

Film-Making the Nation Great Again: Audio-visualizing History in the Authoritarian Toolkit

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How can populist authoritarian incumbents justify remaining in power when the golden age they promised remains unrealized? We argue that audiovisual products such as videos are particularly suited to enlivening the histories that so many populists evoke in seeking to legitimize their rule. Political science's traditional focus on speech-based legitimation, however, leaves audiovisual tools largely overlooked. The few studies that do engage these tools test for audience effects, but the content itself and the political strategies behind its curation and dissemination remain undertheorized. By adding an audiovisual lens to studies of authoritarian legitimation, we identify a regime durability strategy we term *selective revivification*. We specify the cognitive and affective characteristics of videos that quickly communicate information-dense, emotionally evocative messages, arguing that they engagingly distill specific historical elements to portray incumbent rule as not just legitimate but also necessary. In advancing our argument, we construct an original dataset of all existing narration-based YouTube videos shared by six regime institutions in Turkey from the establishment of YouTube in 2005 to 2022 ($n = 134$). We use quantitative analysis to identify when video usage emerges as a strategy, as well as patterns of dissemination and content elements. We then use intertextual analysis to extract common historical themes and production techniques. The audiovisual tools we specify and the selective revivification strategy they enable fill gaps in studies of authoritarian legitimation while adding to political scientists' toolkits for wider inquiry.

Keywords: Authoritarianism, populism, legitimation strategies, history, audiovisual media, Turkey

Populist autocrats frequently aim to galvanize support by calling for a return to an idealized past or “golden age” (Betz and Johnson 2004; Kranert 2018; Tannock 1995). Nostalgic themes can evoke the

need to return to a time when the pure, authentic, and therefore rightful ingroup lived by its own norms and values—that is, before corrupt, inauthentic elites usurped power and imposed their own way of life (Frischlich et al. 2023; Menke and Wulf 2021; Schreurs 2021). Yet whereas populist candidates can leverage powerful memories of victories and defeats to gain support for agendas promising change from the status quo, populist autocrats face somewhat of a paradox in their reliance on historical references. How can these incumbents communicate the appeal of their rule by referring to a golden age they have failed to revive? What strategies can these leaders use to try to maintain a support base when their material performance is objectively not great, much less “great again” (Al-Ghazzi 2021; De Matas 2017; Ding et al. 2021)? In brief, how can populist authoritarians leverage varied pasts in problematic presents to legitimize their own future rule?

In answering these questions, political science studies focus predominantly on speech-based rhetoric (Ding et al. 2021; Elçi 2022; Lacatus and Meibauer 2023; Selçuk 2024). Image-based and audiovisual regime strategies are

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largely absent in this research. Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2018, 1674; emphasis added) reflection on the state of populism research in *Comparative Political Studies*, for example, notes populists' reliance on discourse promising a return to "an idealized *image* of the past" but does not include studies of how populists use actual images to render these idealized pasts visible and visceral for potential supporters. Another recent disciplinary reflection from Hunger and Paxton (2022, 627; emphasis added) in *Political Science Research and Methods* includes discussion of how populist-urbanist cleavages helped "legitimate Orban's reactionary *image* of Hungarian nationalism"; yet, neither the review article nor the study it cites touches on methods for analyzing the politics of constructing such images (Toomey 2018).

Thus, although it provides useful insight, the prevailing political science lens on populism—and on discursive authoritarian legitimation more broadly (Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2018; Edel and Josua 2018; Omelicheva 2016; Wolf, Bachleitner, and Bufkin 2024)—requires refocusing for several reasons. First, current approaches' emphasis on speeches, slogans, and other oral and written texts misses an opportunity to investigate the meaning-making advantages that image- and sound-based instrumentalizations offer—particularly for complex and intangible concepts like "history" and the "nation" that words alone do not (Joffe 2008; Schill 2012; Seo 2020; Seo et al. 2013). Research in disciplines ranging from evolutionary biology and philosophy to journalism and media studies has placed empirical weight behind the adage suggesting that a picture is worth a thousand words (Barrett and Barrington 2005; Bateman 2014; Brockmeier 2016).¹ Yet political scientists seem to avoid analysis of audiovisual materials,² perhaps because of disciplinary trends among top journals that privilege hypothesis testing, causal identification, and statistical significance (Berinsky et al. 2021; Garand and Harman 2021; Keele 2015; Samii 2016).

Second, and relatedly, political science research that does engage audiovisual content prioritizes testing its effects, rather than analyzing content themes and dissemination patterns. For example, scholars have examined the impact on respondent attitudes of "soft propaganda" television content (Mattingly and Yao 2022) and reality TV (Kim 2025; Kim 2023), "non-declarative persuasion" in pro-government online games ("propagames"; Ming-Tak Chew and Wang 2021), and regime-produced videos (Lutscher, Draege, and Knutsen 2023). Yet the literature lacks a systematic, in-depth focus on the content itself and how regimes directly deploy it. Finally, a narrow focus on rhetoric occludes the empirical reality of authoritarian incumbents' deep investments in audiovisual production (Liu and Shao 2024; Schneider 2019; Van Herpen 2015).³ In sum, studying regimes' political messaging without analyzing how specific audiovisual properties operate, what types of narratives are selected by regimes, which institutions they use to deploy these narratives, and

when they deploy them misses an opportunity to flesh out the literal and figurative channels through which particular media forms can serve authoritarian elites' goals.

In this article we add a film-making lens to comparative politics scholarship on populism and authoritarian durability. We "audio-visualize" the authoritarian toolkit by analyzing legitimation strategies in the understudied yet empirically widespread phenomenon of regime-disseminated videos.⁴ We analyze how populist autocrats use the particular advantages of narratively rich, visually captivating, dramatically scored videos to bind particular past glories and traumas to contemporary contexts in ways that depict their continued rule as rightful and necessary. We argue that populist authoritarian leaders use a strategy of *selective revivification* to bring specific historical events and figures and, in turn, their own political futures (back) to life for the public. In advancing our argument, we identify all popular history videos (PHVs)—heavily produced videos with a narrative arc that includes a historical event, site, or figure—among all existing YouTube posts shared by Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and four state institutions between 2005 and 2022. Using multimethod, multimodal analysis of video content and dissemination patterns, we find increasing usage of three complementary selective revivification themes as a period of authoritarian consolidation intensifies: (1) historical continuity between the incumbent, past events, and forward progress; (2) great strength through great sacrifice; and (3) perennial, often unspecified, threats to the nation.

We focus on populist authoritarian regimes—an increasingly prevalent empirical phenomenon produced by what Weyland (2018, 320; see Weyland 2013) identifies as populism's "inherent tendency to turn authoritarian"⁵; cross-country evidence backs up this claim (Benasaglio Berlucci and Kellam 2023).⁶ Contemporary Turkey is a useful case for analyzing video usage by autocratizing populists, given that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been Turkey's leader for more than two decades. Serving first as prime minister in 2003 and then as president in 2014, he assumed leadership of a highly consolidated authoritarian presidency of his own design in 2018 (Esen and Yardimci-Geyikçi 2020). Although de-democratization processes in Turkey have been incremental under Erdoğan's AKP, scholars over the last decade have classified Turkey as a competitive authoritarian regime, moving toward hegemonic electoral authoritarianism in its later years (Akkoyunlu 2017; Esen and Gumuscu 2016; Ugur-Cinar 2023).⁷ Our data collection reflects this autocratizing shift: of the 134 narrative-based storytelling videos in our dataset, all but 2 were released from 2017 onward. The AKP also fits our focus on populist actors (Arat-Koç 2018; Bulut and İleri 2019; Elçi 2019; Erçetin and Erdoğan 2023; Yabancı 2018). Scholars further refine the party's populist categorization by citing elements that include Islamic nationalism (Sandal 2021; Yabancı 2023), patriarchy (Kandiyoti 2016), and

personalism (Selçuk 2024). Studies of the AKP's engagement with chronopolitics (Taş 2022), nostalgia (Elçi 2022), and (neo)Ottomanism (Fisher Onar 2009; Ongur 2015) spotlight the historical (re)framing through rhetoric that we analyze in film-making strategies.

Importantly for our study, the AKP faced multiple challenges that threatened its continued tenure. These included a nationwide uprising (2013), a protracted economic crisis with inflation reaching 80% annually (2015–present), an attempted coup (2016), and major election upsets at the local level (2019). Survey-based research with data up to 2022 indicates the AKP was grappling with voter defection in response to the country's economic and democratic decline during the later period of our study (Balta and Demiralp 2023). These factors comprise the kind of “problematic presents” we argue lead populist authoritarians to leverage historical elements in rallying support for their rule. In sum, these challenges make clear *why* the AKP needed to engage in legitimization in boosting regime durability in its later terms. Here we take up the question of *how*.

In addition to this empirical contribution in the Turkish case, our study makes four theoretical contributions. First, we recalibrate the emphasis on idealized pasts in populism studies, an emphasis that a nostalgia lens understandably generates (Benabdallah 2021; Elçi 2022; Van Prooijen et al. 2022). We focus on the narrative power of linking past threats and sacrifices with contemporary challenges. Second, we unpack patterns in the dissemination and content of regimes' legitimization videos. The selective revivification strategy we identify reveals the specific legitimizing themes and film-making techniques that incumbents use to reframe current struggles through historical lenses in ways that position autocratizing incumbents as essential to the survival of the nation. In articulating this strategy, we expand the analytical toolkit for studying how populist authoritarian incumbents transform historical narratives into contemporary political capital as they consolidate power. Third, our video-based analysis extends recent scholarship on the political functions of entertainment media products such as history-themed television serials. As scholars of India, China, Brazil, Russia, and other cases note, popular culture content can align with and even actively boost regime narratives (Asthana 2019; Bai and Song 2014; Cai 2016; Ribke 2021; Wijermars 2016). In the Turkish case, popular (proto-)Ottoman-themed shows broadcast by the state-run Turkish Radio Television (TRT) Corporation reinforce the ruling party's conservative Islamic vision for the nation and its foreign policy activism in former Ottoman territories (Algan and Kaptan 2023; Bulut and İleri 2019; Carney 2014; 2019a; Çevik 2020; 2024). Here, we turn the focus from two-hour-long fictionalized TV serials (*dizis*) to content that is (1) disseminated directly by institutions of governance not affiliated with entertainment; (2) presented as historical reality, rather than fiction;⁸ and (3) packaged in quickly digestible, easily shareable YouTube videos. Finally, much

of the research on YouTube centers on its democratizing potential (Dylko et al. 2012; May 2010). Even in the authoritarian context of Russia, Litvinenko's (2021) study analyzes the platform as “alternative television” produced by oppositional actors like Alexei Navalny. Here, we focus instead on YouTube's authoritarian legitimization potential. By examining regime strategies of content production and dissemination, we add to digital authoritarianism research that has thus far largely focused on content restriction (Berman 2018; Dragu and Lupu 2021; Schlumberger et al. 2024).

