VOTING AGAINST AUTOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

When and how do voters punish politicians for subverting democracy? To investigate the role of the public in democratic backsliding, I develop a conceptual framework that differentiates among three mechanisms: vote switching, backlash, and disengagement. The first mechanism entails defection by voters from a candidate who undermines democracy to one who does not; the latter two mechanisms entail transitions between voting and abstention. I estimate the magnitude of each mechanism by combining evidence from a series of original survey experiments, traditional surveys, and a quasi-experiment afforded by the rerun of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral election, in which the governing party, AKP, attempted to overturn the result of an election that it had lost. I find that although vote switching and backlash contributed to the AKP's eventual defeat the most, each of the three mechanisms served as a democratic check in some subset of the Istanbul electorate. Persuasion, mobilization, and even demobilization are all viable tools for curbing the authoritarian tendencies of elected politicians.

"If we lose Istanbul, we lose Turkey."
—*Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan*[1]

I. Introduction

ON June 23, 2019, Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) experienced the biggest political defeat in its almost two decades in power. Three months earlier, the AKP's candidate for the mayor of Istanbul, Binali Yıldırım, had narrowly lost to the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu. Rather than conceding defeat, the AKP and Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan alleged irregularities in an election administered by their own government and the Turkish Electoral Commission subsequently annulled the election and ordered its rerun. Against expectations, the AKP's initial, narrow defeat in March by fewer than 14,000 votes turned into an overwhelming defeat in June, when the AKP candidate lost by more than 800,000 votes.[2]

[1] Abdülkadir Selvi, "Erdoğan, İstanbul için hangi uyarılarda bulundu?" [What Warnings did Erdoğan Issue about Istanbul?], *Hürriyet*, 26 September 2017.

[2] Given Istanbul's electorate of 10.6 million voters, the CHP's margin of victory corresponds to 0.16 percent and 9.29 percent of the two-party vote in March and June 2019, respectively.

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In this article, I combine quantitative and qualitative evidence from the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race with experimental and traditional survey data to address fundamental questions about democratic stability: When and how do ordinary people resist authoritarianism? The 2019 Istanbul mayoral election provides a unique, quasi-experimental opportunity to tackle these questions. Within the span of three months, the same electorate faced the same set of major candidates, with one critical difference between the two polls: after the original election, Istanbul voters witnessed an unprecedented assault on the integrity of Turkish elections. For the first time, the governing AKP showed a willingness to abuse its control over Turkey's electoral administration so far as to overturn the outcome of an election that it had lost. Despite a playing field tilted heavily in favor of the government's candidate, voters in Istanbul repudiated the AKP with a resounding defeat.

The 2019 Istanbul mayoral election thus offers a rare insight into when and why incumbent-driven attempts to undermine democracy fail.[3] I examine three major questions. The first concerns how Istanbulites punished the AKP's attempt to overturn its March defeat. I distinguish among three mechanisms: vote switching, backlash, and disengagement. Voters punished the AKP by *vote switching* if they switched from voting for the AKP to voting for the CHP. Backlash and disengagement relate to shifts in turnout rather than to vote choice. *Backlash* occurred if an increase in turnout between March and June benefited primarily the CHP; by contrast, *disengagement* occurred if a decrease in turnout took place disproportionately among March AKP voters. Each of the three mechanisms results in a decrease in the AKP's vote share—but for a different reason. Understanding the magnitude by which each mechanism contributed to the AKP's defeat will allow us to address a key question about democratic backsliding: Is persuasion, mobilization, or demobilization the most viable instrument for curbing incumbents with authoritarian tendencies?

The second question concerns who punished the AKP for its attempt to overturn the result of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral election. Mirroring other cases of democratic backsliding from around the world, electoral competition in Turkey takes place between two sharply opposed blocs led by the governing AKP and the opposition CHP, reflecting a highly polarized electorate.[4] After almost two decades of AKP governments, Turkish

[3] For more on the context of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race, see Somer 2019b; Wuthrich and Ingleby 2020; and this article's supplementary material.

[4] On backsliding in Turkey, see Laebens and Öztürk 2020; Somer 2019a. For a comparative perspective on democratic backsliding, see Haggard and Kaufman 2021; Hyde 2020; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Svolik 2019; Waldner and Lust 2018.

voters have witnessed the AKP and President Erdoğan take a number of steps to weaken the opposition and reshape Turkey's institutions to their political advantage.[5] In turn, those who supported the AKP in the original, March Istanbul vote did so after already having factored those authoritarian tendencies into their choices. Who are the Istanbulites that initially supported the AKP but concluded in June that—by attempting to overturn an election defeat—the AKP had gone too far? An answer to this question is key to understanding the characteristics of the voter who, at a critical juncture in her country's democratic trajectory, puts democratic principles above partisan interests.

The third question is why did voters punish the AKP? Can the difference between its narrow March and overwhelming June defeat be indeed attributed to voters' opposition to the AKP's assault on the integrity of Turkish elections? As I point out in the opening paragraphs, the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race approximates a natural experiment. I examine the soundness of this interpretation and address challenges to extrapolating beyond the Turkish context by drawing on the mutually complementary strengths of a range of sources and methods: election results, survey experiments, traditional surveys, as well as administrative data and qualitative case evidence.

While this article is primarily empirical, the analysis is guided by a simple theory of the public as a democratic check. I build on a growing body of research that models democratic backsliding, especially the interaction between incumbents with authoritarian ambitions and prodemocratic, but politically conflicted, publics.[6] My innovation is to model the effects of a politician's violation of democratic norms on both the citizens' candidate and turnout choices, which allows us to explain the prevalence of vote switching, backlash, and disengagement. A key implication of this analysis is that the relative intensity of citizens' partisanship and commitment to democracy determines not only the magnitude but also the manner by which they punish undemocratic politicians: as we move from opponents to supporters of the incumbent, we anticipate a shift in the principal form of punishment from backlash to vote switching to disengagement.

[5] Major steps in Turkey's democratic decline under the AKP include the abuse of antiterrorism laws to prosecute Kurdish politicians and journalists critical of the government, the suppression of the Gezi Park protests in 2013, the purge of the state bureaucracy following the 2016 failed military coup, and a shift toward a presidential system following a 2017 referendum whose campaign and coverage heavily favored the government's preferred outcome. See Aytaç, Çarkoğlu, and Yıldırım 2017; Cleary and Öztürk 2022; Esen and Gumuscu 2016; Laebens and Öztürk 2020; Somer 2019a.

[6] See Chiopris, Nalepa, and Vanberg 2021; Graham and Svolik 2020; Grillo and Prato 2023; Helmke, Kroeger, and Paine 2022; Horz 2021; Luo and Przeworski 2023; Miller 2021; Svolik 2020.

The empirical analysis finds support for the above predictions and yields a number of new insights about the public's capacity to resist incumbents who undermine democracy. As a first-order issue, I establish that Istanbulites did indeed punish the AKP because it attempted to overturn the outcome of a democratic election. Electoral shifts between March and June 2019 were too large to have occurred by chance in more than 96 percent of Istanbul's neighborhoods, and they overwhelmingly favored the opposition. By complementing evidence from the mayoral race with case-based, survey, and experimental evidence and by considering a range of alternative explanations, I corroborate that the relationship between the AKP's attempt to overturn its defeat and the March–June electoral shifts is indeed causal. Istanbulites voted against autocracy.

The experimental evidence comes from a series of original candidate-choice experiments that I conducted prior to Turkey's 2018 general election and in the immediate aftermath of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race to examine whether and how Turkish citizens punish politicians who undermine democracy. This approach builds on a recent wave of studies that have adopted experimental methods to study democratic backsliding and support for democracy.[7] A subset of my experiments closely mirrors the 2019 Istanbul race: I asked respondents to choose between two candidates, one from the governing AKP, the other from the opposition CHP (or its coalition partner the İYİ Party), described each by a range of realistic attributes and, crucially, experimentally assigned the AKP candidate to support a measure that violates democratic principles in a random subset of such scenarios. We can therefore take the decrease in the AKP candidate's vote share between scenarios in which both candidates comply with democratic principles and those in which the AKP candidate undermines them as a measure of the punishment that the Turkish public is willing to dispense in defense of democracy. These experiments reveal that i) the Turkish public is indeed capable of acting as a democratic check and that check is politically consequential; but that ii) substantial fractions of the electorate do so reluctantly, if at all, because opposing autocracy implies abandoning a party that they otherwise favor.

This evidence helps us to reconcile several seemingly contradictory facts about the Turkish electorate and the role of ordinary citizens in democratic backsliding more broadly. By conventional measures, the

[7] Albertus and Grossman 2021; Becher and Brouard 2022; Carey et al. 2022; Gandhi and Ong 2019; Graham and Svolik 2020; Reuter and Szakonyi 2021; Simonovits, McCoy, Littvay 2022; Svolik 2020.

vast majority of Turks supports democracy—and yet a significant fraction votes for parties and politicians that undermine democracy.[8] I verify that this is not because ordinary Turks lack the ability to discern violations of democratic principles for what they are—a concern one might have after almost two decades of AKP governments that have chipped away at Turkey's democracy while claiming to be improving it. Rather, I find that significant portions of the Turkish electorate are willing to trade their democratic principles for partisan interests when faced with a choice between the two. Jointly, these insights help us to understand why prodemocratic publics so frequently vote for antidemocratic politicians: When Turkish citizens support Erdoğan, they are not doing so because they have a soft spot for his authoritarian tendencies or because they fail to discern them. When Turks vote for Erdoğan, they do so despite his authoritarian tendencies.

When it comes to how Istanbulites punished the AKP's attempt to overturn its March defeat, I find that different segments of the electorate did so differently. Across several sources of evidence, I consistently find that vote switching arises primarily from among political moderates and accounts for about half of the overall electoral punishment. Although the sources differ on the relative magnitude of the two turnout mechanisms, they agree on the political characteristics of the voter that tends to engage in each type of punishment: as we move from opponents to supporters of the incumbent AKP, the principal form of punishment shifts from backlash to vote switching to disengagement. These findings have two major implications for our understanding of how ordinary citizens curb or even reverse the course of democratic backsliding.[9] First, persuasion, mobilization, and even demobilization are all viable mechanisms for resisting autocracy. Second, even in a society as bitterly divided as contemporary Turkey, a politically consequential subset of the electorate is willing to switch sides and thus tip the scales in favor of democracy.

To establish who punishes undemocratic behavior, I examine the heterogeneity of punishment using a range of political and socioeconomic covariates. Those who punish the AKP the most are relatively young;

[8] Levels of conventionally measured support for democracy in Turkey are comparable to those in advanced democracies. When asked, "How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?"—with answers ranging from zero for "not important at all" to ten for "absolutely important"—the average answer in Turkey is 8.62, with only minuscule differences among the supporters of the government (8.52 and 8.64 for AKP and MHP voters) and the opposition (8.80 and 8.63 for CHP and İYİ voters).

[9] On when and why backsliding fails, see especially Cleary and Öztürk 2022; Gandhi and Ong 2019; Ginsburg and Huq 2018.

however, they are less-than-college educated and do not score the highest on income or secularism. These results point to a need to revise the civic culture paradigm to account for distinctive features of democratic backsliding, especially its incremental and legalistic nature.[10] After years of constitutionally mandated democratic erosion, the citizen who resists autocracy the most will no longer be the citizen whose vote will be the most decisive. After all, in AKP-era Turkey, the model democratic citizen stopped supporting the AKP long ago, if ever. Instead, the fate of Turkish democracy rests with a less celebrated citizen who, rather than principled and passionate about politics, is pragmatic and persuadable—and this is precisely what makes her pivotal.

In the next section, I develop a theoretical framework that guides my analysis of vote switching, backlash, and disengagement throughout the article. The three sections that follow examine, in turn, evidence from the March 2019 Istanbul mayoral election and its June rerun; surveys conducted between the original Istanbul March race and its June rerun; and candidate-choice experiments conducted in the immediate aftermath of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race. I conclude by synthesizing the findings based on these sources and methods and outlining the scope conditions under which the public can be realistically expected to counter the course of democratic backsliding. Throughout, I rely on qualitative evidence from the Turkish context, which I discuss extensively in the supplementary material.

