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ARTICLE

Endogenous opposition: Identity and ideology in Kuwaiti electoral politics

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Abstract

How do opposition elites succeed in authoritarian elections? Existing theories of authoritarian politics suggest a pivotal role for elections in enhancing the survival of incumbent dictators. Yet, in many contexts, opposition elites attract considerable support and constrain the policymaking authorities of these dictators. This article presents a theory of endogenous opposition that traces the electoral success of opposition elites to the strategic use of symbolic ideological appeals, or campaign appeals that cast politicians as allies of particular ideological movements. I present quantitative and qualitative evidence in support of my argument from Kuwait. I show that minority elites who use symbolic ideological appeals are more likely to capture voters from other minority groups. Once elected, these legislators are more likely to oppose the ruling family in the legislature. These findings challenge existing theories of authoritarian politics and point to ideology as an understudied source of opposition success in authoritarian elections.

In the nearly five decades that have passed since the onset of the third wave of democratization, the number of authoritarian regimes that hold semi-competitive elections has increased. Scholars typically equate minimalist or procedural definitions of democracy with the presence of competitive elections (Schumpeter, 1942)—an early assumption that led to hope that these elections would have a democratizing effect. But evidence has instead pointed scholars to the "fallacy of electoralism," or the mistake that competitive elections are alone sufficient for democratic development (Karl, 1986). This view has gained widespread acceptance, leading to a vast literature in political science that draws attention to the mechanisms linking electoral competition with the *survival* of autocracy. Autocrats use elections to buy support from elites and citizens through patronage (Blaydes, 2011; Geddes, 2006; Magaloni, 2006). Elections provide valuable information about the patterning of dissent and reveal the coercive strength of the regime (Brownlee, 2007; Gandhi, 2008; Malesky & Schuler, 2010; Simpser, 2013). Legislative institutions allow regimes to credibly commit not to expropriate domestic investment (Boix, 2003; Wright, 2008). Regular, institutionalized interactions also allow autocrats to use institutions to monitor rival elites (Svolik, 2012).

Despite the persistence of this conventional wisdom—that competitive elections in non-democracies facilitate the survival of incumbent autocrats—opposition parties, movements, and elites regularly participate in authoritarian elections. In many contexts, opposition elites attract considerable electoral support and shape policy. Broadly speaking, the literature relies on the assumption that

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oppositions are bound to the stability of autocracy: inclusion in nominally democratic institutions forecloses more contentious options such as protest, rebellion, or civil war. But in many cases, inclusion in these institutions represents a devil's bargain: oppositions occasionally subvert the autocrat's policy agenda, engage in disruptive behavior in state institutions, and agitate for political change (Knutsen, Nygård, & Wig, 2017; Meng, 2020). Even if the democratizing "power of elections" is an empirical irregularity, existing explanations cannot account for significant variation in opposition success (Di Palma, 1990, p. 85).

This is not to suggest scholarship has not indexed the sources of opposition success. Critical factors include resources and party structure (Arriola, 2013; Gamboa, 2017), the existence of permissive institutions (Williams, 2016), opposition connections to civil society (Ufen, 2020), and the use of pre-electoral coalitions (Gandhi & Reuter, 2013; Ong, 2022). This article develops an argument rooted in an understudied source of opposition success: symbolic ideology. I argue that the strategic use of symbolic ideological appeals in elections, or campaign appeals that cast politicians as allies of particular ideological movements, can itself be generative of the very oppositional forces autocrats seek to contain. The argument is tailored—but by no means exclusive—to explain cases of opposition success in cases where ethnic identity is politically salient.[1] The argument implies that oppositions are not always bound to support the authoritarian system from which they emerge, even if they do not in turn support democratization.

I provide evidence for the argument using original data on the electoral strategies and legislative activities of Kuwaiti elites. I pair complete candidate-level election results from 1981 to 2008 (approximately 2,000 candidates) with district-level demographic data detailing the patterning of ethnic groups across districts. I also analyze legislative activity in the Kuwait National Assembly (KNA), using roll call votes and parliamentary recommendations and queries submitted over the same period. I supplement quantitative tests of the argument with evidence from interviews conducted with former candidates and legislators to explicate the mechanisms linking electoral strategy with oppositional behavior. Two mechanisms explain how the use of symbolic ideological appeals facilitates an expansion of opposition: minority group interdependence and the blurring of ethnic group boundaries.

[1] The understanding of ethnicity I use in this article follows from Weber (1978, p. 389), who defines ethnic groups as groups that "entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both." I assume that tribes and ethnosectarian groups constitute ethnic groups, though I acknowledge that some definitions of ethnicity do not include these groups.

Patterns of participatory politics in Kuwait provide an ideal setting to trace the success of opposition. First, the Kuwaiti case typifies the type of disruptive opposition that can emerge from semicompetitive elections (Tavana & York, 2025). Since 1963, legislators in the KNA have submitted at least 70 interpellations (votes of no confidence in ministers) and forced over a dozen ministerial reshuffles. Second, gridlock in the legislature has frequently led the emir of Kuwait to dissolve the legislature and call for new elections. Over the past two decades, Kuwaitis have gone to the polls to elect a new legislature 11 times. Open criticism of the government is common in the legislature: elected legislators routinely block the emir's policy agenda and use legislative tools to expose corruption, misconduct, and other criminal activity. In this regard, oppositional elites wield considerable power and influence—despite the fact that Kuwait is a monarchy and executive power remains in the hands of the ruling Al-Sabah family. Kuwait is among the many authoritarian regimes that host semicompetitive elections, where power remains largely in the hands of a ruling family or hegemonic party.

Findings from Kuwait highlight the importance of authoritarian elections—but not in the same way existing theories predict. Where ethnicity is politically salient, elections designed to facilitate the creation of durable elite coalitions can also result in their undoing. Whereas most studies focus on how autocrats use elections to construct coalitions and manage elite access to the state, this study shows that other mechanisms can generate forms of opposition that are beyond the autocrat's control (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Lust-Okar, 2005). Its findings hold broader lessons for understanding how elites use ideology strategically. Existing theories of authoritarian politics emphasize the role of ideological "affinity" in shaping the autocrat's recruitment of potential allies (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Svolik, 2012). In contrast, I show that elites can use symbolic ideological appeals to attract voters from outside their ethnic group. Finally, these findings reveal that ignoring processes that do not generate regime change or democratization obscures micro-level mechanisms that give rise to elites unconstrained by the preferences of incumbent autocrats.

A THEORY OF ENDOGENOUS OPPOSITION

The existing literature suggests a pivotal role for opposition success in authoritarian elections. Successful opposition contention has been credited with inducing political liberalization, facilitating democratic reform through collective action, and, in some cases, generating turnover and electoral change (Bunce &

Wolchik, 2011; Howard & Roessler, 2006). Yet this success varies significantly across time and space, and no clear consensus has emerged to explain this variation. Conceptual, theoretical, and empirical limitations have impeded the advancement of our collective knowledge on the sources of opposition success.

This is primarily because the term "opposition" has multiple meanings. For some, oppositions are components of the authoritarian regimes in which they are embedded. These explanations typically emphasize role complementarity: opposition is used, "and it tends to acquiesce to this use, for some reason other than the expectation of finding itself in power…" (Zartman, 1988, p. 62). For others, opposition is a normative category that embodies pro-democratic resistance to authoritarian rule. In this study, I define opposition as a group of elites who initiate routine, public, and goal-oriented activities in formal institutions of the state when those activities aim to limit either (a) the extent to which state institutions implement the policy prerogatives of the ruling coalition or (b) the ruling coalition's effective control over state institutions themselves. In adopting a definition of opposition rooted in elite behavior, I focus on resources, decisions, and strategies: factors which the democratization literature has long identified as generative of elite-led political change (Bermeo, 1997; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986).

In addition, few studies have traced the origins of opposition. Existing theories of authoritarian politics tend to analyze the strategic interaction between incumbent autocrats and oppositional elites or parties (Lust-Okar, 2005). But without greater attention to the mechanisms that give rise to opposition in the first place, theorizing cannot credibly rule out the possibility that antecedent conditions and causal pathways that facilitate the emergence of opposition are themselves unrelated to outcomes in authoritarian elections. We thus need theorizing that links processes that may or may not generate opposition to authoritarian rule, on the one hand, and the variety of ways elites challenge incumbent autocrats in electoral and legislative arenas on the other. The explanation I develop draws from the ethnic coalition literature and focuses on how elites use symbolic ideological appeals to capture out-group minority voters and how this strategy incentivizes opposition in legislative institutions.

The electoral consequences of ethnic coalitions

Two problems shape the survival of incumbent autocrats: conflict *among* elites over governance and conflict *between* elites and the larger population over which they rule (Svolik, 2012). In ethnically divided societies, incumbents manage the first problem through the construction of ethnic coalitions. Scholars have long argued that autocrats build coalitions large enough to sustain their survival (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). Coalitions limit conflict, make social interaction possible on a larger scale, and facilitate shared control over the rent-generating activities of the state (North, Wallis, & Weingast, 2009). The durable, self-reinforcing features of coalitions raise the costs of elite defection by encouraging norms of loyalty and making elite commitments to honor agreements more credible (Pepinsky, 2009). In ethnically divided societies, elite members of ethnic groups comprise the raw material from which these coalitions are built.

