

Misperceptions and Demand for Democracy under Authoritarianism

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ACCURATE INFORMATION ABOUT THE STATE AND THE VALUE OF DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA FREEDOM REDUCES SUPPORT FOR AUTHORITARIANISM

NBER WORKING PAPER March 2025

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Summary

This paper examines whether citizens' misperceptions about democratic decline and media repression sustain authoritarian rule. This question is explored using online and field experiments during Türkiye's May 2023 elections. The study finds that providing factual information about the state and value of democracy and media freedom significantly shifted support toward the democratic opposition. These effects were driven not by further mobilizing opposition supporters, but primarily by government supporters with larger baseline misperceptions.

Objective

Determine whether informing citizens about misperceptions regarding democratic institutions and media freedom increases demand for democratic governance and can alter voting behavior under authoritarianism.

Methodology

The researchers conducted a randomized online survey experiment and a large-scale field experiment using door-to-door canvassing across 554 neighborhoods (approximately 880,000 voters). Participants received either factual information on democratic decline and media repression or placebo content, with outcomes measured through self-reported belief updates, voting intentions, and official ballot-box results.

Results

- Providing information changed beliefs and significantly increased support for democratic institutions.
 - The likelihood of voting for the opposition rose by 3.7 percentage points online (6.2% relative increase).
 - Treated neighborhoods in the field experiment experienced a 0.8 percentage-point increase in ballot-box level opposition vote share (1.5% relative increase).
 - Effects were concentrated among government-aligned voters (1.1 percentage points) and had a long-run impact, persisting into the 2024 municipal elections.
- opposition voting intentions online rose by **+3.7** percentage points and opposition vote share at ballot boxes by **+0.8** percentage points