The article proceeds as follows. First, we briefly review the political science literature on authoritarian legitimization strategies. Second, we fill the gaps we identify by specifying the cognitive and affective functions of audiovisual media in linking complex historical frames to current leadership. Third, we outline our theoretical assumptions and our methods of data collection and analysis for studying selective revivification strategies in regime-produced videos. We then present quantitative findings on content and dissemination patterns from the original dataset we assembled (Hintz and Draege 2025), followed by a discussion of common themes extracted using intertextual analysis. We conclude with suggestions for future studies linking curations of history to regime legitimization strategies, and for wider applications of an audio-visualized political science toolkit.

The Authoritarian Legitimation Toolkit

A rich corpus of political science literature on strategies demonstrates that authoritarian elites have a deep toolkit from which they can draw when attempting to create legitimacy. Here we define legitimacy as a widespread societal-level perception of an actor's rule as rightful and appropriate. We stress the word *attempt* here in recognition that such strategies may not be successful and that societal phenomena interpreted by regimes and scholars as legitimacy may, in fact, be produced by quite different factors, such as citizens' acquiescence, complaisance, and actions performed “as if” they found the regime to be legitimate (Wedeen 1999, xi; see Wedeen 1998). Despite important interventions about the conceptual and empirical ambiguity of citizens' behavior, the record shows that many authoritarian regimes seek to cultivate perceptions of legitimacy. As Gerschewski (2015) theorized and others have refined in varied contexts (Amat 2023; Buehler 2015; Josua 2016; Tsourapas 2021), autocrats rely on some combination of the durability “pillars” of legitimacy, repression, and co-optation to preempt and, if necessary, punish challengers.⁹ Because repression and co-optation are costly—implemented via violence and favors, respectively—legitimation strategies are often preferable (Gerschewski 2018; Guriev and Treisman 2018; Josua 2016; Omelicheva 2016).¹⁰ The logic of legitimization holds that the more people who believe the incumbents are the rightful and appropriate rulers, the fewer

destabilizing challenges to their rule those leaders will face and thus the longer they will endure (Von Soest and Grauvogel 2018).

Authoritarian incumbents subscribing to the logic of legitimation have significant incentives to attempt to generate widespread perceptions of the rightfulness and appropriateness of their rule. In addition to its political, economic, and personal benefits, incumbency can be existential should autocrats lose the security that their position of power provides (Akkoyunlu and Öktem 2018; Escribà-Folch 2016; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014). To avoid incurring the potentially destabilizing costs of repression, many authoritarian elites turn to alternative strategies that aim at building consent for their rule. The literature on authoritarian legitimation includes studies examining social service provision (Cassani 2017), economic development and other forms of “performance legitimacy” (Zhu 2011), “strongman” personalization and leadership elements (Matovski 2021; Selçuk 2024), and “façades” of democracy such as using elections to justify their rule to both domestic and international audiences (Morgenbesser 2017; Schedler 2013).

The largest segment of the legitimation literature focuses on rhetorical strategies (Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2018; Edel and Josua 2018; Josua 2016; 2021). These strategies include regime attempts to persuade citizens of the rightfulness of their rule via speeches, slogans, manifestos, pamphlets, and state and pro-regime news publications. The content of this rhetoric can include language mimicking that of politically pluralist settings, functioning as the discursive and thus cheaper equivalent of the institutional strategy of creating democratic façades (Maerz 2019); specifying criteria that define what constitutes “proper” leadership (Omeličeva 2016); and constructing external threats (Shakrai 2015). Rule of law-oriented rhetorical strategies can vilify particular behaviors or groups as “vandals” or “terrorists,” thus legitimizing surveillance and violent crackdowns against designated outgroups (Edel and Josua 2018; Hintz and Ercan 2024; Lachapelle 2022).

Turning to the subset of populist authoritarian legitimation strategies, these narratives similarly deploy simultaneously inclusionary and exclusionary language (Bonikowski 2017; Selçuk 2024). Indeed, populists are categorized in part by their use of “us vs. them” discourse (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Pauwels 2017). As a distinguishing factor, they also invoke claims of authenticity stemming from their struggles against an inauthentic establishment as a source of their legitimacy. Such leaders frame politics as a struggle between a pure, authentic people and corrupt, inauthentic elites who usurped the people’s legitimate right to rule (Mudde 2004; Ziller and Schübel 2015). This constructed binary can be understood as one between the “people with traditions” and the “immoral secular-liberal elites and enemies” (Yabancı and

Sağlam 2023, 4). Thus, although the identity content of rhetorical strategies differs based on populist authoritarians’ definition of their own ingroup, these actors share an anti-establishment ethos that can garner support from citizens frustrated with their socioeconomic status. This oppositional orientation serves candidates claiming to challenge the current order but can be problematic for populist incumbents when the anti-establishmentarians become the establishment (Selçuk 2024).

The decades in power that some populist authoritarian incumbents have now accumulated—with their long rule at times profoundly challenged by issues such as economic crises that complicate the realization of returns to any purported “golden age”—provide researchers with a prime opportunity to expand understandings of how these leaders seek to boost support for their future rule. We find answers in the form of regime-disseminated videos that glorify selected elements of a specific historical age that the incumbent claims as an inherited legacy, while also revivifying for citizens the lingering specter of past threats that require the incumbent’s continued vigilance. Our approach builds on an “affective turn” in the social sciences that encourages researchers to unpack the psychological pull of historical elements on which populists frequently rely (Hoggett and Thompson 2012; Jasper 2011; Martin 2016). Analyses of populist actors’ social media outreach indicate that right-wing populists in particular employ nostalgia’s pull in stoking dissatisfied citizens’ longing for better times (Frischlich et al. 2023). The emotional attachment that nostalgia evokes strengthens populist candidates’ ability to place blame for current sociopolitical and economic woes on the inauthentic elite outgroup (Akkerman et al. 2014; Rooduijn et al. 2016) and to position themselves as uniquely suited for leading a return to a mythologized golden age (Bellelli and Amatulli 1997)—whether that is a supposedly simpler time when conservative values prevailed among a homogeneous population within a shared “heartland” (Bonikowski 2017; Taggart 2004) or a purportedly glorious era of domestic achievements and global status (Bevernage et al. 2024; Elçi 2022; Staught and Turner 1988).

However, because of the focus on nostalgia and idealized pasts in studies of populist uses of history, these actors’ invocation of *past* threats has been relatively underexamined. In contrast, the literature contains numerous studies on populist construction of *current* threats, often in the form of immigrants and ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities (Mikdash 2022). However, less is written on how incumbents can mine, inflate, and even conjure past threats, loss, and martyrdom to communicate the necessity of their continued rule.¹¹ Indeed, just as populists place rose-tinted lenses on selected slices of history, factual constraints are loose in the darker realm too. As scholars of “updatism” in the populism of Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro underscore, flexible approaches to reality can

allow politicians and their communications teams to treat the past like a “large wardrobe full of *prêt-à-porter* images and templates” (Pereira and Araujo 2024, 175). Simply put, the treatment of past traumas in populists’ discourse can be as mythical as their purported glory days and can substantially shape public opinion in ways of interest to political scientists.¹²

Audio-visualizing the Authoritarian Toolkit

Authoritarianism research has important insights into various strategies that leaders use in attempting to justify their rule as rightful. However, political scientists’ tendency to focus on rhetoric has occluded the examination of other forms of legitimizing communication such as visual and audiovisual representation. This is puzzling, given that state communication ministries and directorates within institutions such as ministries of defense and foreign affairs dedicate significant resources toward producing films, promotional videos, posters, and other forms of public iconography (Cantor et al. 2021; Sanders and Canel 2013). Whereas authoritarian elites actively engage in the censorship of visual materials deemed to pose a challenge to their “regime-legitimising official account” (Tan 2016, 233), the production and proscription of visual media are fundamentally political tools used in attempts to bolster support for regimes of all types.¹³ Indeed, the literature on the “YouTubification” of political communication has centered on established democracies, initially focusing on the platform’s use as a civil society tool; recent studies reflect elites’ increasing usage of YouTube for their own political goals (Dylko et al. 2012; May 2010).

The dearth of political science work on visual communication strategies among populist varieties of authoritarian regimes is especially surprising. Studies of populism have surged in recent years, yet Moffit (2022, 557) finds the visual politics of populism to be “largely ignored” and calls for political scientists’ increased attention to imagery and aesthetics. Sayan-Cengiz and Tekin (2022) assess the state of the field similarly, and Melito and Zulianello’s (2025, 372) recent review finds research on populism “disproportionately focused on its written and verbal dimensions.” Yet populist incumbents and challengers alike are prolific visual content producers. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013), for example, stressed how integral poster imagery is in defining ingroup membership among far-right parties. However, those authors did not cover posters or other uses of images in their subsequent article reflecting on the state of populism studies (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018).