Ethnic geography shapes the options available to incumbent autocrats as they construct coalitions (Chandra, 2004; Posner, 2005). Three expectations from the ethnic coalitions and ethnic politics literatures shape the assumptions on which my theoretical framework is built. First, incumbent autocrats opt for oversized multiethnic coalitions that share as many ethnic markers as possible as a result of "elite uncertainty about future support by their coethnic supporters and coalition partners" (Bormann, 2019, p. 484). Existing research describes ethnic groups included in these coalitions as "dominant groups" (Wimmer, 2004; Kaufmann & Haklai, 2008; Smith, 1986). Often, the distinction between "dominant" and "minority" groups draws on national-level distributions of ethnicity to distinguish ethnic majority regimes, such as Indonesia and Turkey, and ethnic minority regimes, such as Bahrain and Syria (Bormann, 2019; Beiser-McGrath & Metternich, 2020; Bormann, 2017). But in many cases, variation in the behavior of ethnic elites is better explained by "sub-ethnic units' inclusion or exclusion from networks of access" to the state (Mazur, 2019, p. 996). I modify the expectation that autocrats frequently opt for oversized coalitions by drawing attention to the patterning of these groups at the local, rather than national, level. In other words, elections provide incumbent autocrats with opportunities to develop coalitions that include locally dominant ethnic groups. Autocrats incorporate different ethnic elites at the local level, but this incorporation often crosses distinct group boundaries at the national level.

Second, when incumbents use elections to develop coalition partners from larger, dominant groups, ethnic coalitions exclude minority group elites from access to the state. Minority group elites are thus doubly disadvantaged: without either the numbers to challenge dominant group elites in their districts or the privileges that accompany inclusion in ethnic coalitions, candidates representing these groups struggle to compete for votes. Existing work highlights the often violent consequences of this exclusion (Cederman, Wimmer, & Min, 2010; Wimmer, 2006; Roessler, 2016). Because electoral competition structures the political allocation of resources and rewards, such

as access to economic rents, government sinecures, and social services, minority elites are unable to use elections to provide resources to in-group members. This exclusion suggests that, in order to compete effectively, minority elites must attract the support of other minority out-group voters to remain electorally viable. This is exceedingly difficult: minority elites are often perceived as less credible and more likely to inadvertently trigger perceptions of intergroup competition (Arriola et al., 2020; Ferree, 2010).

Third, where elections resemble ethnic head counts or racial censuses, the durability of ethnic coalitions that rely on locally dominant groups constrains the electoral options available to minority elites. Several factors make it easier for these minority elites to succeed in elections. Where group demography is legible and clear, cross-group agreements are more likely to emerge (Stroschein, 2011). Minority elites can appeal to local leaders who command moral authority, control resources, and shape the preferences of their voters to attract out-group support (Koter, 2013). When minority elites are perceived as electorally viable, direct contact may reduce an out-group candidate's credibility gap (Devasher, 2020). Over time, new parties, external patrons, institutional modifications, and valence issues can emerge to encourage cross-ethnic voting (Coakley, 2008; Gadjanova, 2021; Jenne, 2007).

Symbolic ideological appeals

So far I have argued that, consistent with the ethnic coalitions and ethnic politics literatures, autocrats seek locally dominant ethnic groups as coalition partners. These partners serve as an important reservoir of support in legislative institutions. But partnership with locally dominant groups results in the exclusion of minorities and the elites that represent them. At the district level, minority elites face considerable challenges in mobilizing an electorally viable bloc of voters—given that in-group members are smaller in number and excluded from access to the state. The literature above points to a variety of ways that minority elites can mobilize other, excluded minorities. But my argument relies on the strategic use of symbolic ideological appeals as a source of minority electoral success. In short, where minority elites are excluded from ethnic coalitions, the strategic use of symbolic ideological appeals can increase their appeal to other minority voters.

Ideologies are sets of "idea-units" packaged in reasonably coherent bundles that describe the nature of political life, how power is distributed, and the world-at-large (Gerring, 1997). Existing research draws a distinction between symbolic and operational ideology. Symbolic ideology refers to the affective attachments that structure an individual's connection to an ideology; operational ideology refers to beliefs about the role of government and policy that stem from an ideology (Edelman, 1964; Ellis & Stimson, 2009; Popp & Rudolph, 2011). Unlike operational ideology, symbolic ideology reflects sets of principles and ideas that invoke abstract worldviews but do not necessarily invoke concrete policies (Parkinson, 2021; Robison et al., 2021). I define symbolic ideological appeals as explicit statements that link the actors who use these appeals to some category of people that espouse generalized support for a particular ideology. These appeals consist of (1) a candidate that uses the appeals, (2) an association or disassociation, and (3) the targeted group's ideological attachments (Thau, 2019).[2]

Symbolic ideological appeals provide minority elites with a set of discursive resources that are particularly attractive to other minority voters in the electoral arena. Two factors help understand why minority elites turn to symbolic ideological appeals: the ability of symbolic ideological appeals to (1) articulate a vision of minority group interdependence and (2) blur seemingly impenetrable ethnic group boundaries. First, because minority groups are similarly—but not evenly—disadvantaged numerically, minority elites compete unsuccessfully in the electoral arena on their own. Interdependence occurs when group members share common goals and the actions of others affect group outcomes (Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Rabbie, Schot, & Visser, 1989). Positive interdependence is associated with more favorable out-group stereotypes and cooperative intergroup relations (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Fiske et al., 1999, 2002). Categorization and group boundaries are not themselves sufficient to explain in-group favoritism or out-group prejudice: "categories do not become in-groups/out-groups until some kind of perceived interdependence creates the belief that members of different categories will act for or against self-interest" (Flippen et al., 1996, p. 883). Symbolic ideological appeals articulate common goals that cross-group divisions, energizing minority groups to behave contrary to a simple cost-benefit calculation (Sanín & Wood, 2014).

Second, symbolic ideological appeals can modify group boundaries themselves. Andreas Wimmer describes this process as boundary blurring, or the intentional reduction of the salience of ethnicity as a principle of categorization or social organization (Wimmer, 2013, pp. 61–63). Group members can be induced to recategorize themselves as members of a "superordinate" group rather than separate groups, causing a reduction of prejudice, stereotyping,

[2] For example, in the United States, these appeals include the following: "support working class families" (liberal) or "secure the border" (conservative). In election campaigns in the Middle East and North Africa, these appeals include the following: "support the Islamization of laws" (Islamist) or "support for freedom of the press" (liberal).

and discrimination. These inducements can extend in-group favoritism to former out-group members "without requiring groups to forsake valued ethnic and racial identities" (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kafati, 2000, p. 1). Ideological appeals can resonate with voters, even in contexts where clientelism is common and identity is politically salient (Fossati et al., 2020; Pepinsky, Liddle, & Mujani, 2018).

If my argument about the utility of ideological appeals for minority candidates is correct, we should expect to see evidence consistent with the following hypothesis:

H1. Minority group candidates who use symbolic ideological appeals in elections are more likely to mobilize and capture the electoral support of out-group minority voters.

This theoretical expectation implies that minority candidates who use ideological appeals during elections will be better positioned to capture the support of out-group minority voters.

I next turn to the behaviors and activities of elites in legislative institutions. If legislators who use symbolic ideological appeals are more likely to secure the support of voters across different minority groups, I expect that they will be more likely to oppose government policy in the legislature once elected. When candidates use symbolic ideological appeals, they are not beholden to one particular ethnic group—even if they must rely, in part, on support from their ethnic group to win. This makes the threat of opposition attractive: ideological legislators cannot secure their reelection by providing their supporters with resources and rewards alone. This is the case for several reasons. First, these candidates use the universalistic claims embedded in symbolic ideological appeals to criticize forms of campaigning that rely on promises of in-group access. Second, many voters who vote on the basis of ideology do so with the expectation that the candidate they vote for will seek policy concessions from the government, even if these concessions are not clear during the campaign. Last, incumbent autocrats cannot easily satisfy these legislators. On the one hand, these legislators seek access to employment, educational, and other patronage-based perks that the government provides in order to reward voters from their tribe. On the other hand, out-group voters who are encouraged to vote for these legislators on the basis of ideology seek policy concessions from the government. Taken together, the logic of the argument implies that the regime will struggle to coopt legislators who run on ideology once they are elected. This is because different constituents who vote for these legislators are motivated by divergent concerns that the government cannot easily accommodate.

If my argument about the opposition-inducing features of symbolic ideological appeals is correct, we should expect to see evidence consistent with the following hypothesis:

H2. Once elected, candidates who use symbolic ideological appeals in elections are subsequently more likely to oppose the government in the legislature.

The second hypothesis implies that candidates who use symbolic ideological appeals are more likely to oppose the incumbent autocrat in the legislature—regardless of their dominant or minority status. Besides being more likely to oppose government policy in the legislature, if the argument I have laid out is correct, one additional pattern should be evident. If it is indeed the case that using ideological appeals provides legislators with a constituency-based incentive to oppose the government in the legislature, we should expect to see this effect regardless of the ideological appeals candidates use. In other words, ideological differentiation should not necessarily result in more or less opposition. Different ideological appeals—even if they attract different types of voters—should still incentivize legislators to oppose the government.