II. Vote Switching, Backlash, and Disengagement

To analyze the public's capacity to serve as a democratic check, I build on a theoretical framework according to which citizens conceive of politicians' compliance with democratic principles as a valence attribute in the context of spatial electoral competition.[11] From this perspective, citizens differ in their preferences for policies, but they all prefer politicians who comply with the rules of democratic competition. To examine the implications of this framework for vote switching, backlash, and disengagement in the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race, I extend it to account for both vote choice and turnout.[12]

[10] On the civic culture paradigm, see Almond and Verba 1963; Fish 2002; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Norris 2011. For a recent reassessment, see Bautista et al. 2023; Claassen 2020; Dahlum 2019; Dahlum and Knutsen 2017; Neundorf and Pop-Eleches 2020; Rosenfeld 2021; Voeten 2017; Wuttke, Gavras, and Schoen 2022.

[11] See Graham and Svolik 2020 and Svolik 2020.

[12] For a recent reassessment of comparative politics research on turnout, see Aytaç and Stokes 2019; on turnout in Turkey, see Livny 2020.

Suppose that citizen i's payoff from candidate j is

$$u_{ij} = -\alpha_i\left(x_i - x_j\right)^2 - \delta_i D_j^-,$$

where x_i is citizen i's ideal policy and x_j denotes candidate j's platform, with $j = 1,2$ referring to the incumbent and challenger, respectively. The term D_j^- is a binary indicator of whether candidate j is complying ($D_j^- = 0$) or not ($D_j^- = 1$) with democratic principles. Parameters α_i and δ_i denote the weights that citizen i places on the candidates' policy platforms and compliance with democratic principles, respectively.[13]

Because candidate platforms are either fixed or randomly assigned throughout the data and only the incumbent potentially undermines democracy, I treat the candidates' policy platforms x_j as constants; assume that the challenger complies with democratic principles, $D_2^- = 0$; and focus on the consequences of the variation in the incumbent's compliance with democratic principles, $D_1^- = \{0,1\}$. In the Turkish context, I interpret the $D_1^- = 0$ action as having already factored in the AKP's history of preelection manipulation prior to the March 2019 Istanbul race; the $D_1^- = 1$ action captures the new level of authoritarianism revealed by the AKP's attempt to overturn its defeat in that election.

Assuming that candidate 1's policy platform is to the right of candidate 2's platform, $x_1 > x_2$, citizen i prefers candidate 1 to candidate 2 if

$$x_i \geq \frac{x_1 + x_2}{2} + \frac{\delta_i D_1^-}{2\alpha_i(x_1 - x_2)}.$$

The right-hand side of this inequality identifies the swing supporter, whom I denote by $x^*(D_1^-)$. The swing supporter is located at the midpoint between the two candidates' policy platforms if the incumbent complies with democratic principles; she shifts to the right of the midpoint by $\frac{\delta_i}{2\alpha_i(x_1 - x_2)}$ if the incumbent violates democratic principles.

A key implication of this setting is that voters will be less willing to punish undemocratic behavior by an otherwise favored candidate when the intensity of their partisanship as well as candidate or voter polarization is high. Specifically, the fraction of citizens who switch their support to candidate 2 if candidate 1 violates democratic principles follows intuitive comparative statics: it is increasing in the weight that citizens place on democracy δ_i relative to the candidates' policy platforms α_i; and it is decreasing in the distance between the two candidates' platforms $x_1 - x_2$.

[13] The formal analysis assumes $\alpha_i, \delta_i > 0$; evidence examined in the sections that follow provides support for this assumption.

Citizens with extreme policy preferences, $x_i > \frac{x_1+x_2}{2} + \frac{\delta_i}{2\alpha_i(x_1-x_2)}$, support candidate 1 even if he violates democratic principles.[14]

To examine how the incumbent's violation of democratic principles translates into citizens' turnout choices, I adopt an intentionally simple perspective: I assume that the primary driver of turnout is the citizens' desire to express support for their favored candidate. Specifically, if citizen i prefers candidate 1 to candidate 2, $x_i \geq x^*(D_1^-)$, turns out to vote (for candidate 1), and candidate j wins, then she obtains the payoff

$$u_{ij} + \rho(u_{i1} - u_{i2}) - c\,,$$

where $\rho(u_{i1} - u_{i2})$ is the expressive payoff from turning out for one's favored candidate (assuming $\rho > 0$) and $c > 0$ is the cost of turning out. By contrast, if citizen i abstains and candidate j wins, she only obtains the payoff u_{ij}.[15]

The chief implication of this expressive model of turnout is that citizens who vote for candidate 1 will be closer to him policy-wise than those who merely support him but do not turn out to vote.[16] Specifically, if citizen i prefers candidate 1 to candidate 2, $x_i \geq x^*(D_1^-)$, she turns out and votes for candidate 1 if

$$u_{i1} - u_{i2} \geq \frac{c}{\rho},$$

or equivalently if

$$x_i \geq x^*(D_1^-) + \frac{c}{2\alpha_i\rho(x_1 - x_2)}.$$

In turn, those who see little difference between the two candidates abstain,

$$x^*(D_1^-) - \frac{c}{2\alpha_i\rho(x_1 - x_2)} \leq x_i < x^*(D_1^-) + \frac{c}{2\alpha_i\rho(x_1 - x_2)}. \quad (1)$$

[14] These implications are consistent with Wuthrich and Ingleby's analysis of how the opposition's inclusive "radical love" campaign in Istanbul allowed it to appeal to the AKP's base despite an otherwise highly polarized political landscape; see Wuthrich and Ingleby 2020. In terms of my model, İmamoğlu's strategy aimed to reduce the perceived distance between the candidates' policy platforms, thus bringing into focus differences in their commitment to democracy.

[15] Note the absence of any pivotality considerations in this framework. These play a key role in the classic, instrumental models of turnout; see, e.g., Riker and Ordeshook 1968.

[16] In the supplementary material, I corroborate this prediction using evidence from a nationally representative survey conducted in the aftermath of the 2019 Turkish local elections.

Intuitively, the abstention interval in inequality (1) is increasing in the cost of voting c and decreasing in the expressive payoff parameter ρ, the policy weight α_i, and the distance between the two candidates' platforms $x_1 - x_2$.[17]

Having a framework that accounts for both vote choice and turnout, we can now partition the electorate by whether and how each citizen punishes candidate 1's violation of democratic principles. This partition is most concisely characterized in terms of the difference $u_{i1} - u_{i2}$ in citizen i's payoff from the two candidates rather than voter i's ideal point x_i. Inequality (1) implies that for citizens who abstain, the difference $u_{i1} - u_{i2}$ is within the interval $\left(-\frac{c}{\rho}, \frac{c}{\rho}\right)$ when candidate 1 complies with democratic principles; it is in the interval $\left(-\frac{c}{\rho} + \delta_i, \frac{c}{\rho} + \delta_i\right)$ when candidate 1 violates democratic principles. To simplify the presentation, I denote the payoff difference $u_{i1} - u_{i2}$ when candidate 1 complies with democratic principles by Δu_i. Figure 1 illustrates this partition.

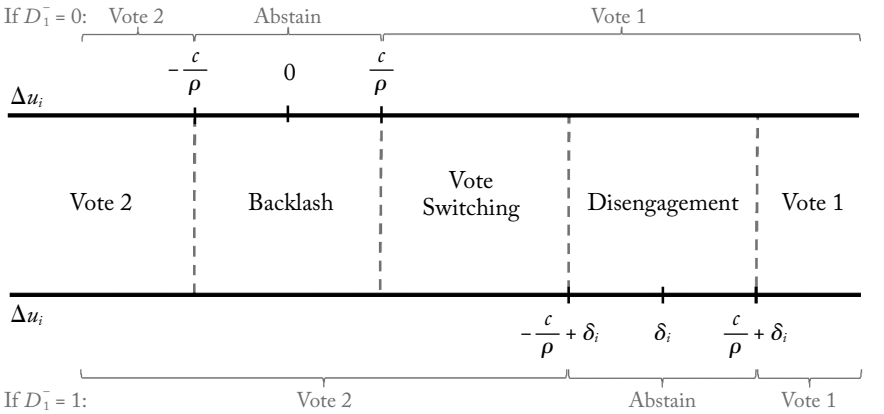


Figure 1
Vote Switching, Backlash, and Disengagement as a Function of the Payoff Difference

Backlash: These citizens abstain if $D_1^- = 0$ but turn out to vote for candidate 2 if $D_1^- = 1$,

$$-\frac{c}{\rho} < \Delta u_i \leq \min\left\{\frac{c}{\rho}, -\frac{c}{\rho} + \delta_i\right\}.$$

[17] The reasoning about turnout among citizens who prefer candidate 2 to candidate 1, $x_i < x^*(D_1^-)$, is analogous.

The right limit accounts for the fact that for low values of δ_i, vote switching will not occur (see below.)

Vote switching: These citizens vote for candidate 1 if $D_1^- = 0$ but vote for candidate 2 if $D_1^- = 1$,

$$\frac{c}{\rho} < \Delta u_i \leq -\frac{c}{\rho} + \delta_i.$$

This interval is positive only if $\delta_i > \frac{2c}{\rho}$.

Disengagement: These citizens vote for candidate 1 if $D_1^- = 0$ but abstain if $D_1^- = 1$,

$$\max\left\{\frac{c}{\rho}, -\frac{c}{\rho} + \delta_i\right\} < \Delta u_i \leq \frac{c}{\rho} + \delta_i.$$

The remainder of the electorate—those for whom $\Delta u_i \leq -\frac{c}{\rho}$ or $\Delta u_i > \frac{c}{\rho} + \delta_i$—do not punish candidate 1 for violating democratic principles: they turn out and vote for candidate 2 and 1, respectively, regardless of candidate 1's actions.

The above analysis yields two key empirical implications. First, the manner by which citizens punish the incumbent for violating democratic principles depends on the intensity of their policy-based preference for the incumbent. Backlash occurs among those who are politically indifferent and therefore most likely to abstain if the incumbent complies with democratic principles. Vote switching occurs among those who just barely support the incumbent: this subset of the electorate must both support the incumbent enough to turn out to vote for him if he acts democratically, but not so much as to be unwilling to punish him by voting against him if he does not. Disengagement occurs among the incumbent's moderate supporters: these normally turn out, vote for the incumbent, and once confronted by his undemocratic actions, they are willing to punish him—but at most by abstaining. In sum, as we move from opponents to supporters of the incumbent, we anticipate a shift in the nature of punishment from backlash to vote switching to disengagement.

The second empirical implication concerns the extent of vote switching. The proportion of citizens who punish by vote switching increases as the weight that they place on democracy δ_i goes up, and it may not occur at all if δ_i is too low, $\delta_i < \frac{2c}{\rho}$. The latter holds because to engage

in vote switching, a citizen must fill a tall order: she must care about democracy enough to not only stop supporting an undemocratically acting incumbent, but to also turn out and actually vote against him.

III. The 2019 Istanbul Mayoral Election

On March 31, 2019, Binali Yıldırım, the governing AKP's candidate for the mayor of Istanbul, lost to the opposition CHP's candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, by 13,729 out of 8,869,362 cast ballots. In the weeks that followed, Istanbulites witnessed an unprecedented assault on the integrity of Turkish elections.[18] After at first appearing to concede,[19] the AKP alleged that the election suffered from a number of administrative irregularities and called on the Turkish Electoral Commission (YSK) to order a rerun. Yet the most severe irregularity, which indeed took place in 754 of Istanbul's 31,186 ballot boxes, was a violation of a minor and often ignored statutory provision: that the ballot box committees, whose members count votes and certify results, be chaired by civil servants.[20] On May 6, 2019, in a divided 7–4 ruling that included a dissent by its chief justice, the YSK annulled the election and ordered its rerun.