Experimental studies suggest that scholars take up the call to analyze visual material as political strategy; research demonstrates, for example, the “otherizing” power of far-right campaign posters in heightening negative attitudes

toward immigrants and minorities (Matthes and Schmuck 2017). Visual representations can also juxtapose and reinforce populists’ ingroup–outgroup binaries in ways and to extents that rhetoric cannot. Whereas populist discourse frequently deploys fear-based narratives (Erçetin and Erdoğan 2023), research shows that a video or poster image depicting a villainous outgroup threatening the homeland can cognitively concretize and evoke affect-charged understandings of us and them more quickly and more durably than using words alone (Bateman 2014, 119). As communication scholars note, viewers can become absorbed in narratives of visual media “with an intensity far exceeding that achieved by the speech-maker” (Slater et al. 2006, 236).

Visual media also offer communicative value for populists’ use of layered nostalgia narratives in articulating these us vs. them dynamics. Classified by psychologists as a “complex emotion,” nostalgia simultaneously triggers multiple, often conflicting feelings, such as sadness, happiness, longing, fear, pride, and uncertainty (Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989). Political elites can use future-oriented visions of idealized pasts to trigger this complex emotion (Boym 2001; Kenny 2017), requiring audiences to consider collective pasts—both glorious and traumatic—in evaluating their ingroup’s present situation versus that of the outgroup. The numerous feelings, temporalities, and actors that historical frames evoke lead populists to search for communication methods that can distill these intricacies. Visual forms of media provide an attractive platform for the “populist style [of] simplifying complex political issues” in attention-grabbing, easily digestible, and politically persuasive ways (Esser et al. 2016).

Yet despite political scientists’ useful engagement with the politics of idealized memory (Aytaç et al. 2024; Benabdallah 2021; Elçi 2022; McGlynn 2020),¹⁴ the general neglect of audiovisual strategies in these studies leaves underexplored the methods by which authoritarians of various stripes instrumentalize history.¹⁵ In sum, the lack of attention to populist authoritarians’ visual politics is not just a literature gap. It also represents a missed opportunity to unpack a medium of political communication whose inherent properties make it arguably more efficient and more effective than the rhetorical strategies that receive so much attention.

Having made our case for visualizing the authoritarian toolkit and using the case of Turkey to do so, here we specify the added value that audiovisual elements offer in instrumentalizing history. We identify three distinct but mutually reinforcing film-making elements that serve the legitimization strategy that we term *selective revivification*: rapid visualizations of ingroup–outgroup membership criteria, selective spotlights on positive ingroup attributes, and visceral evocations of emotions. First, image components serve to designate who belongs in the ingroup versus the outgroup, rendering visible for the target audience how

these groups appear and behave. In addition to quickly and legibly identifying membership in these groups, images can simultaneously juxtapose positive portrayals of an ingroup and negative portrayals of the outgroup(s) in ways that augment the sentiments ingroup viewers attach to both (Doerr 2017; Flam and Doerr 2015; Tuomola and Wahl-Jorgensen 2023). Sound-based components such as voiceover narration can coherently link images depicted to specific forms of ingroup/outgroup behavior and can insert the instantly recognizable recorded voice of a famous group member (Kozloff 1989; Matamala 2018). Audiovisual communication is thus especially attractive for populists,¹⁶ who frequently rely on characterizations that contrast their authentic/pure/native selves with inauthentic/corrupt/foreign others. In our history-focused line of inquiry into populist authoritarians' legitimization strategies, the inclusion of imagery of faces, clothing, geographical landscapes, and other elements in regime-disseminated videos serves to specify which historical figures belong to the ingroup and very quickly remind viewers of their glory, martyrdom, or both.

As an illustrative example, a 10-second clip in a video titled "Who Are You?" (AK Gençlik [@AKGenclikGM] 2020) uses images of minarets, a previous Bosnian coat of arms to which Serbs and Croats objected on the grounds it only represented Bosniaks/Bosnian Muslims (Doubt et al. 2022), and the first Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic's face as both an elderly statesman and a young man behind prison bars.¹⁷ This brief use of imagery serves to specify Muslims as the ingroup, efficiently communicating a narrative of ingroup members achieving unprecedented victories despite being persecuted for practicing and defending their faith. The use of superimposed prison bars on this recognizable ingroup member quickly and powerfully communicates the message of unjust oppression beyond the individual pictured. The voiceover throughout the video defines the specific historical figures whom Turkey's youth (should) embody using repetitive rhythmic phrasing—"you are X," "you are Y"—that is mantra-like and easily internalized.

Second and relatedly, visual representation can delimit and highlight those selected identity characteristics and actions of a historical figure that should be celebrated as exemplary of the ingroup accomplishments. As humans, historical figures' lives can be messy in ways that do not fit the simplistic, Manichean narratives that characterize populist discourse (Akkerman et al. 2014; Çınar et al. 2020). Just as national museums curate particular versions of history through their content and display choices (Anderson 1983; Dunleavy 2004; Işsız 2015), the selective use of content and contextual framing of that content allow regimes and their production teams to curate personal histories (Haim and Jungblut 2021; Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013). Curation directs the eye and the mind toward particular behaviors and thus away from others less

befitting a regime's agenda. Image selectivity in pro-regime video production visually imprints in viewers' minds the qualities of historical figures that serve that agenda—those identity characteristics that align with the regime's vision of the ideal citizen, the moments of greatness, the times these figures' enemies matched those of the current regime. Via image exclusion, videos silence aspects of these figures that undermine the regime's agenda, such as personal behaviors deemed improper, moments of weakness, and incompatible political realignments. This selectivity can also help regimes appeal to multiple audiences through the calculated use of a particular aspect of a historical figure or event. Images, much more so than texts, are especially adept at conveying "different, even sometimes inconsistent, messages that work at different levels and address different audiences" (Sayan-Cengiz and Tekin 2022, 68). This quality enables regimes to quickly and clearly reach viewers across some (if certainly not all) political and identity dividing lines, potentially expanding the ingroup by depicting historical elements that resonate with multiple groups. Importantly for our study of incumbents' audiovisual strategies, Lutscher, Draege, and Knutsen (2023) find that regime-critical viewers exposed to certain state-produced videos reported an increased sense of group belonging—an indication that these tools can resonate beyond loyalist audiences.

Third, in addition to its cognitive efficiency in quickly conveying information about ingroup membership and behavior, visual representation is also a particularly useful political communication tool because of its affective capabilities. Images can powerfully conjure emotions such as anger, fear, and pride among viewers that serve political agendas of actors from regimes to social movements (Flam and Doerr 2015; Pink et al. 2017). Relevant for our analysis of history-themed audiovisual representation, insights from visual methods literatures indicate images are also effective in eliciting memories of both personal experiences and of learned or collective memory (Bagnoli 2009; Kunimoto 2004; Rose 2022). Visual representation is adept in making dramatized arguments that evoke emotions without having to substantiate the claims that are either made explicitly or implied implicitly (Richardson and Wodak 2009; Sayan-Cengiz and Tekin 2022). Rhetorical and symbolic devices evoke emotions and engender meanings that serve in threat construction (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2020). Addressing the cognitive and affective aspects of visual representation, Hintz (2021, 31) terms the brief use of imagery to convey information, evoke emotion, and frame the image's subject in political context an "affective heuristic." She cites the image of Syrian child Alan Kurdi's lifeless body flashed onscreen during a rap video or shared in an Instagram feed as one that can quickly and powerfully conjure grief and anger at the multiple actors who failed him and many others.¹⁸ In line with this

article's argument, the splicing of a three-second segment of footage showing Erdoğan displaying a photo of Kurdi at a UN General Assembly meeting into a Directorate of Communication video quickly conveys that the Turkish president is a champion of vulnerable populations on the world stage (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2022a). The use of prison bars noted earlier in the Bosnian example and further analyzed later similarly serves as an affective heuristic in revivifying historical traumas.

Studying the Audiovisual Instrumentalization of History: Assumptions, Data, Methods

We define the audiovisual strategy that we identify—selective revivification—as the rendering visible of curated pasts to justify incumbent futures. Historical myths and selective interpretations of past events come equipped with a politically useful affective appeal that can be deployed in legitimacy-building efforts (Aydın-Düzgit et al. 2022). Regime-disseminated media materials can audio-visually bring to life and, in doing so, naturalize specific political constructions of history in ways that paint regime-defined ingroups as heroes and outgroups as villains, usurpers, or invaders. This revivification is particularly feasible for authoritarian regimes, given high levels of media capture in these contexts (Barnehl and Schumacher 2024; Petrova 2008; Schiffrin 2018). History-themed forms of communication are “highly favoured instruments” of populist authoritarian governance in particular (Aydın-Düzgit and Balta 2019, 518–19). As Aydın-Düzgit and Balta note, myths serve an important role in populist governance by consolidating people/elite binaries domestically, anchoring the self in a stable identity during times of crisis, and legitimizing antiglobal foreign policy narratives (2019). In this section we elaborate on the theoretical aspects of our approach to the selective revivification strategy we outlined earlier and our methods for studying it as a legitimization strategy.

Notes on Theoretical Assumptions

Our approach leans heavily on the instrumental functions of history in bringing real and imagined past glories and traumas (back) to life in ways that justify populist authoritarian rule. We acknowledge, however, the constitutive role that history can play for political actors. A particular reading of history informs elites' understandings of the appropriate national identity for their people and the righteousness of their own position as leaders of those people in ways that transcend purely rationalist accounts. In line with applied constructivist scholarship (Aydın-Düzgit and Rumelili 2021), we treat understandings of history as constitutive of the “identity proposals” that ruling elites seek to instill among their citizens (Abdelal 2009, 29). Elites disseminate these proposals by using

formal and informal nation-building institutions such as education systems, militaries, museums, holiday celebrations, and, of course, the media (Anderson 1983; Paglayan 2022; Sarigil 2023). Control over state institutions is thus both a goal in itself, in terms of power, and a means to achieving a normative goal of “identity hegemony” (Hintz 2016). Regime uses of history in constructing founding narratives and other forms of myth-making support both these pursuits. In brief, they reflect elites' own inherently subjective interpretations of the past, as well as their strategic curations that selectively prioritize some themes over others.

