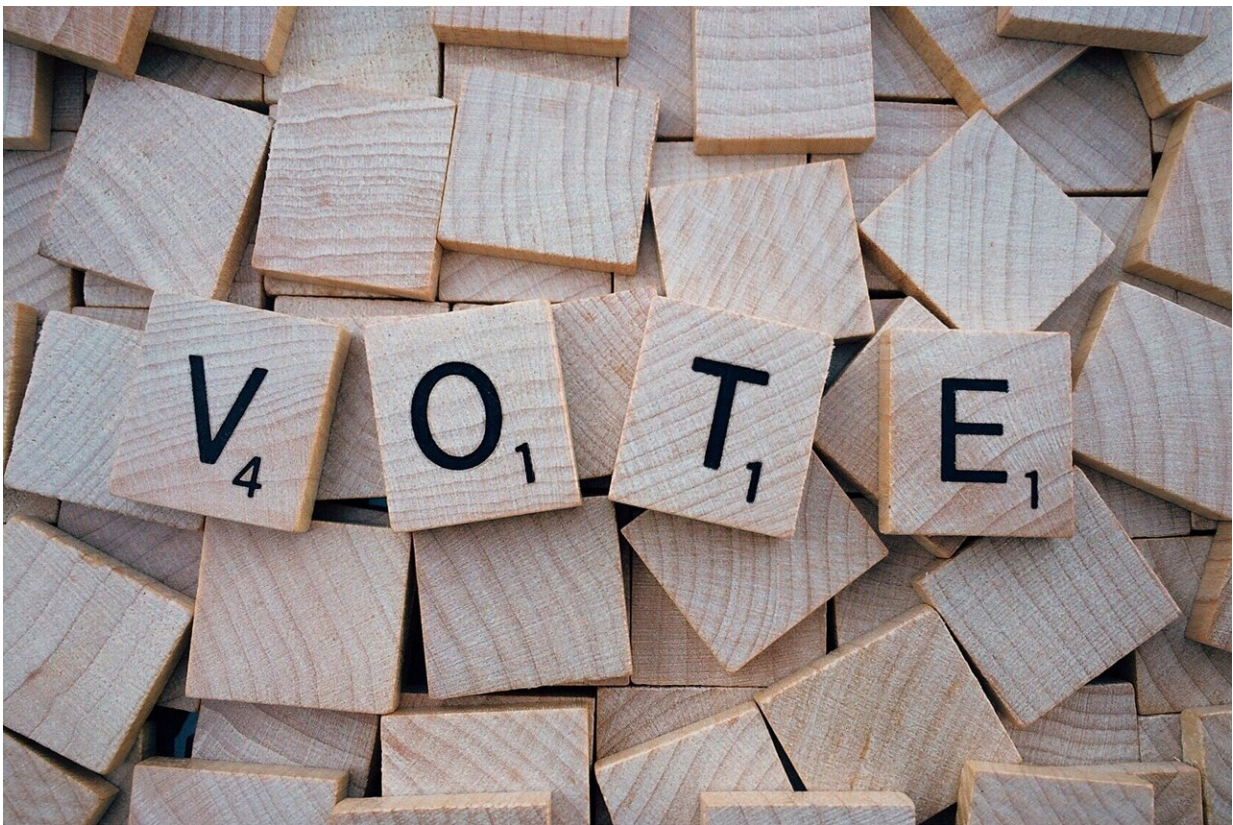


# The influence of voting advice web tools is limited during elections with authoritarian candidates, study shows

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The influence of online vote advice tools designed to help voters discover more about candidates is limited when elections are affected by

authoritarianism, a recent study shows.

Voting advice applications offer voters nonpartisan information about political parties, [candidates](#), and policy issues.

The research shows they could be an alternative source of information for those interested in learning about politics in democracies, but their use would be limited in authoritarian settings, particularly in the longer term.

In the short-term, and during highly competitive elections with tiny winning margins for candidates challenging the authoritarian incumbents, voting advice applications might still carry credible power to mobilize support behind challengers.

The [study](#), published in the journal *Electoral Studies*, was carried out by Simge Andi and Susan Banducci from the University of Exeter and Ali Çarkoğlu from Koç University.

The researchers carried out a randomized experiment to evaluate the effects of a voting advice application on voter attitudes and choices in Turkey, combined with a survey conducted before and after the 2019 local elections in Istanbul.

Researchers found the voting advice application influenced candidate choice, mainly among centrist voters. However, these effects were short-term and dissipate within two months.

Dr. Andi said, "Our findings demonstrate voting advice applications affect the candidates for which citizens would like to vote in local elections in competitive authoritarian regimes. They have short-term effects on the likelihood of voting for competing candidates.

"Voting advice applications can be practical tools for local election campaigns in countries experiencing democratic backsliding, but their effects are relatively small and short-lived. But in authoritarian contexts where the media is heavily censored and [social media](#) easily manipulated with state-led disinformation, VAAs could also be under state control in the long run."

During the election, in Istanbul, held in the city on March 31, 2019, the opposition alliance candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu won against the incumbent conservative alliance candidate, ex-prime minister Binali Yıldırım. This win effectively ended the 34-year, pro-Islamist party control of the Greater City mayorship in Istanbul. However, the Supreme Election Council (Yüksek Seçim Kurulu, YSK) annulled the result because of alleged irregularities in the [election](#) procedures. The re-run resulted in a larger margin of victory for İmamoğlu.

The VAA provided information on the positions of the two leading candidates and six [political parties](#) on 20 issues, including traffic, urban transformation, and gentrification or local investments in culture and sportive activities. Nine focused on national issues such as the Kurdish conflict, principles of economic policy, and foreign policy.

Half of the participants were randomly given access to the VAA designed by academics, which showed them where they stood on a political map. All the participants then responded to the same outcome questions measuring their likelihood to vote for different candidates.

Participants who self-identified as centrist were significantly less likely to say that they would vote for the government alliance than those who were also centrist and did not receive the treatment.

Among the far-right voters there was a drop in the share of participants who said they would vote for the opposition candidate. The less

polarized and more centrist [voters](#) were more likely to be influenced by their exposure to the voting advice application.

**More information:** Simge Andı et al, Closing the information gap in competitive authoritarian regimes? The effect of voting advice applications, *Electoral Studies* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102678](#)

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