STUDY CONTEXT

Identity and electoral politics in Kuwait

The above hypotheses are tested in Kuwait, an oil-rich Arab Gulf constitutional monarchy that has held regular elections since independence. In 1976, the Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Salim Al-Sabah dissolved the KNA, a 50-member legislature elected by registered male citizens over the age of 21. When the emir died in 1977, he was replaced by his crown prince, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Soon after, Sheikh Jaber and the ruling family began consultations with various elites in anticipation of new elections and a reopening of the National Assembly.

Sheikh Jaber inherited an administrative and political system shaped by his predecessors and British planners. Since 1951, the ruling family implemented a modernist planning ideology that encouraged—and reproduced—unconstrained state power and an enfeebled civil society (Al-Nakib, 2016). The old Arab medina was demolished, and residents were relocated to new neighborhood units outside the city limits. These neighborhoods had distinct boundaries and were nested between a traffic grid that extended rings from the city center. Those urban-dwellers who had lived in the city (henceforth, *hadhar*) were moved into neighborhoods more closely adjacent to it. Bedouins

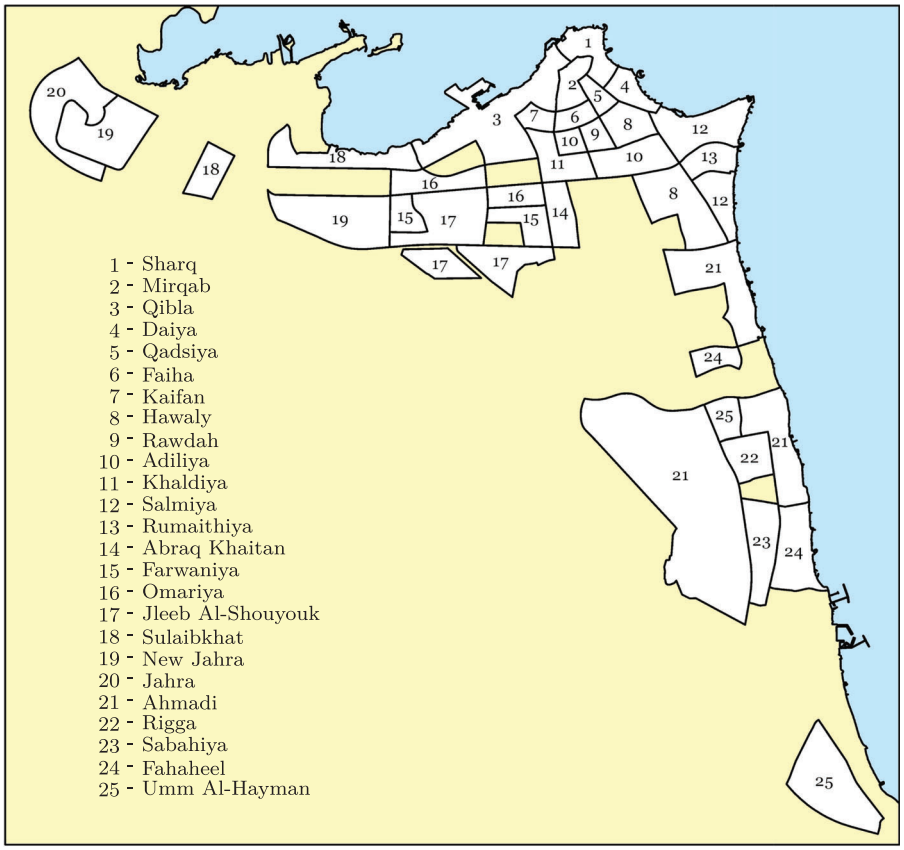

FIGURE 1 Electoral districts in Kuwait, 1981–2008. *Notes*: Figure 1 shows the name and number of each electoral district in Kuwait.

(henceforth, *badu*) that had previously lived in shantytowns outside the city were naturalized and settled into peripheral underdeveloped neighborhoods further away from the old city center. This social cleavage encouraged the ruling family to develop strong ties with communal elites in these new neighborhoods. Two divisions, in particular, shaped the categories of social difference made salient by this geographic segmentation of groups and the settlement of tribes. First, a religious cleavage divided citizens into members of one of two large sects (Sunni and Shia). Second, an origin cleavage divided citizens into members of one of several localized tribal, familial, and ethnosectarian groups. These groups included divisions among the recently sedenterized *badu* as well as prominent kin- and family-based networks among the *hadhar*.

On December 17, 1980, Sheikh Jaber issued Decree Law No. 99 of 1980 and called for elections. The law divided the country into 25 electoral districts: each comprised at least one neighborhood unit. The law also kept a nonproportional, plurality (block vote) electoral system in place. Each voter would have up to two votes to use in the two-member district in which he was registered. The new law consolidated the incorporation of the *badu* as an important source of support for the ruling family in the legislature. By isolating the *badu*, the ruling family would be able to better solicit their loyalty through continued sedentarization, social legislation, and direct material rewards (Crystal, 1990). These tribes constituted the dominant groups the regime intended to target as its partners in the National Assembly. The new law also divided the *hadhar* who, unlike the overwhelming majority of Sunni tribespeople, were segmented both by place of origin and sect. *Hadhar* families were distinguished primarily by their ties to Kuwait City in the pre-oil era: their ancestors worked as traders, sailors, fishermen, and pearl divers (Longva, 2006).

Figure 1 presents a map of the new electoral districts. The law hardened boundaries between these groups and amplified pre-oil social cleavages that segmented the population by sect and origin. In segmenting the population into smaller groups on the basis of these boundaries, the law ensured predictable patterns of mobilization on the basis of ethnic identity. In each electoral district, a dominant group had a plurality or majority of registered voters in the district. Although segmentation allowed the ruling family to deal with dominant groups in these districts in predictable ways, it also allowed each group some

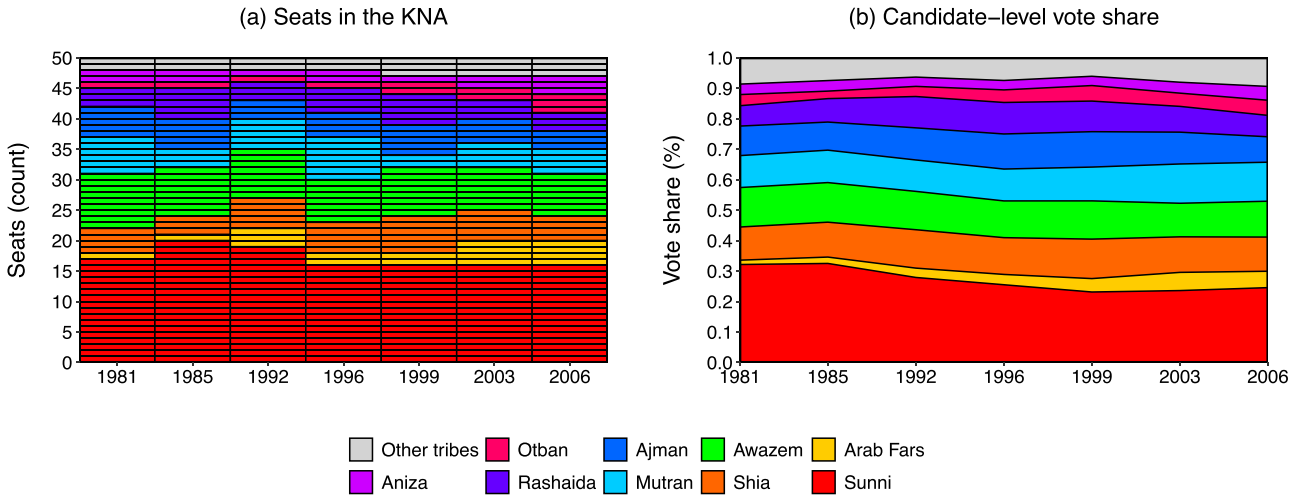

FIGURE 2 Ethnic representation in the National Assembly, 1981–2008. *Notes*: Figure 2 shows the number of seats each ethnic group won in each election (left) and the national-level share of votes each group won in each election (right).

level of representation at the national level. With few exceptions, national-level representation of each group remained balanced across subsequent elections. Figure 2 compares the distribution of seats in the KNA and group-level vote shares in elections across candidates representing these different groups from 1981 to 2008.