The constitutive and instrumentalist components that comprise our selective revivification approach entail three points we clarify here. First, this approach acknowledges the emotional and ontological heft that historical elements can carry for elites and the general public alike, while specifying the particular events and figures from layered histories (İğsız 2021) that elites invoke to support their political agendas. Second, this approach assumes that selected historical events hold meaning for elites at all times, but that they can be revivified in audiovisual form at politically useful moments. Anniversaries can function as collective memory focal points that “story-tell” historic events in the incumbent's favor (Sarsfield and Abuchanab 2024; Taş 2022); heightened tensions with a neighbor can provide discursive opportunity structures in which populist authoritarians can remind audiences why they must remain in power as rightful guardians of the nation and its borders. For example, although the term *Blue Homeland* was coined as part of a drill by the Turkish Naval Command in early 2019, a video celebrating the broader maritime initiative by linking it to a sixteenth-century Ottoman corsair's naval victories in the Mediterranean was released in September 2020—following an “*annus horribilis*” of territorial disputes and near-conflagrations between Turkey and Greece (Psaropoulos 2020). Finally, our focus on the selective uses of history also facilitates examination of emotion-laden negative themes that much of the “golden era,” nostalgia-oriented scholarship on populist strategies omits. Casting a wide net with our data collection, we find constructed “continuity” not only with the glories of the Ottoman Empire (Ergin and Karakaya 2017; İğsız 2021; Karakaya 2024; Özer and Özçetin 2024, 7) but also with the strategic construction of perennial threats against which the nation requires the incumbent's protection.

Data Collection, Coding, and Analysis

In studying uses of history in legitimization strategies, we sought to identify forms of curated audiovisual content containing historical references disseminated by incumbent party and state institutions. Thus, although the broader dataset we make available includes all YouTube

posts shared by the regime actors we study in the specified time period, for the purposes of this article we excluded the overwhelming majority of posts that consisted of unedited news fragments.¹⁹ Focusing on curated content that does narrative or *storytelling* work enables us to study populist incumbents' intentions via the production and narrative choices made by content creators working in the service of the regime—for example, which historical figures and events to feature, which images and symbols to present in depicting them, and what type of music to select in eliciting affective responses from viewers (Nordensvard and Ketola 2022). Given the heavy regulation of and intervention in the production and dissemination of news, social, and entertainment media within Turkey (Bulut 2016; Yeşil 2018), we can comfortably claim that the curated content shared by the ruling AKP and the institutions over which it has consolidated control reflects the party line.

We apply a mixed-methods approach to an original dataset we constructed of all existing videos posted by the ruling AKP, its youth wing (*AK Gençlik*), and four state institutions—the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Presidency, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), and the Directorate of Communications (*Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı*)—on YouTube between 2005 and 2022. Doing so allows us to showcase how the AKP's multifaceted approach to YouTube involved not only blocking access to the site in Turkey (2008–10, 2014) and requesting content removals (Akgül and Kırıldoğ 2015) but also producing its own content in later years. In designing our data collection strategy, we chose a start date of 2005, the year YouTube launched its site, but note the bans mentioned earlier.²⁰ This enabled us to track when the first type of videos we study here begin to emerge and how video dissemination varies over time. Because our strategy captures only those videos publicly available during our data collection in 2023–24, we acknowledge that the dataset has the potential to contain a recency bias. Videos of allies-turned-foes (such as earlier, much friendlier footage of the Gülen movement in the AKP case) could have been removed, for example, to reflect shifting coalitional dynamics. Whereas exploring any specific instances of deleted regime videos could provide useful insight into these dynamics, recency bias would likely prove more problematic in collecting videos posted by opposition groups, rather than the government-produced content we study here; indeed, Turkey is among the countries that most frequently request social media platforms to remove oppositional content (“X’s Türkiye Tangle, between Freedom of Speech, Control, and Digital Defiance” 2025). For the purposes of our analysis of regime videos, although we are aware of potential limitations posed by deleted content, our long-term observation of the AKP’s media strategy does not give us reason to

believe that working with existing videos significantly affects the broader patterns we find in video emergence and usage.

To study these patterns, we began by using web scraping to collect all existing YouTube posts of all types by these actors ($N = 11,165$), along with metadata including links, date of posting, and number of views at the time of scraping in July 2023. Working with two research assistants, we then hand-coded the content of each post to identify and separate out those we term *storytelling videos*—heavily curated videos containing visual cues and stirring narration that construct easy-to-follow plot trajectories—from news fragments and unedited footage. After discussions of several coding iterations involving the two Turkish-speaking authors and two native Turkish-speaking research assistants, we decided on the following criteria for storytelling videos: a duration ranging from 60 seconds to 10 minutes; the presence of a clear narrative plot that unfolds with or without music; visible curation (e.g., resource-intensive production techniques, scripted speech, or image splicing); and content that includes a speaker, voiceover, or subtitles in Turkish so that we capture media intended for domestic audiences. We argue that this crucial element of audience-oriented curation highlights the production level and the political intent of these videos. Indeed, the fact that they comprise a tiny share of the regime institutions’ total YouTube content—134 storytelling videos from 11,165 posts—underscores the cost and effort that go into them.

Within this corpus of storytelling videos, we then classified those that refer to at least one pre-2002 event or figure via words, images, or music as *popular history videos* (PHVs). We use the term “popular” to capture the people’s sovereignty component integral to how these videos function in populists’ political communication, connoting texts that narrate and elevate the lives of everyday people in a form of “history from below” (Moses 1998; Strauss 1991; Velasco 2011). As we demonstrate later, the 71 PHVs we found serve discursively to link these everyday individuals and their accomplishments to the regime that protects them and makes the nation proud. Whereas leaders may refer to such individuals in speeches through the use of anecdotes and “everyday knowledge” (Atkins and Finlayson 2013), our approach suggests that audiovisual content carries the advantage of being able to render these everyday figures visible and thus more relatable to audiences. Some of the most frequently viewed PHVs we study narrate and elevate the contributions of specific everyday citizens—a real-life teacher arrested for his religious views under secularist leadership, for example, or a woman who became a symbol of conservatism, motherhood, and anticommunism in the Cold War era (Emen-Gökatalay 2021)—and of unspecified everyday citizens who are depicted in a similar fashion as the “unknown soldier” archetype (Wagner 2013).

We also coded PHVs on many other variables, such as which historical figures or events were depicted, whether there were heroes or enemies, and whether music was used. Notably, although music was not a defining criterion, all 134 storytelling videos—thus including the subset of 71 PHVs—contained music, with musical shifts often used to facilitate plot development via the delineation of scenes or the heightening of drama. This finding speaks to the utility of music as an effective component in political communication by those who design such strategies (Aufderheide 1986; Wardani, Listya, and Winarni 2017; Way 2019). As scholars introducing a 2022 special issue of *Popular Music* dedicated to populism note, music’s “performative character, affective potential, and significant role in the discursive construction of cultural identities” makes it a valuable resource “on which populists can draw in articulating a ‘people’ or an ‘elite’” (Dunkel and Schiller 2022, 282); Rancier’s 2009 study of Kazakh folk artists similarly elucidates the power of group-specific genres of music in constructing national identities.

We used intertextual analysis to extract storytelling tools that feature historical figures, events, and symbols from our PHVs. A form of critical discourse analysis, an intertextual approach allows researchers to extract various internally coherent themes that emerge across a large body of texts from multiple actors (Fairclough 1992). Our multimodal approach to intertextual analysis is particularly useful in identifying not only similar content themes but also audiovisual narrative techniques used across videos in regime legitimization strategies. In simple terms, incorporating multimodality facilitates analysis beyond speech-based rhetoric to include how elements such as sound effects, visual symbols, and lighting techniques can quickly produce meaning and resonance for audiences (Machin 2013; Van Leeuwen 2015). As a brief example, techniques wielded in a video shared by the Office of the Presidency in 2017 include the use of ominous music and clouds casting shadows over onlookers’ faces as a black-clad “henchman” figure attempts to bring down the nation’s flag. Replete with dark glasses, leather gloves, and a crowbar, the figure represents a nefarious threat to the sacred symbol of the flag. The video then zooms out to show citizens streaming in from all parts of the country to form a human tower and save the flag, as an Erdoğan voiceover proclaims the resilience of the nation against all threats.²¹

Before proceeding, it is important to delimit the scope of this study. We ground our inquiry in the premise unpacked earlier that authoritarian leaders use various strategies to establish legitimacy in pursuit of regime durability. In line with much of this scholarship, we study strategy components and bracket for future research any causal linkage of these phenomena to societal-level outcomes. Thus, we put aside the questions of whether and how these videos *affect* the target audience. We do not

engage in audience reception studies (e.g., using interviews, focus groups, and participant observation)²² or analysis of public opinion using surveys, experimental or otherwise.²³ Instead, we are motivated by existing experimental studies suggesting that regime-aligned audiovisual content can have significant effects on the emotions, beliefs about politics, and political behavior of citizens who support and oppose the regime (Kim 2023, 2025; Lutscher, Draege, and Knutsen 2023; Mattingly and Yao 2022).

