Threat Type, Personality & Policy Preferences in Authoritarian Contexts

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Abstract

A robust literature in political psychology finds that exposure to threat increases support for illiberal policies through the activation of authoritarian and system-justifying personality traits. However, these studies overwhelmingly analyze data from democratic contexts. This study seeks to contribute to a growing literature on political psychology in authoritarian political contexts through analysis of threat, personality, and policy preferences in contemporary Egypt. This paper presents the design and results of a survey experiment priming economic, physical, infrastructure, and identity threats (with a pure control group) embedded in a survey of a nationally representative sample of Egyptian adults in December 2018. The instrument included pre-treatment batteries measuring authoritarian personality traits and system justification. Results demonstrate that different kinds of threats have different effects on policy preferences: respondents assigned to the economic treatment were significantly more supportive of illiberal policies, while those in the security treatment were not, and those in the infrastructure and identity treatments showed mixed results. Additional analyses show that different threats vary in whether and how they interact with underlying personality traits. The findings suggest that the process through which threat activates personality traits and increases support for illiberal policies, an established finding in democracies, may be universal and generalize to authoritarian contexts.

Introduction

A robust literature in political psychology finds that exposure to threat affects policy preferences. In comparison with the unexposed, those exposed to a variety of economic, physical, structural, or moral threats articulate higher support for illiberal policies such as the extrajudicial use of force, infringement on civil liberties, and autocratic governance than the unexposed as well as the parties and politicians who advocate illiberal policies.[1] The relationship between threat and policy preferences is not automatic or deterministic. Instead, threat activates underlying personality traits – immutable core attributes, stable and consistent within an individual over the course of the life-cycle[2] – which then alter policy preferences. More specifically, threat increases support for illiberal policies when it activates authoritarian and system-justifying personality traits.[3] While its strengths are many, one central limitation of this literature is that it has overwhelmingly focused on how threat makes individuals more supportive of hawkish, conservative, or otherwise punitive policies in *democracies*.[4] Political psychology emphasizes the importance of context for conditioning relationships, raising the question of whether these relationships generalize to *authoritarian* political systems. Does the difference in political context alter the relationship between threat, personality and political preferences? And if so, how?

In this paper, I present the design and results of an experimental study which both directly builds on existing literature while also expanding the body of evidence and contextual scope of our collective knowledge about the effect of threat on policy preferences. I embedded an experiment in a December 2018 survey of a nationally-representative sample of adults (n = 2,000) in Egypt, an important contemporary authoritarian political context. The instrument included established batteries measuring authoritarian and system justifying personality traits prior to the experimental intervention. Respondents were then randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups priming economic, physical, infrastructure, or identity threats, or to a pure control group in which respondents receive no prime (n for each group = 400). The treatments isolate and prime different kinds of threat identified in existing studies as influential and most likely to activate underlying personality traits. Results demonstrate that different

kinds of threats have different effects on policy preferences among the sample of Egyptian adults: respondents assigned to the economic treatment were significantly more supportive of illiberal policies, while those in the security treatment were not, and the infrastructure and identity treatments showed mixed results. In addition, the results demonstrate that underlying personality traits interact differently with different kinds of threat, affecting those who score low on authoritarian personality and system justification differently than those with higher scores (though I note these interactions are not always at the level of statistical significance).

Threats, Personality & Preferences in Authoritarian Contexts

Political psychology research consistently finds that exposure to threat increases support for illiberal policies and the politics who advocate them. Illiberal policies include the extrajudicial use of force and infringement on civil liberties, often targeting minority groups or perceived national or non-state enemies.[5] Exposure to a variety of economic, physical, structural, or moral threats increases support for illiberal policies through the activation of personality traits. Personality traits are immutable core attributes, stable and consistent within an individual over the course of the life-cycle.[6] While these characteristics are constant, exogenous shifts in context can activate, or shift the level of salience, of these traits with implications for political preferences and behavior.

Exposure to threat increases support for illiberal policies when it activates specific personality traits – those of authoritarianism and system-justification.[7] Authoritarian personality is characterized by a high willingness to obey authority, a high obedience to conventional in-group norms, and aggressive behavior towards outgroups.[8] Those who naturally rank higher on authoritarianism tend to hold more illiberal, more hawkish, and more conservative (as commonly understood on the left-right scale) policy preferences.[9] Threat has been found to most affect the *least* authoritarian in a population, rendering those individuals similar to the strongest authoritarians in a kind of bump-up effect. Similarly, system justification is a personality type characterized by a tendency to bolster, justify, and defend the status quo, with a particular commitment to the societal status quo. Group members passively reflect stable and

legitimate status systems, which are deeply ingrained in their psyche. Those who naturally rank higher on system justification scales tend to be more politically conservative (again, as commonly understood on the left-right scale).[10]

Documentation of the robust relationship between threat and support for illiberal politics has overwhelmingly relied on evidence from *democracies*. However, political psychology emphasizes the importance of context in conditioning the direction and the size of the effect of various inputs with implications for political behavior.[11] This raises the question of whether the established findings on threat, personality trait activation, and support for illiberal politics holds in *authoritarian* contexts – and if not, how the difference in political context alters or undermines this relationship.