Symbolic ideological appeals in electoral campaigns

When candidates nominate themselves to run in Kuwaiti elections, they do so as nominal members of one of the ethnic groups described above. But many candidates also support a particular ideology—and use appeals that speak to these ideologies on the campaign trail. Candidates who espouse support for these ideologies do not run as representatives of these larger, transnational movements. Though parties are not officially banned, candidates do not organize themselves as members of party organizations. These larger ideological movements are best understood as currents, or trends. Most of these ideologies were introduced in Kuwait by elites who belonged to civic associations and clubs before independence. But in Kuwaiti elections, candidates nominate themselves to run in elections only as individuals: there is no political party law or other legislation regulating the activities of these movements. Figure 3 compares the distribution

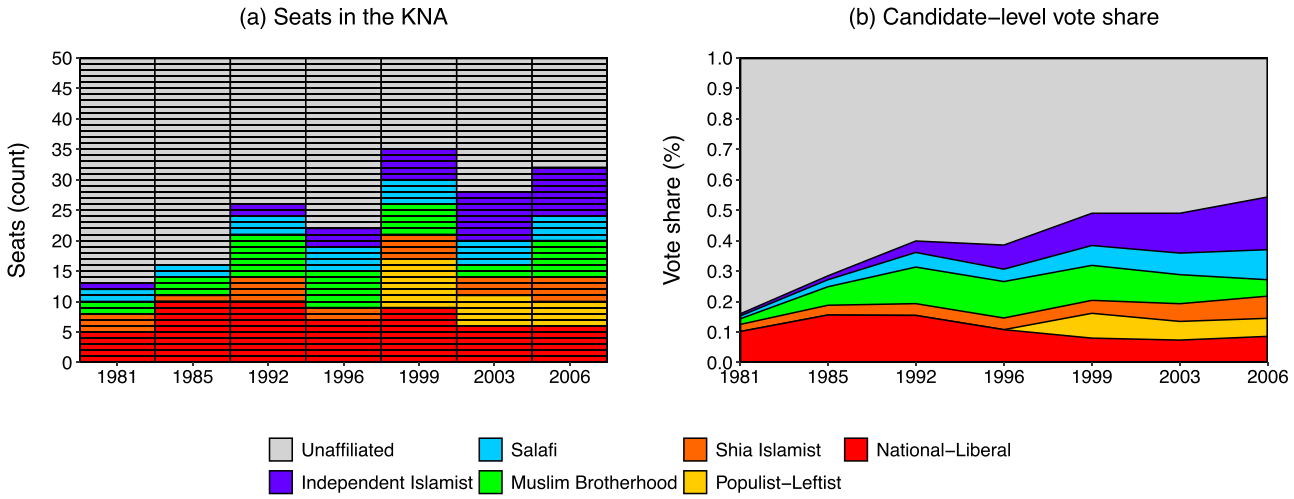

FIGURE 3 Ideological representation in the National Assembly, 1981–2008. *Notes*: Figure 3 shows the number of seats candidates self-identifying with ideological movements won in each election (left) and the national-level share of votes each ideological group won in each election (right).

of seats in the KNA and vote shares in elections across candidates who self-identified with these movements from 1981 to 2008. Sunni Islamists included the Kuwait branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis, and independent Islamists. National-liberals, Shia Islamists, and Populist-Leftists also ran in these elections.

After the 1981 election, candidates quickly caught on to the fact that, in order to compete for votes, they would need to "get votes from outside their tribe or group."[3] In 1981, 8% of candidates self-identified with one of these movements and used symbolic ideological appeals in subsequent campaigns. In 1985, 19% of candidates self-identified with one of these ideological movements. The number of candidates who chose to identify with these larger movements began to increase: in each of the four elections from 1996 to 2006, over a quarter of all candidates self-identified with an ideological movement. In practice, symbolic ideological appeals provided candidates with a set of narratives and discursive frames anchored in broader ideologies, such as liberalism and Islamism. In Kuwait, candidates connected these ideas to nonspecific commitments to reform and anti-corruption. But these appeals did not have clear political implications or policy goals—nor did they provide candidates with a set of clear programmatic initiatives that they could sell on the campaign trail.[4]

Symbolic ideology allowed candidates to present themselves as stewards of larger global causes. This presentation provided these political entrepreneurs with a set of rhetorical tools that helped convince voters that, if elected, they would forgo the particular interests of their tribe or group. A former legislator described how, as an independent Islamist, he was able to attract a larger number of votes: "This ideology is a solution to everything: genocide, poverty, social justice. Islam is not just for me: it is for everyone. No matter where I went, I spoke about this ideology on the campaign trail."[5] A former candidate reflecting on his failure to win in previous elections lamented the use of ideology in this way. "These were the good old days of quick fix ideologies that will save the world. They don't make sense. You want to fix the world and liberate Palestine in two weeks? Sorry. Not possible."[6]

Data

To test the above hypotheses, I draw on two original sources of data covering seven elections and legislative terms from 1981 to 2008 (Tavana, 2025). I focus on this time period because there is very little information about the social composition of electoral districts before 1981. In addition, after the 2006 election, the number of electoral districts was reduced to five and two separate changes modified the number of candidates each elector could vote for. To ease comparison across multiple elections held under the same electoral system, I have limited the scope of the analysis to this time period.

First, the data used to test H_1 comes from the Kuwait National Assembly Elections Dataset, an original dataset of candidate-level election results from 1963 to the present. I collected these data from numerous government and newspaper archives and contemporaneous accounts of elections written by academics, journalists, and others. Overall, a total of 1,969 candidates (1,283 unique candidates) ran in the seven elections from 1981 to 2008. Additional details and a description of the sources of these data can be found in Online Appendix A (pp. 2–6). I pair these candidate-level election results with detailed information about the social composition of each electoral district. These data describe what I refer to as "tribal censuses," or the number of registered voters belonging to each tribe or group in each electoral district. Since the mid-1980s, local newspapers began reporting the number of registered voters belonging to each tribe, sect, and group in each electoral district. These data allow for tests of the theory's implications regarding candidate strategies designed to attract out-group support over time. These sources were used to develop a panel dataset that includes the size of each tribe in each electoral district from 1981 to the present. A description of the tribal censuses can be found in Online Appendix B (pp. 7–10).

Second, features of the Kuwait case allow me to measure opposition at the legislator level. The Kuwaiti constitution permits the government to participate in the legislative process in unique ways: members of the Council of Ministers, or cabinet, serve as ex officio voting members of the National Assembly. Ministers include members of the ruling Al-Sabah family, elected legislators, and others outside government. The total number of ministers cannot exceed one-third the number of elected legislators, or 16. After appointing a prime minister, the emir approves the appointment of ministers and can relieve them of their posts. Ministers typically vote as a bloc, and their votes are recorded, permitting uncommon insight into the ruling family's preferences on legislation. In the sections below, I use this feature to develop more fine-grained measures of opposition. Data used to test H_2 come from two sources. First, with Erin York, I collected the Kuwait National Assembly Roll Call Votes dataset, an original dataset of all legislator votes on each piece of legislation passed by the KNA from 1963 to 2016.

[3] Interview with former candidate, January 12, 2022.
[4] Interview with former legislator, December 26, 2021; interview with former candidate, January 5, 2022.
[5] Interview with former legislator, December 8, 2021.
[6] Interview with former candidate, March 13, 2021.

Second, I scraped data from the National Assembly of Kuwait's Online Parliamentary Information System, which includes digitized.pdf files of all legislative recommendations and queries submitted by legislators since 1963. Further descriptions of these sources can be found in Online Appendix A (pp. 2–6). Overall, a total of 352 legislators (172 unique legislators) served in the seven legislative terms that spanned 1981 to 2008.

I also draw on interviews conducted as part of a larger project in which I interviewed over 150 current and former candidates and legislators, government officials, and members of the ruling family.[7] The interviews were conducted over 18 months of fieldwork between 2017 and 2022. I also use a variety of primary and secondary sources, including memoirs and monographs written by journalists, academics, and political leaders, newspaper articles, and government documents from the KNA.

Variables

The dependent variable of interest for H_1 is *Out-group support*, or the share of valid votes a candidate receives from (out-group) voters that do not belong to their tribe or group in an electoral district (d) in an election year (t). This can be expressed as a^*/b^*, where a^* denotes the number of out-group voters in the district who voted for the candidate and b^* denotes the number of all out-group registered voters in the district. For example, in an electoral district with 100 voters evenly split between two ethnic groups, a candidate who receives 10 votes from outside their tribe or group would have a level of out-group support equal to 20%. However, the absence of accurate information about both a^* and b^* is common in studies of ethnic voting. This makes it difficult to estimate candidate-level out-group support using aggregate electoral data.

Data from the tribal censuses allow me to estimate b^*. But even where detailed district-level information about b^* is available, a^* is always unknown: in the absence of survey data, we do not know how many of a candidate's voters belong to those outside their ethnic group. Borrowing from Chandra (2004) and other studies of electoral behavior, I develop a measure of candidate-level out-group support in the Kuwaiti context. Formally, I define out-group support for candidate i in electoral district d in election-year t as

$$\text{Out-group support}_{idt} = \frac{\text{Valid votes for candidate } i \text{ in district } d \text{ in election-year } t}{\text{Voters in district } d \text{ in election-year } t} - \frac{\text{Voters in candidate } i\text{'s tribe/group } in district d \text{ in election-year } t}{\text{Voters in district } d \text{ in election-year } t}.$$

In simple terms, I subtract the percentage of registered voters belonging to the candidate's tribe or group from the percentage of valid votes received by each candidate at the district-election-year level. For example, if a candidate receives 25% of the district's valid votes, but the candidate's tribe or group includes 20% of the registered voters in the district, the candidate's extent of out-group support is 5%.[8] Interviews with candidates suggest the measure captures the extent of a candidate's out-group support. For example, a candidate who ran in District 16 (Omariya) described his electoral base: "From my tribe, I had about 600 votes. The remaining 500 votes were from *hadhar* voters who supported me."[9] In this particular election, with 653 registered voters belonging to the candidate's tribe, the candidate received an out-group support score of 16.1% (using the measure described above). Assuming that the number of out-group voters (500) who voted for the candidate is accurate, the candidate's "true" score is 23.2%. Cases where interview subjects were able to provide reasonable estimates of out-group support validate the measure described above.