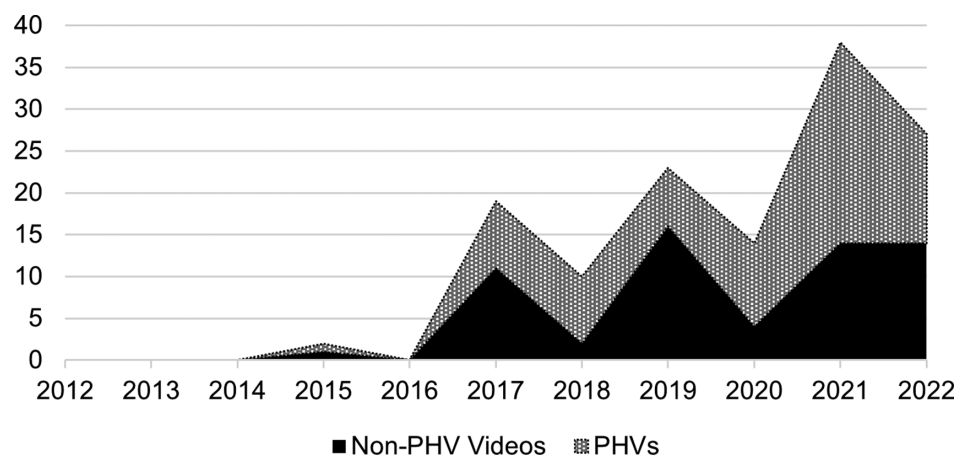
Here we reflect briefly on viewership, urging caution when evaluating data from YouTube and other platforms. We find that the PHVs we collected seem to have attracted substantial viewership, but precise measurement is challenging. Our dataset includes view counts from the official government YouTube channel, but many videos were cross-posted on other YouTube channels and social media platforms. For example, one video shows one million views on the AKP’s official channel, but it was reposted by 1,900 separate accounts on Twitter (now X; AK PARTİ 2019e). Another video from the same channel recorded 6.9 million views but was not posted on the party’s Twitter account; it circulated widely via other social media users and mainstream media (*Milliyet Gazetesi* 2018). Such discrepancies are common across the dataset. Some videos gained significantly more traction when reposted elsewhere. For instance, one titled *Kızıl Elma*—Red Apple, a key symbol in (pan-)Turkish nationalism and now the name of a fighter jet [Özer and Özçetin 2024])—had 65,000 views on the Communications Directorate channel, which was part of our dataset but received 731,000 views when shared by the account Netd Müzik (n.d.); pro-government media coverage also raised that video’s profile (*Hürriyet Gazetesi* 2020; *Sabah Gazetesi* 2020; *T24.com* 2020). These variations in channel strategy, cross-posting practices, and media amplification complicate efforts to determine the videos’ total reach and are thus cause for circumspection in drawing determinative inferences about viewership.

Selective Revivification Patterns: Quantitative Analysis of Dissemination and Content

The data we collected from six party and state institutions between 2005 and 2022 show that the dissemination of curated pro-regime YouTube videos constitutes a relatively new legitimization strategy. Figure 1 shows the total number of *storytelling videos*. Even though we began our data collection in 2005, we found that the first storytelling video does not appear until 2015, when just two such videos were posted by our institutional YouTube accounts. The number of videos released per year began to shoot up in 2017.

An analysis of the dissemination and content patterns in these videos suggests that the driving factor behind this

Figure 1
Number of Storytelling Videos Released by Year



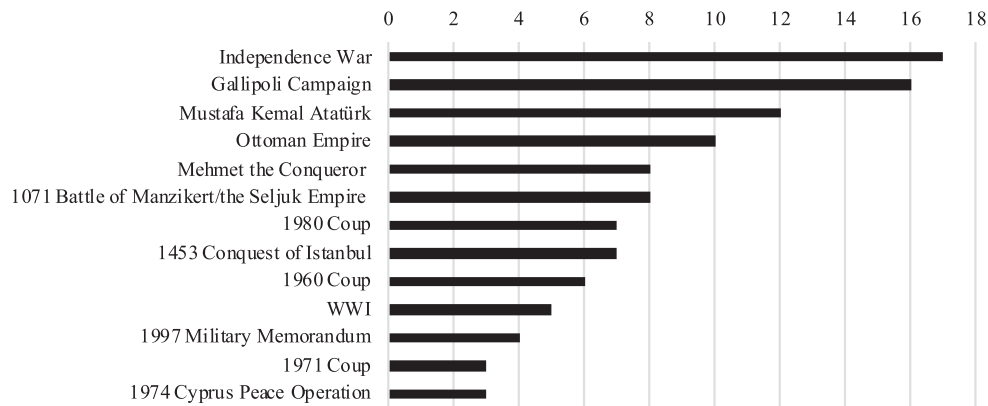
spike is the coup attempt of July 15, 2016. Although ultimately unsuccessful, the events of that night constitute an inflection point that led to shifts in “the grammar and vocabulary of politics” (Taş 2018, 3); our study evinces the emergence of an audiovisual strategy that expanded rapidly as the AKP faced other challenges to its rule and consolidated power in response. Notably, the last two years we coded contained 38 (2021) and 27 (2022) videos. Within this overall rise lies a substantial increase in the number of PHVs. These videos largely leverage historical content to depict linkages between heroes and martyrs of definitive pre-Republic battles, such as the Battle of Dumlupınar, a 1922 Turkish victory during the War of Liberation against (Western) Allied forces, and those who defended the AKP-led government against the July 2016 coup attempt—a putsch that AKP figures claimed was supported by the United States (Taş 2018).

Altogether, PHVs make up more than half the storytelling videos (71 out of 134). In the peak year of 2021, 24 of 38 storytelling videos contained historical events, figures, or both. It is worth noting that the increase in the share of storytelling videos that contain historical references occurred during a period of intense authoritarian consolidation following the AKP’s stunning losses in the 2019 local elections. The party lost control of major metropolitan municipalities, including the economic powerhouse Istanbul (from which Erdoğan as mayor in the 1990s was able to springboard to national politics) and the capital city Ankara. The fact that the government ramped up its selective revivification during a worsening economic crisis is also striking and aligns with research suggesting that political elites facing crisis are more successful in shifting the subject away from the economy than in blaming others for economic woes (Aytaç 2021).

In terms of institutional patterns, the dissemination of YouTube videos in our dataset became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the Communications Directorate over time. Established via presidential decree in 2018, the institution employed approximately 700 individuals with a budget of 3 billion Turkish lira for 2020–24, about \$18 million per year (*2020–2024 Dönemi İletişim Başkanlığı Stratejik Planı (Güncellenmiş)* 2022, 54). In the production process, the Directorate works with media companies such as 2D Medya and creators such as prolific composer and director Ali Sinanoğlu (Özer and Özçetin 2024). The institution accounted for about 40% of all storytelling videos disseminated in our timeframe and approximately 80% of videos disseminated between 2020 and 2022. Combined with AKP’s own YouTube channel, the two account for 87% of the total number of storytelling videos in our dataset. The Office of the Presidency’s channel disseminated an additional 11% of storytelling videos, nearly all of which predated the creation of the Communications Directorate to take on precisely this role. The Directorate of Religious Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs channels consist almost entirely of news clips and thus account for only a very small fraction of the curated videos we study here.

Figure 2 shows the historical figures and events most frequently referred to in PHVs, coded separately despite their temporal overlap to capture their thematic emphases.²⁴ Remarkable here is that, despite symbolic linkages between Erdoğan and Ottoman leaders in imperial-themed TV dramas (Çevik 2020; 2024), no sultans appear among the three most frequently referenced elements. Fifteenth-century conqueror Sultan Mehmet (Fatih Sultan Mehmet) is fifth; the Ottoman Empire more broadly is fourth. The Independence War, led by Mustafa Kemal

Figure 2
Most Common Historical References in PHVs

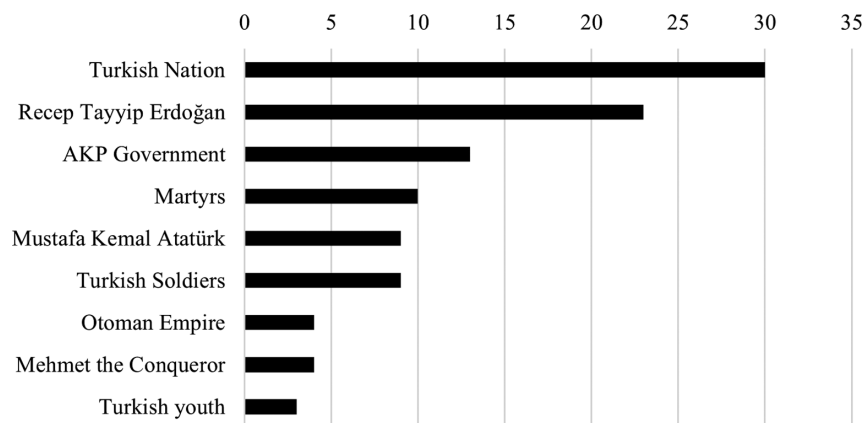


Atatürk, the “founding father” and first president of the Republic of Turkey, receives the most references. Sixteen videos depicting the Ottoman era’s Gallipoli Campaign (Çanakkale, 1915–16) largely feature Atatürk’s improbable victory as an imperial soldier.

The depiction of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a hero (see [figure 3](#)) in videos disseminated by institutions of a regime that has at times vilified the Republic of Turkey’s first president and sought to roll back many of his secularizing reforms (Gumuscu 2024; Yilmaz 2022) may seem surprising. However, film-making techniques can facilitate the selective representation of individuals who appeal to diverse audiences in ways that align with an incumbent’s legitimization narrative. In these videos, Atatürk largely appears as *Gazi* Mustafa Kemal, an Ottoman military commander wearing a *kalpak*—a felt or fur hat that became a “symbol of resistance” against “hat-wearing

Christian occupiers” during the Turkish War of Independence and later abandoned, notably in favor of hats during Atatürk’s early Republican-era modernization and Westernization measures (Abalı 2009, 204)—and heroically fighting against Allied powers. Notably, his honorific from that period contains meanings connoting “warrior who fought for Islam” and “wounded veteran.” This representation supports the AKP’s portrayal of itself as a Global South vanguard battling Western global dominance (Çevik 2020; Fisher-Onar 2022; Hintz 2018; Yeşil 2024). These representations of Atatürk, in fact, predate his adoption of that surname, which means “father of the Turks”; this name change was in line with the Westernizing measures over which he presided (Türköz 2007). Very few images depict him dressed in the Parisian-modeled cravats and waistcoats that were a part of Atatürk’s *laïcité*-inspired reforms to which the

Figure 3
Most Common Heroes Depicted in PHVs



AKP and its pious supporters strongly objected. Thus, even though this selective revivification of Atatürk as *Gazi* Mustafa Kemal aligns smoothly with the incumbent's Ottoman-themed, counterhegemonic discourse, it also creates overlapping resonance for varied nationalist groups, including supporters of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) that Atatürk founded.

