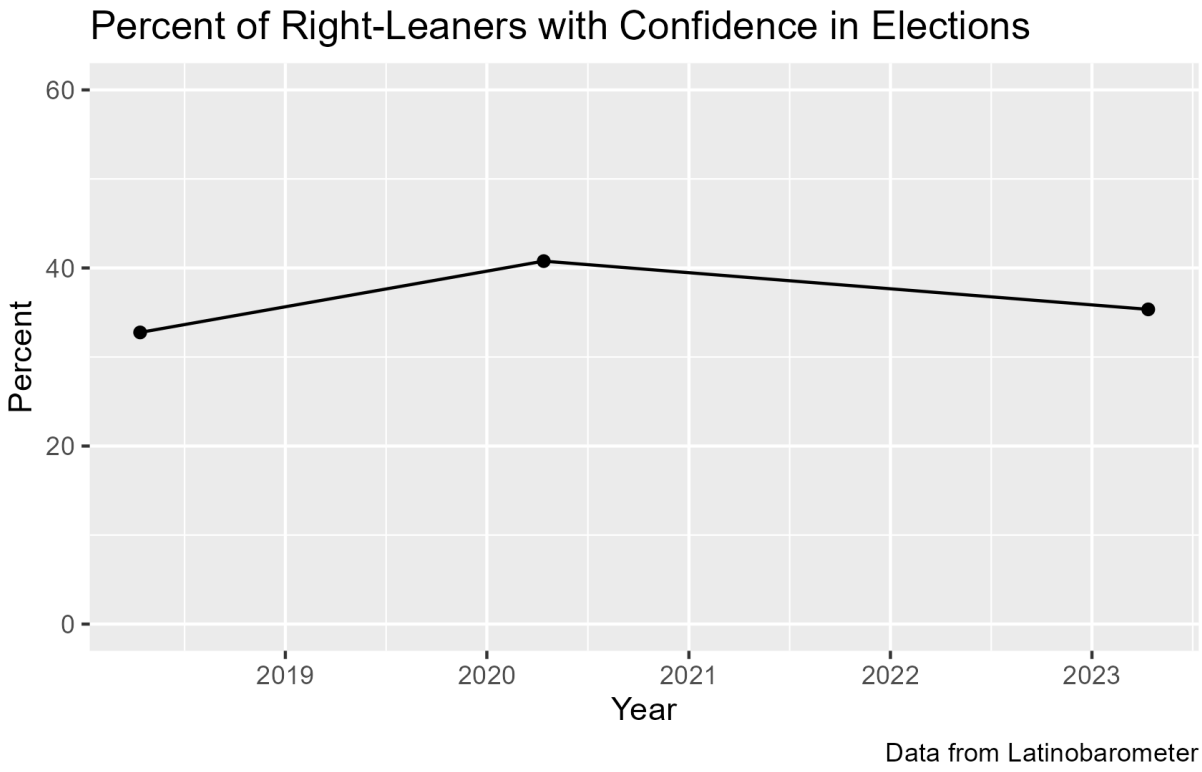
independence of the TSE as a major reason that peaceful transfers of power after elections is possible in Brazil (Fleischer and Barreto 2009).

The TSE has 7 members, consisting of 3 judges from the STF, 2 from the Higher Court of Justice (STJ), and 2 citizen legal professionals. The STF judges and citizen legal professionals can serve two 2-year terms, while the STJ judges can only serve one 2-year term (Marchetti 2012). This constant rotation of judges makes it more difficult to exert political power on them, partially because the judges must maintain their reputation when they return to their other positions, and partially because it may be too costly for other political elites to build relationships with those judges if they are going to be replaced shortly. These judges are also not selected by the President or members of their party. Rather, they have internal mechanisms to decide who will fill the positions (Marchetti 2012). The members of the STF were chosen by the President to be on the STF, though, which raises questions about how independent they are. Marchetti (2012) argues that this worry has not come to fruition, with "no record of any TSE ruling that once submitted to the STF was then reversed" (p 119). Ultimately, this makes a compelling case establishing the independence of the TSE. This has been reaffirmed by Hernández-Huerta (2017), who found that Brazil's TSE is the most powerful among electoral bodies in South America, Central America, and the United States.

Due to the presence of checks within the electoral administration along with the independence of the TSE, which insulates it from the influence of elites like Bolsonaro, I determine that the electoral administration was a high threat when Bolsonaro became President in 2019. Thus, I expect that it should have been highly targeted.

Public Opinion

Figure 22: Percent of Right-Leaners with Confidence in Elections



The Latinobarometer asks a question about confidence in the electoral system in 2018, 2020, and 2023, and the question wording and scale are the same as for the National Congress and STF trust questions. As seen in Figure 22, about 32% of right-leaning respondents in 2018 reported some or a lot of confidence in the electoral system. This increased to slightly above 40% in 2020 and declined back to about 35% in 2023. While these are not large differences, they do indicate there should be some adjustment in rhetorical and direct targeting from Bolsonaro, with most rhetorical targeting happening in 2020 when the electoral administration is most popular.

Expectations

1. Bolsonaro will target the electoral administration consistently throughout his term in office.
2. Bolsonaro will rhetorically target the electoral administration most and directly target it least in 2020.
3. Bolsonaro will rhetorically target the electoral administration least and directly target it most in 2019, 2021, and 2022.

Direct Targeting

Bolsonaro started to target the electoral administration indirectly through the appointment of Bolsonaro loyalists to key positions in the Federal Police and Prosecutor's office early on in his Presidency. Positions such as the lead of the federal prosecutorial service (Ministério Público Federal, MPF) have oversight power over the electoral process. Appointing people loyal to him would allow Bolsonaro to exert influence over the electoral administration, lessening the independence of the institution (Sader 2022).

Then, during the pandemic, municipal elections were postponed due to public health concerns, but unlike in other countries where this was an effort made by authoritarian populists to undermine the validity and legitimacy of elections, this did not have long-term effects on the electoral administration and was supported by the electoral courts and the National Congress (Constitutional amendment 107; Ouverney and Fernandes 2022).

Starting the year before the election, targeting increased, in part because Bolsonaro publicly pledged not to peacefully hand over power if he lost the 2022 election (Peries 2021). After stating that he would not follow any STF rulings put out by Justice de Moraes, Bolsonaro extended his argument to say that he would not accept the results of an election because of de

Moraes role in officiating it (Gottlieb et al 2023). Bolsonaro used his defense ministry to announce his government would do their own vote-counting separate from the TSE (Dash 2023). These attacks and pledges not to accept an unfavorable electoral outcome continued throughout the second half of 2021 and in 2022. In August of 2021, he stated that "I have three alternatives for my future: being arrested, killed or victory" (Bolsonaro as cited by Mandl 2021). These statements, along with attempts to introduce laws that would make voting more difficult, continued in 2022 and after the election. This finally culminated in the attack on government buildings on January 8, 2023, during which Bolsonaro supporters attempted to disrupt the government in order to restore Bolsonaro to power (De Amaral Maia 2023). This targeting is somewhat in line with expectations, as it is greater than targeting experienced by medium threat institutions, but is relatively low compared to targeting of elections in other backsliding countries, like Hungary. It may be the case that Bolsonaro attempted more attacks than these, but they were unsuccessful. This is especially plausible because we see that the STF and state governments actively worked to thwart Bolsonaro's actions and made him less effective at carrying out backsliding.

Rhetorical Targeting

Due to data limitations, Bolsonaro's tweets are only available for 2019 and 2022, meaning I cannot directly test for the latter two expectations. However, I can still look at the frequency of targeting tweets to see if any patterns emerge. Similar to patterns for other institutions, there was no rhetorical targeting of the electoral administration through Bolsonaro's tweets in 2019. Like for Donald Trump, it is possible that rhetorical targeting was low due to the timing of the threat. Since the election was 3 years away in 2019, perhaps there were more immediate threats to tackle first.

In 2022, as the election drew closer, the frequency of tweets targeting the electoral administration increased, though it never reached the frequency of tweets that were used to target the media during the same time period. Two days before the second round of the Presidential election in 2022, Bolsonaro tweeted “Many thanks to you who accompanied us until this time! We were able to restore the truth of the facts about what good our Government did and put an end to the PT's electoral terrorism…”. This tweet demonstrates two points. First, Bolsonaro is suggesting that the electoral administration has been attacked or weakened in the past by Lula’s party (PT). The second point, which may also help explain why rhetorically targeting the electoral administration was rarer than expected, is that he is not warning of future electoral fraud. He is indicating that he is the one returning the electoral administration to its proper functioning and insinuating that PT victories have been and will continue to be fraudulent. This seems to set Bolsonaro up to either use his victory to show how he has positively changed institutions or use his defeat to extend the narrative that the PT have weakened the electoral administration over time through “electoral terrorism”. This rhetorical targeting does not fit with expectations based on public opinion, but it does further demonstrate that Bolsonaro was strategic about how he interacted with and talked about institutions.

Legislature

The legislative branch of the central government in Brazil is made up of a lower chamber, the Chamber of Deputies, whose members are elected based on proportional representation, and an upper chamber, the Senate, made up of three elected representatives from each Brazilian state (Constitution of Brazil 1988). As with most bicameral systems, some powers of the legislature are divided between the chambers and others are shared. Each has its own checks on the executive, along with their combined legislative competence.

The Brazilian National Congress is often viewed as relatively weak given the executive's exclusive right to initiate legislation and the executive's use of provisional decrees. The 1988 constitution gave the executive the right to introduce all administrative bills, budgetary bills, tax bills, constitutional amendments, and urgency requests to push bills through the legislature quickly (Figueiredo and Limongi 2016). The executive also has the right to put forward provisional decrees. These decrees are meant to address emergencies and urgent situations without having to wait for the legislative procedure to play out. The President introduces and implements the decree, which is then reviewed by the Congress and either accepted, turning it into law, or denied, making it powerless. Scholars have acknowledged that the exclusive right of initiation and the use of provisional decrees goes beyond the executive powers displayed in other Presidential democracies (Arretche 2013), but that does not mean the Congress does not have any legislative checks.

One of those checks is through their required majority in passing bills. The President needs majority support in both chambers to get any of their bills passed. In practice, because there are so many parties and because party loyalty has been relatively high, this usually entails the President getting input from the party leaders so that the party leaders will guarantee the support of their members. This means that some Congressional party leaders have a de facto veto power at the legislative initiation phase. Even beyond this, members of Congress can still vote against the President's bills despite the input of their party leaders, which occasionally happens when state interests are involved (Trojbicz 2019). Galvão (2016) affirms that "the president can only rule effectively through the participation and cooperation of the legislative".

The provisional decrees are more difficult to check but became easier with a 2001 amendment limiting the number of times a President can amend the decree to try to get Congress

to support it (Figueiredo and Limongi 2016). Before this amendment, the President could continuously amend the decree to keep it in place and to garner more support from members of Congress. Now, though, the President can only change it once, making it harder to get around the will of Congress.

Each chamber also has checks apart from their legislative powers. For example, if the President puts forth an amendment to the Constitution, both chambers vote on it and it can only pass if there is 3/5 support in both (Rodriguez, Lorencini, and Zimmermann 2017). In addition, the Senate must approve several appointments to key positions, primary among them being the justices of the Federal Supreme Court. Also similar to the US system, the legislature can charge and remove high level government officials (Constitution of Brazil, Articles 51 and 52).

The legislature has periodically been able to use these checks. When Rousseff came into office, several of her policies were voted down, showing the power of the legislature to block the President's policy goals (Melo 2016). Further showing its power, in August of 2016, the Senate successfully voted to remove former President Rousseff from her position (Romero 2016). Although Rousseff's impeachment has been viewed skeptically due to inconsistencies and procedural issues, it shows the power the legislature has over Presidents (Daly 2019).

However, the use of checks is often delayed. The investigation into Rousseff started more than a year earlier, with the Speaker of the Chamber, Cunha, pushing hard for impeachment. However, Cunha had trouble maintaining support for his efforts due to investigations into his own actions, which delayed the impeachment process significantly (Melo 2016).

Melo (2016) argues that Brazilian Presidents need a stable legislative coalition to achieve their goals. When that is not the case, as for Rousseff, the legislature can obstruct the President's policy agenda. When Bolsonaro came into office, though, he had a relatively favorable Congress

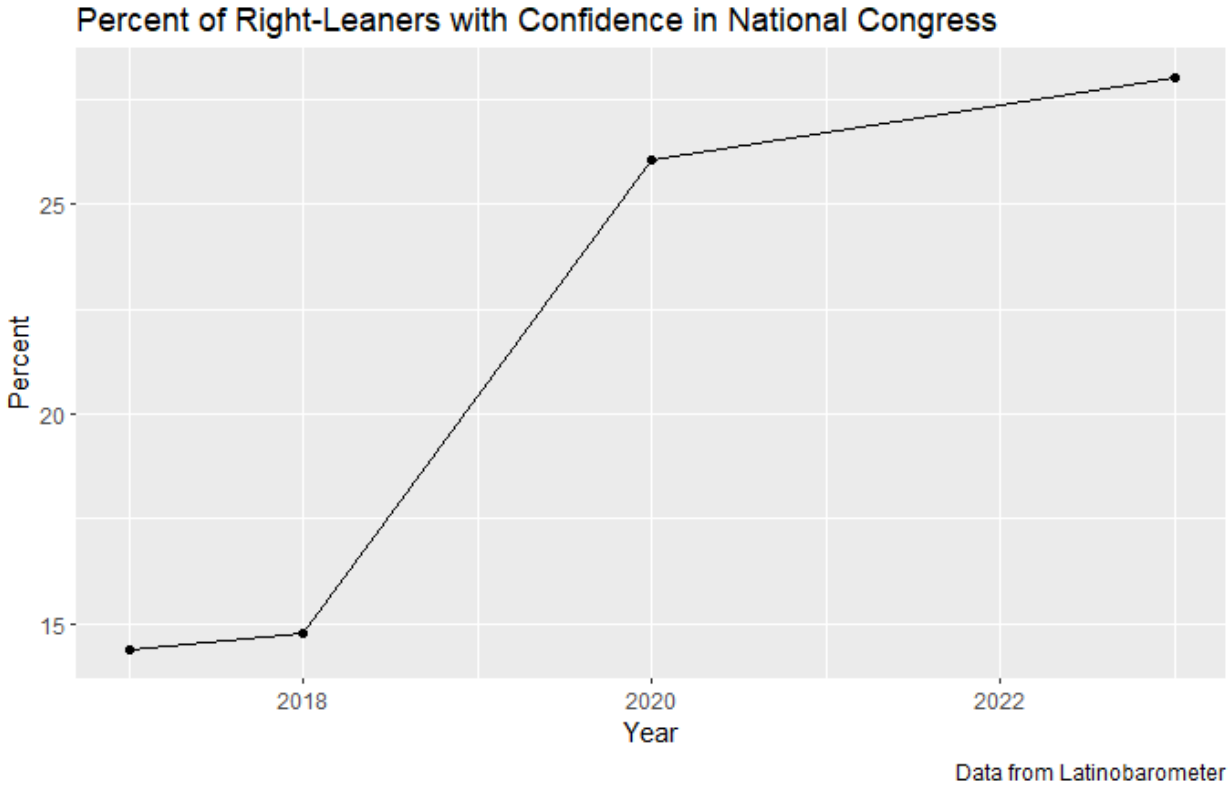
for his agenda. Bolognesi et al (2022) used an expert survey done in 2018 to gather data on ideology of the newly elected members of the Brazilian National Congress. They calculated ideology for each party on a 10-point scale, with higher numbers meaning the party is more conservative. Of the 30 parties that earned seats in the 2018 election, Bolsonaro's party, the Social Liberal Party (PSL) scored amongst the highest. This is unsurprising given the relative dominance of right-wing parties in Brazilian politics. 17 parties were ranked as 7 or higher on the ideology scale, and another 6 ranked between 5 and 7. In contrast, only 7 parties scored lower than a 5. In terms of seat proportions, that means 63.5% of seats went to parties with higher than a 7 on the ideological scale, and 72% of seats went to parties with higher than a 5. Given Bolsonaro's conservativeness, I argue that this means the legislature was relatively unwilling to use its checks. This, combined with the presence of checks, made the legislature a medium threat at the beginning of Bolsonaro's Presidency.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislature's willingness to use its power to check the President increased. As Bolsonaro minimized the severity and importance of the situation, the National Congress saw the risks for their constituents and began legislating around Bolsonaro (Abrucio et al 2021). The National Congress passed Federal Law 13,979/2020, which forced Bolsonaro's Health Minister to follow the recommendations of the World Health Organization, and raised economic assistance to some individuals beyond what was suggested by Bolsonaro's government (Queiroz et al 2021; Bustamante and Meyer 2021). According to the BTI's 2022 Brazil Country Report, "it also helped that the powerful speakers of both houses of Congress supported Bolsonaro's policy, at least until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic". Therefore, starting in February of 2020, the National Congress was a high threat. However, that did not last long. Bolsonaro quickly brought more parties into his legislative coalition through

promising and giving government jobs, lowering the willingness of the National Congress to use its checks on him (Queiroz et al. 2021), reducing the institution's threat level again. This was solidified in February to April 2021, when allies of Bolsonaro won the top leadership positions in both the lower and upper chambers (Boadle 2021; Melo and de Carvalho 2023). At this point, it became less likely that the legislature would move against Bolsonaro's wishes, making the institution a medium threat once again.

Public Opinion

Figure 23: Percent of Right-Leaners with Confidence in National Congress



The Latinobarometer conducted survey waves in 2017, 2018, the year before Bolsonaro became President, 2020, and 2023, the year after Bolsonaro was voted out of office. While this does not provide much nuance from year to year, I am still able to conduct an analysis based on overall patterns between 2018 and 2020 and between 2020 and 2023. In 2017, 2018, and 2020,

the survey included a question asking about level of confidence in the National Congress, with options for no confidence, little confidence, some confidence, and a lot of confidence. In 2023, the question asked about trust, not confidence, but used the same scale.