The key independent variable measures the interaction of group size and ideology. I operationalize each candidate's use of symbolic ideological appeals by creating the *Ideology* variable, which takes a value of one if the candidate self-identified with an ideological movement during the election. I qualitatively coded this variable using information documenting the names of candidates who self-identified with these movements. These documents come from newspaper

[7] Approval for this research was provided by the Toulouse School of Economics-Institute for Advanced Study Review Board for Ethical Standards (reference code 2021-11-003).

[8] There are limitations to this measurement of out-group support. First, though district-level turnout is high, we cannot assume that the composition of registered voters reflects the composition of voters. The measure assumes that the composition of valid votes reflects the composition of registered voters—consistent with other studies that use ecological inference techniques to estimate ethnic voting; see, for example, (Stojanović & Strijbis, 2019). It is plausible, though unlikely, that dominant group voters abstained from voting in ways that differed systematically from minority group voters. Second, absent more fine-grained historical survey data, we cannot know for certain that minority elites were capturing the support of other minority out-groups. This is unlikely, as more candidates tend to run, per seat, among each district's dominant groups; see Chandra (2004) and Strijbis and Kotnarowski (2015) for a more detailed discussion of these challenges.

[9] Interview with former legislator, January 31, 2022.

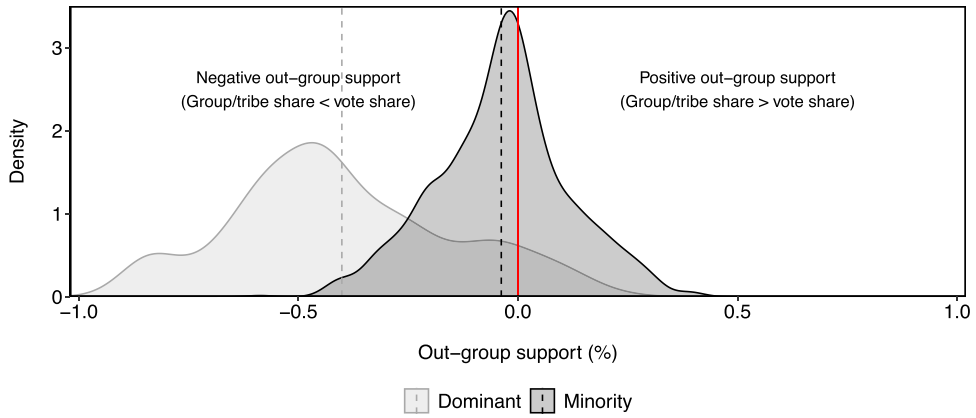

FIGURE 4 Out-group support: Dominant and minority candidates. *Notes*: Figure 4 plots the distribution of out-group support for both dominant (mean = −0.40, *SD* = 0.25) and minority (mean = −0.04, *SD* = 0.15) candidates.

articles, government documents, and contemporaneous accounts and analyses of elections written by academics, journalists, and others. This information is not difficult to obtain in Kuwait, as less than 300 candidates typically nominate themselves to run in each election. Because these affiliations were reported in the media—and confirmed by candidates themselves at the time and retrospectively—I assume that candidates who self-identified in this way during an election used symbolic ideological appeals while campaigning. Additional specifications break this binary variable down into the constituent ideologies described above. Using the tribal censuses, I operationalize group size by comparing the size of each candidate's tribe or group in each electoral district in each election-year. To do this, I create the *Minority* variable, which takes a value of one if the candidate's tribe or group is not the largest, numerically, at the district-year level. Online Appendix A (pp. 2–6) describes how these data were collected and coded in greater detail. Clear differences in patterns of out-group support among both dominant and minority candidates are presented in Figure 4. The figure presents preliminary evidence in support of the argument that minority candidates were better able to attract out-group support from other minority voters.

I include several variables based on sources of bias at the candidate level as controls. First, it could be that incumbency facilitates the capture of out-group support. I include a binary variable, *Incumbent*, that takes the value of one if the candidate was elected in the preceding election-year. The variable *Experience* takes the value of one if the candidate ran in any previous election. The variable *Previous candidate* takes the value of one if the candidate ran in the preceding election. I also include several time-variant variables that are assigned at the district level. It is likely the case that, when more candidates run overall, candidates are less likely to attract out-group support. *Total candidates* measures the total number of candidates running at the district-year level. Next, when more candidates run from the same group or tribe as the candidate, candidates are less likely to attract out-group support. *In-group candidates* measures the total number of candidates running from the same group as the candidate. Similarly, when multiple candidates run using the same type of ideological appeals, those candidates will be less likely to attract out-group support—as minority voters will likely split votes among them. *Ideological candidates* measures the total number of candidates who used the same ideological appeals as the candidate. Mechanically, minority candidates may be better positioned to obtain out-group support because they are numerically disadvantaged. To address this, *Largest group* controls for the size of the dominant group in the district. Last, when a larger number of voters in the district participate in the election, out-group support may be lower. *Turnout* measures the percentage of registered voters in the district who voted in the election. Table A1 in the Online Appendix reports summary statistics for the variables used to test H_1.

The dependent variables for *H*2 include four measures of legislative activity, each measured as count variables at the legislator-term level covering each elected legislator that served in the KNA from 1981 to 2008. *Opposition* measures the number of times the legislator voted against the government in all laws passed in a legislative term and *Opposition (budget)* restricts this count to budget laws. *Recommendations* measures the number of parliamentary recommendations submitted by the legislator. *Queries* measures the number of parliamentary queries submitted by the legislator. The key independent variable is an indicator of whether or not the legislator used symbolic ideological appeals in the preceding elec-

tion. Similar to *H*1, I operationalize ideology by creating the *Ideology* variable, which takes a value of one if the candidate used symbolic ideological appeals in the preceding election. I include a number of control variables that shape a legislator's willingness to oppose the government and are correlated with *Ideology*. These variables include the control variables described above: *Incumbent*, *Experience*, and *Previous candidate*. Because legislators can serve as ministers, I add the variable *Minister* which takes a value of one if the legislator was appointed to serve as a minister at any point during the legislative term. Last, political competition at the district level may shape subsequent legislator behavior. I include the variable *Margin of victory* which subtracts the percentage of valid votes received by the first loser in the district from the percentage of valid votes received by the legislator. Table A2 in the Online Appendix reports summary statistics for the variables used to test H_2.

Estimation

To test *H*1, I estimate pooled fixed effects regression models at the candidate-district-year level, where *i* indexes candidates, *d* indexes electoral districts, and *t* indexes election-years:

$$\text{Out-group support}_{idt} = \beta_1 \text{Ideology}_{idt} + \beta_2 \text{Minority}_{idt} + \beta_3 (\text{Ideology}_{idt} \times \text{Minority}_{idt}) + \text{X}'_{idt} + \alpha_d + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{idt}$$

The equation estimates the relationship between out-group support and two independent variables, *Ideology* and *Minority*. The coefficient β_1 represents the difference between the average level of out-group support for candidates who used symbolic ideological appeals and those who did not. The coefficient β_2 represents the difference between the average level of out-group support for candidates in a minority tribe or group and candidates in a majority tribe or group. I then introduce an interaction term to assess how a candidate's level of out-group support changes depending on whether or not a candidate represents a minority tribe or group and whether or not a candidate used ideological appeals. The coefficient β_3 represents the effect of ideology relative to the size of the candidate's group or tribe. X'_i is a vector of covariates for a given candidate *i*: these covariates vary across districts (*d*) and election-years (*t*). Finally, α_d represents electoral district fixed effects and δ_t represents election-year fixed effects. Electoral district fixed effects capture time-invariant characteristics unique to particular electoral districts. Election-year fixed effects capture shocks in particular elections that affect each candidate independent of their electoral district. This allows me to rule out alternative explanations based on factors invariant across electoral districts and election-years. In the following section, I include a reduced model with the independent variables of interest only (*Minority* and *Ideology*), a model that includes their interaction, a model that adds the above covariates, and models that include district fixed effects, election-year fixed effects, and both district and election-year fixed effects. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity-robust.

Given the event count nature of the data, for *H*2, I estimate pooled negative binomial models at the legislator-district-year level. In doing so, I allow for a conditional variance in these count measures that exceeds their conditional means, relaxing the mean-variance equality assumption underlying traditional Poisson estimation. Observed values of these counts lend support to this decision: variance for each measure far exceeds their corresponding means. Similar to *H*1, I estimate models where *i* indexes legislators, *d* indexes electoral districts, and *t* indexes election-years:

$$\text{Y}_{idt} = \beta_1 \text{Ideology}_{idt} + \text{X}'_{idt} + \alpha_d + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{idt}$$

The equation estimates the relationship between *Ideology* and the following dependent variables of interest (the four distinct forms of legislative activity described above): *Opposition*, *Opposition (budget)*, *Recommendations*, and *Queries*. The coefficient β_1 represents the difference in legislative activity for legislators who used symbolic ideological appeals in the preceding election and those who did not. Because a small number of legislators enter and exit the legislature at different times, I include an offset variable that approximates each legislator's length of membership in a given legislature. Additional variables included in these models are otherwise identical to those used to test *H*1.