Other frequent historical references included major battle victories, such as the 1071 Battle of Manzikert (Malazgirt) and the 1453 Conquest of Istanbul. Defeats appear very rarely and are always accompanied by narratives emphasizing resilience and sacrifice, as in the dramatized scenes of Ottoman soldiers trudging through snowy terrain before being defeated by the Russian Army at the Battle of Sarıkamış in 1915 (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020d). The most frequent historical references from the period after the establishment of the Turkish Republic were the coups in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997.

Figure 3 shows which figures were most frequently depicted as heroes in the PHVs. After the broadly defined category of the Turkish nation—coded as the heroism of individual Turkish citizens and accomplishments of the people as a collective—Erdoğan was the most commonly depicted hero, followed by the AKP party as a unit. Various military figures from historical battles also feature prominently as heroes, as do citizens who died in conflict and are thus considered martyrs (*şehit*) in Turkey. Mehmet the Conqueror (Fatih Sultan Mehmet), who appears in eight videos, is portrayed distinctly as a hero in battle in four videos; he is recognizable to Turkish viewers by the white horse he rode when wresting Istanbul from Byzantine rule in 1453.

Figure 4 indicates the frequency with which PHVs depict particular groups as the enemy. These groups include

Western Allied powers from World War I, Greek and Greek-Cypriot figures from conflicts such as the 1974 “Cyprus Peace Operation” (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2022b), and menacing but vaguely represented characters. The most common enemy category is that of individuals whose actions in the videos tie them to the coup attempt of July 15, 2016. Although we do not code July 15 as a historical event because it occurred during AKP rule, regime rhetoric frames civilians' resistance against the coup as a “*destan*” or historical epic (Carney 2019b; Hammond 2020). These efforts include 21 PHVs, which by definition contain a separate historical component, that depict the events of that night and the Gülenist network the AKP blames for them. As elaborated on later, these videos discursively link civilians resisting putschist efforts in 2016 to scenes from past conflicts, creating a narrative trajectory of brave struggle against internal and external enemies. Within the larger category of storytelling videos (historical and non-historical curated media products with a narrative plot), 25 videos reference the coup attempt; thus, 84% of all videos referencing the coup and its accused plotters include a historical element (21 of 25). Because the event posed the strongest challenge to the rule (and the life) of Erdoğan during the AKP tenure, we find support for our argument about populist authoritarians' instrumentalizations of history in data showing that so many depictions of that event contain references to past struggles and sacrifices, as well as victories.

Selective Revivification Themes and Techniques: Intertextual Analysis

Here we analyze the particular ways in which the storytelling components of videos can quickly distill historical events from multiple eras, imbue them with emotion, and

Figure 4
Most Common Enemies Depicted in PHVs



link them to the incumbent's rule through a selective revivification strategy. We used intertextual analysis to identify common themes among the 71 PHVs disseminated by the regime. Building on our earlier discussion of the qualities of audiovisual content that make videos particularly adroit tools of political communication, we analyze how the common themes we extracted are conveyed quickly and in emotionally evocative ways.

Historical Continuity: Incumbent, Past Events, Forward Progress

The first common theme across videos is that there is a figure moving forward, both physically and metaphorically, through various historical eras. This theme resonates well with insights from the populism literature on chronopolitics that suggest populist actors seek to situate specific events within a broader temporal frame that suggests historical continuity (Taş 2022). In many videos this figure is a sultan or soldier urging a galloping horse forward (AK PARTİ 2021; AK Parti [@Akparsi] 2019; T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2021a) or an everyday citizen running with a flag from conditions of past adversity to present-day prosperity (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2021e). Flag symbols, costumes, and topographic scenery details change as these figures progress, swiftly and clearly signaling continuous advancement through history while swelling music increases the attention-grabbing, emotion-evoking effect. In a video titled “May the Strongest Era Begin,” this transcendent figure is a golden phoenix who keeps the viewer's eye focused on the screen as it flies through scenes from Central Asian tribal yurts to the 1453 Conquest to the rule of Abdülhamid II (AK PARTİ 2018b). In another, it is a young boy who is reading a story about Ottoman naval commander Hayreddin Barbarossa when he receives news of his father's death in combat; the scene then flashes forward to his adult self, who is steering a vessel steaming ahead in the Aegean while he gazes at a black-and-white portrait of his fallen father (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020c). In one of several videos commemorating the July 15, 2016, coup attempt, a flag-carrying, *kalpak*-wearing soldier morphs into a civilian defending the Bosphorus Bridge (later renamed the 15 July Martyrs' Bridge) on the night of the coup; he then transforms into a construction worker running along a paved road that unfurls under his feet as a shiny high-speed train zooms past him.

Whereas speakers at political events frequently draw links between past events and the present—Carney (2019b, 145) notes that *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* actor Mehmet Çevik rhetorically linked events from the thirteenth century to the Battle of Gallipoli and then to the present at a “democracy vigil” after the 2016 coup attempt—these film-making tools facilitate an easily digestible transition from past to present for the viewer

beyond what rhetoric alone can accomplish. Scenes use candlelight and the music of reed flutes, as well as imperial-era writing implements and navigational tools, that immediately render visible and audible the glorious Ottoman past that AKP leaders rhetorically laud (AK PARTİ 2019c; T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020b). Sepia-tinted lighting, early-model televisions, and beloved, easily recognizable figures from children's programming in the 1980s like Barış Manço and Adile Naşit lend nostalgic warmth to a narrative arc in a video titled “Our Story of Unity Begins Anew” (figure 5).

The storytelling narrative of that video, accompanied by instrumental sounds from Turkish folk music, encourages everyone who “grew up together” and shared these warm memories to secure an even brighter future by voting for the AKP in the 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections (AK PARTİ 2018a). As a caution that Turkey needs its current leadership as protection against threats, a black-and-white scene depicting the torture and death of Turkey's first pilot to be killed in combat switches to colorful scenes of street signs, parks, and schools named after the pilot, reminding viewers that his legacy is “all around us today” before closing the scene with a presidential seal (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2021f). These selective revivification techniques create visual and auditory links between specific past accomplishments of forefathers and the ruling party that claims to be the contemporary custodian of their legacy.

A video titled “From Malazgirt to Dumlupınar,” which was released on August 30, 2021, to commemorate Victory Day (*Zafer Bayramı*), exemplifies these film-making techniques and the political message they communicate. It depicts a Selçuk victor in Malazgirt, the 1071 battle also known as Manzikert that marked Central Asian Turkic tribes' entry into the Anatolian territory that they and their descendants would claim as their homeland. Anatolia figures prominently in Erdoğan's definition of “native” (*yerli ve milli*) “Black Turks”—a predominantly cultural and socioeconomic rather than racial classification for conservative, rural Turks whom the Turkish president claims to represent (Arat-Koç 2018). Black Turks are positioned against “White Turks,” the Western-oriented, secularist (Kemalist) elite who victimized pious individuals before the AKP's ascent to power in 2002. In this video, the soldier is easily identifiable for Turkish audiences by his distinctive armor, Selçuk flag, and captioning visualized in a glittering font that specifies the date and place. The soldier rides on horseback through a field hospital in Gallipoli where, against all odds, Ottomans achieved victory against Allied Forces-affiliated Australian and New Zealand (ANZAC) forces. Facilitated by using a film-splicing technique, the soldier rides behind a tent and emerges into view dressed as an Ottoman soldier to swelling music. He then continues riding through Dumlupınar (1922), one of the most significant battles of

Figure 5
Author Screenshot (AK PARTİ 2018a)



Turkey's Independence War, and hands a Turkish flag to a contemporary military unit, with accompanying signage from the Communications Directorate that completes the progression to present-day AKP rule.

Great Strength, Great Sacrifice

A second common theme asserts that the Turkish nation has shown and continues to show great strength, and that this strength comes with great sacrifice. Each of the 71 PHVs includes a representation of great strength, from the aggregation of everyday citizens' power when defending a nation under threat to military air capabilities to massive transportation infrastructure projects. As figure 3 shows, 10 PHVs also feature martyrs as heroes whose sacrifices to the nation make possible its greatness. A video reenacting the sacrifice made by doctor-turned-hero Tarık Nusret dramatizes the moment in which he denies morphine to his own dying son on the battlefield at Gallipoli, reserving the medication for soldiers with higher chances of surviving to carry on the struggle (AK PARTİ 2019f). A film-making technique explicitly linking sacrifice to greatness uses narrator commentary—sometimes as a poem read by Erdoğan that serves to place him in the action (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı 2017a) or captioning or both—to evoke the notion of victory against all odds. Narration in a reverential tone adds dramatic effect to real-life and artist-rendered images of those who fought on when hope and medical supplies were nearly gone—“just when hopes

were about to be extinguished”) (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı 2021f). Figures 6 and 7 exemplify the usefulness of intertextual analysis in identifying common themes across texts.

In addition to PHVs commemorating fallen soldiers whose service contributed to battle victories, several also commemorate sacrifice in defeat. A video re-creating the Battle of Sarıkamış (1914–15), a loss to Russia in which tens of thousands of Ottoman soldiers froze to death, features men fighting fatigue and frostbite to state their name and city of origin through chattering teeth before succumbing to the cold (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020d). At the video's conclusion, the surviving men salute contemporary Turkish soldiers who join them in the driving snow, as they pass on a legacy of bravery under adverse conditions.