As critics of the verdict—including the YSK's chief justice—pointed out, the ruling lacked factual basis, broke with precedent, and contained numerous inconsistences. No evidence existed that the improper chairing of a small fraction of ballot box committees adversely affected the AKP's vote—after all, the election took place under the AKP's own national and city government; no complaints about the improper chairing of ballot box committees had been lodged prior to the election; the district election boards that appointed the committees had AKP members serving on them; and observers from the AKP certified the results at nearly all ballot boxes for which committee chairs were improperly appointed. The ruling also ignored statutory provisions that allow non–civil servants to serve as ballot box committee chairs when civil servants are not available; it contradicted the YSK's past verdicts according to which violations of minor administrative procedures do not constitute

[18] In the supplementary material, I outline in detail why the annulment represents an unprecedented violation of electoral integrity in the Turkish context. Briefly, electoral fairness under AKP governments has been compromised primarily by preelection manipulation and, up to this point, systematic election-day fraud or attempts to overturn election outcomes ex post had not occurred. The most controversial incident is described in fn. 21.

[19] Gümrükçü, Tuvan, and Ece Toksabay. 2019. "Erdoğan appears to concede Istanbul defeat after Ankara loss," *Reuters*, March 30.

[20] The ballot box is the lowest level of aggregation at which election results in Turkey are conducted and reported (a ballot box can have at most 350 voters) and corresponds to a precinct or polling station.

grounds for invalidating an election;[21] and it selectively annulled only the mayoral race—in which the AKP lost—even though elections for district mayors, district municipal councils, and the provincial municipal council—in which the AKP did significantly better—were held concurrently with the mayoral race, with votes counted and certified by the very same ballot box committees.[22]

Throughout and paralleling other instances of incumbent-led democratic erosion from around the world, the AKP and President Erdoğan insisted that the only purpose for the annulment was to safeguard Turkish democracy and ensure that elections "reflect the national will."[23] The opposition, by contrast, accused the AKP of subverting the electoral process—Turkish "democracy's last stronghold"[24]—by exerting undue pressure over the YSK to get another chance to win an election that it had narrowly lost.[25] Istanbulites appear to have agreed: on June 23, 2019, when the rerun took place, the AKP candidate lost again—this time by a massive margin of 806,014 votes.[26]

Who punished the AKP's attempt to overturn its March defeat and how did they do it? For an initial indication, consider Figure 2. It summarizes the neighborhood-level change between March and June for four key outcomes: the shift in the AKP's two-party vote share and its three constituent parts—the shifts in the vote for the AKP, for the CHP, and abstention.[27] All

[21] The most prominent of these took place during the 2017 constitutional referendum, when the YSK ruled on election day that ballots without an official seal should still be counted to avoid placing the burden of administrative errors on voters. The opposition criticized that verdict, calling it a last-minute effort by the YSK to help the AKP-favored "Yes" side in a narrow vote. See "Kılıç daroğlu: Bu seçim mühürsüz bir seçimdir." [Kılıç daroğlu: This election is an unsealed election.], *CNN Türk*, April 18, 2017.

[22] This inconsistency was criticized by the Union of Turkish Bar Associations; see Artmutçu, Oya. 2019. "TBB: YSK takvimine niye uymadı?" [TBB: Why did the YSK not abide by its calendar?], *Hürriyet*, May 8.

[23] "Cumhurba¸skanı Erdoğan'dan YSK'nın İstanbul kararı ile ilgili ilk açı klama" [First statement from President Erdoğan regarding YSK's Istanbul verdict], *Hürriyet*, May 7, 2019.

[24] "Kılıç daroğlu: Haklılığ ımıza gölge dü¸ sürmeyeceğiz" [Kılıç daroğlu: We will not let our rightfulness be overshadowed], *Hürriyet*, May 7, 2019.

[25] The progovernment newspaper *Yeni Akit* reported prior to the verdict that Erdoğan believed an AKP victory would be certain in a rerun, drawing a parallel between the Istanbul race and the 2015 general election. In the latter, the AKP called for an early parliamentary election in November 2015, in which the party regained a legislative majority that it lost in a regularly scheduled election in June of that year. See "Başkan Erdoğan: Seçim yenilenirse İstanbul'u kazanırız" [President Erdoğan: If the election is repeated we would win Istanbul], *Yeni Akit*, May 2, 2019.

[26] The surveys that this article examines in the next section asked respondents about their reaction to the YSK ruling. As we may expect, supporters of the opposition candidate had an overwhelmingly "negative" reaction (93 percent). But so did 85 percent of those who in March had voted for a third-party candidate, 73 percent of those who had abstained, and 27 percent of those who had voted for the AKP candidate.

[27] Istanbul consists of 39 districts (*ilçe*) and 980 neighborhoods (*mahalle*). A neighborhood is the lowest geographically fixed level of aggregation for which administrative data are available. My analysis

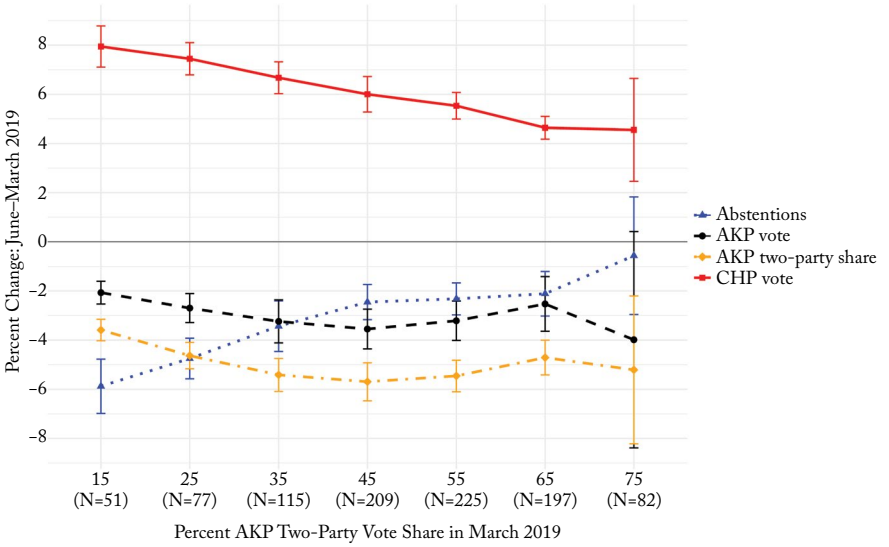


FIGURE 2
ELECTION RESULTS: SHIFTS IN THE AKP TWO-PARTY VOTE SHARE, THE AKP VOTE, CHP VOTE, AND ABSTENTION BETWEEN MARCH AND JUNE 2019

outcomes are plotted against the AKP's March two-party vote share, which I take as a proxy for the AKP's baseline, neighborhood-level popularity.[28] We see that shifts in the AKP's two-party vote share ([yellow] diamonds connected by a dot-dashed line) follow a u-shaped pattern according to which the AKP's two-party vote share declined the most in evenly split neighborhoods.[29]

To examine the three mechanisms of punishment—vote switching, backlash, and disengagement—I disaggregate shifts in the AKP's two-party vote share into shifts in the vote for the AKP, for the CHP, and abstention. Figure 2 shows that changes in abstention ([blue] triangles

is based on 956 regular neighborhoods; the remaining neighborhoods correspond to various detention facilities.

[28] This election was effectively a two-candidate race even though several third-party candidates contested it. The latter were jointly supported by less than 2.1 percent and 0.7 percent of registered voters in the March and June polls, respectively. To simplify the presentation of my results, I treat votes for third-party candidates as abstentions.

[29] With the exception of the extreme categories, the subgroups along the horizontal axis are labeled by the midpoints of the 10 percent interval that labels the subgroup. The leftmost subgroup contains neighborhoods in which the AKP's March two-party vote share was smaller than 20 percent (the minimum is 11.8 percent); the rightmost subgroup contains neighborhoods in which the AKP's March two-party vote share was greater than 70 percent (the maximum is 96.4 percent).

connected by a dotted line) are mostly negative, implying an upswing in turnout, and increasing in the AKP's March two-party vote share. By contrast, mean changes in the CHP vote ([red] squares connected by a solid line) are positive throughout and decreasing in the AKP's March two-party vote share. Shifts in the AKP vote ([black] circles connected by a dashed line) exhibit a less clear-cut pattern, mirroring the u-shaped changes in the AKP's two-party vote share, with a notable decline in the rightmost subgroup.

These trends suggest that the u-shaped pattern in the AKP's two-party vote share shifts may mask a differential incidence of the three mechanisms of punishment. Vote switching, backlash, and disengagement each imply a different correlation in shifts in the vote for the AKP, CHP, and abstention. Accordingly, backlash appears to be the primary punishment mechanism in CHP strongholds, in which large increases in the CHP vote occur simultaneously with large increases in turnout. By contrast, disengagement is most plausibly at work in AKP strongholds, in which a decrease in the AKP vote occurs along with an increase in abstention rates in just under a half of neighborhoods. Vote switching might have occurred everywhere but appears to be a necessary explanation in evenly split neighborhoods, in which the increase in turnout alone cannot account for the much larger increase in the CHP vote.[30]

To further explore the nature and magnitude of the mechanisms by which Istanbulites punished the AKP, I proceed in two steps. First, I probe whether the correlations pointing to vote switching, backlash, and disengagement actually occur at the neighborhood level, as opposed to being an artefact of aggregating neighborhoods into the subgroups along the horizontal axis in Figure 2. This step also establishes that, for the vast majority of neighborhoods, outcome shifts between the two elections were too large to have occurred by chance. Second, I show that because election results only come aggregated, the exact prevalence of the mechanisms of punishment cannot be uniquely established without further assumptions or evidence. Nonetheless, only some combinations and magnitudes of the three mechanisms are consistent with the most prevalent electoral shifts in the 2019 Istanbul race, and even among these, many would require large electoral swings that are unlikely in Turkey's highly polarized and partisan electorate.

[30] In my analysis, which treats third-party and invalid votes as abstentions, the overall March turnout is 79.57 percent, with somewhat higher rates in AKP strongholds; the overall June turnout is 82.24 percent, with somewhat higher rates in both parties' strongholds. The corresponding official turnout figures are 83.94 percent and 84.51 percent. See the supplementary material for further details.

Neighborhood-Level Analysis: Patterns and Significance

In the first step, I ask the following two questions: Which June election outcomes depart from March outcomes too much to have occurred solely due to the idiosyncratic randomness inherent in elections? What are the patterns in those departures? To address these questions, I conduct a simulation-based test of the null hypothesis of no difference between the March and June election outcomes at the neighborhood level. Specifically, I simulate a large number of draws from a multinomial distribution that takes the March fraction of citizens that voted for the AKP, the CHP, and abstained as the respective outcome probabilities under the null hypothesis. I then identify all neighborhoods in which at least one of the three June outcomes falls below the 2.5th or above the 97.5th percentile of the simulated draws.[31]

Table 1 summarizes the findings. Only in 3.56 percent of neighborhoods did all three March outcomes fall within a range that is consistent with no change between the two elections.[32] By far, the most frequent pattern was a significant decrease in the AKP vote alongside an increase in both the CHP vote and turnout—that is, a decrease in abstentions. This pattern is compatible with the simultaneous occurrence of both vote switching and backlash and took place in 60.77 percent of

Table 1
Election Results: Neighborhood-Level Shifts in the Vote for the AKP, for the CHP, and Abstention between March and June 2019[a]

	June-March Change			*Frequency*	
	AKP	*CHP*	*Abstain*	*%*	*N*
Vote switching and backlash	↓	↑	↓	60.77	581
Vote switching	↓	↑	—	13.91	133
Backlash	—	↑	↓	13.39	128
Disengagement	↓	—	↑	1.88	18
Other				6.48	62
No significant change	—	—	—	3.56	34

[a] Arrows denote a statistically significant downward or upward shift in the relevant outcome; an em-dash (—) denotes a lack of a statistically significant shift.