ANALYSIS

How symbolic ideological appeals attract out-group support

Table 1 presents the results for *H*1. The first two columns include reduced models that estimate only the effect of the *Minority* and *Ideology*, and their interaction, on *Out-group support*. The third column includes a vector of covariates that, as described above, control for a variety of individual- and district-level confounders. The fourth column includes district-level fixed effects, the fifth column includes election-year fixed effects, and the sixth column includes both. Consistent with *H*1, the coefficients on *Minority*, *Ideology*, and their interaction are positive and statistically significant across all specifications. When candidates use symbolic ideological

TABLE 1 Effect of ideology and minority status on out-group support.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Ideology	0.085**	0.052**	0.098**	0.097**	0.091**	0.096**
	(0.012)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Minority	0.371**	0.354**	0.176**	0.174**	0.175**	0.173**
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Ideology × Minority		0.081**	0.051**	0.054**	0.057**	0.054**
		(0.022)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Incumbent			0.080**	0.079**	0.079**	0.078**
			(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.010)
Experience			0.011**	0.010**	0.012**	0.010**
			(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Previous candidate			0.038**	0.040**	0.038**	0.040**
			(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Total candidates			0.005**	0.005**	0.005**	0.004**
			(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
In-group candidates			−0.024**	−0.027**	−0.024**	−0.027**
			(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Ideological candidates			−0.026**	−0.021*	−0.023*	−0.020*
			(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Largest group (%)			−0.495**	−0.488**	−0.479**	−0.472**
			(0.022)	(0.079)	(0.022)	(0.079)
Turnout			0.095*	0.202**	−0.276**	−0.011
			(0.043)	(0.041)	(0.070)	(0.076)
Constant	−0.423**	−0.415**	−0.141**			
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.035)			
Controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
District FE				✓		✓
Election-year FE					✓	✓
Adjusted R^2	0.45	0.45	0.75	0.78	0.76	0.78
Observations	1,968	1,968	1,968	1,968	1,968	1,968

Notes: Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses.
Abbreviation: FE, fixed effects.
$^{\dagger}p < 0.10$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

appeals, they are more likely to attract out-group voters. Similarly, minority candidates are more likely to attract out-group voters. As shown in Figure 4 above, minority candidates in general have an easier time attracting voters outside their tribe or group. But as *H*1 predicts, the effect of ideology is greater for minority candidates. Across all specifications, the interaction of *Minority* and *Ideology* is positive and statistically significant.

These results are robust to the inclusion of several covariates. Individual-level variables including *Incumbency*, *Experience*, and *Previous experience* each increase the likelihood that a candidate will capture voters from outside their group. In contrast, when additional in-group candidates (*In-group candidates*) and candidates using similar ideological appeals (*Ideological candidates*) also run, competition constrains the ability of candidates to attract out-group support. As expected, when the district's dominant group is larger, candidates are less likely to capture out-group voters—because the pool of available minority voters is smaller.

Because interaction effects are difficult to interpret, Figure 5 presents linear combinations of the *Minority* and *Ideology* coefficients, and their interaction, from Table 1 above. The first panel plots the *Ideology* coefficient (β_1) from column 4 (square), column 5 (triangle), and column (circle) in Table 1. The second panel plots the *Minority* coefficient (β_2). The third panel plots the linear combination of the *Ideology*, *Minor-*

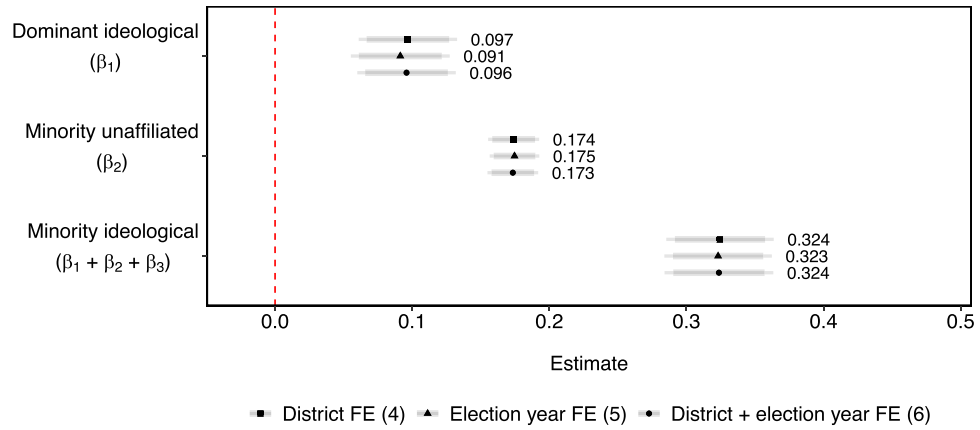

FIGURE 5 Interaction effect of ideology and minority on out-group support. *Notes*: Figure 5 plots linear combinations of coefficients (black dots) from column 4 (district fixed effects), column 5 (election-year fixed effects), and 6 (district and election-year fixed effects) in Table 1. Thick (90%) and thin (95%) gray bars represent confidence intervals. All effects are significant at $p < 0.01$.

ity, and *Minority* × *Ideology* coefficients ($\beta_1+\beta_2+\beta_3$). Taken together, these results explain the variation presented in Figure 4 above. When minority candidates representing minority tribes or groups use ideological appeals, they are able to nearly double their extent of out-group support in the district.

Evidence from candidates highlights the strategic efficacy of symbolic ideological appeals. Two mechanisms are particularly important and are repeated often by minority candidates who campaigned in this way. First, when minority candidates use symbolic ideological appeals, they are able to credibly signal that other minority out-group voters share a common goal in the candidate's electoral success. These appeals facilitated a growing sense of minority group interdependence. Candidates who used ideological appeals in these elections often reflected on how different their campaigns were from those of their rivals. "When you run as an Islamist," one former legislator told me, "you signal a particular vision. A symbolic model of cooperation that encourages people to put aside their differences. In every rally I held, I drew attention to this vision so that other tribes knew I was not focused solely on my own tribe."[10] Candidates deploy these appeals in an effort to unite other minority voters—despite their differences. The negative and statistically significant coefficient for *Largest group* in Table 1 indicates this, as well: when dominant group voters comprise a larger share of the district's voters, candidates are less likely to attract out-group support.

Symbolic ideological appeals also blur group boundaries. For example, across three elections from 1981 to 1992, in District 23 (Sabahiya), the dominant Awazem tribe's candidates won all six of the seats contested in the district. But before the 1996 election, elites from each minority tribe in the district met to discuss how they could break the Awazem tribe's hold on the district. Once each minority tribe selected a candidate, they would have their own election to limit the pool down to two candidates. Muhammad Al-Olayim, a member of the much smaller Mutran tribe, succeeded in the election—and later went on to win in the general election, receiving more votes than either Awazem candidate. A participant in the popular gathering election described how Al-Olayim's use of ideological appeals as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood ensured his victory. Voters believed that Al-Olayim would be better positioned to support the interests and needs of all voters in the district.[11] Though pre-electoral coordination is not common in Kuwait, the example of District 23 (Sabahiya) indicates that symbolic ideological appeals can help candidates blur group boundaries in an effort to convince out-group voters to support their campaigns.

A similar pattern is evident in District 22 (Rigga): in five elections from 1981 to 1999, the dominant Ajman tribe's candidates won eight of the ten seats contested in the district. For nearly two decades, the Ajman legislators supported the government in the KNA in exchange for the provision of clientelist benefits that went primarily to members of the tribe. After the 1999 election, it was clear that the Ajman were refusing "to leave room for any other tribe."[12] In 2003, two independent Islamists from smaller tribes, Jassim Al-Kandari and Abdullah Akash, ran against the Ajman. "Ideology is not about belief. It's about trust—and this had a huge effect," one candidate told me. "From many tribes, we became one—and this made it clear to the smaller tribes that we would do things differently."[13] In 2003, both independent

[10] Interview with former legislator, December 20, 2021.

[11] Interview with former legislator, January 10, 2022.
[12] Interview with former legislator, December 26, 2021.
[13] Interview with former legislator, December 26, 2021.

Islamist candidates defeated the Ajman candidates. Though they did not formally endorse each other in the election, the election changed how voters understood competition in the district: Islamist candidates were competing against pro-government Ajman candidates who cared only for their tribe. In both districts, symbolic ideological appeals blurred the boundaries separating minority groups. This blurring permitted candidates who used these appeals to win by undermining the salience of identity as a mobilizing force in the election itself.

Ideology inside the Kuwait National Assembly

Once in the legislature, legislators who use ideological appeals while campaigning should be more likely to engage in forms of oppositional activity in the legislature. Table 2 presents the main results for *H*2. The dependent variable in columns 1 and 2 is a count variable indicating the number of times a legislator voted against the government (*Opposition*). *Opposition (budget)* restricts this count to budget laws in columns 3 and 4. The dependent variables for columns 5–8 are count variables, indicating the number of recommendations (*Recommendations*) and queries (*Queries*) submitted by the legislator. Columns 1, 3, 5, and 7 present results from the full specifications with a binary variable for *Ideology*, including district and election-year fixed effects. Columns 2, 4, 6, and 8 present results from the full specifications with a categorical variable for *Ideology*, where unaffiliated legislators are the reference category, including district and election-year fixed effects. For each dependent variable, additional specifications are printed in Tables A4–A7 in Online Appendix C (pp. 11–12).

