

# International Influences on Elections in New Multiparty States

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## Abstract

Practitioners and politicians have long debated the wisdom of pushing countries to hold elections, with some arguing for its necessity and others warning of its futility and even danger. Yet, research on how varying types of international activities affect the conduct and structure of elections still has a long way to go to be able to inform this debate. This article discusses the myriad international forms of engagement with elections and reviews the research on their ability to improve election quality. It also explores the more nefarious international activities, which are even less well understood than the efforts to improve elections. Given the mixed outcomes and findings, much work remains to be done, especially in specifying the conditions under which various effects occur. Such work has both practical and theoretical merits and can shed light on broader scholarly inquiries about the international dimensions of democratization.

## INTRODUCTION

International law enshrines the right of citizens to choose their own government. Elections have traditionally been a matter of entirely domestic jurisdiction and even a hallmark of sovereignty. In recent decades, however, this image of elections has grown increasingly inaccurate, as elections in many countries have acquired a strong, if underappreciated, international dimension.

Most people recognize that global economic interdependence and communication mean that events around the world can shift the fortunes of domestic political parties across countries. International financial markets may depress domestic economies and doom incumbents running for reelection, or a nuclear power plant disaster such as the one in Japan in 2011 may boost the fortunes of environmental parties in Europe and elsewhere. Similarly, refugee and immigration flows may increase nationalist party support. However, international influences on elections go far beyond this traditionally recognized interconnectedness. As this article highlights, international factors affect even core elements of how some countries conduct and structure elections. Not only has election conduct become enshrined in international law, but in recent decades the international community, including development agencies, intergovernmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations, has begun to intrude actively and extensively in elections. To illustrate, in December 2010 the United Kingdom issued its own “How To” note on “Electoral Assistance,” providing detailed “guidance for UK country posts on when and how to support elections internationally” (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2010). Elections have thus come to epitomize the great extent to which domestic and international politics have become intertwined even in the least likely areas (Gourevitch 1978), and, relatedly, the increasing futility of separating the study of international relations from that of comparative politics.

Because the prevailing consensus is that domestic factors influence democratization far more than international ones (Whitehead 1996), scholars have largely overlooked the many different ways that international actors influence elections. However, the level of international activities is quite high, and studying these activities can help refine theories of how external actors promote domestic political reforms and why governments respond to the international efforts. Such theory has traditionally focused on military intervention, sanctions, and political conditionality, and worked to understand various causal mechanisms such as coercion, shaming, and socialization. In addition, studying international influences on elections is important from a practical perspective of understanding “what works” to better understand what might successfully be applied elsewhere and to understand the role of elections in democratization more generally.

This article explores the myriad international influences on electoral laws, processes, behaviors, and norms and discusses research on the ways that international actors engage in domestic elections. It focuses specifically on elections, not broader democracy promotion efforts. That said, elections are conceptualized broadly as a comprehensive process that encompasses the legislative framework, the electoral system, the pre-electoral environment, electoral administrative institutions, and the many facets of elections such as media access, campaigning, funding rules, and dispute-resolution mechanisms that contribute to competitive elections throughout what has come to be known in the election-assistance community as the “electoral cycle.”

After a review of the history of the international involvement in elections and the popular debate about that involvement, the article briefly discusses indirect influences on elections before moving to the main focus on more direct forms of engagement, including a discussion of the dark side of international meddling. The conclusion lays out the many remaining research questions.

## HISTORY

The controversial history of international involvement in elections goes back at least to 1857, when the Treaty of Paris established a European Commission to observe elections in Moldavia and Wallachia. In the early twentieth century, the United States engaged in elections in Central America and the Caribbean, observing and assisting in the design of the electoral process and even sending troops to administer elections (Wright 1964). After the 1945 Yalta declaration stressed free elections and urged the signatories to “facilitate where necessary the holding of such elections” (Yalta Declaration 1954), the United States, along with the British and French, promoted elections in Europe with particularly heavy involvement in Greece in 1946, Italy in 1948, and Germany in 1953 (Zak 1987). In yet another high-profile incident, in 1978 U.S. President Carter deployed warships off the coast of the Dominican Republic during the election. Thus, President Reagan’s 1982 call for a “crusade for freedom that will engage the faith and fortitude of the next generation” followed a long history of external involvement in elections, often closely intertwined with the Cold War competition for allies.