Authoritarian regimes are characterized by low levels of political pluralism, minimal popular participation, and power centralized in an executive not held to account by any system of checks and balances.[12] In addition, non-democratic political regimes inculcate the notion among its population that support for and identification with the regime is necessary to combat "easily recognizable societal problems," systemic issues such as underdevelopment and a lack of national security.[13] Authoritarian regimes propagate this idea among the masses by controlling and censoring information and using propaganda[14] In combination, these tactics produce rhetoric that identifies certain kinds of threats, emphasizing and even exaggerating them, and importantly assigns the regime the role of savior, as the only actor that can keep the people safe from these threats. Threat is central to how authoritarian regimes stay in power. While an important component of state-controlled narrative is its pro-regime nature, it is rarely *only* that. Propaganda also "appeals to feelings and emotions, to elementary drives and motives" rather that presenting information in a logical or factual manner.[15] In doing so, authoritarian regimes employ specific rhetorical styles meant to exaggerate threats and oversell regime-backed solutions.

Thus, while the existence or nature of threats faced in any given context is not unique, and the way in which threats activate underlying personality traits is also universal, how threat relates to shifts in policy preferences may be altered in an authoritarian contexts. Existing studies focus on how individuals living in democracies become more supportive of hawkish, conservative, or otherwise punitive policies

under conditions of threat. However, in authoritarian regimes, the policy preferences altered by threat may be more closely tied to support for the regime.[16] [17] Increased exposure to these state-narratives, often measured through state-sponsored media consumption or educational attainment level, result in larger effects.[18]

Research Design

The experiment analyzed in this paper was embedded in a nationally representative survey of 2,000 Egyptian adult citizens conducted in December 2018.[19] The instrument included questions capturing respondents' political behavior, policy preferences, emotions, personality and demographic information. While a survey experiment does not allow me to test how long the effects might endure, the combination of a nationally representative sample and an experimental manipulation provides a reliable test of causal propositions about the way in which exposure to different kinds of threat relate to the expression of particular attitudes.[20]

Egypt is an ideal case in which to test questions surrounding the relationship between threat, personality, and policy preferences in an authoritarian context. The country has been an authoritarian regime since its independence in 1952. Following the 2011 'Arab Spring' uprisings, Egypt witnessed a brief democratic opening. However, since coming to power in a 2013 coup, military president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has overseen authoritarian retrenchment on a scale that dwarfs the policies of his predecessors. Economically, Egyptians' living conditions are rapidly deteriorating due to chronic mismanagement of public finance. Nearly 58% of public resources goes towards debt and loan repayment, resulting in meager spending on health, education, and other basic social services for the country's 100 million citizens. The World Bank reports that at present 60% of Egypt's population is either poor or vulnerable. Relatedly, Egypt's rapidly aging infrastructure increasingly puts Egyptians at high risk due to food insecurity, pollution, and poorly maintained roads and public transport systems.[21] The current regime came to power by ousting democratically elected president Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. Since 2013, the regime has paired mass arrests of tens of thousands of accused supporters with a smear campaign against

the Brotherhood painting the organization as an existential threat to the country.[22] Egypt regularly witnesses terrorist attacks and large swathes of territory remain beyond government control. For the past five years, the Egyptian military has conducted persistent counter-terrorism operations in Sinai against an Islamic State affiliate with the help of billions of dollars in American aid, many of which are broadcast on national television. The regime intentionally blur the lines between moderate Islamist organizations and violent militant ones, and often conflates the security and identity threats they pose.

Despite these significant issues, Sisi remains quite popular, and much of this support appears to be genuine.[23] The question that inspired this paper and experiment was what might explain Sisi's seemingly legitimate popularity while Egypt faces so many significant economic, security, and political crises. Previous research has established that citizen support, both in aligned policy preferences and in compliant behavior, is critical to the stability and survival of autocratic regimes.[24] If perceived by individuals as threats, these crises of governance may actually be driving support for Sisi rather than undermining it. Egypt is thus a "most likely" case for observing the effects of threat on support for illiberal policies.

Experimental Treatment Conditions

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of five treatment conditions, with each treatment group totaling 400 individuals. The experiment was designed to subtly and ethically prime different kinds of threats among respondents in a conversational but thorough manner. I constructed treatments to be consistent in how they described threat, including quantitative statistics and qualitative descriptions of the specific threat and how people might experience it, and similar in length. The randomization of the treatments succeeded with respect to pre-treatment covariates and observables.[25] Respondents were read one of the following paragraphs:

1. **Control:** *No text.*

2. **Economic Treatment:** As you may know, Egypt has experienced a national economic crisis in recent years. Poverty rates have soared, reaching 60 percent in some governorates, and inflation of the Egyptian pound rose as high as 35 percent in 2017. Unemployment has remained very high at above 10 percent. In addition, prices for basic commodities such as bread, oil, public transportation, and electricity have nearly doubled. This economic crisis threatens the country.