PHVs referencing the 2016 coup attempt blend these themes to demonstrate historical precedents for contemporary sacrifices that facilitate greatness. Three such videos use the word “insuperable” (or “impassable,” *geçilmez*) in their title to convey that the Turkish nation has been tested but stands strong (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2021d; 2021i; 2021e). A video titled “Turkey Is Insuperable,” released by the Communications Directorate to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the 2016 coup attempt, opens with grainy black-and-white footage of soldiers wearing distinctive soft caps and carrying arms just before the Ottoman victory at Gallipoli (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2021i). The narrator states, “Throughout its history and

Figure 6
Author Screenshot (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2021b)



Figure 7
Author Screenshot with Autogenerated Captioning (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2021f)



up to the present day, the heroic Turkish nation never ran away from paying the price of its flag, its homeland, its indivisible union, and its independence,” thereby emphasizing a tradition of sacrifice. The scenes shift to previous military coups, footage of security forces shoving headscarved women, and selective images of opposition demonstrators using violence during overwhelmingly peaceful Gezi Park protests in 2013. The banner of the secularist, main opposition CHP waves over smoldering rubble. The images suggest that the pious ingroup that the AKP professes to represent has historically been, and still remains, under threat and in need of protection—a message reemphasized as the video displays footage of violence from the 2016 coup attempt.

Other videos connect the coup both to past victories and to the need for Erdoğan to retain his leadership position because he is the individual best able to call on the nation to sacrifice when necessary. A video subtitled “Our Foundation Is Çanakkale, Our Decision Is Yes,” and shared on the AKP’s channel in the run-up to the April 2017 constitutional referendum on the switch to a consolidated presidency, contains voiceover narration of how Turks “ran to the fight” at Gallipoli and “ran to the square” during the coup attempt (AK PARTİ 2017a). The video closes with an Erdoğan banner and this caption: “Turkey is for those who run to martyrdom out of love for it.” Other selective revivification techniques communicating this

message include the use of Erdoğan's voice proclaiming that Turkey cannot be defeated, scenes of Erdoğan leading masses in prayer, and the splicing of footage of Erdoğan's FaceTime call with a news anchor asking citizens to come to the streets to defend the nation (AK PARTİ 2019a; T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020a; 2021c). These scenes bring to life the frequent historical sentiment that "this ground wasn't won easily and won't be lost easily," quoted by interviewees on state media after the putsch (TRT Haber 2024).

Perennial Threats, Unspecified Enemies

As noted in the quantitative section, enemies depicted in PHVs include named or visually rendered leaders of various coups and Western actors. Symbols of identity serve not only as a signal of who the actors are but also to reinforce perennial "pure" ingroup and "corrupt" out-group struggles. A video shared by the presidency on the first anniversary of the 2016 coup attempt depicts coup plotters fuzzily in black-and-white imagery (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı 2017c). This technique draws a symbolic link between these villains and military putschists of the past who executed Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, ousted Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, and purged thousands of religious conservatives from the government and civil service (Hale 2018). Those who stand up to the coup and are ultimately martyred are distinguished by appearing in color. Men wear the red and white of the Turkish flag; featured women wear Islamic headscarves (figures 8 and 9).

In a 2020 video discursively linking sixteenth-century victories in the Mediterranean to Turkey's Blue Homeland (*Mavi Vatan*) naval doctrine (Çubukçuoğlu 2023),

Figure 9
Author Screenshot (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı 2017c)



the Christian cross, which is displayed prominently (if anachronistically) on the uniforms and flags of the Crusaders, plays the role of a temporal bridge between the Knights Templar and contemporary Greece. Further, the production choice to juxtapose the menacing facial expressions of chain-mail-clad combatants wielding coarse medieval weapons with the composed demeanor of Ottomans and modern-day Turkish naval officers using scientific tools to navigate the seas, engaging in Islamic prayer, and mustering on deck in pristine white uniforms to spell out *Mavi Vatan* creates a stark contrast that revivifies a constructed but nevertheless perennial us vs. them dynamic

Figure 8
Author Screenshot (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı 2017c)



Figure 10
Author Screenshot (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020c)



Figure 11
Author Screenshot (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020c)



in Turkey's relations with the Western Christian world (figures 10–12).

In addition to the visual representation of figures who are recognizable to Turkish viewers from the country's distant or recent past, another notable theme is the omnipresence of threats that are unspecified. We found that half the cases of threats in PHVs are implicit, rather than explicit, which is facilitated by the frequent use of the passive voice in the Turkish language. Narrators often warn that Turkey's security and prosperity are “being obstructed” and “being attacked” by “traitors” and other

nefarious forces without naming the purported enemy (AK PARTİ 2017b; 2019d; 2019b). In some videos, the target of a threat is featured, but the suggested threat is either left unspecified or implied. For example, although many videos contain scenes of armed soldiers and military aircraft—including one titled “From Syria to Libya, From the Balkans to Asia” that features soldiers rapping/shouting nationalist slogans (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020e)—the identity of the enemy against which their protection is required remains elusive. One way to suggest that identity is by using imagery of an identifiable location—for

Figure 12
Author Screenshot (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020c)



Figure 13
Author Screenshot (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2021j)



example, naval vessels sailing in the Eastern Mediterranean (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020c; 2021g). Video content showing images of specific populations' oppression and violence can also imply an enemy, as in videos depicting the AKP's solidarity with Palestinians. The use of prison bars (figure 13) to frame scenes of demolished houses and displaced civilians adds a carceral element that emphasizes the theme of Israel as an enemy oppressor that requires a strongman to stand up to it (T.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2021h)—as Erdoğan did, for example, when denouncing Israeli president Shimon Peres as someone who “know[s] well how to kill” at the Davos World Economic Forum in 2009 shortly after Israeli forces initiated Operation Cast Lead (Prakash and Ilgit 2017).

Selective revivification techniques also facilitate the depiction of figures that are distinctly menacing but whose identities are left undefined and thus open for interpretation. Avoiding specificity is a useful tactic for leaders who seek to signal that their continued rule is necessary to protect a wide swath of citizens. Whereas studies of rhetorical strategies show that populists use broad fear-based narratives and vilifying references to “others” in their speeches (Cap 2016; Erçetin and Erdoğan 2023; Nai 2021; Wodak 2015), audiovisual strategies can render these “others” as villains using no words at all. Videos featuring foreboding music and faceless, dark-clothed actors harming Muslims or the Turkish flag, for example, suggest that the Turkish nation is under threat from enemies who may be internal, external, or both (AK PARTİ 2017a). These vague yet sinister audiovisual techniques entail that no proof is needed to back up leaders' claims about threats nor any direct accusation that could turn off potential supporters with ties to a purportedly threatening group. Turning from a political to a cinematographic standpoint, the practice of leaving the enemy unknown adheres to techniques used in horror films. Leaving an ominous figure unidentified can create more anxiety among viewers than depicting a monster or killer onscreen (Heller-Nicholas 2014). Ominous narration using the passive voice without identifying a subject of the threatening action can compound the effects of this visual technique. A voice rhythmically intoning Turkey's many threats and strengths in a video titled “From Gallipoli to 15 July” uses only passive verbs. This production choice obviates the need to attribute responsibility to any person or group and offers the auditory advantage of phrases that end in passive verbs, which rhyme in Turkish (e.g., *-ilmez*, *-enmez*).

Conclusion

In this article we introduced selective revivification as a populist authoritarian legitimization strategy for “film-making” the nation great again. Through a mixed-methods,

multimodal study of all history-themed videos distributed by six Turkish government institutions over nearly two decades, we analyzed how selective revivification themes and techniques discursively link the contemporary regime to glorious, trauma-surviving figures in the past. Simultaneously, this narrative emphasizes that these legacies and the ingroup that inherited them must be protected against perennial threats. We argue that populist authoritarian incumbents like the AKP instrumentalize historical events and figures to boost support while facing challenges in delivering on their promises of glorious futures.

Our findings make several contributions to the scholarly literature on authoritarianism and legitimization strategies. First, we add an important visual dimension to the study of the authoritarian legitimization toolkit from which elites draw in pursuit of regime durability. We outline how curated forms of audiovisual content such as these videos provide a particularly potent medium for conveying intricate populist narratives in cognitively efficient yet emotionally evocative ways. An “audio-visualized” approach thus allows political scientists to analyze systematically the symbolic messaging that populist leaders frequently use to generate an aura of historical legitimacy as a basis for this popular support.

Second, we specify the varied regime-boosting properties of history by developing the concept of selective revivification. The videos we analyze not only invoke historical glories, perils, and sacrifices but also emphasize fears of threats from explicit or implicit outgroups. We find that PHV content systematically ties imagery of historical threats with those experienced under the ruling party, serving to legitimize the incumbent as not just a rightful inheritor of glorious legacies but also a necessary protector against villains at home and abroad. In highlighting videos' ability to distill selective “lessons” from multiple historical eras and present easily digestible “evidence” of why a populist leader should remain in power, we advance the findings of works acknowledging the messy and diverse ways that history and nationalism intersect. Our study thus builds on scholarship examining “heroic nationalism” that celebrates triumphs and “traumatic nationalism” that commemorates shared loss (Lomsky-Feder 2011). We illustrate how PHVs can render visible both these themes in the same three-minute package replete with swelling music that reminds viewers of just who in the country's history is responsible for its glorious wins and whom they should blame for its devastating losses. We similarly build on studies that acknowledge nations can have “restorative, redemptive, and retentive moments.” By showing how pro-regime videos can capture and concisely communicate all three, Ding, Slater, and Zengin's (2021, 155) example of how Chinese

populism exhibits each of these nationalisms is instructive here.

Existing research on pro-regime instrumentalizations of complex histories in other cases suggests opportunities for extensions and refinement of our audiovisual approach. McGlynn's (2020; 2023) research on historical framing in Russia and Fisher-Onar's (2022) comparative work on the "post-colonial sensibilities" of revisionist powers, for example, offer useful scholarship to engage here. Whereas Wijermars's (2016, 84) study of memory politics in Russian TV serials points to a "rhetorical toolbox," we develop an audio-visualized version in storytelling videos.²⁵ Important components that our study thus adds include how regimes' legitimation strategies can cohere around instrumentalized histories, how film-making techniques enhance the dissemination of these histories, and how reliance on historical themes can increase over the course of incumbent rule as challenges arise. We find that more than half the AKP's storytelling videos feature historical elements, that the proportion of PHVs increases as the party counters challenges to its rule with further authoritarian consolidation, and that the selective revivification strategy peaks in the final two years of our dataset.