Consistent with *H*2, the coefficients for *Ideology* in each model are positive and statistically significant across all specifications. The coefficient in these models indicates the difference in the log of the expected count of the dependent variable between legislators who used symbolic ideological appeals in the preceding election and unaffiliated legislators who did not. Legislators who used ideological appeals were more than twice as likely to oppose the government across all laws and more than three times as likely to oppose the government across all budget laws. Similarly, these legislators submitted 4% more recommendations and 75% more queries than their unaffiliated counterparts.

Columns 2, 4, 6, and 8 disaggregate *Ideology* and examine patterns across legislators who self-identified with each ideological movement. Across opposition to all laws and budget laws, the findings are consistent. Though there is heterogeneity in the submission of recommendations and queries across these groups, the overall pattern remains the same. With few exceptions, "ideological" legislators were more likely to submit recommendations and queries. Figure 6 presents exponentiated coefficients from columns 2, 4, 6, and 8. The first panel plots the disaggregated *Ideology* coefficients from column 2, the second panel from column 4, the third panel from column 6, and the fourth panel from column 8. Taken together, these results explain the pattern predicted by *H*2: once elected, candidates who used symbolic ideological appeals in the preceding election were more likely to oppose the government.[14]

Once elected, why are "ideological" legislators more likely to oppose the government? Legislators who use these appeals describe how they represent voters with often competing interests: voters from their tribe or group who rely on services and material rewards, and ideological voters who find these offers less attractive. One former pro-government, dominant group legislator criticized the use of symbolic ideological appeals in his district. The use of symbolic ideological appeals "hijacks the tribe and puts it in service of some other cause." He continued crudely: "It's like drinking milk from two different breasts. Do not act like you are part of the tribe if your intention is to help voters from outside your tribe."[15] Another legislator explained: "Voters in my group want services or access to government employment. They don't care what I do in the legislature. One day, a voter asked me to go with him to a ministry because he needed help. I said, 'I won't go with you because I just submitted a vote of no confidence against that minister!' He replied: 'Am I voting for you to submit votes of no confidence or am I voting for you to get what I need?"'[16] Taken together, evidence from former legislators suggests an electoral connection between out-group support and oppositional activity in the legislature.

ROBUSTNESS TESTS

To increase confidence in the above results, I conduct a series of robustness tests: full results are included in Online Appendix C (pp. 11–20). First, to address within-subject dependence, I replicate Tables 1 and 2 and cluster standard errors at the individual candidate and legislator level for *H*1 and *H*2, respectively. The statistical significance of the above tests a robust to this concern (Tables A9 and A10 in Online Appendix C, pp. 14–15).

[14] I also consider the argument—a corollary to *H*2—that minority legislators who used symbolic ideological appeals in the preceding election were more likely to oppose the government. Table A8 in Online Appendix C (p. 13) replicates columns 1, 3, 5, and 7 in 2 and adds an interaction term that explores the behavior of these legislators. This test is an extension of *H*2 and findings from this analysis provide additional evidence in support of the argument.
[15] Interview with former legislator, January 13, 2022.
[16] Interview with former legislator, February 1, 2022.

TABLE 2 Effect of ideology on legislative opposition.

	Opposition		Opposition (budget)		Recommendations		Queries	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Ideology	0.918**		1.160**		0.040		0.561**	
	(0.113)		(0.158)		(0.107)		(0.119)	
Independent Islamist		0.632**		1.037**		0.347†		0.477*
		(0.212)		(0.307)		(0.199)		(0.235)
Salafi		0.758**		1.076**		0.647**		1.112**
		(0.190)		(0.302)		(0.207)		(0.203)
Muslim Brotherhood		0.691**		0.882**		0.024		0.539**
		(0.163)		(0.210)		(0.173)		(0.176)
Shia Islamist		1.206**		1.199**		0.625†		1.005**
		(0.220)		(0.253)		(0.330)		(0.364)
Populist-Leftist		1.630**		2.381**		−0.125		0.760**
		(0.244)		(0.367)		(0.259)		(0.232)
National−Liberal		0.781**		0.840**		−0.431**		0.212
		(0.174)		(0.237)		(0.162)		(0.168)
Incumbent	−0.043	−0.113	−0.126	−0.269	−0.294*	−0.294*	−0.256*	−0.274*
	(0.131)	(0.130)	(0.183)	(0.190)	(0.123)	(0.123)	(0.127)	(0.126)
Experience	0.036	0.011	0.063	0.033	−0.175**	−0.147**	−0.078*	−0.065†
	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.053)	(0.055)	(0.036)	(0.041)	(0.034)	(0.037)
Previous candidate	0.126	0.182	0.184	0.302	0.303†	0.284†	0.233	0.207
	(0.161)	(0.161)	(0.243)	(0.242)	(0.166)	(0.163)	(0.164)	(0.163)
Minister	−1.624**	−1.536**	−1.801**	−1.743**	−1.275**	−1.367**	−1.337**	−1.406**
	(0.296)	(0.299)	(0.428)	(0.437)	(0.288)	(0.279)	(0.287)	(0.268)
Margin of victory	−0.592	−0.586	−0.536	−0.608	0.680	0.770	0.604	0.741
	(0.500)	(0.481)	(0.660)	(0.667)	(0.502)	(0.469)	(0.564)	(0.581)
Constant	1.585**	1.663**	1.065**	1.134**	1.596**	1.740**	1.283**	1.341**
	(0.141)	(0.156)	(0.142)	(0.155)	(0.131)	(0.151)	(0.107)	(0.113)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Term FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	352	352	352	352	352	352	352	352

Notes: Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses.
Abbreviation: FE, fixed effects.
† $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Next, I assess the impact of unobserved cofounders. To do this, I rely on a series of sensitivity analyses that evaluate the impact omitted variables have on the results, permitting an investigation of the robustness of the above findings to unobserved confounding. The approach I adopt uses worst-case scenarios to evaluate the effect of confounders on point estimates and tests for statistical significance. The strength of these confounders can be benchmarked against control variables. I use Model 3 in Table 1 and the three candidate controls (*Incumbent*, *Experience*, and *Previous candidate*) to benchmark the effect of confounding.

The sensitivity analysis for the interaction of *Ideology* and *Minority* indicates that a potential confounder that would explain 7.0% of the residual variance of both the interaction term and the dependent variable would be strong enough to bring the point estimate of the interaction to zero (Table A11 in Online Appendix C, p. 16). When benchmarked against observed control variables, a confounder three times the strength of each of these controls would not be sufficient to bring the point estimate of the interaction term to zero. Additional results of this analysis can be found in Figure A9 in Online

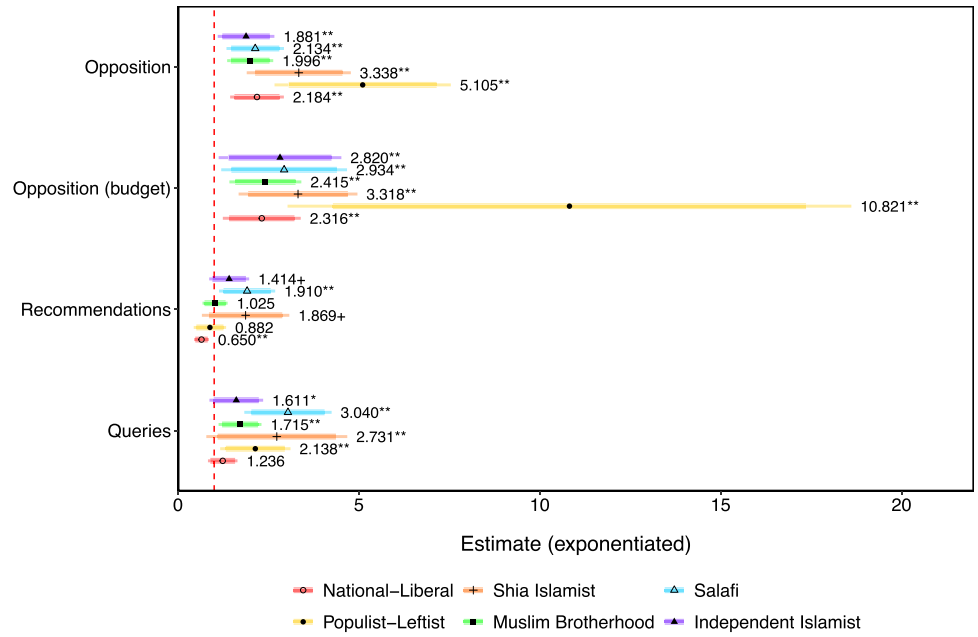

FIGURE 6 Effect of ideology (disaggregated) on legislative activity. *Notes*: Figure 6 plots exponentiated coefficients (shapes) from columns 2, 4, 6, and 8 in Table 2. Thick (90%) and thin (95%) bars represent confidence intervals.
$^{\dagger}p < 0.10$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

Appendix C (p. 16). Overall, the estimate appears robust to potential confounders.