3. **Terrorism Treatment:** As you may know, Egypt has experienced a national security crisis in recent years. Terrorism rates have soared, reaching 1700 attacks in the Sinai, and 225 attacks and 877 civilian fatalities at the national level in 2017. Almost 1000 police officers and soldiers have been killed while fighting extremists and insurgents. In addition, the number of attacks in urban centers has increased dramatically. This security crisis threatens the country.

4. **Infrastructure Treatment:** As you may know, Egypt has experienced a national infrastructure crisis in recent years. Infrastructure accidents have soared, reaching 11,098 incidents and 3,747 fatalities related to poor road conditions at the national level in 2017. The number of collapsed buildings due to poor maintenance exceeded one per week. In addition, the number of accidents involving the Egyptian National Railways increased by nearly a third. This infrastructure crisis threatens the country.

5. **Identity Treatment:** As you may know, Egypt has experienced a national identity crisis in recent years. Violent sectarian incidents have soared, reaching 77 major attacks in 2017. While recent public opinion data suggests that the majority of the country acknowledges Egypt as a civil-secular state that respects Islamic tenets, as many as one fifth of Egyptians want the government to adopt more strict and literal interpretations of Islam. In addition, the number of Egyptian citizens who use an adjective in their self-description, such as *Muslim* or *Christian* Egyptian, has grown in recent years. This identity crisis threatens the country.

Outcome Variables

The post-treatment questions of interest capture policy preferences. Responses were coded as 1 for choosing the more illiberal option (option a for both questions) and 0 for choosing the more liberal option (option b in both questions). I was unable to ask directly about support for the current president given the sensitivity of the question, and so I turned to established questions from the Arab Barometer measuring preferences over democratic and non-democratic governance. Answer order was randomized across respondents.

1. Which of the following two options is closer to your opinion?

   a. "A non-democratic government can be preferable under some circumstances."
   b. "A non-democratic government is never preferable under any circumstances."

2. Which of the following two options is closer to your opinion?

   a. "During times of crisis, it is important to have a strong leader decide the best policies."
   b. "During times of crisis, it is important to have the people vote to decide the best policies."

Pre-Registered Hypotheses

I pre-registered my expected outcomes of the study in November 2019, prior to any data collection. [26] My pre-registered hypotheses stated that in all treatment conditions, respondents would demonstrate higher levels of support for authoritarian policies in comparison with the control. With regards to personality traits, and how they might interact with primed threats, I took existing studies as my guide, likening more hawkish and conservative positions in democratic contexts with support for illiberal and non-democratic governance in the authoritarian context of Egypt. I hypothesized that respondents who rank higher on the authoritarian and system justification indexes would be more likely to support authoritarian policies, and would be most moved by the primes.

Main Results: Threat Type and Support for Illiberal Policies

First, does the type of threat an individual faces matter in whether they become more (less) supportive of illiberal policies? The results suggest that the answer to this question is yes. Figure **??** demonstrates the average treatment effects on the post-treatment questions measuring policy preferences, comparing response rates and the level of statistical significance of the difference with the untreated control. Recall that respondents faced a force-choice answer between one of two statements. In the control group, 46.0 percent of respondents expressed support for the statement "a non-democratic government can be preferable under some circumstances." Respondents were significantly more supportive of the statement in the economic and infrastructure treatments – and nearly so in the identity treatment (p = 0.069). The security treatment did not produce a significant effect. 67.5 percent of respondents in the control group expressed support for the statement, "during times of crisis, it is important to have a strong leader decide the best policies" rather than having people vote to determine the best policies. Respondents' support for the authoritarian policy in the economic, infrastructure, and identity treatments demonstrates a similar pattern to that of the first question, but the effect is only significant for the economic treatment. Similar to the first question about support for authoritarian policies, the security treatment did not produce a significant effect.
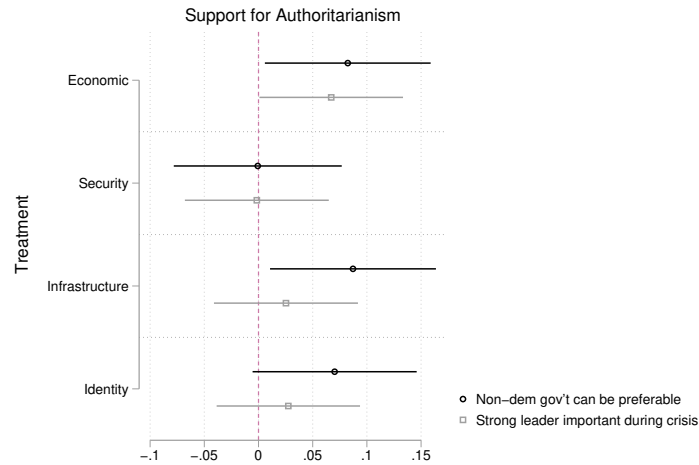
Figure 1: Average Treatment Effects on Support for Illiberal Policies