[31] This test accounts for two issues: i) the same percentage shift in an outcome is less likely to occur by chance in neighborhoods with a larger number of registered voters; ii) a negative correlation between shifts in any two outcomes arises mechanically because the number of registered voters is constant across the two elections.

[32] In Table 1, a significant increase and decrease in an outcome is denoted by ↑ and ↓, respectively. A shift that is not statistically significant is denoted by —.

neighborhoods. The next two most frequent patterns occurred with a roughly equal frequency—13.91 percent and 13.39 percent—and point to vote switching and backlash alone. Patterns consistent with disengagement alone materialized in only 1.88 percent of neighborhoods. The remaining significant shifts took place in 6.48 percent of neighborhoods, with no single pattern occurring in more than 2.2 percent of neighborhoods.[33]

Neighborhood-Level Patterns and Individual-Level Behavior

In the second step of my analysis, I examine whether the neighborhood-level patterns just discussed can be attributed to individual voters partaking in the three mechanisms of punishment, rather than arising spuriously, due to aggregation at the neighborhood level.

To characterize all possible individual-level action shifts between the March and June elections, consider the joint distribution of March-June electoral choices in Table 2. The nine elements π_{mj} correspond to the probabilities that a voter who chose action m in March chose j in June, $\pi_{mj} = \Pr(m \text{ and } j)$, where $m, j \in \{1,2,3\}$ correspond to voting for the AKP, for the CHP, and abstaining (ABS), respectively. Denoting by v_m^M and v_j^J the proportions of the three outcomes in March and June, the probabilities π_{mj} must satisfy the constraints

$$\begin{aligned} v_m^M &= \pi_{m1} + \pi_{m2} + \pi_{m3} \quad \text{for } m \in \{1,2,3\}, \text{ and} \\ v_j^J &= \pi_{1j} + \pi_{2j} + \pi_{3j} \quad \text{for } j \in \{1,2,3\}. \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Table 2
The Joint Distribution of March and June Electoral Choices

		June 2019			
		AKP	**CHP**	**ABS**	
March 2019	**AKP**	π_{11}	π_{12}	π_{13}	v_1^M
	CHP	π_{21}	π_{22}	π_{23}	v_2^M
	ABS	π_{31}	π_{32}	π_{33}	v_3^M
		v_1^J	v_2^J	v_3^J	

[33] The largest subgroup consists of 2.2 percent of neighborhoods in which a significant decrease in the AKP vote and turnout occurred along with an increase in the CHP vote. This pattern is consistent with a simultaneous occurrence of both vote switching and disengagement.

The three mechanisms of punishment can in turn be characterized as appropriate differences in the off-diagonal cells of the joint distribution in Table 2:

$$\begin{aligned} \textbf{vote switching: } \Delta_{VS} &= \pi_{12} - \pi_{21}, \\ \textbf{backlash: } \Delta_{B} &= \pi_{32} - \pi_{23}, \\ \textbf{disengagement: } \Delta_{D} &= \pi_{13} - \pi_{31}. \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

The challenge in inferring the magnitude of each of the three mechanisms in (3) above from election outcomes is that these only contain information about the row and column margins v_m^M and v_j^J, not the nine probabilities π_{mj} that fully characterize the joint distribution in Table 2. Combining the constraints in (2) with the requirement that the joint probabilities π_{mj} as well as the marginal proportions v_m^M and v_j^J sum to 1, we obtain an underdetermined system of equations that reduces to:[34]

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta_B &= v_2^J - v_2^M - \Delta_{VS}, \\ \Delta_D &= v_1^M - v_1^J - \Delta_{VS}. \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

The pair of equations in (4) implies that the most frequent March to June electoral shift—an increase in the CHP's vote, $v_2^J - v_2^M > 0$, and a simultaneous decrease in the AKP's vote, $v_1^J - v_1^M < 0$—can be accounted for by i) vote switching alone or backlash combined with disengagement alone, if the increase in the CHP's vote is exactly matched by the decrease in the AKP's vote; ii) vote switching and either backlash or disengagement, if the increase in the CHP's vote was greater than the decrease in the AKP's vote and vice-versa; or iii) a combination of all three mechanisms with mutually offsetting and potentially negative magnitudes—that is, when voters reward rather than punish the AKP by a subset of the mechanisms. In sum, election outcomes alone do not allow us to pin down a unique magnitude of the three punishment mechanisms.[35]

Nonetheless, only some combinations and magnitudes of the three mechanisms are consistent with the most frequently observed electoral shifts, and among these, some require implausibly large, mutually offsetting electoral swings to have occurred. As an illustration, consider the overall, Istanbul-wide electoral shifts. Between March and June, the AKP's total vote declined, as a share of registered voters, by 2.08 percentage points; the CHP's total vote increased by 5.42 percentage points; and

[34] See the supplementary material for a formal proof.

[35] This indeterminacy parallels the familiar ecological inference problem; see Cho and Manski 2008.

abstentions, including third-party votes, declined by 3.34 percentage points. Thus, we have $v_1^M - v_1^J = 0.0208$ and $v_2^J - v_2^M = 0.0542$. The system of equations in (4) implies that these shifts can, in turn, be accounted for by a combination of vote switching and backlash with respective magnitudes of 2.08 and 3.34, respectively; a combination of mutually offsetting backlash and disengagement of magnitudes of 5.42 and 2.08, respectively; or by a mutually offsetting combination of all three mechanisms with larger magnitudes than those just listed.

The large electoral swings that would be needed to generate such mutually offsetting mechanisms may not be plausible in Turkey's highly polarized and partisan electorate. Nonetheless, we cannot eliminate such a possibility based on aggregate election outcomes alone.[36] Survey evidence that I examine in the next two sections allows me to address the puzzle of how Istanbulites punished the AKP's authoritarian tendencies at the individual level.

IV. Election Surveys

A key challenge to inference about the mechanisms of punishment from election results is that voters' choices only come aggregated, whereas the mechanisms of vote switching, backlash, and disengagement occur at the individual level. The surveys that I examine next help us to overcome this challenge: the surveys asked a representative sample of Istanbulites about their turnout and vote choices in both the March and June elections.[37] These data therefore allow me to reconstruct individual voters' trajectories between the two elections and thus directly address the question of how voters punished the AKP's attempt to overturn its electoral defeat.[38]

Table 3 presents the estimated joint distribution of the March and June outcomes, with probabilities expressed as percentages.[39] Consider

[36] In the supplementary material, I explore the implications of an ancillary, "status quo bias" assumption, which allows us to uniquely identify the three punishment mechanisms. Briefly, the status quo bias assumption excludes from consideration redundant vote shifts between elections by focusing on the most parsimonious set of mechanisms that can account for any March-June electoral shift. This assumption yields aggregate, Istanbul-wide estimates of vote switching, backlash, and disengagement of 2.08 (2.05, 2.12), 3.34 (3.29, 3.35), and 0 (−0.02, 0.00), respectively.

[37] The data in this section combine proprietary surveys conducted by the survey agencies Konda and Sonar during the two weeks prior to the June poll, yielding a sample of 6,247 respondents.

[38] Given the timing of the surveys, questions about the June election asked about intended turnout and vote choices. The analysis presented below drops respondents who were undecided at the time of the survey about their vote in the June rerun and classifies as abstaining respondents who voted or intended to vote for a third-party candidate. In the supplementary material, I show that my key findings are robust to alternative procedures for the handling of undecided and third-party voters.

[39] To approximate the Istanbul voting population as closely as possible, the survey data were poststratified to match 2019 administrative population totals for the joint distribution of age, gender, and

first the extent and direction of vote switching between the two elections. Using the notation introduced in section III, the estimates of π_{12} and π_{21} indicate that voters were switching in both directions. Crucially, however, the difference between the two implies that, for every voter who defected from the CHP to the AKP, three times as many defected in the opposite direction. The estimated magnitude of vote switching is 1.86 (1.37, 2.37).

Table 3 also shows evidence of significant backlash. A comparison of π_{32} and π_{23} implies that the number of citizens who abstained in March but turned out to vote for the CHP in June was an order of magnitude greater than the reverse, implying a backlash estimate of 3.55 (3.03, 4.09). By contrast, we see no evidence of significant disengagement: When we compare π_{13} and π_{31}, we see that March AKP voters who ended up abstaining in June were only marginally more numerous than March abstainers who turned out and voted for the AKP in June.[40] The resulting estimate of disengagement is small and statistically indistinguishable from zero, 0.23 (−0.29, 0.75).

To gain insights into who punishes candidates that undermine democracy, I examine the heterogeneity in the three mechanisms of punishment by both political and socioeconomic covariates. A key limitation

TABLE 3
ELECTION SURVEYS: THE JOINT DISTRIBUTION OF MARCH AND JUNE OUTCOMES[a]

		June 2019			
		AKP	**CHP**	**Abstain**	
March 2019	**AKP**	π_{11} = 34.47 (33.25, 35.71)	π_{12} = 2.78 (2.35, 3.21)	π_{13} = 2.07 (1.70, 2.46)	39.32 (37.30, 41.39)
	CHP	π_{21} = 0.91 (0.66, 1.19)	π_{22} = 38.21 (36.93, 39.47)	π_{23} = 0.32 (0.18, 0.47)	39.44 (37.77, 41.13)
	Abstain	π_{31} = 1.84 (1.50, 2.21)	π_{32} = 3.87 (3.36, 4.40)	π_{33} = 15.53 (14.56, 16.50)	21.24 (19.42, 23.10)
		37.23 (35.40, 39.11)	44.86 (42.65, 47.08)	17.91 (16.44, 19.43)	

[a] Probabilities expressed as percentages, 95-percent bootstrap confidence intervals in parentheses.

education as well as the margins from the 2018 legislative and the March and June 2019 mayoral elections. I explore alternative poststratification schemes in the supplementary material.

[40] Note, however, that Table 3 implies that the conditional probability that a citizen who abstained in March would turn out and vote for the AKP in June is in fact higher than the reverse, due to the much smaller share of the electorate that abstained as opposed to voted for the AKP in March.

is the small set of covariates that are plausibly pretreatment—that is, covariates that could not have been plausibly altered by the AKP's attempt to overturn the March election, either because they are durable personal characteristics or pertain to actions that the respondent took before the March 2019 election.

The only such available covariate that reflects the political conflict in the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race is rather crude: the respondents' vote in the last, 2018 legislative election. In Figure 3, I disaggregate respondents by whether they voted in 2018 for the AKP, for the CHP, or took some other action (abstained or voted for a third party.) The pattern in the three mechanisms of punishment mostly comports with the theoretical predictions developed in section II: Vote switching and disengagement occur almost exclusively among 2018 AKP voters. Meanwhile, backlash occurs disproportionately among the "other" category. This subset of citizens tends to abstain from voting at some of the highest rates—as it did in the original March Istanbul election—and, in line with the logic of backlash, contributed the largest share of newly mobilized CHP voters in the election's June rerun.[41]

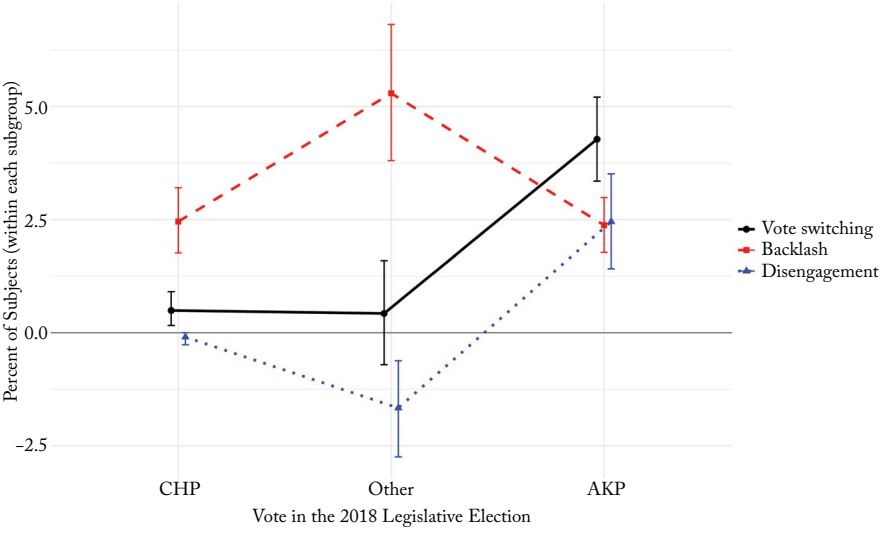


FIGURE 3
ELECTION SURVEYS: VOTE SWITCHING, BACKLASH, AND DISENGAGEMENT BY THE RESPONDENTS' VOTE IN THE 2018 LEGISLATIVE ELECTION

[41] Note, however, also the statistically significant *negative* disengagement in this subgroup—evidence of the AKP having successfully mobilized in June 2019 some of those who either abstained or voted for a third party in both the 2018 legislative and March 2019 mayoral election.