After narrowing the data to respondents from Brazil who answered the National Congress question, I also filtered the data to include only right-leaners who scored themselves at a 5 or higher on a 10-point left to right ideological scale. Finally, I calculated the proportion of respondents who had some or a lot of trust in the National Congress. Figure 23 shows this proportion.

Then, I compared the public opinion data to Bolsonaro's tweets, which are coded for whether they rhetorically target each institution or not. Unfortunately, data is only available for 2019 and 2022, so expectations will be based on those two years, not the entirety of Bolsonaro's Presidency[1]. Because confidence in the National Congress starts low then increases throughout the term, I would expect rhetorical targeting of the National Congress to be less frequent in 2019 than in 2022. As the National Congress gets more popular, Bolsonaro should rhetorically target it more instead of directly targeting it because directly targeting a popular institution could lead to backlash against him.

Expectations

1. The legislature will be directly targeted most between February 2020 and February 2021 when it is a high threat.
2. Rhetorical targeting of the legislature will be more frequent in 2022 than in 2019 because the National Congress was more popular among right-leaners in 2022.

[1] Data limitations are due to changes in the X (Twitter) API. Posts from 2019 and 2022 were collected and coded manually by the author.

Direct Targeting

Throughout 2018 and 2019, there was very little targeting of the National Congress, which is less than I would expect given the medium threat level in those years. Similarly, in 2020, when I would expect the most targeting due to the increase to a high threat level, there was little targeting. This is not due to a misevaluation of threat, because once COVID-19 hit, the National Congress began distancing itself from Bolsonaro and actively worked against him. According to Ouverney and Fernandes (2022), during the first several months of the pandemic, the National Congress only considered about 9% of the provisional measures Bolsonaro sent to it about the pandemic. In contrast, the National Congress considered more than 90% of Lula's provisional measures in his first term, and during other times in his Presidency, about 47% of Bolsonaro's provisional measures were considered. This, again, shows that the National Congress became more willing to use its powers during the pandemic, making it a high threat to Bolsonaro. However, despite this increased threat level, Bolsonaro was not truly able to directly target the National Congress. This suggests that Bolsonaro either was faced with too many medium and high threat institutions to target them all to the level expected, or that Bolsonaro, like Trump, is working to put out fires as he goes. In other words, he targets the institutions that get in his way of his immediate goals.

Rhetorical Targeting

Rhetorical targeting of the National Congress was also minimal, though there is some variation between 2019 and 2022. In 2019, none of Bolsonaro's tweets targeted the National Congress, but in 2022, five of Bolsonaro's tweets targeted the National Congress. This is some evidence to support my assertion that when an institution is more popular, it will be rhetorically targeted more. However, the impact is small, a difference of just five tweets, and more research

needs be done to further understand the role of public opinion in Bolsonaro's targeting of the legislature. In this case, expectations about direct targeting were not fulfilled, but expectations about rhetorical targeting were tentatively supported.

States/Governors

Historically, state actors have played a large role in politics in Brazil. During the military-led regime of the 1960s and 1970s, state governors emerged as some of the strongest checks on the central government's power, eventually forcing the democratic transition (Samuels and Abrucio 2000). Scholars in the 1990s and 2000s pointed out the continued influence of state actors in national politics after the transition, with governors and state party leaders having influence over how representatives from their state voted in the National Congress (Samuels and Abrucio 2000; Jha 2007).

However, more recently, a line of research has emerged that is more skeptical of the role of state actors in national politics. There are two main strands to this literature. The first asserts that state actors influence national policy, but only through their partisan ties (Figueiredo and Limongi 2022). The second argues that due to the President's agenda-setting power and that the states are not needed to approve constitutional amendments, the central government is not as constrained by state actors as it once was (Arretche 2013; Figueiredo and Limongi 2022). This does not mean, however, that state actors do not have any influence over the national executive and legislature, only that their influence is narrower.

Trojbicz (2019) finds that on issues that directly impact states and especially redistribution among states, state actors have a large influence over how members of the legislature vote, and thus have an indirect check on policies introduced by the President. This is true for revenue sharing and taxation issues, which are largely left to the states and has led to

high levels of inequality due to the central government's inability to redirect resources from wealthier to poorer states (Jha 2007). Similarly, states have a regional interest in natural resources. When one or several states stand to benefit from the discovery of natural resources in their region, members of the National Congress from those states are likely to vote together despite party identification, and members from states that are likely to lose out on revenues from those natural resources are likely to band together to advocate for higher levels of redistribution, again regardless of their party affiliation. This was the case in 2007 with the discovery of oil in Brazil, with party leadership in the National Congress declining to whip votes, knowing that to satisfy constituents, members would have to vote with their state interests over party interests (Trojbicz 2019). States also have relatively high autonomy over education and health care operations within their states, giving state actors power the national government does not have. Further evidence of the influence of states was in the attempted electoral reforms of 2007, during which members did not vote with their party if they saw it was detrimental to their chances of being reelected in their state (Nicolau and Stadler 2016).

This literature has shown that governors and state legislators have at least an indirect impact on national actors, meaning that they have a check on the executive branch when it comes to certain issues, like interstate trade and education policy. However, there are also more formal checks given to state governments in the Constitution. Specifically, Governors and state legislators are given powers to indirectly check the national executive by being in control of certain policy areas outside the purview of the national government and are given powers to directly check the national executive through use of the courts and other institutions. The indirect checks on the President include issues that only the Governor or states have control over, and thus they can legislate without regard for the President's policy positions. Article 25 of the

Constitution gives the states the right to operate natural gas pipelines, giving them, rather than Bolsonaro and central government, control over energy policy. The Constitution also gives states power over police and other emergency services, declaring them the "military of the states" (Article 42), and gives them control over certain types of taxation, along with the ability to choose how to use some federal tax revenue (Article 155 and Article 157 Section I). Aside from these specific policy areas, the Constitution more broadly grants states the right to legislate on any issue that has not already been addressed by the national government (Article 24, Para 3) and to be free from national government intervention unless there is a pressing national need (Article 34).

There are also more direct checks on the national executive. One such check is the ability of Governors to use the Court system to challenge actions taken by the national executive branch. In Brazil, only certain actors can ask the Supreme Court to hear a case about the possible unconstitutionality of policies, and governors are part of that group (Article 103). This means that Governors have some checks on national executive actions via their relationship with the Courts. The other formal check on the national executive branch by the states is the ability to amend the Constitution without the executive's approval. According to Article 60, the Constitution can be amended by "more than one half of the State Legislatures of the federal entities, each of them expressing itself by a simple majority of its members" (Section III).

Given these powers of the states, they have clear checks on the executive branch. However, the partisan makeup of the Governors and State Legislatures makes the states a medium threat. The election in 2018 was not only a Presidential election, but also an election for Governor of every state. Despite the volatility of the party system, with Governors from 13 different parties being elected, many of the newly elected Governors either endorsed Bolsonaro

or refused to endorse his opponent, Haddad (Brazil Institute 2018). 12 out of the 27 new Governors explicitly supported Bolsonaro, while 7 did not make explicit statements of support for either Presidential candidate. This means that out of the 27 Governors, less than 30% supported the opposing candidate. This means that Bolsonaro did not face an immediate threat from the Governors. The Governors who supported his opponent did not make up close to the 50% needed to amend the Constitution, meaning the states were unlikely to use that power, making it unlikely a major check would be used on Bolsonaro.

Like the legislature, though, the threat level increased at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic because governors began stepping in to create healthcare policies while Bolsonaro downplayed the situation. The governors had this check all along because these types of policy competences were shared by the federal, state, and local governments (Bustamante and Meyer 2021), but the severity of the pandemic and risks of public backlash made them more willing to use those checks. Some implemented their own safety policies, such as social distancing, because Bolsonaro refused to do so (Queiroz et al. 2021). This is part of the larger concept of "uncooperative federalism" in which state or local governments act in contradiction with the President (Bulman-Pozen and Gerken 2009). This turned out to be an effective strategy for the governors because "the federative structure partially succeeded in averting an even worse scenario, mitigating the impact of mistaken presidential decisions" (Abrucio et al 2021, p. 65).

Unlike the legislature, in which Bolsonaro added new parties into his legislative coalition and promised jobs to supportive members, the governors and state governments were not easily captured. This allowed governors to stay largely independent from Bolsonaro, maintaining their high threat status until the end of Bolsonaro's term. Based on this threat assessment, I expect that Bolsonaro would have moderately targeted the states from his inauguration until February 2020.

Because COVID-19 increased political willingness of states to use their checks, states became a high threat in February 2020, and I expect that targeting should have increased.

Public Opinion

Because the Latinobarometer does not ask questions about confidence in, trust in, or approval of state governments or governors, I am unable to test the public opinion theory for this section.

Expectations

1. Direct targeting of state governments will be higher during and after February 2020 than before February 2020.

Direct Targeting

When Bolsonaro became President in 2019, he did not spend much time or political capital competing with state Governors. He did, however, work to alter the federal structure. Before, the federal government had to aid states with financial and managerial support, but Bolsonaro worked to change this, taking away much needed resources from less wealthy states and making them more responsible for carrying out policies (Abrucio et al 2021). This especially impacted the capacity of states to carry out education and environmental policies (Abrucio et al 2021), but also increased the autonomy of and cooperation among some states.

Bolsonaro also attempted, unsuccessfully, to lessen public interaction with state governments in April 2019. At the time, there were 90 councils in Brazil, which are intended to be forums for direct democracy where citizens can interact with and participate in local and state government. Each council is typically about one issue or one social group, and research shows that participation in these councils leads to better social programs (Donaghy 2011). Bolsonaro used a presidential decree to abolish 55 of these councils, and although ultimately the councils

remained in place due to civil society and STF pressure, Bolsonaro's actions made it clear that he was looking to weaken public participation in state and local governments in favor of strengthening the federal government (Gottlieb et al 2022).

Problems with this system of federalism became more apparent at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Unified Health System in Brazil gives significant autonomy to states in forming and carrying out health care policies, and under Bolsonaro's federalism, that responsibility grew (Abrucio et al 2021; Carvalho et al 2022). Governors were especially independent in this area in the sense that they could implement their own policies beyond those put in place by the federal government. Despite this fitting into Bolsonaro's conception of federalism, Bolsonaro did not agree with many Governors' policies, and worked to undermine the independence of states that he had previously advocated for.

While many Governors imposed lockdowns and social-distancing measures, Bolsonaro constantly downplayed the threat of COVID-19, often calling it a "little flu" (Néris and Bedritichuk 2021; Carvalho et al 2022; Meyer et al 2023). When some Governors stepped up at the beginning of the pandemic to fill the policy void left by the federal government, Bolsonaro responded by attempting to take power from the states and give it to his Minister of Health (Abrucio et al 2021).

Bolsonaro also personally defied local and state regulations regarding COVID-19 starting in March 2020 and continuing throughout the pandemic (Bustamante and Meyer 2022). Several Governors made their disdain for Bolsonaro's COVID-19 response well known. The Governor of Rio de Janeiro, Wilson Witzel, tweeted "That is why governors and mayors need to lead the pandemic crisis, and not you, Mr. President" (as cited in "Brazil loses" 2020). In April 2020, there was also a Governors' Forum (Forum dos Governadores), intended to help states negotiate

with the federal government without Bolsonaro (Abrucio et al 2021). Governors would maintain this cooperation throughout the pandemic, working with each other rather than the federal government to coordinate responses (Grin et al 2022; Carvalho et al 2022; de Paiva et al 2022). Bolsonaro continued to undermine their cooperation, though, firing a Minister of Health partially for his policy views and for his cooperation with state officials.

In addition, Bolsonaro actively recruited citizens to defy Governors' orders (Hunter and Vega 2022). Once vaccines began being available for countries to purchase, this strategy came up again, with Bolsonaro intimidating the company working with the Governor of São Paulo in order to undermine the power of the Governor (Bustamante and Meyer 2022). Nonetheless, despite Bolsonaro's actions, São Paulo was able to start distributing vaccines before the federal government (Abrucio et al 2021). This did not stop Bolsonaro from continuing his targeting. These patterns of defying Governors and replacing Ministers of Health continued through the second wave of the pandemic in 2021 (Abrucio et al 2021). By targeting the state governments, Bolsonaro attempted to take power from governors and hold that power himself. This attack on the separation of powers in the Brazilian system could have led to a weakening of one of the biggest checks on the executive and left the states unable to check the executive in other policy areas usually under the states' competences.

Targeting of the state governments follows the expected pattern based on institutional threat. While some targeting did occur while the states were a medium threat, there was a clear increase in frequency and intensity of the targeting after the states became a high threat.

Discussion

The evidence provided from tracking direct targeting of the STF, media, electoral administration, National Congress, and state governments provides some support for the institutional threat theory. The high threat institutions (STF, media, and electoral administration) were generally directly targeted more than medium threat institutions. Direct targeting of state governments, especially, demonstrates how backslider decision-making is impacted by threat. During the first year of Bolsonaro's presidency, he was not spending his time limiting the powers of governors. Rather, he was focusing much of his time and attention on fighting with the STF and the media. However, once the state governments' threat level increased during the pandemic, Bolsonaro began paying more attention to them.

Despite this clear demonstration of the relationship between threat and targeting, not all patterns fit expectations. For example, like with Trump's targeting of the electoral administration in the US, Bolsonaro's direct targeting of the Brazilian electoral administration increased as the election grew closer. This, again, suggests that timing is an important consideration. There are a couple reasons this may be the case. First is that there are too many high threat institutions in the system, so Bolsonaro must focus on only the institutions that are actively working against his interests at any given time. Due to time constraints, he can only focus on the election when it is imminent. Second is that Bolsonaro was unclear about the threat level of the electoral administration until the election got closer. Perhaps, once polls started showing how close the race was, Bolsonaro realized the threat level and began to target it. More research is needed to determine which, if either, of these explanations are at play here.

This chapter has also provided evidence that not all backsliders are responsive to their voters in the expected ways. Given the literature on populism and responsiveness, we should

expect populists to care about what their voters think about institutions because populists own the issue of anti-establishmentism, and research shows populists are responsive to their voters on issues they own. Changes in public opinion of the National Congress, media, and electoral administration did not coincide neatly with increases or decreases in rhetorical targeting. In fact, rhetorical targeting of the National Congress and electoral administration, along with the STF, was minimal in both 2019 and 2022, even when public opinion changed, suggesting that Bolsonaro was not considering his voters' trust or confidence in institutions when deciding which institutions to target and when to target them.

In the next chapter, I will discuss these findings in conjunction with the findings from the other two case study chapters and assess the fit of the theories. Additionally, I will reiterate the contributions this project makes to the democratic backsliding and populism literatures and highlight what I think are the biggest takeaways.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Summary of Findings

In this dissertation, I have investigated the role institutions and public opinion play in authoritarian populists' decisions about backsliding. I attempted to explain why authoritarian populists target some institutions but not others, and why this targeting is sometimes direct and sometimes rhetorical. Overall, I found that institutional factors play a larger role in these decisions than public opinion.

Chapter 1 introduced the puzzle and research questions, and Chapter 2 developed a two-pronged theory of institutional threat and public opinion to explain the sequencing of events during episodes of democratic backsliding. I argued that high threat institutions, those who have checks on the executive and are willing to use those checks, are likely to be targeted more intensely and more frequently than medium threat institutions, which are unlikely to use their checks, and low threat institutions, which do not have checks on the executive. I also argued that public opinion should impact decisions about whether to target and institution directly or rhetorically. Because populists are responsive to their voters on issues they own, I theorized that populists would target unpopular institutions directly, while targeting popular institutions rhetorically to avoid backlash from the public in the present and to weaken public trust in the institution enough that there will not be backlash for future attempts to directly target it.

In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I tested the institutional threat and public opinion theories. Specifically, I looked at episodes of backsliding that occurred in Hungary from 2010 to 2014, the US from 2017 to 2020, and Brazil from 2019 to 2022. Due to data limitations, I was only able to test the institutional threat part of the theory in Hungary, but was able to also test both parts of the theory in the US and Brazil.

In the case of Hungary, I determined, based on primary and secondary sources, that the Constitutional Court was a high threat institution, the media were a medium, then high threat, and the electoral administration was a medium threat. This variation in threat level across the institutions and the variation within the media allowed me to test whether threat level impacts direct targeting.

Direct targeting of all three institutions fit with my expectations. The high threat Constitutional Court was constantly directly targeted throughout the term until it was weakened severely enough in 2014 that it could only rarely block Orbán's policy goals. The media saw the expected increase in targeting when threat level increased in 2013. The electoral administration saw some direct targeting throughout the time period, as well, but less so than the high threat institutions.

Chapter 4 tests this institutional threat theory in the context of the United States. The 115th Congress, 116th Congress, media, electoral administration, and Supreme Court were all assessed for threat level. The 115th Congress, electoral administration, and Supreme Court were all medium threats, while the 116th Congress and the media were high threats. After tracking direct targeting of these institutions, I find that high threat institutions were targeted more often than medium threat institutions. The difference in targeting between medium and high threat institutions is most clearly demonstrated by the increase in targeting from the medium threat 115th Congress to the high threat 116th Congress.

Due to data availability through the Trump Twitter Archive, I was able to track rhetorical targeting of Congress, the media, the electoral administration, and the Supreme Court throughout the entirety of Trump's Presidency. I compared the frequency of targeting to increases and decreases in public trust in the institutions, as measured through yearly Gallup polls. I found that

public trust in institutions did not influence the frequency of rhetorical targeting of those institutions. Rather, Trump seemed to be more reactive to the institutions themselves than to the public. Rhetorical targeting of all of the institutions was more common when those institutions were actively using their powers against Trump, not when they were most popular among the public.

I found some similar and some different targeting patterns in Chapter 5, where I test the theory on the National Congress, Supreme Federal Court, state governments, media, and electoral administration in Brazil during the Presidency of Jair Bolsonaro from 2019 to 2022. Direct targeting was relatively low for most institutions, especially when comparing to the Hungarian case. Bolsonaro attempted to take power from institutions quite often, but was largely unsuccessful, leaving most institutions' checks on the executive intact. The direct targeting that did occur roughly fits expectations, with targeting of state governments increasing when they became high threats during the COVID crisis and targeting of the media staying consistent throughout the term.