Mechanism Tests: Threat Type and Personality Activation

Recall that the survey instrument included batteries capturing two personality types.[27] First, a pre-treatment battery of questions measured respondents' authoritarian personality by asking established questions about child-rearing used to measure this personality type. Second, a pre-treatment battery measured respondents' level of system justification. To explore whether different kinds of threats differently activated respondents' personality types, I interact the authoritarian personality and system justification indexes with treatment assignment.[28] In figures 2 and 3, I plot the marginal treatment effect at different levels of the authoritarian personality and system justification indexes to determine whether the significance and direction of the treatments varies by the value of these indexes. The y-axis indicates the direction of the effect: more positive values indicate a stronger positive effect from the treatment at that value of x, while more negative values indicate a stronger negative effect from the treatment at that value of x. Figure 2 demonstrates that there was no significant variation in treatment effect by authoritarian personality, with the exception of the security treatment; respondents who ranked *more* authoritarian were most affected by the prime, perhaps in partial explanation of the null average treatment effect defected above. However, for the second question about a strong leader during a crisis, those who ranked *less* au-

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thoritarian were significantly more positively affected by the primes in the economic and infrastructure treatments.
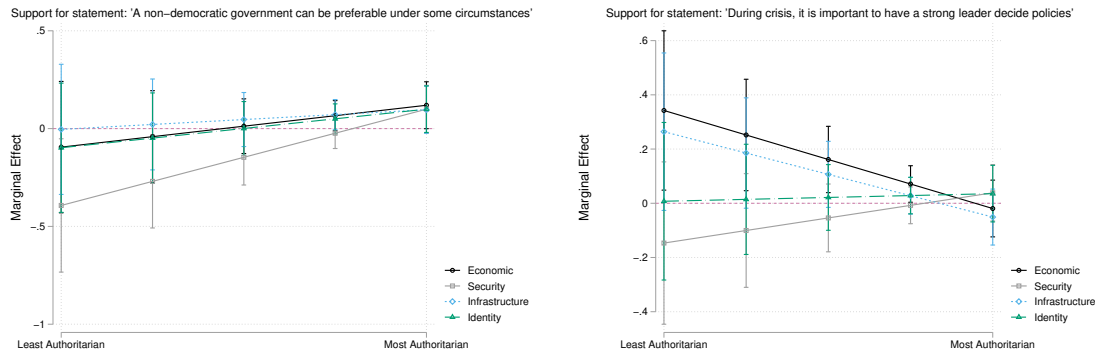

Figure 2: Treatment Effects by Strength of Authoritarian Personality

Figure 3 demonstrates more consistent results for the interaction between treatment and system justification. Respondents who ranked higher on the system justification index were more positively affected by the security, infrastructure, and identity treatments when asked about their support for whether a non-democratic government could sometimes be preferable. Those who ranked higher on system justification were also significantly more supportive of the second statement supporting a strong leader to choose policies during a crisis, though there was not variation in treatment effect.
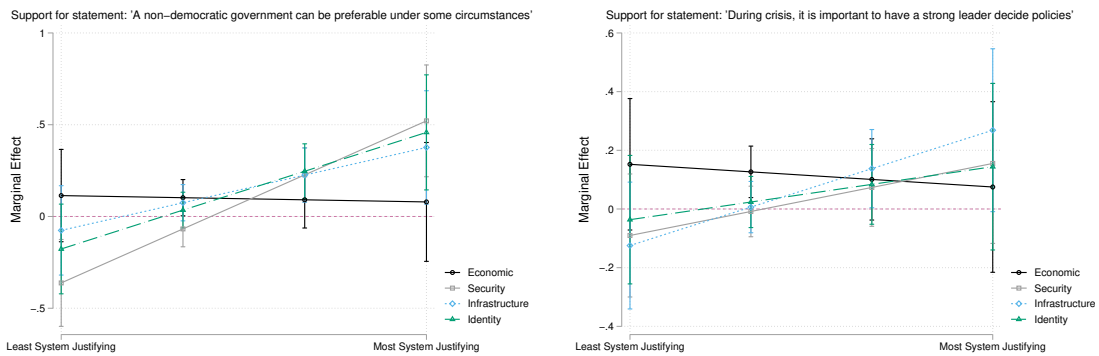

Figure 3: Treatment Effects by Strength of System Justification

Conclusion

In this paper, I outlined and analyzed a survey experiment designed to isolate the effect of different kinds of effect on policy preferences. My findings demonstrate that this is a fruitful and necessary approach to understanding threat and preference formation; different kinds of threats exerted different effects on individual threat perception and policy preferences, and interacted differently with underlying personality traits. Among a sample of Egyptian adults, economic threats were particularly effective; those in the economic treatment group were more likely to report that the threat would affect them and more supportive of illiberal policies.