As the changing security landscape freed Western countries to push for democracy, they became increasingly willing to push for elections. Western countries spearheaded democracy promotion efforts in countries such as Namibia, Cambodia, Angola, El Salvador, and elsewhere in Africa and postcommunist countries. In Chile, the international community pressured President Pinochet to legalize political parties in 1988 and call a plebiscite, in which he failed to be reelected. In Nicaragua in 1990, the international community played a strong role in bringing about elections as part of an internationally brokered peace agreement. Elections in Kenya in 1992 also came about largely as a result of pressure from international donors (Roessler 2005). Ghana’s 1992 election is yet another example of external pressure on a ruler to hold multiparty elections.

## THE POPULAR DEBATE

Early critics of international engagement in elections focused on the United States’ heavy hand in “staging” elections to its own advantage (Herman & Brodhead 1984), surely a criticism with considerable truth. However, as elections became a favored tool of liberal democracy promotion, the debate focused less on biased interference to sustain allies in the Cold War rivalry and more on whether pushing for elections helps or hinders democratization. Given that the evolution to competitive elections took a very long time in today’s established democracies (Berman 2007; Ziblatt 2009, p. 19), many scholars began to question the utility of pushing for elections and whether it is wise to operate as if international actors can facilitate the process by somehow “leapfrogging” elections into new or developing democracies, the way some countries have moved directly to advanced technologies by skipping less efficient, harmful, or inferior stages of development (Glidden 2000–2001, Goldemberg 1998).

Karl (1986, p. 34) warned early of the “fallacy of electoralism” as it played out in El Salvador, arguing that holding elections does not channel political action into meaningful political contests, even if foreign or domestic elites “tinker” to produce surface manifestations of electoral competition. Indeed, Karl argued that such efforts could even block progress. Zakaria and others have also argued that liberal attempts to push for elections in countries that lack liberal institutions can instead produce illiberal democracies (Chua 1998; Zakaria 1997, 2004). In her study of the failed 1992 elections in Angola, Ottaway (1998, p. 149) argues that even when delivered quite competently, “technical electoral assistance can be politically dangerous” because it can enable an electoral process for which the country is not ready. Although not writing specifically about elections, more recently security scholars have warned of more dire consequences, arguing that

hasty efforts to liberalize also could produce great instability, even war (Mansfield & Snyder 2005, p. 273; Snyder 2000). Indeed, Roessler (2005) argues that international pressure to hold elections in Kenya in 1992 had the unintended effect of privatizing state violence.

Even if elections may bring troubles, however, scholars and practitioners have countered that inaction would leave many countries under dictatorships far worse than the illiberal democracies that Zakaria bemoaned. Carothers (2007) argues that claims about the necessity of sequencing—that is, waiting for certain institutions to take root before encouraging elections and further democratization—rest on a number of false assumptions and that, furthermore, the choice is not actually in the hands of the international community, because in most countries it is domestic factors that drive the demand for elections. Similarly, Pastor (2004, p. 254) argues that it is unrealistic to expect modern transition states to mimic the Anglo-American sequence of liberal institutions: “No developing country today can or will wait for these institutions to take root.”

This debate about whether international actors should push for elections hinges on at least two questions. First, do elections in themselves promote democratic progress? Second, does external involvement improve elections? Research on the first question is nascent and suffers from the empirical and conceptual difficulties of separating measures of elections from measures of democracy. This makes it even harder than normal to address questions of reverse causality and tautology. Consequently, findings are tentative and split. Brownlee (2007) argues that elections do not change long-term outcomes in authoritarian regimes, but Tucker (2007) and Bunce & Wolchik (2006a) show that elections can be revolutionary events. The authors in Lindberg’s (2009) edited volume *Democratization by Elections* likewise reach a wide range of conclusions. The historical record is also mixed. Since 1975, 83 countries have held a multiparty election that—at least technically—allowed opposition parties for the first time (or the first time after a long interlude). Of these 83 countries, 30% improved their Freedom House rating in the election year, but in most countries, the first multiparty election was not sufficient to improve the rating, which considers both political and civil freedoms. In 8% of countries holding first multiparty elections, the Freedom House rating even regressed the year of the election. On average, subsequent election years displayed greater rates of freedom-score increases than nonelection years, but backsliding has occurred as well. Of course, these mixed findings need not be contradictory. Probably Schedler (2009) gets it right when he argues that whether and how elections improve democracy likely varies across regions and depends on other factors—many of which remain to be identified.

This brings up the second question: does external involvement improve elections? The mixed and slow progress does not necessarily mean that elections are useless and that by association international engagement in elections is useless. Indeed, the variation in outcomes raises the question of whether and how international influences have shaped the quality of elections, a topic to which this article now turns.