Bolsonaro's rhetorical targeting reveals some similarities to Trump. Rather than rhetorically attacking institutions when they are popular among right leaners, as was expected, both Trump and Bolsonaro rhetorically targeted institutions that were in the midst of actively using their powers to check the executive. In both Brazil and the United States, the electoral administration was only seriously attacked starting a few months before the election, rather than being targeted consistently throughout the term. As discussed in previous chapters, I think that the reason for this is that there were other institutions that had more immediate impacts on populist goals, and therefore the populists had to prioritize those other institutions first, leaving the electoral administration for later. Even though the electoral administration was a threat, it was

a longer-term threat than I originally theorized, allowing the authoritarian populists to wait until later to target it.

Discussion and Contributions

This research highlights a couple of the major differences between the backsliding undertaken by Orbán in Hungary and the backsliding undertaken by Trump in the United States and Bolsonaro in Brazil. Unlike Trump and Bolsonaro, Orbán had a supermajority supporting him in the legislature when he came to power. As discussed by other scholars, legislative capture is important for backsliders in their attempts to achieve their policy and electoral goals, and this dissertation helps explain why. In part, Orbán was able to prioritize his targeting of other institutions because there was one fewer institution available to check him in the first place. Fidesz' capture of the legislature allowed Orbán the time and political support he needed to think about his long-term rather than short-term goals. Due to legislative support, Orbán could more effectively plan for the targeting of other institutions, even if they were longer term threats. This includes the electoral administration, which was a medium threat in both the US and Hungary. In Hungary, Orbán targeted the electoral administration as early as 2011, just one year into Orbán's term, while in the US, targeting of the electoral administration did not start in earnest until about one year before the 2020 election, which is about three years into Trump's term. Even though the electoral administrations were both at similar threat levels, Orbán's capture of the legislature in Hungary both freed up time needed to actually plan and conduct backsliding and gave him the political support he needed to change the Constitution and follow through on that backsliding. Therefore, this dissertation finds support for the idea that legislative capture allows democratic backsliders to be more successful in achieving their goals.

Beyond this, the evidence shows that institutional threat impacts backslider decision-making. While it was easier for Orbán's backsliding attempts to be successful because of his legislative support, all three backsliders at least attempted to take powers from or discredit high threat institutions. Both Bolsonaro and Trump consistently targeted the media, for example, which were high threats in Brazil and the US. Although both succeeded in lowering trust in these institutions, they were only able to make some smaller direct changes to the media landscape. This pattern means that institutional threat does help explain the order of targeting but capture of institutions helps explain why some acts of backsliding are successful while others are not.

I also find evidence that high courts are not always targeted for backsliding. Literature has shown that is common for backsliders to target the courts early on during their term. While it is true that Orbán targeted the Court early and often and Bolsonaro targeted the Court, though less successfully, Trump rarely ever targeted the Court either rhetorically or directly. This indicates that the courts are not always targeted early on. Rather, they are targeted early when they are high threats, but are not if they are medium threats.

These backsliding patterns suggest that, at least in some cases, we can predict which institutions backsliders will target based on their threat level. This is potentially helpful when democracy-respecting actors in power anticipate a non-democratic actor coming to power in the near future. If this occurs, democratic actors should be able to identify which institutions are the highest threat to the backslider and begin to implement additional safeguards to insulate those institutions from backslider influence later on. This follows the institutions literature and its assertion that democratic actors will constrain themselves while in office in order to also constrain actors who are in the position later on. This has been demonstrated by Berliner, who finds that office holders implement transparency laws when they think they may be replaced

(2014), and by Epperly, who finds that office holders empower an independent judiciary when they think they will be voted out of office (2013).

While this tactic is usually used as a way to minimize one's own risk in the future, it could also be a potential strategy for democratic actors when they know a non-democratic actor is coming to power. Of course, this requires fore knowledge of the non-democratic actor's political positions and power, but given the rhetoric used by these actors during campaigns, those characteristics are usually clear.

This dissertation also contributes more broadly to the literature on event sequencing during episodes of democratic backsliding. Building from the work of Lindenfors et al (2019), Sato et al (2023), and others, I look at patterns in democratic backsliding to determine in what order institutions are targeted and for what reasons they are targeted in the way they are targeted. While the literature has identified patterns in backsliding, most notably that legislatures and courts are targeted first, there has not been as much theorizing about why it is this happens. There is also limited explanation for why this pattern does not occur in every instance of backsliding, including in the United States.

I have presented a two-part theory to try to explain this. The first part of the theory regarding institutional threat is shown in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 to explain at least part of the variation in the targeting of institutions. On the other hand, public opinion did not impact targeting in the way I expected. I theorized that backsliders would target a popular institution rhetorically to decrease trust in the institution before targeting it directly, as to avoid backlash. On the other hand, I theorized that unpopular institutions would be directly targeted because there is less of a risk of backlash.

According to the data, my expectations about public opinion were not met. When I compared public trust or confidence in the institutions in the United States and Brazil to the patterns of direct and rhetorical targeting, I found, instead, that direct and rhetorical targeting occur at the same time. These findings are based on incomplete public opinion and text data, though, so more fine-grained data may get us closer to understanding the relationship between public opinion and timing and type of targeting during episodes of democratic backsliding.

Therefore, there are plenty of opportunities to extend this work in the future to better understand whether and how public opinion affects the decision-making of backsliders. Other scholars find that populists are generally responsive, so there is a possibility that responsiveness among democratic backsliders looks different than the way I describe it in Chapter 2 of this dissertation (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Guasti and Buštíková 2020). One way forward could be to investigate whether approval of the executive is what matters to backsliders rather than trust in institutions. Another possibility is that public opinion of institutions does not impact voting intention or choice, populists know this, and therefore do not worry about being responsive to it. A third possibility is that, as time goes on, affective partisanship takes over and public opinion ends up reflecting the position of the authoritarian populist rather than the authoritarian populist being responsive to the positions of their voters.

It is also possible that institutional threat plays such a large role in backsliders' decision-making that public opinion becomes less of a concern than the more immediate threat of the institutions blocking their goals. In all, the finding that institutional threat impacts backslider decisions about targeting is supported by the evidence presented in this dissertation and it is possible that institutional threat plays a large role in other decisions. More research in this area will further illuminate the role of institutional threat in other types of decisions. I also hope to

develop more complete datasets to even better understand the extent to which public opinion impacts backsliders and what the relationship is between public opinion and institutional threat.

To further understand this relationship, I will approach the public opinion part of the theory from different angles. Rather than relying only on public opinion of the institutions, I want to look at public opinion of the backslider, the backslider's government, and the European Union. Especially since Clayton (2022) finds that people are generally unable to identify when an institution has been targeted for democratic backsliding, public opinion of those institutions might not have the explanatory power I originally expected.

Considering opinion of the authoritarian populist, I would expect it matters most when elections are close due to the possibility of being ousted. Based on my threat analysis of electoral administrations, authoritarian populists are most likely to target elections as the elections draw closer. It is possible that this occurs because public opinion itself is seen as a threat as elections approach because low approval ratings can lead to losing an election. If this is the case, I would expect that as an election approaches, backsliders should be responsive to public opinion. However, this responsiveness looks different than the responsiveness I previously outlined, with the authoritarian populist responding to low public approval by conducting more backsliding. Since the backslider sees that their electoral goals may not be achieved due to low approval ratings, they have incentives to go all in on targeting institutions, most specifically of the electoral administration.

It is also possible that public opinion of the European Union matters in decisions about when and how to backslide. According to de Vries (2007), voters' opinion of the European Union can affect vote choice in national elections. If opinion of the European Union impacts evaluations of the national government and evaluations of the national government impact the

likelihood of the authoritarian populist achieving their reelection goals, then voters' opinions of the European Union should be important to the authoritarian populist. While the literature identifies different ways in which opinion of the EU matters for national politics, it is unclear how it matters for democratic backsliding. Future work will theorize about and test the relationship amongst public opinion of the EU, national governments, and the authoritarian populist.

The abundance of opportunities for future research exemplifies how much there is still to understand about the current global wave of democratic decline. This project moves us toward this goal, identifying institutional threat as a way to explain the order in which institutions are targeted and tracking rhetorical tracking of institutions over time. I have also presented a thorough summary of backsliding related to institutions in Hungary, the United States, and Brazil, which are rarely studied together. Altogether, this project provides a unique theoretical framework through which we can, in part, predict the actions of authoritarian populists and work to safeguard institutional targets.

Appendix 1: Coding Guide for Trump's Rhetorical Targeting

Supreme Court

Yes Rules:

1. Direct criticism of Supreme Court decisions or how he is "treated" by the Court.
    a. Example: Tweet 1273630000000000000: "Do you get the impression that the Supreme Court doesn't like me?" 6/18/20

Maybe Rules:

1. Indirect criticism of Court decisions.
    a. Example: Tweet 1281240000000000000: "The Supreme Court sends case back to Lower Court, arguments to continue. This is all a political prosecution. I won the Mueller Witch Hunt, and others, and now I have to keep fighting in a politically corrupt New York. Not fair to this Presidency or Administration!" 7/9/20
2. Criticizing decisions/actions of the "court" but not specifying that he is talking about the Supreme Court.
    a. Example: Tweet 1116710000000000000: "Even the Democrats now say that our Southern Border is a Crisis and a National Emergency. Hopefully, we will not be getting any more BAD (outrageous) court decisions!" 4/12/19
3. Arguing about what the Supreme Court "should" be doing, challenging independence.
    a. Example: Tweet 1034980000000000000: "...charge of the FISA court. He should direct the Presiding Judge, Rosemary Collier, to hold a hearing, haul all of these people from the DOJ &amp, FBI in there, &amp, if she finds there were crimes committed, and there were, there should be a criminal referral by her.... @GreggJarrett" 8/30/18

4. "Warning" the Supreme Court not to take an action.
    a. Example: Tweet 1322070000000000000: "If Sleepy Joe Biden is actually elected President, the 4 Justices (plus1) that helped make such a ridiculous win possible would be relegated to sitting on not only a heavily PACKED COURT, but probably a REVOLVING COURT as well. At least the many new Justices will be Radical Left!" 10/30/20

No Rules:

1. Predicting what Democrats or others might do to the Court, indicating the need to "save" it.
    a. Example: Tweet 1276840000000000000: "....We will win the Election against Corrupt Joe Biden, Nancy Pelosi, and Schumer. We will save the Supreme Court, your 2nd Amendment, permanent damage from the ridiculous Green New Deal, and you from massive Tax Hikes. Also, our Heritage, History and LAW & ORDER!" 6/27/20
2. Clear references to "courts" that are not the Supreme Court.
    a. Example: Tweet 1078370000000000000: "The reason the DACA for Wall deal didn't get done was that a ridiculous court decision from the 9th Circuit allowed DACA to remain, thereby setting up a Supreme Court case. After ruling, Dems dropped deal - and that's where we are today, Democrat obstruction of the needed Wall." 12/27/18
3. Positive/neutral statements about the Supreme Court.
    a. Example: Tweet 1006330000000000000: "Just won big Supreme Court decision on Voting! Great News!" 6/12/18

Media

Yes Rules:

1. Accusing the media of lying.
    a. Example: Tweet 908652000000000000: “ESPN is paying a really big price for its politics (and bad programming). People are dumping it in RECORD numbers. Apologize for untruth!” 9/15/17
2. Accusing the media of censoring him or others.
    a. Example: Tweet1022450000000000000: “Twitter SHADOW BANNING prominent Republicans. Not good. We will look into this discriminatory and illegal practice at once! Many complaints.” 7/26/18
3. Accusing the media of unfair treatment/bias against him.
    a. Example: Tweet 1120640000000000000: “In the old days if you were President and you had a good economy, you were basically immune from criticism. Remember, “It’s the economy stupid.” Today I have, as President, perhaps the greatest economy in history...and to the Mainstream Media, it means NOTHING. But it will!” 4/23/19
4. Reference to media as the opposition/enemy.
    a. Example: Tweet 826073000000000000: “Where was all the outrage from Democrats and the opposition party (the media) when our jobs were fleeing our country?” 1/30/17

5. “Fake news,” “Lamestream,” other negative nicknames, “Trump Derangement Syndrome”.
    a. Example: Tweet 1107770000000000000: “While the press doesn’t like writing about it, nor do I need them to, I donate my yearly Presidential salary of $400,000.00 to different agencies throughout the year, this to Homeland Security. If I didn’t do it there would be hell to pay from the FAKE NEWS MEDIA! https://t.co/xqIGUOwh4x” 3/18/19
6. Saying the media owe him an apology.
    a. Example: Tweet 1120000000000000000: “Do you believe this? The New York Times Op-Ed: MEDIA AND DEMOCRATS OWE TRUMP AN APOLOGY. Well, they got that one right!” 4/21/19
7. Personal attacks on journalists/reporters.
    a. Example: Tweet 881140000000000000: “Crazy Joe Scarborough and dumb as a rock Mika are not bad people, but their low rated show is dominated by their NBC bosses. Too bad!” 7/1/17
8. Partial tweets that still include an insult/criticism with negative language.
    a. Example: Tweet 1266110000000000000: “RT @WhiteHouse: The Trump Administration is making sure your taxpayer dollars don't go to social media giants that unfairly repress free sp...” 5/28/20

9. Accusing media of cover-ups.
    a. Example: Tweet 1028630000000000000: “Seems like the Department of Justice (and FBI) had a program to keep Donald Trump from becoming President”. @DarrellIssa @foxandfriends If this had happened to the other side, everybody involved would be in jail. This is a Media coverup of the biggest story of our time.” 8/12/18

Maybe Rules:

1. Statements about what the media has not covered.
    a. Example: Tweet 835479000000000000: “The media has not reported that the National Debt in my first month went down by $12 billion vs a $200 billion increase in Obama first mo.” 2/25/17
2. References to “Real” news, indicating there is “fake” news.
    a. Example: Tweet 863021000000000000: “China just agreed that the U.S. will be allowed to sell beef, and other major products, into China once again. This is REAL news!” 5/12/17
3. Criticisms of media without negative language.
    a. Example: Tweet 875888000000000000: “RT @seanhannity: #Hannity Starts in 30 minutes with @newtgingrich and my monologue on the Deep State’s allies in the media” 6/17/17
4. Incomplete tweets from the Archive that are likely insults to the media.
    a. Example: Tweet 1120000000000000000: “RT @iheartmindy: So James Woods was kicked off Twitter for quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson...but @TalbertSwan the racist fake man of God, that…" 5/4/19

5. Tweeting stories about the media but with limited/no negative embellishment.
    a. Example: Tweet 1260170000000000000: “RT @alexdatig: MediaBuzz: Former NBC Staffer Emily Miller Describes Culture of Harassment at NBC https://t.co/WLsWhEp4HD https://t.co/vijeTâ€¦” 5/12/20
6. Inaccuracy of polls with no other negative language. Referencing “fake” polls without direct reference to media.
    a. Example: Tweet 886589000000000000: “The ABC/Washington Post Poll, even though almost 40% is not bad at this time, was just about the most inaccurate poll around election time!” 7/16/17
7. Statements about media ratings without negative language.
    a. Example: Tweet 1203820000000000000: “RT @DailyCaller: CNN Receives Bad TV Rating For Speaker Pelosi Town Hall https://t.co/YxzzHljJAK” 12/8/19
8. Saying the media was manipulated by a political actor or allied to the actor (primary attack is on the political actor but media still made to look bad).
    a. Example: Tweet 924097000000000000: “WHAT HAPPENED” How Team Hillary played the press for fools on Russia https://t.co/GqpIidk017NOW WE KNOW! https://t.co/SgWL1HZmkI” 10/28/17
9. Statements about how others view/interact with journalists without specifying content.
    a. Example: Tweet 1178310000000000000: “RT @steventatkinson: Mark Levin just mopped the floor with Ed Henry. #UkraineScandal” 9/29/19

No Rules:

1. Praising media.
    a. Example: Tweet 1256690000000000000: “I hate to be promoting AT&T, but @OANN is Great News, not Fake News. Everybody should be carrying them! https://t.co/b2fx9w0zqq” 5/2/2020
2. No reference to media.
3. References to “fake ads”.
    1. Example: Tweet 1288830000000000000: “Drug prices will soon be lowered massively. Big Pharma (Drug Companies) are advertising against me like crazy because lower prices mean less profit. When you watch a Fake Ad, just think lower drug prices!!!” 7/30/2020

Electoral Administration

Yes Rules:

1. Accusing people/groups/companies of “interfering,” “meddling,” “tampering,” etc., with an election, cheating, or keep people from being able to vote (most likely illegal actions) (can be about 2016 election, as well).
    a. Example: Tweet 1156240000000000000: “RT @LYNNTHO06607841: @SenSchumer @senatemajldr DEMOCRATS ARE THE ONLY ONES INTERFERING IN OUR ELECTIONS. WHY DO YOU THINK THEY SO STRONGL...” 7/30/2019

2. Saying election results are fake, “rigged”.
    a. Example: Tweet 1327980000000000000: “He only won in the eyes of the FAKE NEWS MEDIA. I concede NOTHING! We have a long way to go. This was a RIGGED ELECTION!” 11/15/2020
3. “Stop the count”.
    a. Example: Tweet 1320000000000000000: “STOP THE COUNT!” 11/5/2020
4. Claims of voter fraud, claims that mail-in voting will lead to voter fraud, claims of people receiving the wrong ballots.
    a. Example: Tweet 1266050000000000000: “So ridiculous to see Twitter trying to make the case that Mail-In Ballots are not subject to FRAUD. How stupid, there are examples, & cases, all over the place. Our election process will become badly tainted & a laughingstock all over the World. Tell that to your hater @yoyoel” 5/28/2020
5. Saying he will not accept results of election or that he actually won.
    a. Example: Tweet 1330000000000000000: “I WON THIS ELECTION, BY A LOT!” 11/7/2020
6. Criticisms of Dominion.
    a. Example: Tweet 1327100000000000000: “Must see @seanhannity takedown of the horrible, inaccurate and anything but secure Dominion Voting System which is used in States where tens of thousands of votes were stolen from us and given to Biden. Likewise, the Great @LouDobbs has a confirming and powerful piece!” 11/13/2020