Returning to the puzzle that motivated my inquiry, these results may help to explain Sisi's seemingly sincere popularity despite the variety of crises ongoing and worsening under his rule. If citizens feel these challenges as threats, these crises may actually be reinforcing rather than undermining support for illiberal policies and strongman politics, particularly among those Egyptians who rank low on authoritarian personality and high on system justification. Beyond Egypt, the results might help to explain why authoritarian leaders consistently use propaganda that critics dismiss as fear mongering by outlining the individual-level microfoundations of why it seems to work.[29] This article demonstrates that personality must be considered in any exploration of why and how individuals support and contribute to the stability of undemocratic regimes.

Future research should continue to test the relationship between threat and illiberal policy preferences in additional national and temporal contexts. In addition, future experimental research on the subject might design an experiment that permits the manipulation of threat perception at the individual level in order to determine how much threat directly affects policy preferences, and how much of its effect is mediated through individual-level threat perception. In doing so, researchers must disaggregate threat into specific components to fully understand its effects on policy preferences. My findings strongly suggest that not all threats are equally important or exert the same influence over policy preferences.

Notes

[1] Darren W. Davis and Brian D. Silver, "Civil Liberties vs. Security: Public Opinion in the Context of the Terrorist Attacks on America," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 1 (2004): 28–46; Leonie Huddy et al., "Threat, Anxiety, and Support of Antiterrorism Policies," *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (2005): 593–608; Karen Stenner, *The Authoritarian Dynamic* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jennifer L. Merolla and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, *Democracy at Risk: How Terrorist Threats Affect the Public* (University of Chicago Press, 2009); Bethany Albertson and Shana Kushner Gadarian, *Anxious Politics: Democratic Citizenship in a Threatening World* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Thomas Pepinsky, "Southeast Asia: Voting Against Disorder," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 2 (2017): 120–131; Caroline Abadeer et al., "Did Egypt's Post-Uprising Crime Wave Increase Support for Authoritarian Rule?" (Working paper, 2019).

[2] Avshalom Caspi, Brent W. Roberts, and Rebecca L. Shiner, "Personality Development: Stability and Change," *Annual Review of Psychology* 56 (2005): 453–484; Alan S. Gerber et al., "The Big Five Personality Traits in the Political Arena," *Annual Review of Political Science* 14 (2011): 265–287.

[3] Stanley Feldman and Karen Stenner, "Perceived Threat and Authoritarianism," *Political Psychology* 18, no. 4 (1997): 741–770; Edward J. Rickert, "Authoritarianism and Economic Threat: Implications for Political Behavior," *Political Psychology* 19, no. 4 (1998): 707–720; Davis and Silver, "Civil Liberties vs. Security: Public Opinion in the Context of the Terrorist Attacks on America"; Huddy et al., "Threat, Anxiety, and Support of Antiterrorism Policies"; John T. Jost and Orsolya Hunyady, "Antecedents and Consequences of System-Justifying Ideologies," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14, no. 5 (2005): 260–265; Howard Lavine, Milton Lodge, and Kate Freitas, "Threat, Authoritarianism, and Selective Exposure to Information," *Political Psychology* 26, no. 2 (2005): 219–244; Stenner, *The Authoritarian Dynamic*; Merolla and Zechmeister, *Democracy at Risk: How Terrorist Threats Affect the Public*; Albertson and Gadarian, *Anxious Politics: Democratic Citizenship in a Threatening World*; Samuel Greene and Graeme Robertson, "Agreeable Authoritarians: Personality and Politics in Contemporary Russia," *Comparative Political Studies* 50, no. 13 (2017): 1802–1834.

[4] Though see (Greene and Robertson, "Agreeable Authoritarians: Personality and Politics in Contemporary Russia") and related work for important exceptions.

[5] Davis and Silver, "Civil Liberties vs. Security: Public Opinion in the Context of the Terrorist Attacks on America"; Huddy et al., "Threat, Anxiety, and Support of Antiterrorism Policies"; Stenner, *The Authoritarian Dynamic*; Merolla and Zechmeister, *Democracy at Risk: How Terrorist Threats Affect the Public*; Albertson and Gadarian, *Anxious Politics: Democratic Citizenship in a Threatening World*; Pepinsky, "Southeast Asia: Voting Against Disorder"; Abadeer et al., "Did Egypt's Post-Uprising Crime Wave Increase Support for Authoritarian Rule?"