I also use a more conservative measure of each candidate's vote share to construct *Out-group support*. Each voter selected up to two candidates in each of the seven elections analyzed in the above analysis. Measuring vote share as the number of valid votes for each candidate divided by the number of registered voters could generate measures of vote share that are distorted in unpredictable ways (Katz, 2003). To adjust for this, I use the Swiss "fictional voter" method to equalize the unequal contribution of each candidate's votes to the district's total valid votes (Mustillo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2018). Table A12 in Online Appendix C (p. 17) replicates the analysis in Table 1 using this dependent variable.

Next, I consider the alternative explanation described above: that minority candidates are better able mechanically to capture out-group support because they have a larger pool of voters to attract and a smaller pool of voters from their own tribe or group. If this is correct, we should expect to see a strong relationship between the absolute size of the candidate's group and out-group support. I substitute *Minority* with a continuous variable measuring the size of the candidate's group in the district. The effect of the interaction of this variable and *Ideology* is smaller and statistically indistinguishable from zero, even after controlling for the size of the largest group (*Largest group*) in the district. I interpret this as evidence that candidates representing minority groups that are numerically larger are not better able to secure out-group support—even after controlling for the size of the largest group in the district—than similar minority candidates representing smaller groups. Table A13 in Online Appendix C (p. 18) prints results replicating Table 1 with this independent variable.

Last, I turn to the argument that specific election-years, districts, or groups may drive the results in Table 1. I partition the data into several subsets, sequentially removing one election-year from the analysis, then one district, and finally, one ethnic group. Figure A10 in Online Appendix C (p. 19) presents a visualization of the *Minority* × *Ideology* interaction term from each of these partitioned datasets. To present additional evidence that the findings in Table 1 are not being driven by specific groups, I regress *Ideology* on a categorical variable indicating the name of the group to which each candidate belongs in Table A14 in Online Appendix C (p. 20). Even after the inclusion of fixed effects specified in the test for *H*1 above, these coefficients are statistically indistinguishable from zero with one exception. A related concern stems from temporal changes to the social composition of districts. If districts change over time, the effect could be due to changes either in the relative number of dominant or minority registered voters in the district. In Online Appendix B (pp. 7–10), I show that the size of each group in each district did not change across elections.

CONCLUSION

Many authoritarian regimes hold competitive elections—but these elections have given rise to powerful oppositions that subvert the autocrat's policy agenda, engage in disruptive behavior in state institutions, and agitate for political change. This article has analyzed elite behavior in Kuwait, where the strategic use of symbolic ideological appeals gave rise over time to one of the region's most powerful oppositions. Findings support the argument that oppositions are not always created or effectively managed by incumbent autocrats. Rather, oppositions can emerge endogenously from repeated elections.

The theory and evidence presented above contribute to the literature on authoritarian politics by looking beyond elections as a strategy of control. While mechanisms of control are evident in patterns of cooptation in authoritarian institutions, existing explanations cannot explain significant variation in opposition success. The argument above differs from previous studies by drawing attention to the way individual elites mobilize voters and how divergent electoral strategies result in different patterns of legislative contestation. The argument also advances the literature on ethnic politics. While most studies show that ethnic coalitions are durable and self-reinforcing, I show how under certain conditions, these coalitions can unravel. Existing arguments focus on how candidates rely on information, resources and clientelism, and in-group favoritism to mobilize voters (Arriola, 2013; Birnir, 2007; Conroy-Krutz, 2013; Rabushka & Shepsle, 1974). In contrast, I show how candidates can use symbolic ideological appeals to blur ethnic boundaries and credibly capture out-group voters.

The evidence comes from an authoritarian regime that permits competitive elections and implements policy through a legislature with law-making power. But the argument that oppositions are endogenous to elections likely applies to other contexts and time periods. Figure 7 provides additional evidence from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Coppedge et al., 2021). The left panel shows how opposition has increased in all authoritarian regimes from 1980 to 2020. Consistent with the evidence presented above, opposition in Kuwait increased over this time period. Other autocracies have experienced a similar expansion of opposition over time. The remaining five Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which did not hold elections during this time period, did not experience a similar expansion of opposition. A counterfactual case where Kuwait—like peer countries in the GCC—did not hold regular elections is not difficult to imagine.

Temporal variation in the size of opposition suggests the plausible endogeneity of opposition to elections, as well. The right panel of Figure 7 provides some counterfactual evidence. Since the onset of the third wave, opposition has expanded in authoritarian regimes that hold direct legislative elections—and contracted in those that do not. There are several plausible alternative explanations for this empirical pattern. But the pattern raises comparative questions about the generative effect of elections on the expansion of opposition. Dictators may use elections to mitigate elite conflict to stay in power. But even if these mechanisms do not facilitate regime transitions or democratization, they may strengthen opposition.

Why were symbolic ideological appeals used so effectively in the Kuwaiti case and how far can the above argument travel? Beyond Kuwait, the scope of the argument relies on three conditions: the salience of ethnic identity, the law-making power of authoritarian legislatures, and the mobilizing potential of ideology. While these first two conditions are common in other authoritarian regimes, elite incentives to move away from ethnic mobilization are less common. In Kuwait, ideological movements predated the onset of mass politics in the 1980s. These ideological movements held broad, transnational appeal—and were popular throughout the region. Though the ruling family occasionally offered policy concessions demanded by these legislators, at no point did the regime offer its own ideological alternative. These features of the case should encourage future studies to explore whether these mechanisms work beyond authoritarian regimes that do not explicitly espouse a "dominant ideology" (Linz, 2000; Wahman, 2011).

Theories of authoritarian politics center on the strategic interaction between incumbent autocrats and oppositional elites, movements, and parties. These theories conceive of actors as ontologically and temporally prior to these strategic interactions. One implication of the theory of endogenous opposition is that these strategic interactions can shape the preferences and options of actors in unexpected ways. The role of timing, sequencing, and endogeneity in generating feedback loops is an important focus of comparative historical analysis. Theories of authoritarian politics may benefit from greater attention to how the preferences of incumbent autocrats and oppositional elites change *because of* the strategic interactions central to these theories (Falleti & Riofrancos, 2018; Pierson, 1993).

This article's findings imply that symbolic ideological appeals merit greater attention in comparative politics. Existing scholarship points to an important distinction between clientelist, programmatic, and charismatic appeals. These approaches tend not to distinguish ideological and party-based programmatic appeals: "Ideology tends to be thus more a quality of parties than of individuals" (Kitschelt, 2000, p. 848).

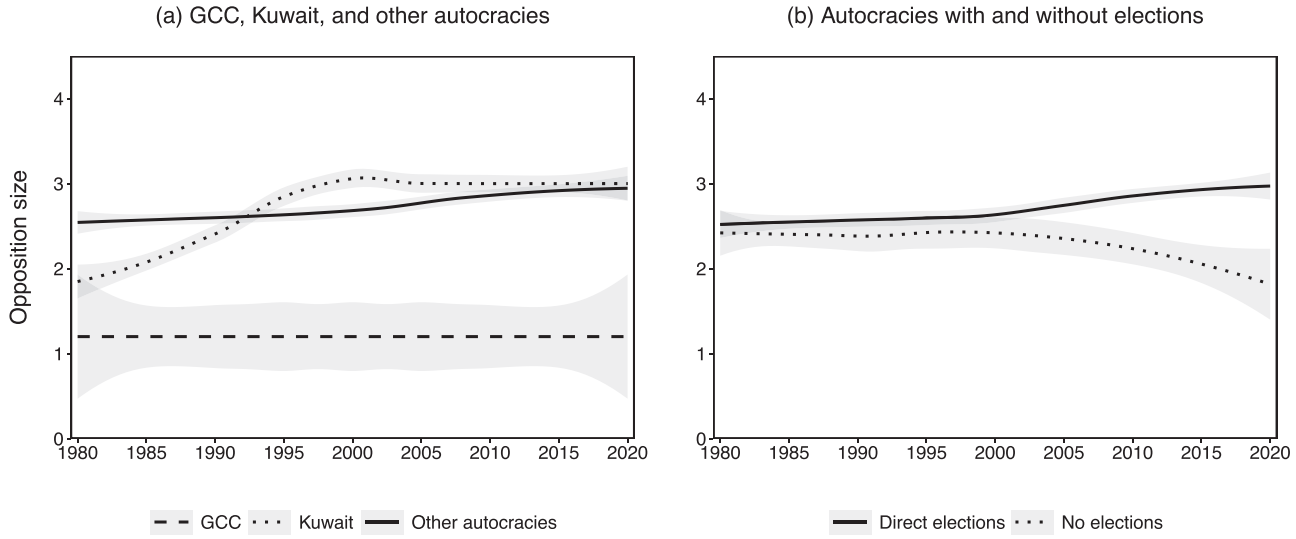

FIGURE 7 Elections and opposition size in authoritarian regimes, 1980–2020. GCC, Gulf Cooperation Council. *Notes*: Figure 7 plots the size of opposition in the GCC, Kuwait, and other autocracies (left) and autocracies with and without direct legislative elections (right) over time.

But in many contexts, party organizations are weak or nonexistent and ideological appeals do not necessarily connote investment in programmatic conflict resolution, party-based organizational infrastructure, or public goods. Future research should expand on the conditions that encourage the use of symbolic ideological appeals and their promotion of different linkage mechanisms.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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