7. Claims of the election being "stolen" or that his team/poll watchers were not treated fairly.
    a. Example: Tweet 1331450000000000000: "RT @PJStrikeForce: Opinion: The Thieves Who Stole Our Election Got Sloppy https://t.co/tFgNgCX1Ka" 11/25/2020
8. Suggesting that not knowing the election results on election day means something is wrong.
    a. Example: Tweet 1290000000000000000: "Must know Election results on the night of the Election, not days, months, or even years later!" 7/30/2020
9. References to the DNC taking the nomination from Sanders.
    a. Example: Tweet 1220000000000000000: "They are rigging the election again against Bernie Sanders, just like last time, only even more obviously. They are bringing him out of so important Iowa in order that, as a Senator, he sit through the Impeachment Hoax Trial. Crazy Nancy thereby gives the strong edge to Sleepy..." 1/17/20
10. References to January 6th rally/insurrection. Following movements of the "stop the steal" bus tour.
    a. Example: Tweet 1345090000000000000: "The BIG Protest Rally in Washington, D.C., will take place at 11.00 A.M. on January 6th. Locational details to follow. StopTheSteal!" 1/1/2021

Maybe Rules:

1. Negative references to the electoral system not covered by the "Yes" rules.
    a. Example: Tweet 1290000000000000000: "How can voters be sending in Ballots starting, in some cases, one month before the First Presidential Debate. Move the First Debate up. A debate, to me, is a Public Service. Joe Biden and I owe it to the American People!" 8/6/2020
2. Accusing people of not properly addressing election interference.
    a. Example: Tweet 1177200000000000000: "RT @DonaldJTrumpJr: Yikes! I guess the Dems no longer want to do anything about election interference. https://t.co/X52fMO3CRj" 9/26/20193
3. References to number of "legal" votes. Suggests there are illegal votes.
    a. Example: Tweet 1330000000000000000: "NOW 73,000,000 LEGAL VOTES! https://t.co/VSNfdzoFkK" 11/12/2020
4. References to suppression polls or media affecting elections (without language from "Yes" rules). Must say they are affecting the election, not just that they are fake or bad.
    a. Example: Tweet 1290000000000000000: "The Trump Campaign has more ENTHUSIASM, according to many, than any campaign in the history of our great Country - Even more than 2016. Biden has NONE! The Silent Majority will speak on NOVEMBER THIRD!!! Fake Suppression Polls & Fake News will not save the Radical Left." 7/26/2020

5. Accusing people/groups/events of "influencing," "steering" the election (different than interfere) (not necessarily illegal).
    a. Example: Tweet 1300000000000000000: "....John a loser and swear on whatever, or whoever, I was asked to swear on, that I never called our great fallen soldiers anything other than HEROES. This is more made up Fake News given by disgusting & jealous failures in a disgraceful attempt to influence the 2020 Election!" 9/4/2020
6. Partial tweets likely questioning election results, tweets most likely about election but without mentioning it explicitly.
    a. Example: Tweet 1337760000000000000: "WE HAVE JUST BEGUN TO FIGHT!!!" 12/12/2020
7. Encouraging laws that make it harder to vote. Suggesting that there is no need for mail-in or alternative forms of voting.
    a. Example: Tweet 1296080000000000000: "IF YOU CAN PROTEST IN PERSON, YOU CAN VOTE IN PERSON!" 8/19/2020
8. Falsely accusing others of violating campaign laws.
    a. Example: Tweet 926250000000000000: "....This is real collusion and dishonesty. Major violation of Campaign Finance Laws and Money Laundering - where is our Justice Department?" 11/3/2017
9. Accusing people/groups of trying to reverse or undo previous election.
    a. Example: Tweet 1185640000000000000: "RT @VP: While Dems in Congress have been trying to overturn the will of the American people by reversing Election Day 2016, our Admin will..." 10/19/2019

10. Accusing democrats of bad primary election administration
    a. Example: Tweet 1220000000000000000: “When will the Democrats start blaming RUSSIA, RUSSIA, RUSSIA, instead of their own incompetence for the voting disaster that just happened in the Great State of Iowa?” 2/4/2020
11. Warning people of potential future election fraud, saying their vote might be taken away by the Democrats.
    a. Example: Tweet 1300000000000000000: “NORTH CAROLINA: To make sure your Ballot COUNTS, sign & send it in EARLY. When Polls open, go to your Polling Place to see if it was COUNTED. IF NOT, VOTE! Your signed Ballot will not count because your vote has been posted. Don’t let them illegally take your vote away from you!” 9/12/2020
12. References to lawsuits about the election/voter fraud without language from “Yes” rules.
    a. Example: Tweet 1333860000000000000: “Michigan voter fraud hearing going on now!” 12/1/2020

No Rules:

1. Not about elections.
    a. Example: Tweet 1100410000000000000: “Just arrived in Vietnam. Thank you to all of the people for the great reception in Hanoi. Tremendous crowds, and so much love!” 2/26/2019

2. Positive or neutral statements about elections.
    a. Example: Tweet 1259150000000000000: “Mike has my complete & total endorsement. We need him badly in Washington. A great fighter pilot & hero, & a brilliant Annapolis grad, Mike will never let you down. Mail in ballots, & check that they are counted! https://t.co/KMS62yCyfl” 5/9/2020
3. Warnings not to partake in election fraud.
    a. Example: Tweet 1053810000000000000: “All levels of government and Law Enforcement are watching carefully for VOTER FRAUD, including during EARLY VOTING. Cheat at your own peril. Violators will be subject to maximum penalties, both civil and criminal!” 10/21/2018
4. Encouraging use of poll watchers without negative language.
    a. Example: Tweet1321050000000000000: “Philadelpiha MUST HAVE POLLWATCHERS!” 10/27/2020

Congress

Yes Rules:

1. Any reference to obstruction or holding up nominees.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 871722020278587000: “.@foxandfriends Dems are taking forever to approve my people, including Ambassadors. They are nothing but OBSTRUCTIONISTS! Want approvals.” 6/5/17

2. Threatening to find ways around Congress and to impede it.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 1288506554585500000: “If Congress doesn’t bring fairness to Big Tech, which they should have done years ago, I will do it myself with Executive Orders. In Washington, it has been ALL TALK and NO ACTION for years, and the people of our Country are sick and tired of it!” 7/29/20
3. Casting doubt about impeachment process (subpoenas, appointing counsel, mischaracterizing as a coup). Impeachment is allowed by the Constitution. “Witch Hunt” references during the impeachment trials. Later tweets exclusively about the FBI’s witch-hunt or just using the term to mean anyone doing anything he does not like do not count.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 1148270600407920000: “Brilliant Constitutional Lawyer, Dr. John Eastman, said the Special Prosecutor (Mueller) should have NEVER been appointed in the first place. The entire exercise was fundamentally illegal. The Witch Hunt should never happen to another President of the U.S. again. A TOTAL SCAM! https://t.co/5sRAMhHAR8” 7/8/19
4. Attacks on Mueller once he was tied to the Congressional investigation.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 1149317469544370000: “....conflicted and compromised Mueller again. He said he was done after his last 9 minute speech, and that he had nothing more to say outside of the No Collusion, No Obstruction, Report. Enough already, go back to work! I won, unanimously, the big Emoluments case yesterday!” 7/11/19

5. Attacks for certifying the election. Congress is required to certify the results.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 1346110956078810000: “How can you certify an election when the numbers being certified are verifiably WRONG. You will see the real numbers tonight during my speech, but especially on JANUARY 6th. @SenTomCotton Republicans have pluses & minuses, but one thing is sure, THEY NEVER FORGET!” 01/04/21
6. Blame for shutdowns. It is within Congress’ duties to pass a budget, and shutdowns are legally allowed. Does not include blame on individuals for shutdown.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 943856675294982000: “House Democrats want a SHUTDOWN for the holidays in order to distract from the very popular, just passed, Tax Cuts. House Republicans, don’t let this happen. Pass the C.R. TODAY and keep our Government OPEN!” 12/21/17

Maybe Rules:

1. Mentioning “Democrats” negatively without specific reference to Congress but, given context, they are most likely alluding to Congressional Democrats.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 1202377368142150000: “RT @RepMikeJohnson: Democrats are pursuing their hatred for @realDonaldTrump atop the ruins of our public liberty. That is the greatest dan...” 12/5/19
2. References to “Do Nothing Dems” or similar sentiment. Except for where context is given to ensure he is talking about Congress (would be Yes in that case).
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 1177576649233190000: “The Democrats are now to be known as the DO NOTHING PARTY!” 9/27/19

3. Attacks on whistleblower. Witness, not hired by Congress but still part of investigation.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 1202792805753590000: “Where’s the Fake Whistleblower? Where’s Whistleblower number 2? Where’s the phony informer who got it all wrong?” 12/6/19
4. Mix of positive and negative statements about Congress in same tweet.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 887279050263285000: “We were let down by all of the Democrats and a few Republicans. Most Republicans were loyal, terrific &amp, worked really hard. We will return!” 7/18/17
5. References to impeachment/witch hunt that mention/allude to the FBI or deep state but which also are connected to Congressional investigation.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 1089156621002000000: “If Roger Stone was indicted for lying to Congress, what about the lying done by Comey, Brennan, Clapper, Lisa Page &amp, lover, Baker and soooo many others? What about Hillary to FBI and her 33,000 deleted Emails? What about Lisa &amp, Peter’s deleted texts &amp, Wiener’s laptop? Much more!” 1/26/19
6. Saying Dems are holding things back, not doing their job the right way, or are getting in the way but does not rise to the level of saying they are obstructing, abusing power, or doing something unconstitutional.
    a. Example: Tweet ID:1315652617863860000: “The Republicans are giving the Democrats a great deal of time, which is not mandated, to make their self serving statements relative to our great new future Supreme Court Justice. Personally, I would pull back, approve, and go for STIMULUS for the people!!!” 10/12/20

7. Negative tweet about votes or how certain groups voted on a bill.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 890820505330212000: “3 Republicans and 48 Democrats let the American people down. As I said from the beginning, let ObamaCare implode, then deal. Watch!” 7/28/17
8. Saying Congress is not paying attention to an issue he thinks they should or is not doing what it should be doing.
    a. Example: Tweet ID:1335336916582080000: “But you never got the signature verification! Your people are refusing to do what you ask. What are they hiding? At least immediately ask for a Special Session of the Legislature. That you can easily, and immediately, do. #Transparency https://t.co/h73ZfjrDt3” 12/5/20

No Rules:

1. Stating policy positions even if he makes a moral judgement of them.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: “The Democrats are pushing for Universal HealthCare while thousands of people are marching in the UK because their U system is going broke and not working. Dems want to greatly raise taxes for really bad and non-personal medical care. No thanks!” 2/5/18
2. Statements made about Democrats in context of running for election.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 939149296389251000: “LAST thing the Make America Great Again Agenda needs is a Liberal Democrat in Senate where we have so little margin for victory already. The Pelosi/Schumer Puppet Jones would vote against us 100% of the time. He’s bad on Crime, Life, Border, Vets, Guns &amp, Military. VOTE ROY MOORE!” 12/8/17

3. Reference to Russia investigation explicitly about the FBI or Obama, not Congress.
    a. Example: Tweet ID:1262180792714830000: “Watch @marklevinshow tonight on @FoxNews. He covers the Russia Hoax and all of the other criminality that came from the Obama Administration They got caught! A repeat later in evening. Really something.” 5/18/20
4. Veto threat, within Constitutional power given to President.
    a. Example: Tweet ID:1333965375839620000: “.....Therefore, if the very dangerous & unfair Section 230 is not completely terminated as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), I will be forced to unequivocally VETO the Bill when sent to the very beautiful Resolute desk. Take back America NOW. Thank you!” 12/2/20
5. Unrelated to Congress or positive toward Congress.
    a. Example: Tweet ID: 1233990259802760000: “I would find it hard to believe that failed presidential candidates Tom Steyer, or Mini Mike Bloombeg, would contribute to the Democrat Party, even against me, after the way they have been treated - laughed at & mocked. The real politicians ate them up and spit them out!” 3/1/20

Appendix 2: Public Opinion Data, US

Figure 24: Republican Approval of 115th Congress (YouGov 2022)

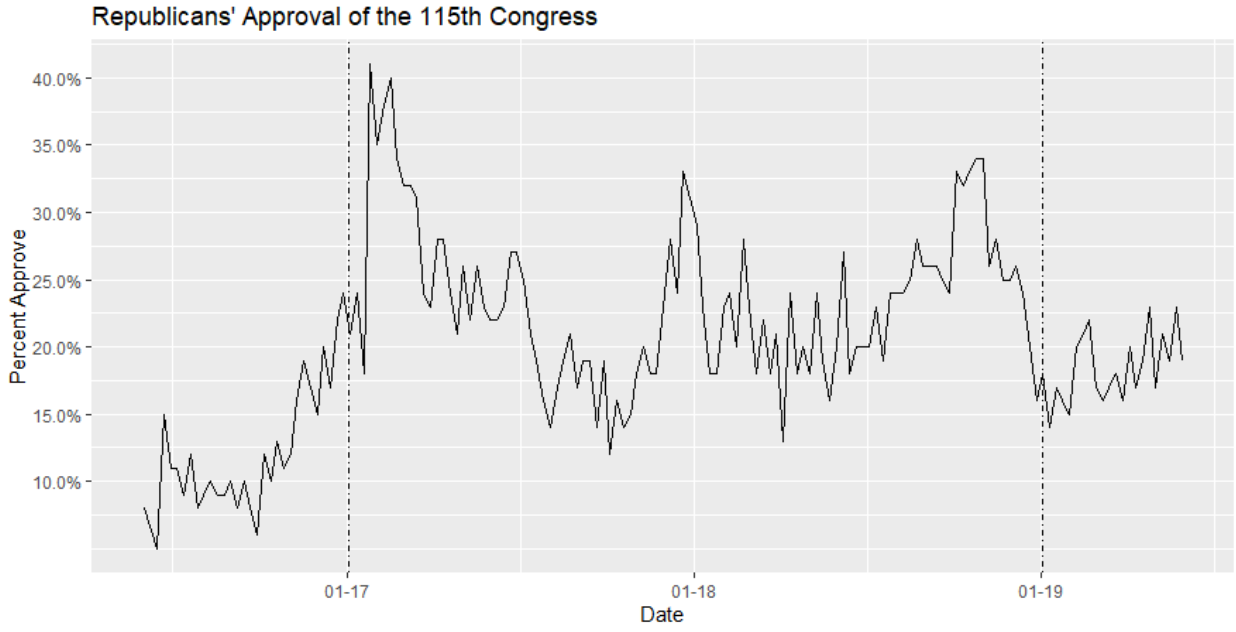


Figure 25: Democrat Approval of 116th Congress (YouGov 2022)