To explore the heterogeneity in punishment by socioeconomic covariates, I estimate the following linear probability model for each of the three mechanisms:

$$\Pr\left(i \text{ punishes by } M_i^j | x_{ik}\right) = \gamma_0 + \cdots \gamma_k x_{ik} \cdots + \epsilon_i, \qquad (5)$$

where M_i^j refers to vote switching, backlash, and disengagement for $j = \{\text{VS, B, D}\}$. The outcome $M_i^j = 0$ if respondent i could have engaged in the relevant punishment mechanism but did not, while $M_i^j = 1$ if i did. Thus, for vote switching, for example, $M_i^{VS} = 0$ for respondents who voted for the AKP in both March and June, whereas $M_i^{VS} = 1$ for respondents who voted for the AKP in March but switched to the CHP in June.[42] The regressor x_{ik} refers to respondent i's covariate values, with individual covariates indexed by k. In turn, the γ coefficients estimate the association between covariate k and each of the three mechanisms.

Table 4 presents the estimates. Only a small subset of socioeconomic covariates is associated with any of the three mechanisms. The negative, statistically significant coefficients on the two age groups (35–54, 55+) for vote switching and backlash imply that these two mechanisms occurred disproportionately among the baseline, youngest age group (18–34). Meanwhile, men appear to have engaged in vote switching at higher rates than did women; although, the opposite holds for backlash. Identifying ethnically as other than Turkish is the most significant predictor of disengagement and implies that non-Turks—primarily Kurds—punished the AKP not by switching from voting for it to voting against it but instead by simply sitting the June rerun out.

These patterns are partially consistent with modernization theory and, in the Turkish context, point to the potentially pivotal political role played by young voters and the Kurdish minority. But note the absence of a statistically significant association between any mechanism of punishment and other modernization correlates, such as education or an urban background. As I explore in greater detail in the next section—in which I examine candidate choice experiments that contain a rich set of pretreatment, individual-level covariates that have figured prominently in research on support for democracy—this finding may be due to a subtle but key difference between conventional analyses and this inquiry. Whereas the former typically examine the overall, unconditional association between a covariate and support for democracy, my focus is on marginal effects: whether that covariate predicts a switch

[42] This is why the number of observations differs across the three models in Table 4 even though they are all based on the same set of survey respondents.

Table 4
Election Surveys: Heterogeneity in Punishment by Respondent Covariates[a]

	Vote Switching	*Backlash*	*Disengagement*
Intercept	0.123***	0.506***	0.134***
	(0.024)	(0.118)	(0.049)
Age: 35–54	−0.049***	−0.158*	0.040
	(0.015)	(0.083)	(0.029)
Age: 55+	−0.069***	−0.235**	0.043
	(0.018)	(0.105)	(0.034)
Sex: Male	0.024**	−0.136*	-0.028
	(0.011)	(0.082)	(0.023)
Education: High school	−0.003	−0.119	0.049*
	(0.014)	(0.091)	(0.028)
Education: College or higher	0.000	−0.092	0.079*
	(0.018)	(0.094)	(0.046)
Turkish	−0.022	−0.086	−0.139***
	(0.018)	(0.090)	(0.051)
Istanbul-born	−0.018	0.145	0.003
	(0.013)	(0.090)	(0.030)
N	2603	155	2409
R^2	0.014	0.100	0.065

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

[a] Linear probability model. Standard errors clustered by district and shown in parentheses. Baseline categories: Age: 18–34, Sex: Female, Education: Less than high school.

from abstaining or voting for the AKP in the March Istanbul poll to punishing it in the June rerun by one of the three mechanisms.

V. Candidate-Choice Experiments

Throughout the analysis so far, I have emphasized the quasi-experimental features of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race and attributed the difference between the AKP's narrow March and overwhelming June defeat to one causal factor: voters' punishment of the AKP's assault on the integrity of Turkish elections. To probe whether Turkish citizens are indeed willing to punish politicians who undermine democracy, I conducted a series of candidate-choice experiments prior to the 2018 general election as well as in the immediate aftermath of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral election. The experiments asked a nationally representative sample to choose between two candidates, each described by a range of attributes, including their policies, party, and accomplishments in office. Crucially, some

candidates were randomly assigned to endorse a measure that violates democratic principles. A comparison of respondents' choices between scenarios when both candidates complied with democratic principles to those when one of the candidates violated them allows us to causally identify the consequences of a candidate's undemocratic behavior for his electoral prospects.

I focus on a subset of these candidate-choice experiments that most closely mirrors the choices faced by voters in the 2019 Istanbul mayoral election. The candidates were described by two or three political attributes—their political party, a policy position (only in 2018), and a democracy position—as well as three demographic attributes—age, gender, and profession.[43] The candidates' party and positions on democracy are the focus of my analysis. Mirroring the Istanbul mayoral contest, candidate 1 was always from the AKP while candidate 2 was from either the CHP or its coalition partner the İYİ Party (only in 2019). The control condition, which I label *AKP vs. CHP* was just that. The treatment condition, which I label *D⁻ AKP vs. CHP*, included a proposal by the AKP candidate that undermines democracy. Specifically, the AKP candidate proposed that if his party wins, "We should fire government employees who did not vote for our party" (2019) or "We should appoint new judges in place of those who are prejudiced against the AKP" (2018).[44]

Both undemocratic positions are realistic violations of democratic principles in the Turkish context, as I document in the supplementary material. I also verified that our respondents indeed understood these positions to be undemocratic. Before the experiment, all respondents saw a battery of democratic and undemocratic practices and were asked to rate each on a scale where zero corresponds to "not at all democratic" and ten to "completely democratic." These were intentionally introduced as instances from "around the world" and, crucially, included items mirroring the undemocratic positions that would be adopted by our experimental candidates. These items scored at the undemocratic end of the scale: the item proxying for "firing government employees who did not vote for our party" had a mean rating of 1.29 (1.18, 1.41); and the item proxying for "appointing new judges in place of those who are prejudiced against the AKP" rated at 2.09 (1.91, 2.34). A position

[43] The demographic attributes served two ends: one, to add realism to candidates' profiles; and two and primarily, to artificially generate differences between candidates beyond their political attributes and thus allow us to conceal that these latter features are our primary interest.

[44] Experiments examined in the supplementary material also include the position: "Said: We should cut government spending in districts that did not vote for our party."

that most closely mirrors the AKP's attempt to overturn its defeat in Istanbul had a mean rating of 2.16 (1.94, 2.38).[45] Figure 4 presents respondent ratings for all items in this battery, including those that were consistent with democratic principles. We see that respondents systematically rated items that violate democratic principles as less democratic than those that comply with them. Turkish citizens know a transgression against democracy when they see it.

Respondents' choices in the experiment allow us to infer three quantities: their willingness to punish the AKP candidate for violating democratic principles, the mechanism by which they do so, and the correlates that differentiate those respondents who punish violations of democratic principles from those who do not. Each respondent was asked whether she would vote for candidate 1, candidate 2, or abstain. Because the only systematic political difference between the control and treatment conditions was in candidate 1's undemocratic position, the change in these three choices reflects the extent and nature of the punishment that voters are willing to mete out against candidates who violate democratic principles. I present findings based on the 2019 experiment; analogous findings from the 2018 experiment are presented in the supplementary material.

Consider first the question of whether the Turkish public is willing to sanction candidates who undermine democracy. Table 5 summarizes the aggregate changes in the candidates' vote shares in the two experimental conditions. When the AKP candidate makes a proposal that violates democratic principles, we see a 23–percentage point decline in the AKP's two-party vote share in the last column in Table 5—the AKP's vote share among only those respondents who would turn out to vote. This punishment is politically consequential: when both candidates act democratically, the AKP enjoys the support of a majority of respondents (55.36 percent); when its candidate endorses an undemocratic position, the AKP loses that majority (32.20 percent). The Turkish public is both capable and willing to act as a democratic check.

The chief obstacle to exploring how Turkish citizens punish candidates who undermine democracy is that—unlike with the survey data examined in the preceding section—we do not observe the punishment mechanisms at the individual level, due to the aggregation of respondents at the level of the two experimental groups. As Table 5 shows, we have only indirect evidence for the three mechanisms of punishment

[45] This item read, "The incumbent president refused to step down from office after a narrow election defeat." The previous two items read, "The government fired state employees who expressed support for an opposition party." and "The president refused to implement a ruling by the country's highest court."

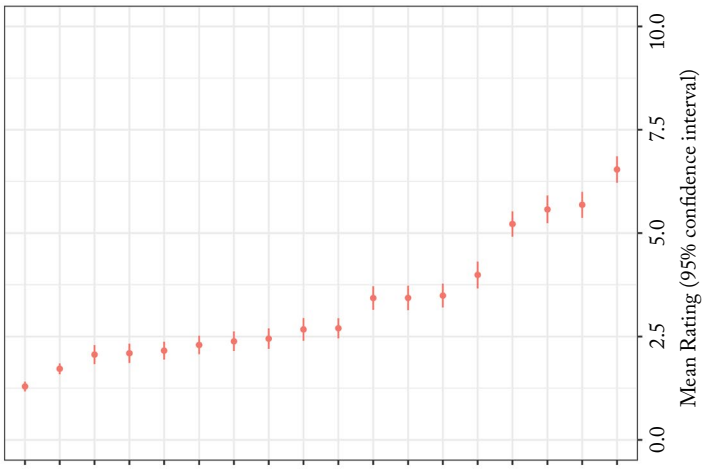


FIGURE 4
CANDIDATE-CHOICE EXPERIMENTS, 2019: THE "DEMOCRACY AROUND THE WORLD" BATTERY

Table 5
Candidate-Choice Experiments, 2019: The Democratic Check[a]

	Vote AKP	*Vote CHP*	*Abstain*	*AKP's Two-Party Vote Share*
AKP vs. CHP	47.61 (42.12, 53.11)	38.39 (32.98, 43.80)	14.00 (10.43, 17.56)	55.36 (49.36, 61.36)
D⁻ AKP vs. CHP	24.02 (18.81, 29.24)	50.58 (44.91, 56.26)	25.39 (21.05, 30.74)	32.20 (25.82, 38.58)
Difference	−23.59 (−30.60, −16.58)	12.19 (5.62, 18.76)	11.40 (6.02, 16.78)	−23.16 (−31.04, −15.28)

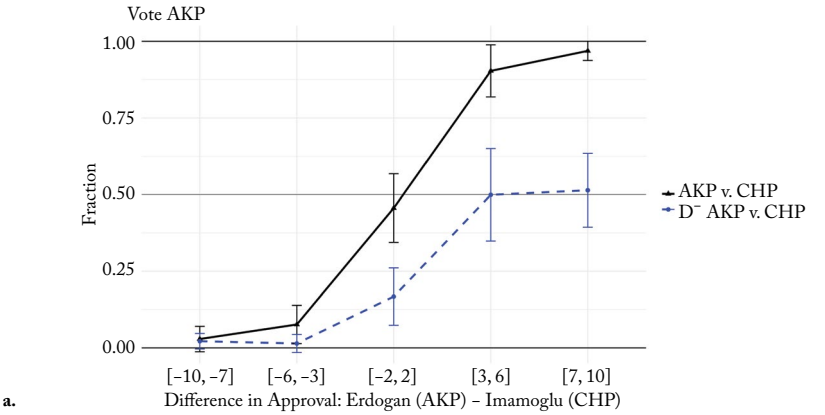
[a] Ninety-five-percent bootstrap confidence intervals in parentheses.

in the form of aggregate shifts in the AKP vote, the CHP vote, and abstentions between the *AKP vs. CHP* control and the *D⁻ AKP vs. CHP* treatment conditions. Nonetheless, the decline in the AKP's two-party vote share appears to be the consequence of primarily vote switching and disengagement. Although the vote for the AKP candidate declines by just under 24 percentage points in the *D⁻ AKP vs. CHP* condition (the first column in Table 5), it is not matched by a corresponding increase in the vote for the CHP candidate; the latter increases by only 12 percentage points (the second column in Table 5). Instead, about one-half of those defecting from the AKP candidate are willing to punish him at most by abstaining (the third column in Table 5), which implies disengagement.

