

QUICK REFERENCE FOR REPORTING ON THE AUTHORITARIAN PLAYBOOK

| | |
|--|---|
| 1 | Politicization of independent institutions |
| Explain why institutions are independent, the rules and norms that have historically protected that independence, and the potential future consequences of politicization. | |
| 2 | Spread of disinformation |
| Beware of the illusory truth effect, or the tendency of audiences to believe false information when exposed to it again and again. As such, be careful that disinformation is not inadvertently spread by stories that aim to debunk it. And illuminate the systems, motives, funding, and actors spreading lies, covering disinformation as a story, not just a statement. | |
| 3 | Aggrandizement of executive power |
| Contextualize the executive branch's role in the governing process and how cutting out other actors—Congress, judiciary, state governments—can allow for unilateral action. While doing so, try to avoid political intrigue stories that, if overstating process dysfunction and conflicts, can inadvertently help warm voters to executive power grabs. | |
| 4 | Quashing of dissent |
| Pay attention to proposed policy solutions that adopt overbroad standards and fail to consider whether targeted activities are protected fundamental rights. Be especially wary of efforts to silence dissent within federal, state, and local public institutions, including universities and bureaucracies. | |
| 5 | Targeting of marginalized communities |
| Authoritarian actors consolidate power by seeking to dehumanize and exclude certain groups, and it's important to avoid presenting conflicts between powerful majority groups and marginalized groups as equal or balanced. Coverage should also help readers appreciate the centrality of minority rights in sustaining self-government, and in reducing the likelihood of violence, conflict, or repression. | |
| 6 | Corrupting of elections |
| Help readers understand the diverse ways that elections can be corrupted, ranging from voter suppression (restricting ballot access before an election) and biased electoral rules (such as gerrymandering) to election subversion (attempting to overturn or manipulate an election after the fact). What's more, because those who attempt to corrupt elections often justify their actions by claiming that elections are insecure or vulnerable to fraud, continue to vigorously explain existing election processes and safeguards. | |
| 7 | Stoking of violence |
| Remain attentive to how political leaders' statements are received by potentially violent actors. Politicians may offer statements with multiple messages, but the way those messages are understood matters. Also, avoid sensationalizing violence and inflating risk perceptions. And explain the impact of violent events on democratic norms and processes in clear, concrete terms. | |