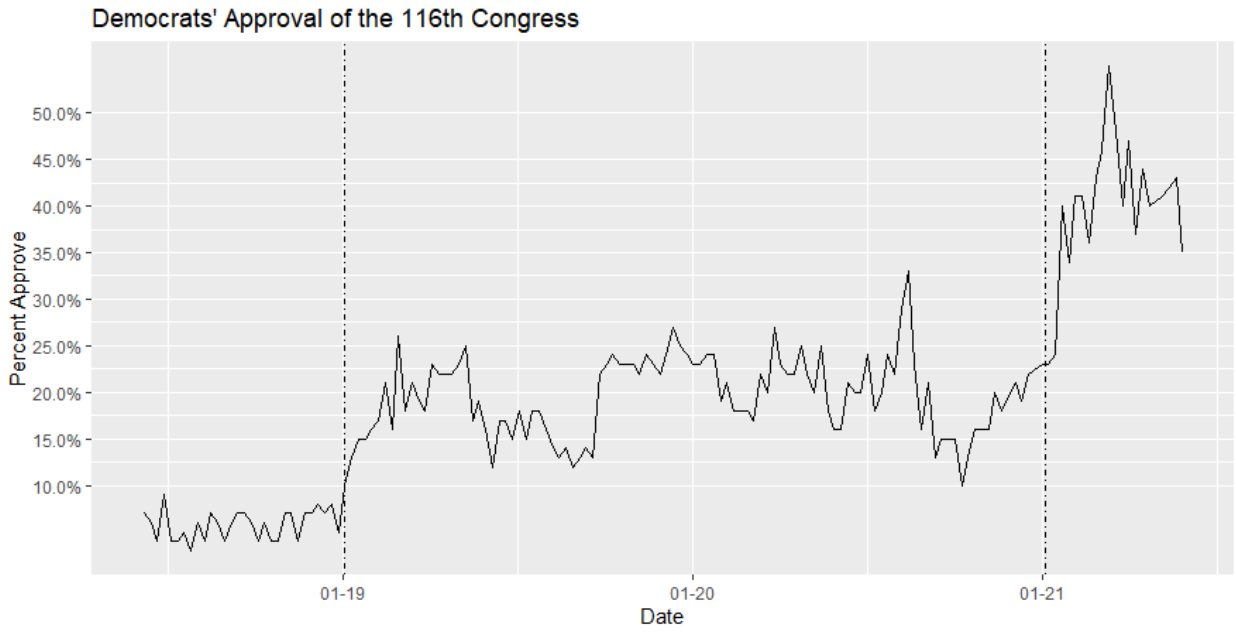
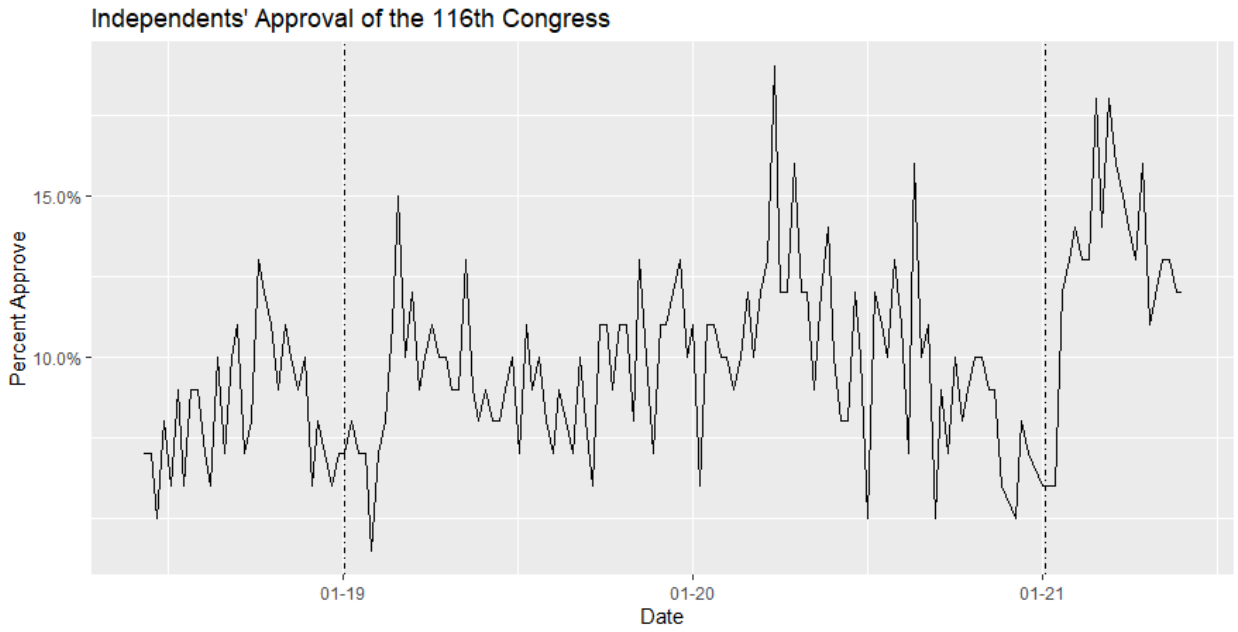
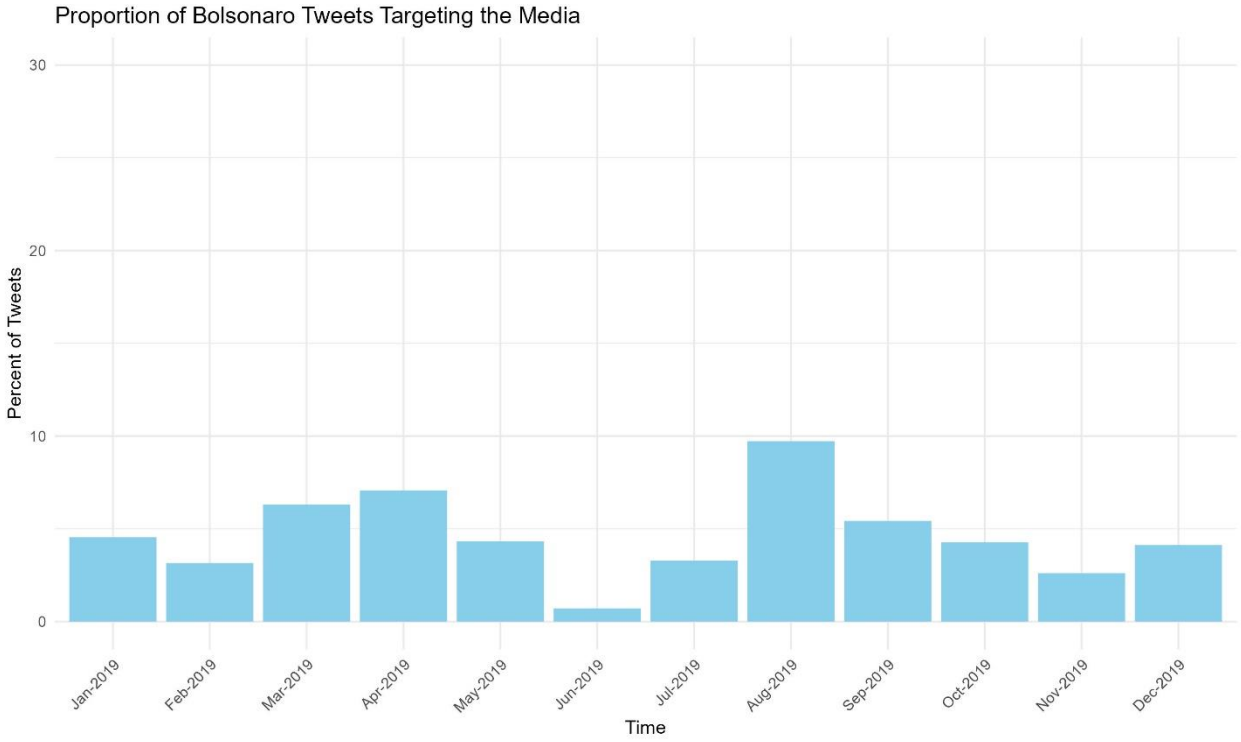


Figure 26: Independent Approval of 116th Congress (YouGov 2022)



Appendix 3: Rhetorical Targeting in Brazil

Figure 27: Proportion of Bolsonaro Tweets Targeting the Media



References

2018 Brazilian Election Results: Initial Takeaways on Political Renewal and the Role of Women | Wilson Center. (2018). Retrieved May 23, 2023, from https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/2018-brazilian-election-results-initial-takeaways-political-renewal-and-the-role-women

Aarslew, L. F. (2023). Why Don't Partisans Sanction Electoral Malpractice? *British Journal of Political Science*, *53*(2), 407–423. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123422000126

Aarts, K., & Thomassen, J. (2008). Satisfaction with democracy: Do institutions matter? *Electoral Studies*, *27*(1), 5–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2007.11.005

Abramowitz, A. I. (1988). An Improved Model for Predicting Presidential Election Outcomes. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *21*(4), 843–847. https://doi.org/10.2307/420023

Abrucio, F. L., Grin, E., & Segatto, C. I. (2021). Brazilian Federalism in the Pandemic. In B. Guy Peters, E. Grin, & F. Luiz Abrucio (Eds.), *American Federal Systems and COVID-19* (pp. 63–88). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80117-165-620211004

Adams, J., Clark, M., Ezrow, L., & Glasgow, G. (2004). Understanding Change and Stability in Party Ideologies: Do Parties Respond to Public Opinion or to Past Election Results? *British Journal of Political Science*, *34*(4), 589–610.

Act CCIII of 2020. Hungarian Parliament.

Act XXXVI of 2013. Hungarian Parliament.

ADI No. 4, 277, Supreme Federal Court of Brazil.

ADPF No. 132, Supreme Federal Court of Brazil.

Ames, B. (Ed.). (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Brazilian Politics*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315543871

Andersen, D. (2019). Comparative Democratization and Democratic Backsliding: The Case for a Historical-Institutional Approach. *Comparative Politics, 51*(4), 645–663.

Andeweg, R. B., & Louwerse, T. (2020). The Institutional Framework of Representative Democracy: Comparing the Populist-Majoritarian and the Liberal/Consensual Model. In R. Rohrschneider & J. Thomassen (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Representation in Liberal Democracies* (p. 0). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198825081.013.4

Andreoni, M., Casado, L., & Semple, K. (2020, May 29). In Brazil, a President Under Fire Lashes Out at Investigators. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/world/americas/brazil-bolsonaro-supreme-court.html

Arguelhes, D. W., & Ribeiro, L. M. (2018). 'The Court, it is I'? Individual judicial powers in the Brazilian Supreme Court and their implications for constitutional theory. *Global Constitutionalism*, *7*(2), 236–262. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045381718000072

Arretche, M. (2013). Demos-Constraining or Demos-Enabling Federalism? Political Institutions and Policy Change in Brazil. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, *5*(2), 133–150. https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X1300500205

As it happened: Calls mount for Trump's removal after deadly storming of US Capitol. (2021, January 6). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/americas/20210106-live-us-congress-poised-to-certify-biden-win-as-democrats-look-set-to-take-senate-control

At Mexican border, Trump threatens to use emergency powers to pay for wall. (2019, January 11). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20190111-trump-threatens-emergency-powers-mexico-border-visit-wall-shutdown

Avelino, G., & Fisch, A. (2018). Money, Elections, and Candidates. In *Routledge Handbook of Brazilian Politics*. Routledge.

Avis, E., Ferraz, C., Finan, F., & Varjão, C. (2017). *Money and Politics: The Effects of Campaign Spending Limits on Political Competition and Incumbency Advantage* (Working Paper 23508). National Bureau of Economic Research. https://doi.org/10.3386/w23508

Bairey, C., Blair, R., Baron, H., Benjamin, C., Chen, A., Fenn, D., Gottlieb, J., Gaunt, U., Karibjanian, I., Seah, M., & Squires, C. (2023). *Democratic Erosion Event Dataset Codebook v6.* Democratic Erosion: A Cross-University Collaboration.

Bajomi-Lázár, P. (1999). Press Freedom in Hungary, 1988–1998. Budapest: OSI-IPF Draft Working Papers. http://www.osi.hu/ipf/pubs.html

Bajomi-Lázár, P. (2013). The Party Colonisation of the Media: The Case of Hungary. *East European Politics and Societies*, *27*(1), 69–89. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325412465085

Bajomi-Lazar, P. (2017). Particularistic and Universalistic Media Policies: Inequalities in the Media in Hungary. *Javnost - The Public*, *24*(2), 162–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2017.1288781

Bánkuti, M., Halmai, G., & Scheppele, K. L. (2012). Hungary's Illiberal Turn: Disabling the Constitution. *Journal of Democracy*, *23*(3), 138–146.

Barnes, R., & Dawsey, J. (2019, April 27). *Trump views the Supreme Court as an ally, sowing doubt about its independence among his critics: The president's tweet on impeachment exacerbates a dilemma facing Chief Justice John Roberts, who took the unprecedented step of publicly admonishing Trump last year*. The Washington Post (Online); https://www.proquest.com/docview/2215737000/citation/CCC5D1F670E848FBPQ/1

Bartels, L. M. (1993). Messages received: The political impact of media exposure. *The American Political Science Review*, *87*(2), 267.

Bátorfy, A., & Urbán, Á. (2020). State advertising as an instrument of transformation of the media market in Hungary. *East European Politics*, *36*(1), 44–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2019.1662398

Benasaglio Berlucchi, A., & Kellam, M. (2023). Who's to blame for democratic backsliding: Populists, presidents or dominant executives? *Democratization*, *30*(5), 815–835. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2190582

Berliner, D. (2014). The Political Origins of Transparency. *The Journal of Politics*, *76*(2), 479–491. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381613001412

Bermeo, N. (2016). On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, *27*(1), 5–19. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012

Bernardi, L., Bischof, D., & Wouters, R. (2021). The public, the protester, and the bill: Do legislative agendas respond to public opinion signals? *Journal of European Public Policy*, *28*(2), 289–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2020.1729226

Bethell, L. (1994). On democracy in Brazil past and present. *ISA Occasional Papers*, *7*, Article 7. https://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/4300/

Birle, P. (2021, November 9). Brazil's judiciary: Defender of democracy. *BTI Blog*. https://blog.bti-project.org/2021/11/09/brazils-judiciary-defender-of-democracy/

Biró, P., Sziklai, B., & Kóczy, L. Á. (2012). Választókörzetek igazságosan? *Közgazdasági Szemle*, *59*(11), 1165-1186,1270.

Blassnig, S., Engesser, S., Ernst, N., & Esser, F. (2019). Hitting a Nerve: Populist News Articles Lead to More Frequent and More Populist Reader Comments. *Political Communication*, *36*(4), 629–651. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1637980

Boadle, A. (2021, February 1). Bolsonaro allies win control of Brazilian Congress. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/bolsonaro-allies-poised-head-congress-after-senate-vote-2021-02-01/

Bodrogi, B. (2017, March 2). Civil Defamation and Media Freedom in Hungary. IPI Media. https://ipi.media/civil-defamation-and-media-freedom-in-hungary/

Boese, V. A., Lundstedt, M., Morrison, K., Sato, Y., & Lindberg, S. I. (2022). State of the world 2021: Autocratization changing its nature? *Democratization*, *29*(6), 983–1013. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2069751

Bogaards, M. (2018). De-democratization in Hungary: Diffusely defective democracy. *Democratization*, *25*(8), 1481–1499. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1485015

Bolognesi, B., Ribeiro, E., & Codato, A. (2022). A New Ideological Classification of Brazilian Political Parties. *Dados*, *66*, e20210164. https://doi.org/10.1590/dados.2023.66.2.303x

Bolton, A., & Thrower, S. (2021). *Checks in the Balance: Legislative Capacity and the Dynamics of Executive Power*. Princeton University Press.

Bolsonaro, Jair. [@jairbolsonaro]. (2022, June 8). *Lie! It was just the opposite. I argued that if we were to arrest and punish someone for something as subjective as "Fake News", WHICH I AM AGAINST AND EVERYONE KNOWS, it would have to start with the press itself, which often publishes lies and distorted information, like this one.* [Tweet]. X. https://x.com/jairbolsonaro?lang=en

Bolsonaro, Jair. [@jairbolsonaro]. (2022, October 28). *Many thanks to you who accompanied us until this time! We were able to restore the truth of the facts about what good our Government did and put an end to the PT's electoral terrorism…* [Tweet]. X. https://x.com/jairbolsonaro?lang=en

Bozóki, A. (1994). Party formation and constitutional change in Hungary. *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13523279408415260

Bozoki, A. (2013). *Access to electoral rights: Hungary*. https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/29814

Brader, T., Valentino, N. A., & Suhay, E. (2008). What Triggers Public Opposition to Immigration? Anxiety, Group Cues, and Immigration Threat. *American Journal of Political Science*, *52*(4), 959–978.

Brazil. (1997). Law No. 9,504, Electoral Code.

Brazil. (2021). Measure No. 1068

Brazil. (1997). Law No. 9,504.

Brazil Constitution. (1988).

Brazil Constitution. Amendment 107. (2020).

Brazil Constitution, Article 25. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 34. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 42. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 51. (1988).

Brazil Constitution. Article 52. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 60, section III. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 95. (1988).

Brazil Constitution. Article 102, Section I(b). (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 103. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 155. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 157. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 220. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 222. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 223. (1988).

Brazil Constitution, Article 224. (1988).

Brazil: Freedom on the Net 2021 Country Report. (2022). Freedom House. Retrieved June 12, 2023, from https://freedomhouse.org/country/brazil/freedom-net/2021

Brazil: Freedom on the Net 2022 Country Report. (2023). Freedom House. Retrieved June 5, 2024, from https://freedomhouse.org/country/brazil/freedom-net/2022

Brazil Institute. (2018). 2018 Brazilian election results: Initial takeaways on political renewal and the role of women. *Wilson Center*. Retrieved from https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/2018-brazilian-election-results-initial-takeaways-political-renewal-and-the-role-women.

Brazil loses its second health minister in less than a month. (2020, May 16). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20200516-brazil-loses-its-second-health-minister-in-less-than-a-month

Brazil resumes publishing Covid-19 virus toll after outcry. (2020, June 10). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20200610-brazil-resumes-publishing-covid-19-virus-toll-after-outcry

Brazil's Bolsonaro threatens to cancel license of network linking his name to murder case | Reuters. (2019). Retrieved June 5, 2024, from https://www.reuters.com/article/brazil-politics-bolsonaro-idUSL2N27F0C8/

Brennan Center for Justice. (2017). *In his own words: The president's attacks on the courts.* Retrieved April 3, 2024, from https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/his-own-words-presidents-attacks-courts.

Brenan, M. (2022, October 18). *Americans' Trust In Media Remains Near Record Low*. Gallup.Com. https://news.gallup.com/poll/403166/americans-trust-media-remains-near-record-low.aspx

Brenan, M. (2023, September 29). *Views of Supreme Court Remain Near Record Lows*. Gallup.Com. https://news.gallup.com/poll/511820/views-supreme-court-remain-near-record-lows.aspx

Brody, R. A. (1991). *Assessing the president: The media, elite opinion, and public support*. Stanford University Press.

Brouillette, A., Van Beek, J., Wanstreet, R., Coyer, K., & Bognnr, E. (2012). Hungarian Media Laws in Europe: An Assessment of the Consistency of Hungary's Media Laws with European Practices and Norms. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2568584

Brown, B. *Search on Trump Twitter Archive*. Retrieved April 3, 2024, from //www.thetrumparchive.com

Broz, J. L., Frieden, J., & Weymouth, S. (2021). Populism in Place: The Economic Geography of the Globalization Backlash. *International Organization*, *75*(2), 464–494. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000314

BTI 2022 Brazil Country Report. (2023). BTI 2022. Retrieved February 27, 2023, from https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report?isocode=BRA&cHash=5ff1fcaef3c7a15008cdce0d7bd1efa9

Bulman-Pozen, J., & Gerken, H. K. (2009). Uncooperative Federalism. *The Yale Law Journal*, *118*(7), 1256–1310.

Busby, E. C., Gubler, J. R., & Hawkins, K. A. (2019). Framing and Blame Attribution in Populist Rhetoric. *The Journal of Politics*, *81*(2), 616–630. https://doi.org/10.1086/701832

Bustamante, T., & Meyer, E. (2021). *Brazil: COVID-19, Illiberal Politics, and the Rule of Law* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3832239). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3832239

Caiani, M., & Graziano, P. (2022). The Three Faces of Populism in Power: Polity, Policies and Politics. *Government and Opposition*, *57*(4), 569–588. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.4

Calls for impeachment intensify after claims Trump sought info on Biden in exchange for Ukraine aid. (2019, September 24). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20190924-usa-donald-trump-ukraine-aid-joseph-biden-congress-whistleblower-Volodymyr-zelensky

Campbell, J. E., & Wink, K. A. (1990). Trial-Heat Forecasts of the Presidential Vote. *American Politics Quarterly*, *18*(3), 251–269. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X9001800301

Caramani, D. (2017). Will vs. Reason: The Populist and Technocratic Forms of Political Representation and Their Critique to Party Government. *American Political Science Review*, *111*(1), 54–67. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000538

Carlson, M., Robinson, S., & Lewis, S. C. (2021). The Trump Presidency: Four Years of Battling and Belittling the Press. In M. Carlson, S. Robinson, & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *News After Trump: Journalism's Crisis of Relevance in a Changed Media Culture* (p. 0). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197550342.003.0004

Carothers, T., & Press, B. (2022, October 20). *Understanding and Responding to Global Democratic Backsliding*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2022/10/understanding-and-responding-to-global-democratic-backsliding?lang=en

Carreirão, Y. S., & Rennó, L. R. (2018). Presidential Voting: Partisanship, Economy, Ideology. In *Routledge Handbook of Brazilian Politics*. Routledge.