Our supply-side analysis of regime strategies also builds directly on research examining audience responses to pro-regime audiovisual products (Kim 2025; Lutscher, Draege, and Knutsen 2023; Mattingly and Yao 2022; Ming-Tak Chew and Wang 2021). Next steps can include cross-national comparisons with other populist authoritarian regimes to determine how and to what extent they rely on selective revivification themes and techniques. Logical points of departure would be similarly personalistic regimes such as Venezuela (Kestler and Latouche 2022), India (Chacko 2018), Hungary (Csehi 2021), and the Philippines (Buckley et al. 2022). Engaging with media elements in their analyses of political strategy, Sagarzazu and Thies (2019) and Selçuk (2024) draw on the rhetorical corpus of Hugo Chávez's weekly television series *Aló Presidente* to demonstrate his strategic deployment of populist messaging. Chakravarty and Roy (2015) study the mediation of populism in news coverage of Narendra Modi's 2014 election campaign. Scholars connecting populism to music point to the commissioning by Viktor Orbán's government of songs that use "the mother tongue" as a tool for constructing "the people" (Barna and Patakfalvi-Czirják 2022), and to Rodrigo Duterte's vocal "performance" of his "proximity to 'the people'" through a popular Filipino love song (Dunkel and Schiller 2022).

Cases that scholars classify as populist authoritarian regimes but that vary in terms of levels of personalism, as well as in factors like economic capacity and global status, could generate useful contrasts. China, debated as a case of populist authoritarianism similarly to Russia (Dickson 2005; Tang 2016), is well positioned for comparative inquiry. Even though single-party regimes typically

promote consensus and emphasize technocratic governance, the Chinese Communist Party deploys populist anti-Western messaging for both domestic and international audiences (Zhang 2020)—a strategy similar to the AKP's "counter-hegemonic" discourse in "talking back to the West" (Yeşil 2024), Modi's rhetorical engagement with the Indian diaspora (Plagemann and Destradi 2019), and Venezuela's anti-imperialist rhetoric under Chávez (Sagarzazu and Thies 2019) and Nicolas Maduro. Audio-visual analysis could usefully identify which if any historical themes of greatness, sacrifice, or both are deployed by these regimes in claiming legitimacy at home and abroad.

Another potentially fruitful avenue for future research could be testing how contextual or individual-level factors shape variance in audience receptivity to such history-themed legitimation strategies. Audience-based studies generally find conditional effects: citizens are significantly emotionally affected when exposed to this imagery or videos (Elçi 2022; Lutscher, Draege, and Knutsen 2023). These effects sometimes translate to changes in political behavior, but this impact differs based on the video, across groups of citizens, and across different points in time of the electoral cycle. These findings point to a need for better understanding how such imagery may evoke diverse effects in citizens and whether certain types of historical narratives are more resonant than others. Future work merging insights on "frame resonance" from the contentious politics literature with audience reception studies can provide useful analytical leverage on these questions (Benford and Snow 2000; Ketelaars 2016); experiment-based research on framing "fluency" would also be instructive here (Bullock et al. 2021; Shulman and Sweitzer 2018). Other paths for further inquiry include studying whether leadership changes affect regimes' instrumentalizations of the past; that is, how and why various leaders choose to spotlight specific historical events and figures. China is also well suited for this type of inquiry. The intersection of Chinese media scholarship (Cai 2016; Chin 2016; Guo 2012) and political scientists' forays into China's audiovisual landscape is a fruitful place to start (King et al. 2017; Mattingly and Yao 2022).

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Data Replication

Data replication (Hintz and Draege 2025) sets are available in Harvard Dataverse at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/NFJ5KC>

Notes

- 1 As Bryce Dietrich (2015), a political scientist specializing in computational social science, cautions in his study tellingly titled “If a Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words, What Is a Video Worth?” the methods used in his study “may be unfamiliar to political scientists.” For critical reflection on the frailty of images, see Gershon (1996).
- 2 Lisa Wedeen’s interpretivist research and Roland Bleiker’s work on visual politics with critical IR scholars such as Emma Hutchison and David Campbell constitute some of the important exceptions here. See Wedeen (1999); Bleiker (2018); and Bleiker, Campbell, and Hutchison (2014).
- 3 We limit our study to authoritarian legitimization strategies, but regimes of all type use audiovisual media as a political tool in attempts to bolster support. Work in communications studies generally refers to such materials as public relations (or “spin”) in democratic regimes and propaganda in authoritarian ones, but both share the work of “organized persuasive communication.” See Bakir et al. (2019).
- 4 Media scholars Özer and Özçetin’s (2024) recent analysis of three history-themed videos produced by Turkey’s Directorate of Communications between 2018 and 2023 makes a useful first cut. We expand the timeframe and the number of institutions and videos analyzed to identify patterns and then connect our argument to political science analyses of authoritarian legitimization and regime durability.
- 5 Whether the causal arrow points in the other direction—that is, whether authoritarian leaders become increasingly populist over time—is an important question but not one we have the scope to explore in depth here. Research in this area could usefully engage the transnational diffusion and authoritarian learning literatures. Because populism often overlaps empirically with personalism (Colburn and Cruz 2012; Selçuk 2024), examples of authoritarian regimes that are not populist might best be found in single-party and military-led autocracies rather than personalistic ones.
- 6 We use the term “populist authoritarian regime” to refer to a subtype of autocracy: a highly consolidated undemocratic regime that is led by actors identified by scholars as populists. The definition of populism—whether conceived as a political strategy, discursive style, or ideology—varies by scholar. For an early review, see Weyland (2001).
- 7 Scholars and authoritarianism analysts largely agree that the March 2025 arrest of Turkey’s main opposition presidential candidate, Ekrem İmamoğlu, places Turkey more firmly in the “hegemonic electoral” or even “full” category of authoritarian regimes (“Dr. Tas: Coercion Has Become the Erdogan Regime’s Default Tool of Governance—ECPS” 2025; “Dr. Cevik: Turkey Has Crossed the Critical Threshold from Competitive to Full Authoritarianism—ECPS” 2025; Schenkkan 2025). Even prior to that power grab, some scholars argued that governance in Turkey’s Kurdish-majority southeastern region constituted subnational autocratic rule (Tanca 2024).
- 8 Key here is that the historical events represented are selectively curated and, in many cases, glorified but are nevertheless presented as reality. In this sense they are designed to function similarly to documentaries but in briefer and more entertaining and digestible formats. On the political role of documentaries in authoritarian regimes, see Baumann (2021); Flood (2006); and Kalinina (2017).
- 9 On the intersection of these three pillars, namely, how autocrats use legitimization to justify repression, see Edel and Josua (2018) and Josua (2016).
- 10 On the lower cost and even political benefits of repressing otherized populations, see Hintz and Ercan (2024) and Lachapelle (2022).
- 11 For important exceptions, see Yilmaz and Erturk (2023); Yilmaz and Shipoli (2022); and Altınordu (2020).
- 12 Much of this important work is currently being done by sociologists. See Bevernage et al. (2024).
- 13 Here again “attempt” is important. As Bush et al. (2016) find via experimental study, exposure to images of leaders had a null effect on regime support and compliance.
- 14 For an overview of this literature and an important correction, see Benabdallah (2021).
- 15 For an important exception that focuses on the genre of news media rather than storytelling videos, see Tolz and Teper (2018). Tan’s (2016) study of “state-sponsored nostalgia,” which focuses on the censorship rather than the production of film content, similarly suggests the importance to authoritarian regimes of controlling audiovisual renderings of history.
- 16 For a cross-national study finding that non-populists use many similar imagery techniques, see Farkas et al. (2022).
- 17 This video is released by the AKP’s youth wing on then-Twitter rather than YouTube and thus is not part of our dataset. However, it very much fits our

- definition of a PHV, and so we use it for illustrative purposes.
- 18 See also Adler-Nissen, Andersen, and Hansen (2020) and Sohlberg, Esaïsson, and Martinsson (2019).
 - 19 The full dataset of all 11,165 YouTube posts and codebook can be accessed via OSF Preprints: https://osf.io/t4vpq/?view_only=5879c35c84f147dd8e1c9cd27ba48238.
 - 20 A blanket ban on the site was put in place from May 2008 to October 2010 in response to a video deemed insulting to Atatürk; in 2015 the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the ban violated users' rights to freedom of expression ("YouTube Blocking in Turkey, Another Violation of Fundamental Rights" 2015). Turkey's telecommunications authorities blocked access to YouTube (and Twitter) from March–May 2014 for "national security" reasons after a recording discussing a possible intervention in Syria was leaked.
 - 21 Following a court judgment ruling against the use of the Turkish flag in a previous version of the video shared on a private YouTube channel, the Office of the Presidency released an altered version around the time of the April 2017 constitutional referendum on the switch to a consolidated presidency (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı 2017b).
 - 22 Despite the inherently political nature of both news and entertainment media content, such topics may seem more approachable to interviewees than overtly political topics. On media reception research in authoritarian regimes, see Abu-Lughod (2008) and Stockmann and Gallagher (2011).
 - 23 On survey experiments in MENA research alone, see Benstead (2018); Bush and Jamal (2015); and Truex and Tavana (2019).
 - 24 Although they overlap temporally, we coded Turkey's Independence War (1919–23), World War I (1914–18), the Battle of Gallipoli (Çanakkale, 1915–16), and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) separately. For example, whereas five videos include visual or spoken references to events of World War I that do not include the Battle of Gallipoli, the presence of 16 videos depicting that specific campaign suggests its high level of significance for regime-affiliated content producers.
 - 25 Wijermars's (2016) study of historical TV serials highlights the length of these shows in creating "lasting memory images" but not their specific audiovisual components; our study does so and points to the communicative power of shorter, sharable videos.

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