In my research, I work to better understand the domestic politics of authoritarian regimes and unconsolidated democracies. In particular, I explore how parties in these regimes navigate a dilemma: how do they reap the many benefits of multiparty elections—gathering and conveying information, legitimation, distribution of patronage, and more—while minimizing the risk of defeat or mass protest? In my dissertation and in four published or forthcoming articles, I have identified some of the limits ruling parties face when confronting this dilemma. I have also made progress on two related projects: the first investigates how independent courts in authoritarian systems can restrain electoral manipulation, while the second draws on political psychology and survey-experiments to test how tainted elections affect individual willingness to participate in collective action.

Book project: Principals, agents, and electoral manipulation

Elections are regularly manipulated, but there is wide variation in the severity of these efforts and in the tactics used. In my dissertation, now under development as a larger book project, I focus on the incentives faced by the large number of low-level agents whose cooperation is necessary if political leaders are to manage the election's outcome. I argue that these individuals' willingness to engage in manipulation is conditional on two factors. First, political leaders with consolidated control over patronage resources, such as access to jobs or rents, are better able to attract agents to manipulate on their behalf (all other things equal). Second, the possibility that an agent might be exposed and punished for breaking the law, which varies locally, can deter manipulation or shift agents toward less detectable forms of tampering. Unlike previous work that focuses primarily on risks to leaders, this theory helps account for important empirical patterns, including the persistence of some forms of electoral manipulation in competitive settings, heavy manipulation when incumbents are unpopular, or failed manipulation attempts when incumbents appear relatively strong.

I test the theory using precinct-level electoral data from Russia, Mexico, and Ukraine, three countries where patronage consolidation and local levels of political risk vary widely geographically and over time. To measure levels of electoral manipulation, I draw on several election-forensic techniques. These quantitative tools are used to look for patterns in election results that would be unlikely in a clean election (Myagkov et al., 2009; Beber and Scacco, 2012). I analyze these estimates using multiple techniques, including multilevel and difference-in-difference models. In addition to election forensics and statistical analysis, I also conducted field interviews with election observers and low-level election officials in Russia, and carried out a survey experiment of Russian public opinion on manipulation efforts.

Thus far, this project has been supported by more than $38,000 in competitive grants,

including UNC's most prestigious graduate fellowship. I am drafting two additional chapters as the project shifts from a dissertation manuscript to a book. An empirical chapter will be based on Russian-language archival research, and a conceptual chapter will describe the current state of the art in election forensics.

Electoral manipulation in broader context

In other research, I work to identify additional causes and effects of electoral manipulation. My 2016 article in *Electoral Studies* addresses a puzzle: why do incumbents in authoritarian regimes engage in costly vote-buying, when they could much more easily falsify election results or stuff ballot boxes out of public view? I argue that vote-buying is employed in more competitive regions in part to demonstrate organizational strength. In a related paper, published in *Government and Opposition*, we predict that costlier manipulation tactics reduce the risk of post-election protest by sending a clearer signal of ruling-party strength. Using cross-national data and tools like multiple imputation and statistical matching, we find that post-election protest is more likely after falsification of results by election workers (a cheap tactic) than following large-scale voting-buying efforts.

Two other papers consider institutional causes of varying types of manipulation. In one, published in *Democratization*, a co-author and I examine the effects of transitional justice mechanisms (e.g. post-transition trials and lustration efforts) on different types of electoral manipulation in post-authoritarian societies. We argue that post-transition trials reduce the severity of illegal forms of manipulation by bolstering the judiciary, while lustration reduces the severity of legal manipulation by removing obstacles to reform. In a solo-authored manuscript, currently under review, I show that independent courts in authoritarian countries can restrict illegal election fraud, especially in uncompetitive settings. This result indicates a further dilemma of non-democratic government—ruling parties can grant courts some independence to reap economic and political benefits, but doing so constrains their ability to control election outcomes. Taken together, these projects demonstrate my interest in deepening the connections between the study of electoral integrity and broader issues in the discipline.

Research trajectory

While I am actively pursuing the above projects, I am also building on their foundation as I develop a second major project. This project uses experimental techniques to investigate individual reactions to electoral manipulation. By studying these attitudes in democracies and non-democracies, I aim to better understand the occurrence of post-election protest. Numerous studies have argued that the risk of protest is a major deterrent

to electoral manipulation by governments (Magaloni, 2010; Fearon, 2011; Chernykh and Svolik, 2015). However, post-election protest is empirically rare (Kalandadze and Orenstein, 2009) while manipulation is common (Simpser, 2013). This raises the question: why is mass protest failing to deter electoral manipulation as predicted?

To address this question, I draw on research in social psychology that has identified specific factors that influence individual participation in collective action (van Zomeren, 2013), such as identification with a group or feelings of efficacy. This project tests a number of hypotheses, including whether some types of electoral manipulation depress these individual triggers for protest participation, meaning that incumbents could deploy them with minimal risk. Preliminary work shows support for this approach. For example, a survey experiment I conducted in late 2017 showed that state-based forms of manipulation reduced feelings of affiliation with the targeted party—a potential explanation for the relative scarcity of electoral protest.

The study of attitudes toward electoral manipulation is largely unexplored territory, and this project will help us better understand variation in manipulation, post-election protest, and regime stability. I expect to conduct further experiments cross-regionally, including in the post-Soviet region and the United States, in order to study how attitudes toward manipulation are influenced by factors like the nature of the party system, political polarization, and the consolidation of democratic institutions. Using promising results from the preliminary study, I am preparing grant proposals in order to begin the cross-national work shortly after completing the dissertation.

Conclusion

One appeal of this research program is its connection to broader issues of real-world relevance and of theoretical importance in political science. Most contemporary non-democracies hold multiparty elections, albeit unfair ones, and political parties in democracies often rely on unfair or illegal tactics. As a result, research on election integrity is central to understanding regime stability in a broad class of countries. Better understanding the mechanics of election manipulation helps explain why electoral authoritarian regimes are durable until suddenly they are not, and why democratization can stall due to biased elections. As my works in progress illustrate, it also connects to research literatures on the rule of law, collective action, and political psychology. I have an established research trajectory that explores these connections, which will guide my research over the next several years.

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