Carvalho, A. L. B. D., Rocha, E., Sampaio, R. F., & Ouverney, A. L. M. (2022). State governments in confronting Covid-19: A new protagonism in Brazilian federalism? *Saúde Em Debate*, *46*(spe1), 62–77. https://doi.org/10.1590/0103-11042022e104i

Caulfield, S. (2011). The Recent Supreme Court Ruling on Same-Sex Unions in Brazil: A Historical Perspective. *International Institute Journal*, *1*(1). http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11645653.0001.103

Cesarino, L. (2022). "Tropical Trump": Illiberal Politics and the Digital Life of (Anti)Corruption in Brazil. In *Corruption and Illiberal Politics in the Trump Era*. Routledge.

Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2010). Dynamic Public Opinion: Communication Effects over Time. *The American Political Science Review*, *104*(4), 663–680.

Cianetti, L., & Hanley, S. (2021). The End of the Backsliding Paradigm. *Journal of Democracy*, *32*(1), 66–80.

Cinar, I., & Nalepa, M. (2022). Mass or Elite Polarization as the Driver of Authoritarian Backsliding? Evidence from 14 Polish Surveys (2005–2021). *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy*, *3*(3–4), 433–448. https://doi.org/10.1561/113.00000067

Clayton, K. (2022). *The Public's Response to Democratic Backsliding*.

Conley, R. (2020). *Donald Trump and American Populism*. Edinburgh University Press. https://libezproxy2.syr.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=2528070&site=ehost-live

Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988. (1988). Brasília: Government of Brazil.

Constitutional Amendment 107 of the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil. 2020.

Coppedge, M. (2017). *Eroding Regimes: What, Where, and When?* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3066677). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3066677

Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., Knutsen, C. H., Lindberg, S. I., Teorell, J., Altman, D., Bernhard, M., Cornell, A., Fish, M. S., Gastaldi, L., Gjerløw, H., Glynn, A., Grahn, S., Hicken, A., Kinzelbach, K., Marquardt, K. L., McMann, K., Mechkova, V., Paxton, P., Pemstein, D., von Römer, J., Seim, B., Sigman, R., Skaaning, S.-E., Staton, J., Tzelgov, E., Uberti, L., Wang, Y., Wig, T., & Ziblatt, D. (2022). *V-Dem Codebook v12*. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project.

Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., Knutsen, C. H., Lindberg, S. I., Teorell, J., Altman, D., Angiolillo, F., Bernhard, M., Borella, C., Cornell, A., Fish, M. S., Fox, L., Gastaldi, L., Gjerløw, H., Glynn, A., Good God, A., Grahn, S., Hicken, A., Kinzelbach, K., … Ziblatt, D. (2024). *V-Dem Codebook v14* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 4774440). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4774440

Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Michael Bernhard, Cecilia Borella, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Linnea Fox, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerløw, Adam Glynn, Ana Good God, Sandra Grahn, Allen Hicken, Katrin Kinzelbach, Joshua Krusell, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Juraj Medzihorsky, Natalia Natsika, Anja Neundorf, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Josefine Pernes, Oskar Rydén, Johannes von Römer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundström, Eitan Tzelgov, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, Steven Wilson and Daniel Ziblatt. 2024. "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v14" Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. https://doi.org/10.23696/mcwt-fr58.

Cox, G. W., & McCubbins, M. D. (1993). *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House*.

Crespin, M. H., Rohde, D. W., & Wielen, R. J. V. (2013). Measuring variations in party unity voting: An assessment of agenda effects. *Party Politics*, *19*(3), 432–457. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068811407578

Crowther, P. (2019, April 18). Mueller report reveals Trump tried to seize control of Russia probe. France24. https://www.france24.com/en/video/20190418-mueller-report-reveals-trump-tried-seize-control-russia-probe

Daly, T. (2019). *Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay in Brazil: Understanding the Rise of Jair Bolsonaro* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3350098). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3350098

Dash, S. (2023, March 5). Democratic backsliding: A retrospective on the Bolsonaro years. *Modern Diplomacy*. https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/03/05/democratic-backsliding-a-retrospective-on-the-bolsonaro-years/

De Amaral Maia, T. (2023). Historical Negationism and the Emergence of the Far Right: The Crisis of the Modern Regime of Historicity in Brazil (2019-2022): Varia História. *Varia História*, *39*(81), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1590/0104-87752023000300013

de Vries, C. E. (2007). Sleeping Giant: Fact or Fairytale?: How European Integration Affects National Elections. *European Union Politics*, *8*(3), 363–385. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116507079546

de Vries, C. E., & Hobolt, S. B. (2012a). When dimensions collide: The electoral success of issue entrepreneurs. *European Union Politics*, *13*(2), 246–268. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116511434788

Dellmuth, L. M., & Tallberg, J. (2021). Elite Communication and the Popular Legitimacy of International Organizations. *British Journal of Political Science*, *51*(3), 1292–1313. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123419000620

Desposato, S. W., Ingram, M. C., & Lannes, O. P. (2015). Power, Composition, and Decision Making: The Behavioral Consequences of Institutional Reform on Brazil's "Supremo Tribunal Federal." *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization*, *31*(3), 534–567.

Devinney, T. M., & Hartwell, C. A. (2020). Varieties of populism. *Global Strategy Journal*, *10*(1), 32–66. https://doi.org/10.1002/gsj.1373

Devins, N., & Baum, L. (2017). Split Definitive: How Party Polarization Turned the Supreme Court into a Partisan Court. *The Supreme Court Review*, *2016*, 301–365. https://doi.org/10.1086/691096

Dodds, G. G. (2013). Unilateral Presidential Directives from Roosevelt to Roosevelt: Taft through FDR. In *Take Up Your Pen* (pp. 152–185). University of Pennsylvania Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fh7nd.8

Donaghy, M. M. (2011). Do Participatory Governance Institutions Matter?: Municipal Councils and Social Housing Programs in Brazil. *Comparative Politics*, *44*(1), 83–102. https://doi.org/10.5129/001041510X13815229366606

Douglas, B. (2015, September 18). Brazil bans corporations from political donations amid corruption scandal. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/18/brazilian-supreme-court-bans-corporate-donations-political-candidates-parties

Downs, A. (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (First Edition). Harper and Row.

Duverger, Maurice. (1959). *Political parties, their organization and activity in the modern state*. (2nd ed.). Wiley.

Enyedi, Z., & Tóka, G. (2007). The only game in town: Party politics in Hungary. In P. D. Webb & S. White (Eds.), *Party politics in new democracies* (pp. 147-178). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199289653.003.0006.

Epperly, B. (2013). The Provision of Insurance?: Judicial Independence and the Post-tenure Fate of Leaders. *Journal of Law and Courts*, *1*(2), 247–278. https://doi.org/10.1086/671163

Epstein, L., Segal, J. A., Spaeth, H. J., & Walker, T. G. (2015). *The Supreme Court Compendium: Data, decisions, and developments* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483376592.

Epstein, L., Segal, J. A., Spaeth, H. J., & Walker, T. G. (2021). *The Supreme Court Compendium: Two Centuries of Data, Decisions, and Developments*. CQ Press. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071834602

Esen, B., & Yardımcı-Geyikçi, Ş. (2019). An Alternative Account of the Populist Backlash in the United States: A Perspective from Turkey. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *52*(3), 445–450. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096519000180

Esponda, I., & Pouzo, D. (2019). Retrospective Voting and Party Polarization. *International Economic Review*, *60*(1), 157–186. https://doi.org/10.1111/iere.12348

European Commission. (2015, March 12). *State aid: Commission opens in-depth investigation into Hungarian advertisement tax* [Press release]. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_15_4598.

Ferland, B., & Golder, M. (2021, March 25). Citizen Representation and Electoral Systems. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.* Retrieved 5 Jun. 2024, from https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1977.

Figueiredo, A. C., & Limongi, F. (2016). Political Institutions and Governmental Performance in Brazilian Democracy. In D. de la Fontaine & T. Stehnken (Eds.), *The Political System of Brazil* (pp. 63–82). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-40023-0_5

Figueiredo, N. (2022, October 26). Analysis: Donations from Brazil farm sector boost Bolsonaro's re-election bid. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/donations-brazil-farm-sector-boost-bolsonaros-re-election-bid-2022-10-26/

Finck, D. E. (1997). Judicial Review: The United States Supreme Court Versus the German Constitutional Court Notes. *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review*, *20*(1), 123–158.

Fiorina, M. P. (1978). Economic Retrospective Voting in American National Elections: A Micro-Analysis. *American Journal of Political Science*, *22*(2), 426–443. https://doi.org/10.2307/2110623

Fleischer, D., & Barreto, L. (2009). El impacto de la justicia electoral sobre el sistema político brasileño. *América Latina Hoy*, *51*(0). https://doi.org/10.14201/alh.1334

Fletcher, K. L. (2017). Truman's Rhetoric Entrenches Unilateral Authority and Fashions a Trend for Future Executive Use. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *47*(4), 720–751. https://doi.org/10.1111/psq.12397

Flório Lima, B., & Bodet, M. A. (2023). The effects of personal campaign financing on party defection: Evidence from Brazil. *Electoral Studies*, *84*, 102649. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102649

Fournier, T. (2019). From rhetoric to action, a constitutional analysis of populism. *German Law Journal*, *20*(3), 362–381. https://doi.org/10.1017/glj.2019.22

Gabel, M., & Scheve, K. (2007). Estimating the Effect of Elite Communications on Public Opinion Using Instrumental Variables. *American Journal of Political Science*, *51*(4), 1013–1028.

Galvão, A. (2016). The National Congress and Brazil's Parliamentary Elite Under the Lula Government. In D. de la Fontaine & T. Stehnken (Eds.), *The Political System of Brazil* (pp. 83–102). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-40023-0_6

Gamson, W., & Modigliani, A. (1987). *The Changing Culture of Affirmative Action*. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Changing-Culture-of-Affirmative-Action-Gamson-Modigliani/54cd049df6bc05e528ba6b80a5873ec333ed514f

Gandhi, J., & Przeworski, A. (2007). Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats. *Comparative Political Studies*, *40*(11), 1279–1301. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414007305817

Gerber, E. R., & Jackson, J. E. (1993). Endogenous preferences and the study of institutions. *The American Political Science Review*, *87*(3), 639.

Golder, M., & Stramski, J. (2010). Ideological congruence and electoral institutions. *American Journal of Political Science, 54(*1), 90–106. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00420.x.

Goldstein, A. A. (2019). The New Far-Right in Brazil and the Construction of a Right-Wing Order. *Latin American Perspectives*, *46*(4), 245–262. https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X19846900

Gottlieb, J., Blair, R., Baron, H., Arugay, A., Ballard-Rosa, C., Beatty, G., Esen, B., Gamboa, L., Grossman, G., Grossman, S., Kulich-Vamvakas, C., Lapp, N., McCoy, J., Paler, L., Peralta, S., Qubaiova, A., Robinson, A., Rosenzweig, S., Royer, E., Schneider, C. L., Stokes, S., Todd, J., Turnbull, M., & Weaver, J. A. (2023). *Democratic Erosion Event Dataset v6*. Democratic Erosion: A Cross-University Collaboration.

Greenwald, G., & Miranda, D. (2020, January 29). The far-right Bolsonaro movement wants us dead. But we will not give up. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/29/glenn-greenwald-david-miranda-brazil-bolsonaro

Gricius, G. (2022). Populism and Authoritarianism. In M. Oswald (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Populism* (pp. 177–193). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80803-7_10

Grin, E. J., Fernandes, A. S. A., Segatto, C. I., Teixeira, M. A. C., Nascimento, A. B. F. M. do, & Schommer, P. C. (2022). A pandemia e o futuro do federalismo brasileiro. *Cadernos Gestão Pública e Cidadania*, *27*(87), Article 87. https://doi.org/10.12660/cgpc.v27n87.85351

Grzymala-Busse, A. (2019). How Populists Rule: The Consequences for Democratic Governance. *Polity*, *51*(4), 707–717. https://doi.org/10.1086/705570

Guasti, P., & Buštíková, L. (2020). A Marriage of Convenience: Responsive Populists and Responsible Experts. *Politics and Governance*, *8*(4), 468–472. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i4.3876

Guedes-Neto, J. V., & Guy Peters, B. (2021). Working, Shirking, and Sabotage in Times of Democratic Backsliding: An Experimental Study in Brazil. In B. G. Peters, J. Pierre, K. Yesilkagit, M. W. Bauer, & S. Becker (Eds.), *Democratic Backsliding and Public Administration: How Populists in Government Transform State Bureaucracies* (pp. 221–245). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009023504.011

Gulyas, Á. (2004). Public images and private lives: The case of Hungary. *Parliamentary Affairs*, *57*(1), 67–79. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsh006.

Gulzar, S., Rueda, M. R., & Ruiz, N. A. (2021). Do campaign contribution limits curb the influence of money in politics? *American Journal of Political Science, 66*, 932-946. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12596.

Gyulavári, T., & Hős, N. (2013). Retirement of Hungarian Judges, Age Discrimination and Judicial Independence: A Tale of Two Courts. *Industrial Law Journal*, *42*(3), 289–297. https://doi.org/10.1093/indlaw/dwt010

Hager, A., & Hilbig, H. (2020). Does Public Opinion Affect Political Speech? *American Journal of Political Science*, *64*(4), 921–937. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12516

Haggard, S., & Kaufman, R. (2021a). *Backsliding: Democratic Regress in the Contemporary World* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108957809

Haggard, S., & Kaufman, R. (2021b). The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, *32*(4), 27–41. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0050

Hanley, S., & Vachudova, M. A. (2019). Understanding the illiberal turn: Democratic backsliding in the Czech Republic. In *Rethinking "Democratic Backsliding" in Central and Eastern Europe*. Routledge.

Hernández-Huerta, V. A. (2017). Judging Presidential Elections Around the World: An Overview. *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy*, *16*(3), 377–396. https://doi.org/10.1089/elj.2016.0373

Hobolt, S. B., & de Vries, C. E. (2015). Issue Entrepreneurship and Multiparty Competition. *Comparative Political Studies*, *48*(9), 1159–1185. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414015575030

Hobolt, S., & Klemmensen, R. (2008). Government Responsiveness and Political Competition in Comparative Perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, *41*(3), 309–337. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006297169

House panel votes to hold US attorney general in contempt. (2019, May 8). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20190509-house-panel-votes-hold-usa-attorney-general-barr-contempt-mueller-report-trump

Howard, M. M., & Roessler, P. G. (2006). Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes. *American Journal of Political Science*, *50*(2), 365–381. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00189.x

Huber, R. A., Fesenfeld, L., & Bernauer, T. (2020). Political populism, responsiveness, and public support for climate mitigation. *Climate Policy*, *20*(3), 373–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2020.1736490

Human Rights Watch. (2013, May 16). *Wrong direction on rights: Assessing the impact of Hungary's new constitution and laws*. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/05/16/wrong-direction-rights/assessing-impact-hungarys-new-constitution-and-laws.

Hung. Const. 1949, Amendment XX. July 5, 2010, https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2010-20102-AM-00

Hung. Const. 1989, Act XXXII on the Constitutional Court: October 19, 1989 (as Amended on October 13, 2011) (Hungary [hu]).

Hungary: 98% retroactive tax on severance payments annulled. (2011). CMS Law. Retrieved June 5, 2024, from https://cms-lawnow.com/en/ealerts/2011/05/hungary-98-retroactive-tax-on-severance-payments-annulled

Hungarian Social Report. (2019). TÁRKI Social Research Institute. (I. G. Tóth, Ed.). 1112 Budapest, Budaörsi út 45, Hungary. ISSN 2631-1313.

Hunter, W., & Vega, D. (2022). Populism and the military: Symbiosis and tension in Bolsonaro's Brazil. *Democratization*, *29*(2), 337–359. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1956466

Ilonszki, G., & Várnagy, R. (2016). Parliamentary elections in Hungary, 2014. *Electoral Studies*, *43*, 169–172. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2016.04.003

Imran, S., & Javed, H. (2024). Authoritarian populism and response to COVID-19: A comparative study of the United States, India, and Brazil. *Journal of Public Affairs*, *24*(1), e2898. https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2898

In His Own Words: The President's Attacks on the Courts | Brennan Center for Justice. (2020). Retrieved April 3, 2024, from https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/his-own-words-presidents-attacks-courts

Index of Seven Big Owners of Dailies. (2021). Retrieved June 5, 2024, from https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/futureofmedia/index-seven-big-owners-dailies

Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2017). Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse. *Perspectives on Politics*, *15*(2), 443–454. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717000111

Iversen, T. (1994). The Logics of Electoral Politics: Spatial, Directional, and Mobilizational Effects. *Comparative Political Studies*, *27*(2), 155–189. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414094027002001

Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (2010). *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion, Updated Edition*. University of Chicago Press.

Jha, P. C. (2007). Decentralization and Federalism in Brazil. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, *68*(1), 157–171.

Judge orders release of Trump tax returns, blasts 'repugnant' immunity claim. (2019, October 7). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20191007-usa-trump-tax-returns-judge-reject-immunity

Kaufman, R. R., & Haggard, S. (2019). Democratic Decline in the United States: What Can We Learn from Middle-Income Backsliding? *Perspectives on Politics*, *17*(2), 417–432. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592718003377

Kitschelt, H. (1994). *The Transformation of European Social Democracy*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511622014

Kitzberger, P. (2016). Media Wars and the New Left: Governability and Media Democratisation in Argentina and Brazil. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *48*(3), 447–476. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X15001509

Klein, E. (2016). Electoral Rules and Party Switching: How Legislators Prioritize Their Goals. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *41*(3), 715–738. https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.12128

Klüver, H., & Spoon, J.-J. (2016). Who Responds? Voters, Parties and Issue Attention. *British Journal of Political Science*, *46*(3), 633–654.