[6] Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner, "Personality Development: Stability and Change"; Gerber et al., "The Big Five Personality Traits in the Political Arena."

[7] Feldman and Stenner, "Perceived Threat and Authoritarianism"; Rickert, "Authoritarianism and Economic Threat: Implications for Political Behavior"; Davis and Silver, "Civil Liberties vs. Security: Public Opinion in the Context of the Terrorist Attacks on America"; Huddy et al., "Threat, Anxiety, and Support of Antiterrorism Policies"; Jost and Hunyady, "Antecedents and Consequences of System-Justifying Ideologies"; Lavine, Lodge, and Freitas, "Threat, Authoritarianism, and Selective Exposure to Information"; Stenner, *The Authoritarian Dynamic*; Merolla and Zechmeister, *Democracy at Risk: How Terrorist Threats Affect the Public*; Albertson and Gadarian, *Anxious Politics: Democratic Citizenship in a Threatening World*; Greene and Robertson, "Agreeable Authoritarians: Personality and Politics in Contemporary Russia."

[8] Theodor Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (Verso Books, 2019[1950]); Robert A. Altemeyer, *Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (University of Manitoba Press, 1981); Robert A. Altemeyer, *The Authoritarian Specter* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

[9] Stenner, *The Authoritarian Dynamic*; Marc J. Hetherington and Jonathan D. Weiler, *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[10] John T Jost, Aaron C Kay, and Hulda Thorisdottir, *Social and Psychological Bases of Ideology and System Justification* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

[11] James N Druckman and Arthur Lupia, "Preference Formation," *Annual Review of Political Science* 3, no. 1 (2000): 1–24.

[12] Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000); Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[13] Juan J. Linz, *An Authoritarian Regime: the Case of Spain*, 1964.

[14] Guriev and Treisman (*How Modern Dictators Survive: An informational theory of the new authoritarianism*). Increases in censorship, propaganda and regime-controlled narratives and information is an indicator of a decline in the quality of democracy (Nancy Bermeo, "On Democratic Backsliding," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 [2016]: 5–19).

[15] Edgar H Henderson, "Toward a Definition of Propaganda," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 18, no. 1 (1943): 71–87.

[16] Maja Adena et al., "Radio and the Rise of the Nazis in Prewar Germany," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130, no. 4 (2015): 1885–1939; Davide Cantoni et al., "Curriculum and Ideology," *Journal of Political Economy* 125, no. 2 (2017): 338–392; Leonid Peisakhin and Arturas Rozenas, "Electoral Effects of Biased Media: Russian Television in Ukraine," *American Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 3 (2018): 535–550.

[17] Though see Huang ("The Pathology of Hard Propaganda") for backlash against state-narratives and propaganda, and Wedeen (*Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*) for whether these performances constitute legitimate support.

[18] Barbara Geddes and John Zaller, "Sources of Popular Support for Authoritarian Regimes," *American Journal of Political Science*, 1989, 319–347.

[19] Details of the survey are available in the article's appendix.

[20] Diana C Mutz, *Population-Based Survey Experiments* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

[21] https://pulitzercenter.org/projects/egypts-deadly-infrastructure.

[22] As detailed by independent statistical database Wiki Thawra in a report titled "Report on the Detained and Prosecuted during the Sisi/Adly Mansour Period." Available in Arabic at https://wikithawra.wordpress.com/2014/01/09/sisi-mansour-detainees/.

[23] Rory Truex and Daniel L. Tavana, "Implicit Attitudes toward an Authoritarian Regime," *The Journal of Politics* 81, no. 3 (2019).

[24] Ronald Wintrobe, "Some Lessons on the Efficiency of Democracy from a Study of Dictatorship," in *The Political Dimension of Economic Growth* (Springer, 1998), 20–37; Barbara Geddes, "Why parties and elections in authoritarian regimes?," in *annual meeting of the American Political Science Association* (2005), 456–471; Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*, vol. 296 (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Steven Levitsky and Lucan A Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[25] See table 1 in the paper's appendix.

[26] Available at xxxxxxx.

[27] The appendix contains the full question wording for each.

[28] Regression results are presented in table 2 in the paper's appendix. Both batteries are reduced to one question through a mean index with high inter-item reliability (α over .7).

[29] Haifeng Huang, "Propaganda as Signaling," *Comparative Politics* 47, no. 4 (2015): 419–444.

Appendix

Additional Information on Survey

The experiment was administered to a nationally-representative sample of 2,000 Egyptian citizens 18 years and older between November 21 and December 5, 2018. 30 enumerators employed and trained on the instrument by the Egyptian Research and Training Center (*al-Markaz al-Misri lil-Buhuth wa al-Tadrib*), a survey research firm headquartered in Cairo, Egypt, conducted the face-to-face interviews.