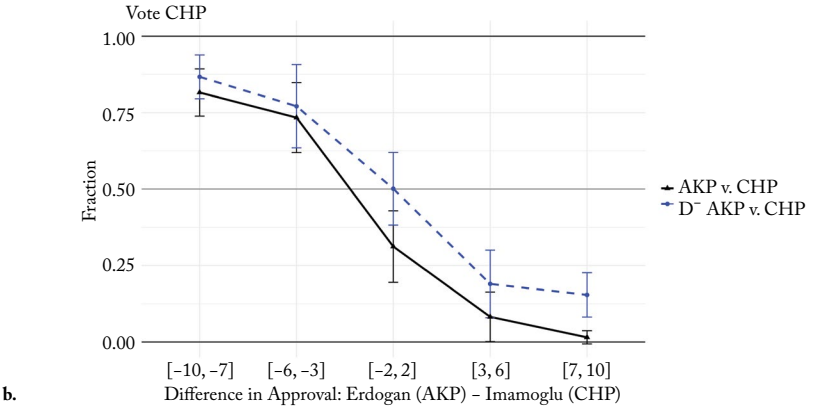
To examine who punishes candidates that undermine democracy, I mirror the approach to this question in the preceding section and examine the heterogeneity in punishment using a range of political and socioeconomic covariates. A comparative advantage of the candidate-choice experiments is the availability of a much larger set of respondent-level covariates that are, by design, pretreatment.

To capture the chief axis of political conflict in the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race, I disaggregate the respondents in the experiment by the difference in their approval of President Erdoğan (AKP) and the CHP's mayoral candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu.[46] Figure 5 plots the resulting changes in the fraction of respondents who voted for the AKP (a), the CHP (b), and abstained (c). The (black) solid line plots the *AKP vs. CHP* control condition; the (blue) dashed line plots the *D⁻ AKP vs. CHP* treatment condition. We

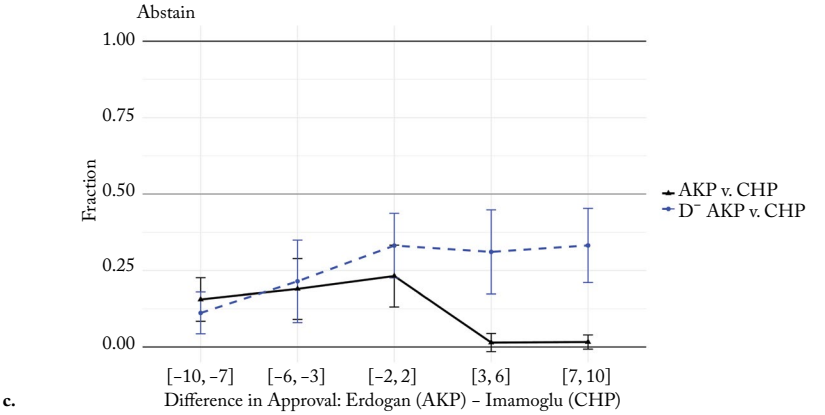
[46] The use of the approval difference (rather than, say, Erdoğan's approval alone) is implied by the theoretical framework in section II: it is the difference in a citizen's payoff from the two candidates that explains whether she punishes a violation of democratic principles by vote switching, backlash, or disengagement. The approval difference is based on the question, "What do you think about the politicians that I will mention now? Can you rate them on a scale between 0 and 10? 0 corresponds to a politician that you do not like at all, 10 corresponds to a politician that you like very much."



a.



b.



c.

FIGURE 5

CANDIDATE-CHOICE EXPERIMENTS, 2019: VOTE FOR THE AKP, CHP, AND ABSTENTION BY THE DIFFERENCE IN RESPONDENTS' APPROVAL OF PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN (AKP) AND THE CHP'S MAYORAL CANDIDATE, EKREM İMAMOĞLU

see a large decline in the AKP vote when its candidate violates democratic principles, especially among respondents who are indifferent to strong supporters of President Erdoğan. But just as in the aggregate analysis above, that decline does not translate into a corresponding increase in the CHP's vote. Rather, we see a large increase in abstention among Erdoğan's supporters, implying—in line with our theoretical predictions—disengagement as the primary mechanism of punishment among this subset of respondents.

To explore the heterogeneity in punishment by socioeconomic covariates that have figured prominently in research on support for democracy, I use an approach parallel to that in the preceding section while accounting for the fact that we do not observe the three punishment mechanisms directly. Specifically, I estimate the following linear probability model for the AKP vote, the CHP vote, and abstentions, as well as for the AKP's two-party vote share:

$$\begin{aligned}\Pr(i \text{ takes action } Y_i|x_{ik}) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 D_1^- \\ + \cdots \beta_k x_{ik} \cdots + \cdots \gamma_k x_{ik} D_1^- \cdots + \epsilon_i\,,\end{aligned} \tag{6}$$

where the action Y_i corresponds to whether respondent i voted for the AKP, for the CHP, or abstained; D_1^- is a binary treatment indicator of whether the experimental AKP candidate made a proposal that undermines democracy ($D_1^- = 1$) or not ($D_1^- = 0$); x_{ik} are respondent i's covariate values (with each covariate indexed by k); and $x_{ik}D_1^-$ is an interaction effect between the treatment indicator and each of the covariates.

Table 6 presents the estimates. The α coefficients estimate the probability of each outcome and the effect of the AKP candidate's undemocratic position at baseline levels of the covariates (the intercept and D^-, respectively). The β_k coefficients estimate the association between covariate k and each of the actions in the control condition. Consistent with past research,[47] the AKP tends to be supported by younger, less educated, more religious, middle-class voters who rate their financial situation as not "much worse off".[48] The converse holds for the control condition correlates of support for the CHP.

My primary interest is in the γ_k coefficients, which estimate how the effect of the AKP candidate's undemocratic position varies with a respondent's covariate k. For the action "Vote AKP", a negative γ_k implies that respondents with covariate values k defect from the AKP at higher

[47] Aytaç, Çarkoğlu, and Yıldırım 2017; Laebens and Öztürk 2020; Livny 2020; Somer 2019a.

[48] The baseline categories for the nondummy covariates are "18–30" for age, "less than high school" for education, "low" for wealth, "never" for religiosity, "much worse" for financial situation, and "not at all" for interest in politics.

Table 6
Candidate-Choice Experiments, 2019: Heterogeneity in Punishment by Respondent Covariates[a]

	Vote AKP			*Vote CHP*			*Abstain*			*AKP's Two-Party Vote Share*		
	α	β	γ	α	β	γ	α	β	γ	α	β	γ
Intercept	0.071			0.886***			0.043			0.081		
	(0.161)			(0.196)			(0.120)			(0.201)		
D^-	0.034			−0.022			−0.012			0.046		
	(0.195)			(0.239)			(0.168)			(0.251)		
Age: 31–40		−0.023	−0.042		−0.031	0.060		0.054	−0.018		0.003	−0.078
		(0.074)	(0.112)		(0.075)	(0.121)		(0.060)	(0.098)		(0.079)	(0.133)
Age: 41–50		−0.211***	0.244**		0.087	−0.178		0.124*	−0.066		−0.161*	0.199
		(0.077)	(0.111)		(0.084)	(0.115)		(0.070)	(0.106)		(0.086)	(0.129)
Age: 51+		−0.130	0.112		0.154*	-0.158		−0.024	0.046		−0.155*	0.097
		(0.078)	(0.114)		(0.077)	(0.116)		(0.056)	(0.098)		(0.084)	(0.132)
Sex: Male		0.006	-0.106		−0.007	0.015		0.001	0.091		0.003	−0.076
		(0.058)	(0.067)		(0.057)	(0.076)		(0.041)	(0.071)		(0.061)	(0.075)
Education: High school		−0.151**	0.106		0.081	0.003		0.070	−0.109		−0.141**	0.023
		(0.067)	(0.085)		(0.068)	(0.098)		(0.045)	(0.080)		(0.069)	(0.099)
Education: College or higher		−0.358***	0.307***		0.219**	−0.035		0.138*	−0.272**		−0.342***	0.199*
		(0.068)	(0.094)		(0.084)	(0.112)		(0.071)	(0.109)		(0.078)	(0.111)
Unemployed		0.161	0.008		−0.116	−0.222		−0.045	0.215		0.132	0.171
		(0.102)	(0.159)		(0.107)	(0.170)		(0.060)	(0.134)		(0.112)	(0.195)

continued

TABLE 6 (*cont.*)

	Vote AKP			*Vote CHP*			*Abstain*			*AKP's Two-Party Vote Share*		
	α	β	γ	α	β	γ	α	β	γ	α	β	γ
Student		0.063	−0.081		−0.123	0.102		0.060	−0.022		0.096	−0.077
		(0.102)	(0.154)		(0.108)	(0.175)		(0.084)	(0.145)		(0.116)	(0.178)
State employed		−0.016	−0.045		−0.066	−0.262		0.083	0.307		0.038	0.006
		(0.136)	(0.177)		(0.153)	(0.211)		(0.140)	(0.185)		(0.175)	(0.300)
Wealth: Lower middle		0.088	−0.041		−0.037	0.074		−0.052	−0.033		0.068	-0.033
		(0.065)	(0.088)		(0.063)	(0.097)		(0.042)	(0.083)		(0.069)	(0.104)
Wealth: Upper middle		0.165**	−0.179*		−0.106	0.189*		−0.058	−0.010		0.140*	−0.168
		(0.076)	(0.093)		(0.070)	(0.101)		(0.056)	(0.084)		(0.074)	(0.108)
Wealth: High		0.044	0.033		−0.010	−0.031		−0.034	−0.002		0.056	0.072
		(0.084)	(0.122)		(0.085)	(0.119)		(0.068)	(0.109)		(0.087)	(0.141)
Pray: Monthly, holidays		0.019	−0.121		−0.131	0.082		0.112	0.040		0.034	−0.131
		(0.094)	(0.122)		(0.101)	(0.131)		(0.073)	(0.103)		(0.104)	(0.133)
Pray: Weekly		0.097	0.014		−0.190**	0.011		0.092	−0.025		0.112	0.015
		(0.085)	(0.120)		(0.088)	(0.120)		(0.070)	(0.097)		(0.091)	(0.126)
Pray: Every day		0.304***	−0.259**		−0.343***	0.158		0.038	0.101		0.313***	−0.220*
		(0.087)	(0.121)		(0.082)	(0.110)		(0.061)	(0.088)		(0.088)	(0.124)
Kurdish		−0.075	−0.028		−0.041	0.049		0.117	−0.021		−0.046	−0.076
		(0.072)	(0.109)		(0.084)	(0.122)		(0.071)	(0.111)		(0.088)	(0.143)
Urban		−0.019	0.011		−0.015	-0.115		0.034	0.104		−0.012	0.090
		(0.056)	(0.086)		(0.054)	(0.072)		(0.034)	(0.067)		(0.057)	(0.088)

continued

TABLE 6 (*cont.*)