Kneuer, M. (2021). Unravelling democratic erosion: Who drives the slow death of democracy, and how? *Democratization*, *28*(8), 1442–1462. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1925650

Koopmans, R., & Muis, J. (2009). The rise of right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands: A discursive opportunity approach. *European Journal of Political Research*, *48*(5), 642–664. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2009.00846.x

Kovács, K., & Tóth, G. A. (2011). Hungary's Constitutional Transformation. *European Constitutional Law Review*, *7*(2), 183–203. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1574019611200038

Kovács, -Zoltán. (2015, February 10). *Meet Lajos Simicska: Fidesz's enigmatic oligarch*. The Budapest Beacon. https://budapestbeacon.com/meet-lajos-simicska-fideszs-enigmatic-oligarch/

Kovalcsik, T., György, V., & Gábor, D. (2019). Az országgyűlési választókerületek kompaktságának elemzése Magyarországon. *TERÜLETI STATISZTIKA*, *59*(2), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.15196/TS590204

Krekó, P., & Enyedi, Z. (2018). Explaining Eastern Europe: Orbán's Laboratory of Illiberalism. *Journal of Democracy*, *29*(3), 39–51. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0043

Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S., & Frey, T. (2006). Globalization and the transformation of the national political space: Six European countries compared. *European Journal of Political Research*, *45*(6), 921–956. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00644.x

Kubas, S. (2017). Zmiany w prawie wyborczym w kontekście przeobrażeń ustrojowych na Węgrzech po 2011 roku. *Przegląd Politologiczny*, *1*, Article 1. https://doi.org/10.14746/pp.2017.22.1.10

Kúria [Curia of Hungary] December 13, 2004, AK.XII.13 884/B/2004 (Hung.).

Kúria [Curia of Hungary] July 11, 2006, AK.VII.13 656/E/1999 (Hung.).

Kúria [Curia of Hungary] March 8, 2011, AK. 132/B/2008 (Hung.).

Kúria [Curia of Hungary] May 6, 2011, AK.V.10 1747/B/2010 (Hung.)

Kwak, J., Tomescu-Dubrow, I., Slomczynski, K. M., & Dubrow, J. K. (2020). Youth, Institutional Trust, and Democratic Backsliding. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *64*(9), 1366–1390. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764220941222

Lamensch, M. (2022). *In Brazil, "Techno-Authoritarianism" Rears Its Head*. Centre for International Governance Innovation. Retrieved June 12, 2023, from https://www.cigionline.org/articles/in-brazil-techno-authoritarianism-rears-its-head/

Latinobarometer. (2016-2023). *Latinobarometer* [Dataset]. Latinobarómetro Corporation. https://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp

Layman, G. C., Carsey, T. M., & Horowitz, J. M. (2006). Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *9*(Volume 9, 2006), 83–110. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.9.070204.105138

Lembcke, O. W., & Boulanger, C. (2014). Between revolution and constitution: The roles of the Hungarian Constitutional Court. In G. A. Tóth (Ed.), *Constitution for a disunited nation on Hungary's 2011 Fundamental Law* (pp. 269–300). Central European University Press. https://www-fulcrum-org.libezproxy2.syr.edu/concern/monographs/b2773x211

Lembcke, O. W. (2018). The German Federal Constitutional Court: Authority transformed into power? In *Constitutional Politics and the Judiciary*. Routledge.

Levitsky, S. (2018). Democratic Survival and Weakness. *Journal of Democracy*, *29*(4), 102–113. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0066

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How democracies die* (First edition). Crown Publishing.

Lieberman, R. C., Mettler, S., Pepinsky, T. B., Roberts, K. M., & Valelly, R. (2019). The Trump Presidency and American Democracy: A Historical and Comparative Analysis. *Perspectives on Politics*, *17*(2), 470–479. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592718003286

Lieberman, R., Mettler, S., Pepinsky, T. B., Roberts, K. M., & Valelly, R. (2017). Trumpism and American democracy: History, comparison, and the predicament of liberal democracy in the United States. *Comparison, and the Predicament of Liberal Democracy in the United States (August 29, 2017)*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3028990

Lijphart, A. (1999). *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. Yale University Press.

Lima, B. F., & Bodet, M. A. (2023). The effects of personal campaign financing on party defection: Evidence from Brazil. *Electoral Studies, 84*, 102649. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102649.

Lindenfors, P., Krusell, J., & Lindberg, S. I. (2019). Sequential Requisites Analysis: A New Method for Analyzing Sequential Relationships in Ordinal Data. *Social Science Quarterly*, *100*(3), 838–856. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12588

Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (1967). *Party systems and voter alignments: Cross-national perspectives: Contributors: Robert R. Alford and others*. Free Press.

Lubbers, M., & Scheepers, P. (2007). Explanations of Political Euro-Scepticism at the Individual, Regional and National Levels. *European Societies*, *9*(4), 643–669. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616690701396603

Lührmann, A., Dahlum, S., Lindberg, S. I., Maxwell, L., Mechkova, V., Olin, M., Pillai, S., Sanhueza Petrarca, C., Sigman, R., & Stepanova, N. (2018). *V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2018. Democracy for All?* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3345071). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3345071

Luo, Z., & Przeworski, A. (2021). *Democracy and Its Vulnerabilities: Dynamics of Democratic Backsliding* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3469373). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3469373

Machado, M. R. D. A., & Pimenta, R. D. M. (2022). Authoritarian Zones within Democracy: Rule of Law in Contemporary Brazil. *Verfassung in Recht Und Übersee*, *55*(4), 441–458. https://doi.org/10.5771/0506-7286-2022-4-441

Magyar, B., Bethlenfalvy, B., & Hale, H. E. (2019). Parallel System Narratives—Polish and Hungarian Regime Formations Compared A structuralist essay. In B. Magyar (Ed.), *Stubborn Structures* (pp. 611–656). Central European University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctvh8qxv9.24

Mainwaring, S. (2018). Party System Institutionalization, Predictability, and Democracy. In *Party Systems in Latin America* (1–Book, Section, pp. 71–101). https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316798553.004

Mainwaring, S., Bizzarro, F., & Petrova, A. (2018). Party system institutionalization, decay, and collapse. In *Party Systems in Latin America* (pp. 17-33). https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316798553.002

Mandl, C. (2021). *Bolsonaro says he will be arrested, killed or declared winner | Reuters*. Reuters. Retrieved April 10, 2024, from https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/bolsonaro-says-he-will-be-arrested-killed-or-declared-winner-2021-08-28/

Marchetti, V. (2012). Electoral Governance in Brazil. *Brazilian Political Science Review*, *6*(1), 113-133,6-7.

Martin, S. (2016). Policy, office and votes: The electoral value of ministerial office. *British Journal of Political Science*, *46*(2), 281–296.

Martínez-Lara, J. (1996). *Building Democracy in Brazil*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-24993-0

Matos, C. (2012). Media Democratization in Brazil: Achievements and Future Challenges. *Critical Sociology*, *38*(6), 863–876. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920512441636

Mayhew, D. R. (1974). *Congress: The electoral connection*. Yale University Press.

Mayhew, D. R. (2004). *Congress: The electoral connection*. Yale University Press.

McCarty, N. M., Poole, K. T., & Rosenthal, H. (2006). *Polarized America: The dance of ideology and unequal riches*. MIT Press.

Mccarthy, J. (2022, November 4). *Confidence in Election Integrity Hides Deep Partisan Divide*. Gallup.Com. https://news.gallup.com/poll/404675/confidence-election-integrity-hides-deep-partisan-divide.aspx

Mechkova, V., Lührmann, A., & Lindberg, S. I. (2017). How Much Democratic Backsliding? *Journal of Democracy*, *28*(4), 162–169. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0075

Media Act (Law CLXXXV of 2010). (2010).

Media Ownership Monitor. (2017). *Brazil 2017*. Retrieved April 10, 2024, from https://brazil.mom-gmr.org/en/media/.

Melo, M. A. (2016). Crisis and Integrity in Brazil. *Journal of Democracy*, *27*(2), 50–65. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0019

Melo, M. A., & Carvalho, A. R. de. (2023). A Tropical Game of Thrones: Courts and executive – legislative relations from Bolsonaro to Lula. In *Brazil after Bolsonaro*. Routledge.

Melo, M. A., & Pereira, C. (2013). *Making Brazil Work*. Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137310842

Merrill, S., & Grofman, B. (1997). Symposium. The Directional Theory of Issue Voting: II: Directional and Proximity Models of Voter Utility and Choice: A New Synthesis and an Illustrative Test of Competing Models. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, *9*(1), 25–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/0951692897009001004

Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely [Mérték Media Monitor]. (2016, May 5). *Soft censorship Hungary 2015*. Mertek Media Monitor. https://mertek.eu/en/2016/05/05/soft-censorship-hungary-2015-2/.

Mettler, S., & Lieberman, R. C. (2020). The Fragile Republic: American Democracy Has Never Faced So Many Threats All at Once. *Foreign Affairs*, *99*(5), 182–195.

Meyer, E. P. N., dos Reis, U. L. S., & de Castro, B. B. (2023). Courts and COVID-19: An Assessment of Countries Dealing with Democratic Erosion. *Jus Cogens*, *5*(1), 85–110. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42439-023-00072-1

Miller, A. H. (1999). Sex, Politics, and Public Opinion: What Political Scientists Really Learned From the Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *32*(4), 721–729. https://doi.org/10.2307/420161

Moreira, S. V., Noam, E., & Mutter, P. (2016). Media Ownership and Concentration in Brazil. In E. M. Noam & T. I. M. Concentration Collaboration (Eds.), *Who Owns the World's Media?: Media Concentration and Ownership around the World* (p. 0). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199987238.003.0020

Mudde, C. (2004). The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, *39*(4), 541–563. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x

Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2013). Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America. *Government and Opposition*, *48*(2), 147–174. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2012.11

Neal, Z. P. (2020). A sign of the times? Weak and strong polarization in the U.S. Congress, 1973–2016. *Social Networks*, *60*, 103–112. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2018.07.007

Néris, E. H. C. da S. P., & Bedritichuk, R. R. (2021). Brazilian federalism: Facing the COVID-19 pandemic. In *Federalism and the Response to COVID-19*. Routledge India.

Neuman, S. (2021, March 9). Brazil Supreme Court Justice Annuls Corruption Conviction Against Former President. *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2021/03/09/975298014/brazil-supreme-court-justice-annuls-corruption-conviction-against-former-preside

Nicolau, J., & Stadler, J. (2016). The Brazilian Electoral System. In D. de la Fontaine & T. Stehnken (Eds.), *The Political System of Brazil* (pp. 103–120). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-40023-0_7

Nord, M., Lundstedt, M., Altman, D., Angiolillo, F., Borella, C., Fernandes, T., Gastaldi, L., Good God, A., Natsika, N., Lindberg, S. I., & Institute, V.-D. (2024). *Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot: Democracy Report 2024* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 4774409). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4774409

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and the rise of authoritarian populism*. Cambridge University Press.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2018, April 9). *Hungary, parliamentary elections, 8 April 2018: Statement of preliminary findings and conclusions*. OSCE. https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/hungary/377410.

Organization of American States: Democracy for Peace, Security, and Development. (2018). Electoral Observation Mission: General Election Brazil Final Report. Retrieved from http://www.oas.org/EOMDatabase/MoeReport.aspx?Lang=En&Id=410&MissionId=489.

Orhan, Y. E. (2022). The relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding: Comparative evidence. *Democratization*, *29*(4), 714–735. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.2008912

Ouverney, A. L. M., & Fernandes, F. M. B. (2022). Legislative and Executive branches in the Covid-19 pandemic: The emergence of a critical federative juncture? *Saúde Em Debate*, *46*, 33–47. https://doi.org/10.1590/0103-11042022E102I

Paiva, C. C. de, Torrezan, R. G. A., & Paiva, S. C. F. de. (2022). O federalismo cooperativo em obstrução: Fissuras intergovernamentais da pandemia. *Cadernos Gestão Pública e Cidadania*, *27*(87), Article 87. https://doi.org/10.12660/cgpc.v27n87.83857

Party Divisions of the House of Representatives, 1789 to Present | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives. (n.d.). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://history.house.gov/Institution/Party-Divisions/Party-Divisions/

Pearson, K. (2015). Introduction. In J. M. Box-Steffensmeier & D. Canon (Eds.), *Party Discipline in the U.S. House of Representatives* (pp. 1–18). University of Michigan Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.4402299.4

Pemstein, D., Marquardt, K. L., Tzelgov, E., Wang, Y., Medzihorsky, J., Krusell, J., Miri, F., & von Römer, J. (2021). *The V-Dem measurement model: Latent variable analysis for cross-national and cross-temporal expert-coded data* (V-Dem Working Paper No. 21, 6th ed.). University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute.

Pemstein, D., Marquardt, K. L., Tzelgov, E., Wang, Y., Medzihorsky, J., Krusell, J., Miri, F., & von Römer, J. (2022). *The V-Dem measurement model: Latent variable analysis for cross-national and cross-temporal expert-coded data* (V-Dem Working Paper No. 21, 7th ed.). University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute.

Pemstein, D., Marquardt, K. L., Tzelgov, E., Wang, Y., Medzihorsky, J., Krusell, J., Miri, F., & von Römer, J. (2022a). *The V-Dem Measurement Model: Latent Variable Analysis for Cross-National and Cross-Temporal Expert-Coded Data* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3595962). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3595962

Pemstein, D., Marquardt, K. L., Tzelgov, E., Wang, Y., Medzihorsky, J., Krusell, J., Miri, F., & von Römer, J. (2024). *The V-Dem measurement model: Latent variable analysis for cross-national and cross-temporal expert-coded data* (V-Dem Working Paper No. 21, 9th ed.). University of Gothenburg: Varieties of Democracy Institute.

Peries, J. (2021, November 18). Brazil and Bolsonaro: Should We Fear Democratic Backsliding? *MIR*. https://www.mironline.ca/brazil-and-bolsonaro-should-we-fear-democratic-backsliding/

Perkins, L. P. (1980). Influences of Members' Goals on Their Committee Behavior: The U. S. House Judiciary Committee. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *5*(3), 373–392. https://doi.org/10.2307/439551

Plescia, C., Kritzinger, S., & De Sio, L. (2019). Filling the Void? Political Responsiveness of Populist Parties. *Representation*, *55*(4), 513–533. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2019.1635197

Polyák, G. (2019). Media in Hungary: Three Pillars of an Illiberal Democracy. In E. Połońska & C. Beckett (Eds.), *Public Service Broadcasting and Media Systems in Troubled European Democracies* (pp. 279–303). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02710-0_13

Queiroz, R. M. R., Bustamante, T., & Meyer, E. P. N. (2021). From Antiestablishmentarianism to Bolsonarism in Brazil. In *Routledge Handbook of Illiberalism*. Routledge.

Rabinowitz, G., & Macdonald, S. E. (1989). A Directional Theory of Issue Voting. *American Political Science Review*, *83*(1), 93–121. https://doi.org/10.2307/1956436

Rascoe, A. (2019, November 7). *Who Was On The Trump-Ukraine Call On July 25? : NPR*. National Public Radio. https://www.npr.org/2019/11/07/775456663/who-was-on-the-trump-ukraine-call

Reid, M. (2014). *Brazil: The troubled rise of a global power*. Yale University Press.

Reporters Sans Frontiers. (2020). *2020 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders*. Retrieved March 16, 2022, from https://rsf.org/en/ranking.

Reporters Sans Frontiers. (2021). *United States 2021 | RSF*. Retrieved April 3, 2024, from https://rsf.org/en/analyse_regionale/564.

Riaz, A., & Rana, M. S. (2024). Understanding Democratic Backsliding. In A. Riaz & M. S. Rana (Eds.), *How Autocrats Rise: Sequences of Democratic Backsliding* (pp. 19–36). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-7580-8_3

Rinaldi, C., & Bekker, M. P. M. (2020). A Scoping Review of Populist Radical Right Parties' Influence on Welfare Policy and its Implications for Population Health in Europe. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 1. https://doi.org/10.34172/ijhpm.2020.48

Rodrigues, G. M. A., Lorencini, M. A. G. L., & Zimmermann, A. (2017). *The supreme federal court of Brazil: Protecting democracy and centralized power*. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=7319543502468489561&hl=en&oi=scholarr

Rodrigues, T. C. M. (2022). *Analysis of the Trajectory of Brazilian Supreme Federal Court (STF) Ministers: Insulation or Coalition Presidentialism?*

Roett, R. (2011). *The New Brazil*. Brookings Institution Press. https://libezproxy2.syr.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=377994&site=ehost-live

Rohrschneider, R., & Schmitt-Beck, R. (2002). Trust in Democratic Institutions in Germany: Theory and Evidence Ten Years After Unification. *German Politics*, *11*(3), 35–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/714001314

Romero, S. (2016, August 31). Dilma Rousseff Is Ousted as Brazil's President in Impeachment Vote. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/01/world/americas/brazil-dilma-rousseff-impeached-removed-president.html

Ros, L. D., & Ingram, M. C. (2018). Law, Courts, and Judicial Politics. In *Routledge Handbook of Brazilian Politics*. Routledge.

Saad-Filho, Alfredo, and Armando Boito. (2016). "Brazil: The Failure of the PT and the Rise of the 'New Right.'" *Socialist Register*, 52. https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/25598.

Sader, V. (2022, September 15). Democratic institutional strength before and beyond elections: The case of Brazil. *Atlantic Council*. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/democratic-institutional-strength-ahead-and-beyond-elections-the-case-of-brazil/

Samuels, D., & Abrucio, F. L. (2000). Federalism and Democratic Transitions: The "New" Politics of the Governors in Brazil. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, *30*(2), 43–62. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.pubjof.a030084

Santiago Lima, F. D., Dantas de Andrade, L., & Moura de Oliveira, T. (2017). Emperor or President? Understanding the (almost) unlimited power of the Brazilian Supreme Court's President. *Revista Brasileira de Direito*, *13*(1), 161–176.