Households were selected from the master sample of households maintained by the Central Agency of Public Mobilization and Statistics (*al-Jihaz al-Markazi lil-Ta'bi'a al-'Amma waal-Ihsa*, or CAPMAS) and drawn from the country's most recent census, conducted in 2017. The sample is drawn from 22 of Egypt's 27 governorates. The excluded five districts (New Valley, North Sinai, Matrouh, Red Sea, and South Sinai) are extremely rural, contain only 1.8 percent of the country's population, and its representatives comprised less than 6 percent of the most recently elected representative Egyptian parliament. In addition, the North and South Sinai districts present unique and costly security challenges due to recent turmoil in the area. These give governorates were excluded from the sample due to safety and feasibility concerns, as is standard practice for ERTC and other reputable Egyptian survey firms.

The sampling employed a multi-stage stratified random probability approach so that every member of the 98.2 percentage of the Egyptian population living in the 22 included governorates had an equal chance of being included. The sample was weighted by governorate population (percent of population living within a given governorate per the 2017 census) and stratified by urbanization (45 percent urban and 55 percent rural per the 2017 census). In Egypt's urban governorates, the district is the smallest local governing unit. Within rural governorates, there exist *marakez* (singular: *markaz*), which are local governing units over groups of villages, and which are equivalent to districts with the difference in name denoting only its rural characteristic. These governorate sub-units are further divided into PSUs, which each contain 12 households.

200 PSUs were randomly selected to cover the target sample of 2000 plus twenty percent more in the case of expected respondents who were unavailable or refused to participate. Within each household, the interviewers employed a standard Kish grid method to select individual participants of alternating genders. The final response rate for the survey was 68.26 percent of those approached as a potential respondent. Table 1 presents the personality and key demographic variables by treatment assignment, demonstrating that randomization largely succeeded and did not impact inferences made from the above analyses.

Table 1: Personality and Demographic Variables by Treatment Assignment

Variable	N	(1) Control Mean/SE	N	(2) Economic Mean/SE	N	(3) Security Mean/SE	N	(4) Infrastructure Mean/SE	N	(5) Identity Mean/SE
Authoritarian Personality	399	0.795 (0.009)	399	0.763 (0.009)	399	0.772 (0.009)	397	0.767 (0.009)	395	0.762 (0.009)
System Justification	308	2.304 (0.026)	305	2.271 (0.025)	294	2.254 (0.030)	301	2.279 (0.028)	303	2.264 (0.027)
Age	400	39.837 (0.678)	400	38.358 (0.672)	400	39.502 (0.680)	400	40.080 (0.673)	400	38.965 (0.697)
Female	400	0.498 (0.025)	400	0.490 (0.025)	400	0.490 (0.025)	400	0.470 (0.025)	400	0.498 (0.025)
Education	400	3.773 (0.091)	400	3.777 (0.092)	400	3.668 (0.095)	400	3.720 (0.095)	400	3.630 (0.094)
Employed	400	0.445 (0.025)	400	0.472 (0.025)	400	0.458 (0.025)	400	0.530 (0.025)	400	0.440 (0.025)
Religiosity	400	2.277 (0.030)	400	2.328 (0.027)	400	2.303 (0.029)	399	2.301 (0.027)	399	2.288 (0.030)
Economic Stability	400	0.255 (0.022)	400	0.223 (0.021)	400	0.240 (0.021)	400	0.215 (0.021)	400	0.207 (0.020)

Question Wording for Personality Questions

A. Authoritarian Personality

Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about parenting. There are a number of different values parents can instill in their children. In your opinion, which is the most important in each of the following pairs?

(a) Is it more important for a child to have independence or respect for elders?

(b) Is it more important for a child to obedience or self-reliance?

(c) Is it more important for a child to be considerate or to be well-behaved?

(d) Is it more important for a child to have curiosity or good manners?

B. System Justification

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your society?

(a) In general, I find society to be fair.

(b) In general, the Egyptian political system operates as it should.

(c) Egyptian society needs to be radically restructured.

(d) Egypt is the best country in the world to live in.

(e) Most policies serve the greater good in Egypt.

(f) Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness in Egypt.

(g) Our society is getting worse every year.

(h) Egyptian society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve.

Answer choices: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, don't know (do not read), refuse (do not read)

Manipulation Check

Two additional post-treatment questions served as a manipulation check and measured respondents' perceptions of threats at the national- and individual-level. The manipulation check is important to measure that the treatment is doing the work it is supposed to – priming different kinds of threat and bring that threat to the forefront of respondents' minds. All respondents in all treatment groups were asked the first question in its entirety, with the order of the answer options randomized. For the second question, respondents assigned to an active treatment condition were only asked about the national crisis mentioned in the treatment text (economic, security, infrastructure, or identity). In the control group, respondents were asked about all four types of crises, with the question order randomized, so that the effect of each treatment could be compared with a baseline level.