	Vote AKP			*Vote CHP*			*Abstain*			*AKP's Two-Party Vote Share*		
	α	β	γ	α	β	γ	α	β	γ	α	β	γ
Financially: Worse		0.158**	−0.009		−0.131*	−0.159		−0.027	0.169**		0.172**	0.056
		(0.065)	(0.088)		(0.066)	(0.098)		(0.046)	(0.074)		(0.071)	(0.107)
Financially: Same		0.415***	−0.133		−0.372***	−0.028		−0.042	0.161*		0.448***	−0.034
		(0.070)	(0.103)		(0.064)	(0.103)		(0.050)	(0.092)		(0.072)	(0.112)
Financially: Better		0.547***	−0.029		−0.397***	−0.147		−0.150***	0.176*		0.502***	0.174
		(0.107)	(0.155)		(0.103)	(0.137)		(0.042)	(0.095)		(0.106)	(0.157)
Financially: Much better		0.556**	−0.507		−0.400*	0.286		−0.156**	0.221		0.512**	−0.500
		(0.163)	(0.282)		(0.164)	(0.373)		(0.050)	(0.281)		(0.166)	(0.361)
Interested in politics: Little		0.154	−0.077		−0.182	0.185		0.027	−0.108		0.227	−0.176
		(0.150)	(0.194)		(0.166)	(0.203)		(0.102)	(0.178)		(0.175)	(0.219)
Interested in politics: Some		0.127	−0.104		−0.150	0.235		0.023	−0.131		0.152	−0.198
		(0.131)	(0.163)		(0.157)	(0.186)		(0.095)	(0.153)		(0.162)	(0.199)
Interested in politics: A lot		0.194	−0.206		−0.173	0.230		−0.021	−0.024		0.214	−0.261
		(0.132)	(0.170)		(0.157)	(0.191)		(0.096)	(0.163)		(0.161)	(0.202)
Interested in politics: Very much		0.153	−0.092		−0.041	0.003		−0.112	0.089		0.132	−0.057
		(0.142)	(0.170)		(0.167)	(0.202)		(0.093)	(0.172)		(0.170)	(0.200)
Respondents	712	712	712	712	712	712	712	712	712	573	573	573
R^2	0.318	0.318	0.318	0.275	0.275	0.275	0.145	0.145	0.145	0.373	0.373	0.373

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

[a] Standard errors clustered by district.

rates than those with baseline values of k. The converse holds when the outcome is "Vote CHP": a positive γ_k implies a tendency to defect to the CHP. Table 6 reveals an intriguing pattern: The correlates of the citizen whose defection is most electorally consequential for the undemocratic AKP candidate are not entirely consistent with modernization theory. The AKP's vote share declines the most among those who are relatively young (forty years old or younger) and middle class, but they also tend to be less than college educated and some of the least secular.

I illustrate these patterns by disaggregating the respondents by their education level. As Figure 6 shows, the AKP candidate's vote share declines the most among the high-school and less-than-high-school educated; it is much smaller among those with a college or higher education. The temporal dynamics of democratic backsliding, especially its incremental nature, suggest an explanation for this counterintuitive pattern: In 2019, after almost two decades of AKP-led degradation of Turkish democracy, the most educated citizens simply do not support the AKP, if they ever did, as is apparent in the AKP candidate's control condition vote shares among this demographic. In turn, this subset of the Turkish electorate has little potential to effectively punish the AKP candidate when he acts undemocratically, despite its potentially high commitment

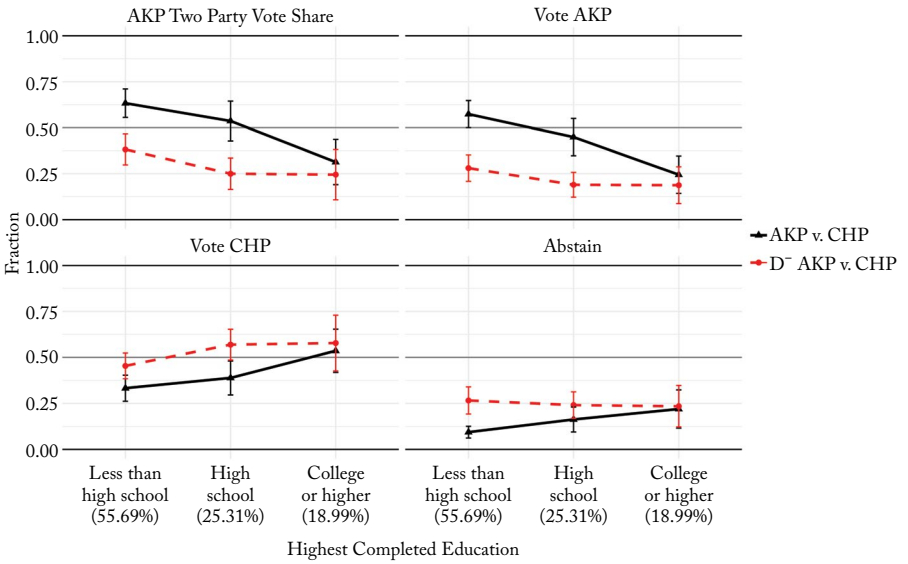


FIGURE 6
CANDIDATE-CHOICE EXPERIMENTS, 2019: OUTCOME SHIFTS BY RESPONDENTS' EDUCATION LEVEL

to democracy. Instead, the citizens whose defection costs the AKP candidate the most are the high-school and less-than-high-school educated—precisely because this is a stratum of Turkish society that is both large and tends to favor the AKP and is, as a result, in a position to tip the scales in favor of democracy. These findings highlight the politically pivotal, prodemocratic role played by marginal, as opposed to baseline, opposition to politicians and parties that undermine democracy.

VI. Empirical Synthesis

In 2019, Turkey's governing AKP attempted to overturn the outcome of an election that it had lost. After losing the Istanbul mayoral race in March of that year by a mere 13,729 out of 8.6 million cast votes, the AKP alleged irregularities and pressured the country's electoral commission to annul the election and order a rerun. Yet in June 2019, when the new election took place, the margin between the opposition candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, and the AKP's candidate, Binali Yıldırım, grew to a thumping 806,014 votes. Who are the Istanbulites responsible for this difference and how did they punish the AKP for this unprecedented assault on Turkish democracy?

To address these questions, the three preceding sections examined a range of evidence. Along with qualitative case information, these analyses drew on, in turn, i) precinct and neighborhood-level returns from the original March election and its June rerun; ii) pre- and postelection surveys; and iii) candidate-choice experiments conducted in the immediate aftermath of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race.

These sources of evidence agree on several points. First, the AKP's attempt to overturn a democratic election resulted in a decline in its vote share that is both statistically significant and politically consequential. Second, the principal mechanism by which voters punished the AKP's violation of democratic principles is consistent with my theoretical predictions: as we move from the AKP's opponents to its supporters, we observe a shift from backlash to vote switching to disengagement. In sum, across the Istanbul electorate, politically pivotal subsets of the public were both capable and willing to act as a democratic check—and each did so in a different manner.

The sources differ, however, on the overall magnitude of this check and the relative role of the three punishment mechanisms. The overall punishment is about twice as large in the candidate-choice experiments as it is in the actual election returns and conventional surveys. Furthermore, whereas vote switching plays a major role regardless of the evidence

used, the relative magnitude of the two turnout mechanisms differs considerably: conventional surveys suggest that backlash predominates while candidate-choice experiments point to disengagement.

To adjudicate between these discrepancies, I take advantage of the mutually complementary strengths of my sources and their associated methods. Results of the Istanbul mayoral election and its rerun represent the most relevant, politically consequential real-world behavior but entail two inferential challenges. The first challenge concerns causality. Throughout this study, I have emphasized the quasi-experimental advantages of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race as a source of evidence for why and how incumbent-driven attempts to undermine democracy fail. From an inferential perspective, this event represents a unique opportunity. Within the span of fewer than three months, the same electorate of almost 11 million voters faced the same set of major candidates, with one critical difference between the two polls: after a narrow loss in March, the incumbent AKP attempted to overturn its defeat by subjugating the country's highest electoral authority, which in turn annulled the election and ordered a rerun. My causal interpretation of the difference between the AKP's narrow March and overwhelming June defeat has been that it reflects the voters' punishment of the AKP's authoritarian actions rather than some other factor.

To probe the plausibility of this interpretation, I conducted a series of analyses, the details of which I present in the supplementary material. To identify plausible alternative explanations, I reviewed all articles covering the Istanbul mayoral election in major Turkish and English-language newspapers throughout the period March–July 2019.[49] Consistent with my arguments, most articles published in the immediate aftermath of the June rerun attributed the outcome to the voters' outrage with the AKP's attempt to overturn its March defeat. The most plausible alternative explanations for the difference between the March and June 2019 Istanbul mayoral election outcomes cited Turkey's 2018 currency crisis or, more specifically, its reverberations. I therefore examined this alternative account in detail, as well as the possibility that the close outcome of the March election raised voters' awareness of their potential to cast a decisive vote and thus spurred greater turnout in the June election. Furthermore, to probe whether some omitted, yet-to-be-identified factor was responsible for the difference between the outcomes of the original Istanbul mayoral race and its rerun, I also

[49] The Turkish newspapers are *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, and *Sözcü*; the English-language newspapers are *The Financial Times* and *The Economist*.

analyzed counterfactual spatial and temporal trends in individual-level support for the AKP-MHP and CHP-İYİ coalitions throughout the period, January to September 2019.

These robustness checks rely on a combination of qualitative case evidence, economic indicators based on administrative data, and conventional public opinion surveys. None of these checks is dispositive on its individual terms. Jointly, however, they significantly circumscribe the nature of plausible alternatives. For the patterns of support for the AKP-MHP and CHP-İYİ coalitions to be due to some unobserved factor other than voters' rejection of the AKP's attempt to overturn its March defeat, that factor would have to i) be present in Istanbul only, ii) coincide with the period May–June 2019, and iii) favor only the CHP's mayoral candidate. Meanwhile, the association between the country's economic performance and individual political preferences allows me to calibrate the magnitude of such an alternative factor: its political consequences would have to be equivalent to a 4.6 percent increase in unemployment within a three-month period. A downturn this large has not occurred during the AKP's preceding seventeen years in power.[50] My qualitative survey of the journalistic coverage of the 2019 Istanbul election, or the coverage itself, would thus have to omit an alternative explanation with consequences of a corresponding magnitude.

A distinct advantage of the candidate-choice experiments is that they allow me to establish that the relationship between a candidate's violation of democratic principles and a decline in his vote share is indeed causal. Evidence from candidate-choice experiments thus further strengthens my interpretation of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral election as voters' punishment for the AKP's assault on the integrity of Turkish elections. Additionally, because the surveys in which these experiments were embedded contain rich individual-level data, I can corroborate my theoretical microfoundations and their predictions: the vast majority of respondents support democracy by conventional measures, are capable of differentiating democratic practices from those that are undemocratic, and their willingness to punish an otherwise favored but undemocratic candidate depends on the intensity of the implied tradeoff between their partisan interests and democratic principles. This favorable combination of explicit experimental manipulation and rich pretreatment covariates also leads me to privilege this source of evidence in my conclusions about who punishes undemocratic behavior the most.

[50] The three increases in unemployment closest in magnitude occurred during the 2008–09 financial crisis (3.8 percent and 3.2 percent) and the 2018 currency crisis (3.1 percent).