Sato, Y., Lundstedt, M., Morrison, K., Boese, V. A., & Lindberg, S. I. (2022). Institutional order in episodes of autocratization (Varieties of Democracy Institute Working Paper No. 133). University of Gothenburg.

Sato, Y., Wiebrecht, F., Lindberg, S. I., & Institute, V.-D. (2023). Disinformation and Episodes of Regime Transformation. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4569010

Schlesinger, J. A. (1966). *Ambition and politics: Political careers in the United States*. Rand McNally.

Schmitt-Beck, R. (2017). The 'Alternative für Deutschland in the Electorate': Between Single-Issue and Right-Wing Populist Party. *German Politics*, *26*(1), 124–148. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2016.1184650

Schmuck, D., & Matthes, J. (2019). Voting "Against Islamization"? How Anti-Islamic Right-Wing, Populist Political Campaign Ads Influence Explicit and Implicit Attitudes Toward Muslims as Well as Voting Preferences. *Political Psychology*, *40*(4), 739–757. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12557

Shear, M. D., & Saul, S. (2021, January 3). Trump, in Taped Call, Pressured Georgia Official to 'Find' Votes to Overturn Election. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/03/us/politics/trump-raffensperger-call-georgia.html

Shipan, C. R. (2008). Partisanship, ideology, and Senate voting on Supreme Court nominees. *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, *5*(1), 55–76. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-1461.2007.00118.x

Sigelman, L. (1979). Presidential Popularity and Presidential Elections. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *43*(4), 532–534.

Sinclair, B. (1993). Studying Presidential Leadership. In G. C. Edwards, J. H. Kessel, & B. A. Rockman (Eds.), *Researching the Presidency: Vital Questions, New Approaches*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Singer, M. M., & Carlin, R. E. (2013). Context Counts: The Election Cycle, Development, and the Nature of Economic Voting. *The Journal of Politics*, *75*(3), 730–742. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613000467

Slothuus, R., & de Vreese, C. H. (2010). Political Parties, Motivated Reasoning, and Issue Framing Effects. *The Journal of Politics*, *72*(3), 630–645. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002238161000006X

Soroka, S. N., & Wlezien, C. (2010). *Degrees of democracy: Politics, public opinion, and policy*. Cambridge University Press. [EBSCOhost database]. (Accession No. 304446)

Spoon, J.-J., & Klüver, H. (2014). Do parties respond? How electoral context influences party responsiveness. *Electoral Studies*, *35*, 48–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.04.014

Spuller, G. (2014). Transformation of the Hungarian Constitutional Court: Tradition, Revolution, and (European) Prospects. *German Law Journal*, *15*(4), 637–692. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2071832200019076

Stecker, C. (2015). How effects on party unity vary across votes. *Party Politics*, *21*(5), 791–802. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068813509514

Štětka, V. (2019). *Media Freedom in Central Europe: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back?* Aspen Institute Central Europe. https://www.aspen.review/article/2019/media-freedom-central-europe-one-step-forward-two-steps-back/

Strøm, K. (1990). A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties. *American Journal of Political Science*, *34*(2), 565–598. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111461

Strøm, K. (1997). Rules, reasons and routines: Legislative roles in parliamentary democracies. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, *3*(1), 155–174. https://doi.org/10.1080/13572339708420504

Superior Electoral Court. (n.d.). STJ International - Superior Tribunal of Justice in Brazil. Retrieved May 23, 2023, from https://international.stj.jus.br/en/Brazilian-Judicial-Branch/Superior-Courts/Superior-Electoral-Court

Svolik, M. (2008). Authoritarian Reversals and Democratic Consolidation. *American Political Science Review*, *102*(2), 153–168. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055408080143

Szelényi, Z. (2019, September 30). Viktor Orbán, Fidesz, and Me. *The American Interest*. https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/09/30/viktor-orban-fidesz-and-me/

Szente, Z., Mandák, F., Fejes, Z., & Szente, Z. (2015). The decline of constitutional review in Hungary – Towards a partisan constitutional court. In *Challenges and pitfalls in the recent Hungarian constitutional development: Discussing the new Fundamental Law of Hungary*. Paris, France: L'Harmattan.

Szente, Zoltan. (2016). The political orientation of the members of the Hungarian Constitutional Court between 2010 and 2014. *Constitutional Studies, 1*, 123–49. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/constudi1&div=9&g_sent=1&casa_token=&collection=journals#.

Szilágyi, A., & Bozóki, A. (2015). Playing It Again in Post-Communism: The Revolutionary Rhetoric of Viktor Orbán in Hungary. *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, *18*(Supplement 1), S153–S166. https://doi.org/10.1080/15362426.2015.1010872

Theriault, S. M. (2008). *Party Polarization in Congress*. Cambridge University Press. https://libezproxy2.syr.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=254453&site=ehost-live

Thesen, G., Green-Pedersen, C., & Mortensen, P. B. (2017). Priming, issue ownership, and party support: The electoral gains of an issue-friendly media agenda. *Political Communication*, *34*(2), 282–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2016.1233920

Thrower, S. (2017). The President, the Court, and Policy Implementation. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *47*(1), 122–145. https://doi.org/10.1111/psq.12348

Toffoli, D. (2017). Democracy in Brazil: The Evolving Role of the Country's Supreme Court Essay. *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review*, *40*(2), 245–260.

Trojbicz, B. (2019). Federalism and Governability in Brazil: Oil Royalties in Dispute. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, *38*(5), 607–623. https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.12916

Trump, D. [@realDonaldTrump]. (2019, April 24). *The Mueller Report, despite being written by Angry Democrats and Trump Haters, and with unlimited money behind it ($35,000,000), didn't lay a glove on me. I DID NOTHING WRONG. If the partisan Dems ever tried to Impeach, I would first head to the U.S. Supreme Court*. [Tweet]. X. https://www.thetrumparchive.com/

Trump, D. [@realDonaldTrump]. (2019, May 17). *Wow! CNN Ratings are WAY DOWN, record lows. People are getting tired of so many Fake Stories and Anti-Trump lies. Chris Cuomo was rewarded for lowest morning ratings with a prime time spot - which is failing badly and not helping the dumbest man on television, Don Lemon!* [Tweet]. X. https://www.thetrumparchive.com/

Trump announces shock firing of FBI director Comey. (2017, May 9). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20170510-trump-announces-shock-firing-fbi-director-comey

Trump bars key witness from testifying before House impeachment inquiry. (2019, October 8). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20191008-usa-trump-bars-witness-testify-impeachment-inquiry

Trump calls on Fox News to fire reporter who confirmed war dead "losers" remarks. (n.d.). Retrieved June 5, 2024, from https://www.france24.com/en/20200906-trump-calls-on-fox-news-to-fire-reporter-who-confirmed-war-dead-remarks

Trump calls Ukraine probe a "coup." (2019, October 2). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/video/20191002-trump-calls-ukraine-probe-coup

Trump deems media "Enemy of the People" over Mueller probe. (2019, March). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://www.france24.com/en/20190326-usa-trump-media-enemy-people-mueller-probe-russia

Trump impeachment inquiry: Whistleblower says White House tried to cover up call details—France 24. (2019, September). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://www.france24.com/en/video/20190926-trump-impeachment-inquiry-whistleblower-says-white-house-tried-cover-call-details

Trump reaches out, then threatens Democrats after losing House. (2018, November). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://www.france24.com/en/20181107-usa-trump-bipartisan-house-senate-investigation-midterms-elections-democrats

Trump refuses to commit to peaceful transfer of power if he loses US election. (2020, September 24). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20200924-trump-refuses-to-commit-to-peaceful-transfer-of-power-if-he-loses-us-vote

Trump says US government shutdown to last until agreement on border wall. (2018, December). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://www.france24.com/en/20181225-trump-says-us-government-shutdown-last-agreement-border-wall-democrats

Trump seeks to halt publication of explosive tell-all book. (2018, January 4). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20180105-trump-bannon-seeks-halt-publication-explosive-tell-all-book-fire-fury

Trump tells ex-White House counsel McGahn not to testify. (2019, May 21). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20190521-trump-tells-ex-white-house-counsel-mcgahn-not-testify-usa-russia

Trump tried to cheat to win re-election, say Democrats at impeachment trial. (2020, January 23). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20200123-trump-tried-to-cheat-to-win-re-election-say-democrats-at-impeachment-trial

US Congress approval rating. (2021). YouGov. Retrieved June 5, 2024, from https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/trackers/us-congress-approval-rating

U. S. Const. art. I.

US House committee chairman subpoenas Trump's tax records. (2019, May 11). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20190511-usa-house-committee-chairman-neal-subpoenas-trump-tax-records-irs-treasury

US Senate panel subpoenas Trump Jr in Russia interference probe. (2019, May 9). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20190509-usa-senate-intelligence-subpoena-donald-trump-jr-russia-interference-probe-mueller-barr

U.S. Senate: Party Division. Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://www.senate.gov/history/partydiv.htm

US Senators sworn in for impeachment trial as watchdog group accuses Trump of breaking the law. (2020, January). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://www.france24.com/en/20200116-us-senate-opens-trump-impeachment-trial-nonpartisan-office-issues-critical-report-ukraine-aid

US - Trump launches fresh attack on news media, tweets video of him knocking down, beating CNN. (2017, July 3). France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/video/20170703-us-trump-launches-fresh-attack-news-media-tweets-video-him-knocking-down-beating-cnn

van Dijk, T. A. (2017). How Globo media manipulated the impeachment of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff. *Discourse & Communication*, *11*(2), 199–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481317691838

Van Duyn, E., & Collier, J. (2019). Priming and Fake News: The Effects of Elite Discourse on Evaluations of News Media. *Mass Communication and Society, 22*(1), 29–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2018.1511807

Vásárhelyi, M. (2012). Journalism in Hungary. In Weaver, D.H. & Willnat, L. (Eds.), *The global journalist in the 21st century* (pp. 234–41). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070740

Vásárhelyi, M. (2014). Journalism in Hungary. In *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*. Routledge.

Vásárhelyi, M. (2016). The workings of the media: A brainwashing and money-laundering mechanism. In B. Magyar & J. Vásárhelyi (Eds.), *Twenty-five sides of a post-communist mafia state* (pp. 491-525). Central European University Press. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1490782&site=ehost-live

Vegetti, F. (2019). The Political Nature of Ideological Polarization: The Case of Hungary. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 681*(1), 78–96. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218813895

Waldner, D., & Lust, E. (2018). Unwelcome Change: Coming to Terms with Democratic Backsliding. *Annual Review of Political Science, 21*(Volume 21, 2018), 93–113. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050517-114628

'War with media': Trump press team defend 'alternative facts.' (2017, January). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://www.france24.com/en/20170123-war-with-media-trump-administration-rolls-out-alternative-facts

Weschle, S. (2021). Campaign finance legislation and the supply-side of the revolving door. *Political Science Research and Methods*, *9*(2), 365–379. https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2019.46

White House blocks virus expert Fauci from testifying to Congress on govt's Covid-19 response. (2020, May). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://www.france24.com/en/20200502-usa-anthony-fauci-donald-trump-coronavirus-covid-19-congress-testify-house-of-representatives

White House restores CNN reporter's pass after legal fight. (2018, November). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://www.france24.com/en/20181120-white-house-restores-cnn-reporter-jim-acosta-pass-after-legal-fight-trump

White House suspends CNN reporter's credentials after heated Trump exchange. (2018, November). Retrieved June 4, 2024, from https://www.france24.com/en/20181108-white-house-suspends-cnn-reporters-jim-acosta-credentials-after-heated-trump-exchange

Wimmer, M., & Pieranti, O. P. (2008). The Right to Communicate in Brazil: Historical Development and Current Challenges. *Global Media Journal*, *7*(13). https://www.globalmediajournal.com/ peer-reviewed/ the-right-to-communicate-in-brazil-historical-development-and-current-challenges-35267.html

Wirz, D. S., Wettstein, M., Schulz, A., Ernst, N., Schemer, C., & Wirth, W. (2019). How populist crisis rhetoric affects voters in Switzerland. *Studies in Communication Sciences*, *19*(1), 69–83. https://doi.org/10.24434/j.scoms.2019.01.006

Wirz, D. S., Wettstein, M., Schulz, A., Müller, P., Schemer, C., Ernst, N., Esser, F., & Wirth, W. (2018). The Effects of Right-Wing Populist Communication on Emotions and Cognitions toward Immigrants. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *23*(4), 496–516. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161218788956

Wrong Direction on Rights: Assessing the Impact of Hungary's New Constitution and Laws | HRW. (2013). Human Rights Watch. Retrieved June 5, 2024, from https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/05/16/wrong-direction-rights/assessing-impact-hungarys-new-constitution-and-laws

Wunsch, N., & Blanchard, P. (2023). Patterns of democratic backsliding in third-wave democracies: A sequence analysis perspective. *Democratization*, *30*(2), 278–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2130260

Zhang, Y., Friend, A. J., Traud, A. L., Porter, M. A., Fowler, J. H., & Mucha, P. J. (2008). Community structure in Congressional cosponsorship networks. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and Its Applications*, *387*(7), 1705–1712. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physa.2007.11.004

Samantha Call | Curriculum Vitae

Personal Information

Email srcall@syr.edu
Website samanthacall.com
Pronouns she/her/hers

Address Department of Political Science
Syracuse University
100 Eggers Hall
Syracuse NY, 13244

Education

June 2024 Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science
Syracuse University | Syracuse, NY
Comparative and American Politics

Dissertation: Explaining Authoritarian Populist Behavior in Episodes of Democratic Backsliding
Committee: Seth Jolly (Advisor); Emily Thorson; Simon Weschle

2021 Master of Arts in Political Science
Syracuse University | Syracuse, NY

2017 Bachelor of Arts in Political Science
St. John Fisher College | Rochester, NY

Publications and Data

Forthcoming Call, Samantha, and Kari Waters. "The European Union as a Target: When do democratic backsliders challenge the EU?". *The Journal of Common Market Studies.*

2020 Call, Samantha, and Seth Jolly. "Euroscepticism in the Populism Era." *The Journal of Politics* 82, no. 1 (January 2020): e7–12. https://doi.org/10.1086/706457.

2017 Odile Gaultier-Voituriez and Samantha Call. Éphéméride 2016-2017. Pascal Perrineau. Le Vote disruptif, Presses de Sciences Po, pp.331 - 355, 2017, 9782724621655. ⟨hal-03397713⟩

Teaching Experience

2023 Instructor of Record | *Syracuse University*
- Introduction to American Politics and Government

2022 Instructor of Record | *Syracuse University*
- Introduction to Comparative Politics

2021 Adjunct Professor | *St. John Fisher College*
- Politics of the European Union
- Eurosimulation (simulation and course)
- Intersectional Politics

2019-Present Teaching Assistant | *Syracuse University*
- Constitutional Law I (Fall 2023)
- Campaign Analysis (2021)
- Ethnic Conflict (2020)
- Refugees in International Politics (2020)
- U.S. Public Policy (2020)
- Introduction to American Politics, sections (2019)

Working Papers

In Progress Call, Samantha. "Explaining Authoritarian Populist Behavior in Hungary."

In Progress Call, Samantha. "Institutional Threat and Democratic Backsliding in Brazil."

Fellowships and Awards

2024 Koff Award for Best Paper in Comparative Politics
Department of Political Science, Syracuse University

2023 American Political Science Association Travel Grant

2022-2023 Research Excellence Doctoral Funding (REDF) Fellowship
Syracuse University
- Awarded at the University level, this is a yearlong fellowship to work on research in place of teaching responsibilities.

2022 Koff Award for Best Paper in Comparative Politics
Department of Political Science, Syracuse University

2021-2022 Syracuse University Graduate Fellowship
The Graduate School, Syracuse University
- Awarded through the Graduate School, this is a yearlong fellowship to work on research in place of teaching responsibilities.

2018-2019 Syracuse University Graduate Fellowship
The Graduate School, Syracuse University
- Awarded through the Graduate School, this is a yearlong fellowship to work on research in place of teaching responsibilities.

Service

May 2024 Invited Guest Speaker
Democratic Backsliding in Hungary, the US, and Brazil
Syracuse University

May 2023 Invited Guest Speaker
Democratic Backsliding in the United States
Washington & Jefferson College

2021-2022 Post-Comprehensive Exam Graduate Student Representative
Political Science Graduate Student Association Executive Board, Syracuse University

2021 Tenure Committee Graduate Student Representative
Political Science Department, Syracuse University

2018-2019 Member, Sherman Social Committee
Political Science Graduate Student Association Executive Board, Syracuse University

Conference Presentations

2023 American Political Science Association
Paper: "The European Union as a Target: When do democratic backsliders challenge the EU?"

2023 European Union Studies Association
Paper: "The European Union as a Target: When do democratic backsliders challenge the EU?"
Paper: "Explaining Authoritarian Populist Behavior in Hungary"
Discussant

2022 Midwest Political Science Association
Paper: "Motivators of Authoritarian Populist Behavior: How Institutional Threat and Public Opinion Explain Democratic Backsliding in the United States"

Research Experience

2021-2024 Graduate Research Assistant
Supervisor: Simon Weschle

2019 Graduate Research Assistant
Supervisor: Seth Jolly

Memberships and Groups

2023 Member, American Political Science Association

2023 Member, European Union Studies Association

2022 Member, Midwest Political Science Association

2019-2024 Member, European Politics Workshop
Syracuse University

2020-2024 Member, Graduate Student Research Meetings
Syracuse University

References

Seth Jolly
Associate Professor of Political Science
The Maxwell School
Syracuse University
100 Eggers Hall
Syracuse, New York 13244
skjolly@syr.edu

Simon Weschle
Associate Professor of Political Science
The Maxwell School
Syracuse University
100 Eggers Hall
Syracuse, New York 13244
swweschl@syr.edu

Emily Thorson
Assistant Professor of Political Science
The Maxwell School
Syracuse University
100 Eggers Hall
Syracuse, New York 13244
ethorson@gmail.com