1. In your opinion, which of the following is the most important challenge facing Egypt today?

   - Achieving economic stability
   - Maintaining national security
   - Improving infrastructure
   - Solving identity issues

2. To what extent do you worry that a national [...] crisis will negatively affect you, your family, and people like you?

   a. Economic
   b. Security/terrorism
   c. Infrastructure
   d. Identity

   Answer choices: To a great extent, to a medium extent, to a small extent, not at all, don't know (do not read), refuse (do not read)

Respondents ranking the threat primed in the treatment as a more serious threat to Egypt *and* to themselves, in comparison with baseline levels in the control, is evidence that the primes "worked," and that respondents "passed" the manipulation check; when a specific threat is primed, respondents perceive that as more threatening than the comparative control group.

The results, presented visually in figure 4, suggest that the primes "worked" and that respondents perceived and understood the experimental treatments. Recall that two post-treatment questions asked about perceptions of national- and individual-level threat. For the first question, respondents were asked about the most important challenge facing Egypt today, and were able to choose one among the economic, security, infrastructure, and identity answer options. There was no significant difference in answers between the control and economic treatment, although this is likely due to ceiling effects; 71 percent of respondents chose the economy as the most important challenge facing Egypt, and it was statistically indistinguishable from the 69 percent who choose the same option in the economic treatment condition. In the security treatment, 27 percent of respondents chose the security response option (verses 18.9 percent in the control), at the expense of economic challenges (which dropped to 63 percent). In the infrastructure treatment condition, 12 percent of respondents chose this option (versus 9 percent in the control), and finally 4 percent of respondents chose an identity threat in the identity treatment condition (versus .05 percent in the control). A second post-treatment question asked about perceptions of individual-level threat. Recall that respondents were asked to rank on a categorical scale of 1 to 4, where 1 indicated "not at all" and 4 indicated "to a great extent," to what extent the primed threat would affect them. In the control group, respondents were asked about all four threats in order to compare with the treatment groups. Figure **??** below demonstrates that all differences were significant at the 95 percent level save the security treatment; the economic treatment averaged 3.78 in comparison with an average of 3.62 in the control, the infrastructure treatment averaged 3.20 in comparison with a 3.02 average in the control; and the identity treatment averaged 2.87 in comparison with a 2.56 average in the control. Taken together, these results suggest that priming a specific threat increased its salience in the minds of respondents and rendered them more likely to rank that prime as a major threat to their country. In addition,

individuals were significantly more likely to feel that they personally could fall victim to a threat in the economic, infrastructure, and identity treatments.
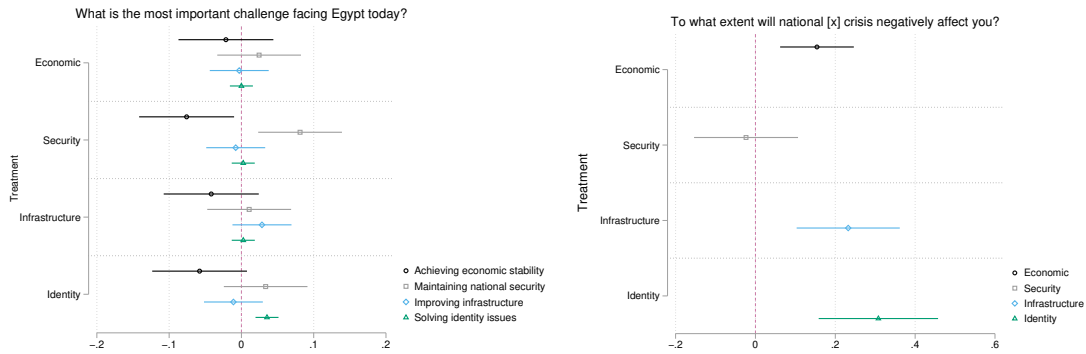

Figure 4: Perceptions of Threat by Treatment Assignment

Additional Analyses

Table 2: Results of Interactions between Personality Types and Treatment Assignment

	Support for non-dem gov't as sometimes preferable	Support for strong leader during crisis
Authoritarian Personality	-0.521***	0.048
	(0.150)	(0.131)
x Economic Treatment	0.214	-0.362*
	(0.214)	(0.187)
x Security Treatment	0.492**	0.186
	(0.217)	(0.190)
x Infrastructure Treatment	0.100	-0.315*
	(0.213)	(0.184)
x Identity Treatment	0.197	0.028
	(0.211)	(0.185)
System Justification	-0.019	0.135**
	(0.065)	(0.057)
x Economic Treatment	-0.011	-0.026
	(0.093)	(0.084)
x Security Treatment	0.294***	0.082
	(0.087)	(0.078)
x Infrastructure Treatment	0.150*	0.131
	(0.089)	(0.080)
x Identity Treatment	0.211**	0.060
	(0.090)	(0.081)
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

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