Nonetheless, I rely on candidate-choice experiments primarily for the qualitative insights outlined above rather than quantitative ones. Although the experiments aimed to present respondents with scenarios that reflect key dilemmas faced by voters in the process of democratic backsliding, their design was necessarily sparser than real-life elections: a candidate's violation of democratic principles was one of only two to three political attributes and may have therefore stood out more in the experiments than in real-world elections; and although the experiments included party labels, they did not explicitly feature the most influential figure in Turkish politics: President Erdoğan. Furthermore, just as with conventional surveys, conclusions from candidate-choice experiments are based on respondents' words rather than actions. One potential consequence of this is that turnout rates in the experimental control condition may have been unrealistically high, preventing me from detecting backlash effects. A related concern may account for why the overall magnitude of punishment for the AKP's violations of democratic principles is higher in candidate-choice experiments than in election results and conventional surveys: a respondent may be more willing to defect from a generic, experimental AKP candidate than from a real-world candidate with Erdoğan's charisma and record.[51]

The second inferential challenge associated with election results concerns aggregation. Election results only come aggregated—at the neighborhood or, at best, the ballot box level—which limits our ability to differentiate among vote switching, backlash, and disengagement at the voter level without further assumptions. Conventional surveys conducted between the March and June elections, by contrast, ask about individual voters' actions and thus allow us to reconstruct their trajectories between the two elections. Unlike election results, however, surveys depend on self-reports of past and intended vote and turnout choices. Their reliability therefore hinges on respondents' willingness to disclose both actions truthfully in a voting system that is compulsory, even if rarely enforced, and a political climate that heavily favors the government's candidate. Furthermore, a survey sample is only an approximation of the target population of interest, unlike election results, which are effectively a census of the Istanbul electorate—the primary population of interest.[52]

[51] Between 2003, when Erdoğan became prime minister, and the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race, Turkey's GDP per capita has almost tripled. It has stagnated throughout the preceding decade (1992–2002).

[52] The discrepancy between the survey samples and election results is most pronounced for abstaining voters who were significantly undersampled by surveys, a concern I accounted for by poststratifying the survey data to match the 2019 election margins.

To explore explicitly the implications of combining the complementary strengths of survey and election outcome data, I employ the following procedure. For each election ballot box, I first poststratify the survey data, via iterative proportional fitting, to match the March and June election outcomes in that ballot box.[53] Next, using the poststratification weights, I repeatedly draw from the survey data a sample of respondents whose size and composition corresponds to the March and June election outcomes in that ballot box.[54] Finally, for each draw and ballot box, I estimate the number of voters that participated in each of the three punishment mechanisms and aggregate those estimates to the city level.

This procedure combines the advantage of observing individual-level trajectories between the March and June Istanbul elections in the survey data with information about the heterogeneity in actual election outcomes at the lowest observable level of aggregation. This heterogeneity constrains the type and magnitude of mechanisms that can take place at the ballot box level but gets lost as we aggregate election outcomes in an evenly divided electorate.[55]

This synthesis implies that in Istanbul's electorate of roughly 10.6 million, 9.3 million voters (88 percent) did not change how they acted between the March and June polls: they either voted for the same candidate in June as they did in March or they abstained from both elections. Although the remaining 1.3 million voters (12 percent) moved in all directions, they overwhelmingly tended to engage in two out of the three mechanisms of punishment. About 399,000 of those who abstained in March turned out and voted for the CHP in June, while only about 38,000 did the opposite. Meanwhile, of those who in March voted for the AKP, roughly 298,000 switched to the CHP in June, far outweighing the 88,000 who switched from the CHP to the AKP. And although some 220,000 of March AKP voters abstained in June, they were almost matched by about 210,000 of Istanbulites who at first abstained but turned out to vote for the AKP in June. The corresponding estimates of vote switching, backlash, and disengagement as defined by

[53] The 2019 Istanbul mayoral election took place in 31,186 ballot boxes. My analysis is based on 31,101 of these; the remaining 85 were either located in various detention facilities or contained administrative irregularities.

[54] This bootstrap-type resampling ensures that the variability entailed in the many ways that we can match survey respondents to ballot box election margins is reflected in the aggregate, city-level estimates.

[55] For instance, the range of the AKP candidate's March vote as a share of registered voters contracts from (.04, .91) at the ballot box level to (.09, .87) at the neighborhood level and (.15, .54) at the district level. Meanwhile, the range of shifts between March and June in the same quantity contracts from (−0.24, .10) at the ballot box level to (−0.24, .06) at the neighborhood level and (−0.07, 0) at the district level.

the expressions in (3) are 1.99 (1.98, 2.00), 3.42 (3.41, 3.44), and 0.09 (0.08, 0.10), respectively.

In sum, this synthesis—based on an explicit integration of the complementary advantages of survey and election outcome data—suggests that the March–June Istanbul-wide shift in the 2019 election outcome can be attributed primarily to vote switching and backlash.[56] While I do detect statistically significant levels of disengagement, its political impact is muted by the AKP's ability to counter the demobilization of its March supporters with almost as large a number of newly mobilized voters in June.

VII. Conclusion: Elections as an Instrument of Resistance against Autocracy

> "We say that democracy is not an end in itself, but a means to an end."
> —*Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 14 July 1996*.[57]

The 2019 Istanbul mayoral election represents a critical juncture in Turkey's democratic development: For the first time, the governing AKP attempted to overturn the outcome of an election that it had lost. By doing so, it assailed a fundamental precept of democratic politics. As Adam Przeworski put it, "democracy is a system in which parties lose elections," and alternation in power constitutes the most credible, prima facie evidence of genuine democratic contestation.[58] The AKP's reluctance to concede the Istanbul race thus epitomizes a commitment problem of cardinal importance. To quote Przeworski again, "democracy generates winners and losers, can one ever expect the losers to comply with the verdict of democratically processed conflicts?"[59]

An answer to this question is key to an improved understanding of democratic stability in the age of democratic backsliding. Since the end of the Cold War, the most serious threats to democracy have been emerging not from actors outside the democratic process, such as

[56] Even though the magnitude of backlash is almost twice that of vote switching, the electoral consequences of the two mechanisms are about the same: while backlash only adds votes to the CHP, vote switching also takes away a corresponding number of votes from the AKP, thus impacting the vote margin twice as much.

[57] An interview for the newspaper *Milliyet*.

[58] Przeworski 1991, 10; Przeworski et al. 2000, 16.

[59] Przeworski 1991, 18.

militaries, but from actors within democracy itself—from elected incumbents.[60] In the age of democratic backsliding, Przeworski's loser's dilemma is first of all the incumbent's dilemma: Why would any incumbent concede an election that he just lost?

Research on the foundations of self-enforcing democracy provides one answer: protest or even outright civil conflict deters losers' noncompliance with the outcomes of elections.[61] According to this paradigm, democracy prevails when competing parties prefer the outcome of an election to the outcome of a violent confrontation that would ensue if the losing party refused to step down. Yet precisely because backsliding starts from a democratic status quo, because it is incremental, legalistic, and rarely does away with elections altogether, voters can stop incumbents who undermine democracy without resorting to costly, violent means of resisting authoritarianism. In backsliding democracies, voters may be able to stop aspiring autocrats simply by voting them out.

These arguments help us to delineate the scope conditions under which elections, even if unfair, can be realistically expected to act as a democratic check of last resort. This article's examination of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race reveals that vote switching, backlash, and disengagement are all viable mechanisms of resisting autocracy and that different subsets of the electorate engage in each form of resistance at different rates. Yet the unique, quasi-experimental features of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral election that facilitated the analysis throughout this article also require reappraisal when drawing lessons for other backsliding democracies. One relevant dimension entails extrapolating from mayoral to national elections; another, key dimension concerns extrapolating from the AKP's brazen attempt to overturn an electoral defeat to the more subtle, incremental methods typically employed by undemocratic incumbents; and yet another dimension is temporal: the prompt rerun of the Istanbul race versus the usually much longer interval between an incumbent's violation of democratic principles and the voters' opportunity to punish him electorally. All of these are germane when we consider generalizing from the Turkish context to democratic backsliding worldwide.

The theoretical framework in section II helps us to identify the pertinent differences when extrapolating across these dimensions. A shift from the local to the national level plausibly implies an increase in partisan policy stakes (the parameter α_i in the model), which according to

[60] Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Svolik 2019.
[61] Fearon 2011; Little 2012; Przeworski, Rivero, and Xi 2015; Weingast 1997.

my analysis results in: i) a smaller overall punishment of an undemocratic incumbent and ii) less vote switching relative to backlash and disengagement. But note that the same local-to-national shift might also entail greater stakes for democracy (the parameter δ_i), with precisely the opposite consequences. Whether the large and politically consequential punishment that we observe in the Istanbul case will be muted or amplified at the national level depends on which of these countervailing pressures predominates.

The same comparative statics provide guidance on how to think about the implications of the Istanbul case for contexts with less severe or less visible transgressions (than an election annulment and rerun) and a longer time lag between such violations and a chance to punish them at the polls. Both departures likely diminish the weight that voters place on democracy (δ_i) relative to policy (α_i) on election day, with implications identical to those discussed in the preceding paragraph. The 2019 Istanbul mayoral race may therefore exemplify an upper bound on the magnitude of the electoral punishment that we can expect from voters for parties and politicians with authoritarian tendencies.

A final external validity consideration concerns a country's stage in the process of democratic erosion at which elections can still serve as an effective instrument of democratic self-defense. Political scientists' nomenclature for regimes, such as contemporary Turkey, has ranged from an illiberal, backsliding, or populist democracy to a hybrid regime to an electoral or competitive authoritarian regime.[62] Despite its richness, this terminology fails to discern that polities pooled under these labels differ significantly in their publics' potential to reverse the course of democratic backsliding. In one subset—exemplified by Turkey—incumbents engage in significant manipulation prior to elections but they do not resort to election-day fraud.[63] In the other subset—exemplified by Russia—manipulation and fraud occur both before and after voters cast their ballots. In the first subset, election outcomes provide a sufficiently informative signal of the incumbent's (lack of) popular support so that no further action is necessary to compel him to step down after a lost election. In the second subset, a costly, potentially violent confrontation is the public's only recourse.[64]

[62] See Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2013; on Turkey specifically, see Aytaç, Çarkoğlu, and Yıldırım 2017; Cleary and Öztürk 2022; Esen and Gumuscu 2016; Haggard and Kaufman 2021; Laebens and Öztürk 2020; Somer 2019a; Wuthrich and Ingleby 2020.

[63] On the distinction between preelection manipulation and election-day fraud, see Luo and Rozenas 2018.

[64] Reuter and Szakonyi show that, even in Russia, revelations of the regime's use of electoral fraud significantly undermine its electoral support; see Reuter and Szakonyi 2021.

This distinction is another reason why the 2019 Istanbul mayoral race constitutes a critical juncture on Turkey's democratic trajectory. After the rerun of the Istanbul mayoral race in June, the Turkish public learned a key fact about the AKP's willingness to comply with the outcomes of elections: although the AKP may dare to challenge the will of a bare majority, it will not dare to defy the will of an overwhelming one.[65] On the night of the rerun, before official results were announced but when unofficial returns indicated a decisive opposition victory, President Erdoğan congratulated the opposition candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, conceding that "the national will was once again manifest."[66]

In 2019, the Turkish public acted as a democratic check, and it succeeded even after institutional safeguards failed. By blatantly compromising the integrity of the Istanbul mayoral election, the AKP and President Erdoğan undermined their own majoritarian legitimacy and, in turn, succeeded in mobilizing and converting—against themselves—a significant subset of the Turkish electorate, one that the opposition itself has struggled to reach. Democracy in Turkey, even if in decline, is not dead.[67]

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article can be found at http://muse.jhu.edu/resolve/204.

Data

Replication files for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/ZX5UQG.

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[65] Nonetheless, when İmamoğlu said in November 2019 that "those who cancelled the March [Istanbul mayoral] election are fools," the AKP government initiated a prosecution on charges of "insulting state officials." In line with earlier instances of preelection manipulation, the prosecution was denounced as an attempt by Erdoğan to eliminate a potential challenger in Turkey's 2023 presidential election. See Human Rights Watch. 2022. "Turkey: Court Convicts Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu," December 14. At https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/14/turkey-court-convicts-istanbul-mayor-ekrem-imamoglu.

[66] "I hope that the results of the repeat election for the Istanbul Metropolitan Mayoralty will lead to good things for our Istanbul. Today, the national will was once again manifest. I congratulate Ekrem İmamoğlu, who has won the election according to unofficial results." Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *Twitter*. June 23, 2019.

[67] For similar conclusions, see Somer 2019b.

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