## CAUSES AND MECHANISMS OF INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES

### Indirect International Influences

Before discussing the direct international efforts to improve elections, we should recognize some less direct international influences. For example, both colonial legacies and emulation behavior help explain the distinct geographical patterns of electoral systems around the world (Golder 2005). The research suggests that diffusion mechanisms have varied from region to region. Thus, Lijphart (2008) argues that in Latin America and Europe, electoral systems have spread mostly through voluntary emulation of what countries perceived as successful systems in other countries. In Africa, however, colonial legacies predict various aspects of elections in postcolonial states, ranging from

the very design of the electoral system to the administration of the election. Mozaffar (2002) shows that colonial legacies help explain the degree of autonomy of electoral management bodies in Africa, with Anglophone countries inheriting the most autonomous electoral management bodies. Several scholars also show that British colonies were, at least initially, more likely to choose parliamentary systems, whereas other former colonies chose presidential or mixed systems (Blais & Massicotte 1997, Golder & Wantchekon 2004). The choice of electoral systems and institutions thus has often depended on past external influences, although the mechanisms for the diffusion have varied across regions.

The international legal system of electoral rights, norms, and standards also influences elections indirectly (Franck 1992). In 1948, Article 21 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) established the principle of participation—the idea that citizens have the right to choose their own government—as the central right that connects other substantive human rights. The UDHR also established the principle of genuine and periodic elections, with a secret ballot and universal and equal suffrage. In the decades thereafter, these principles became ever more detailed and embedded in a wider regional network of treaty standards and declarations, all of which increasingly identified elections as an internationally guaranteed right and legitimized international enforcement of this right (see Rich 2001 and Kelley 2008, among others).

This body of international law can influence elections in a state if international courts rule based on an instrument to which the state has acceded. For example, the European Court of Human Rights has upheld electoral rights enshrined in the European Convention (O’Connell 2010). International law can also provide electoral standards to which external actors can hold countries accountable. As the EU compendium (European Commission 2007) on electoral standards and the Carter Center database of legal commitments (Carter Center 2010) show, most states have committed themselves to a wide array of international electoral norms through multiple regional and global instruments, which guide many of the other forms of electoral assistance (Davis-Robert & Carroll 2010). Finally, domestic actors may also mobilize around these international electoral “rights,” the way that Simmons (2009) argues that domestic actors mobilize around international human rights instruments. But perhaps the most prominent way international electoral standards influence domestic elections is by framing the rights of citizens to choose their government as a fundamental human right, which has facilitated more direct international involvement in elections.

### **Direct International Involvement**

A variety of international actors engage extensively in domestic elections. As the regional organizations have adopted standards on elections, they have also created agencies to oversee and promote these standards. The United Nations has also intensified electoral assistance of various kinds, and nongovernmental organizations have sprung up everywhere to promote good elections. Several national development agencies, such as USAID, have also developed election units. In addition, international aid donors and international financial institutions sometimes get involved with elections.

These many different kinds of actors engage in elections in several different ways. They target different aspects of elections such as the electoral system, the legal framework for the election, the dispute-resolution system, the administration of the election, or the behavior of voters and politicians. Some efforts aim to correct capacity-related problems or to overcome inexperience, while others aim to mobilize domestic political participation or curb fraud. Other efforts seek to change the incentive structure of the actors involved by manipulating material costs and benefits directly, or by empowering local actors in ways that change the cost-benefit analysis of national actors. This is akin to what some scholars call coercion, even if it does not necessarily involve

direct force of any kind. It could include the political conditionality of aid and other resources, or even the use of shaming to increase reputational costs of running bad elections. Other efforts aim to change the beliefs of actors about the state of the world through education, or to persuade them to change their preferences by exposing them to new ideas or theories. This is akin to what scholars have called learning or socialization.

In theory, these efforts may improve elections through very different mechanisms, such as learning, capacity building, incentives, and persuasion. In reality, however, these causal mechanisms often blur because several types of engagement may work through multiple mechanisms. The next section reviews the research on the various types of direct engagement and discusses the mechanisms of influence most likely to be at work in each type of activity as well as any findings on their effects.

**Legal advice.** As discussed above, historical legacies may influence electoral systems or countries may voluntarily emulate the systems used in other countries. Often overlooked, however, is that international actors also actively spread particular electoral institutions by providing legal assistance and advice to countries in transition. Such “rule of law aid” mushroomed in the 1990s. In 1999, within the United States government alone, 26 agencies administered rule of law–related projects (Holmes 1999, p. 68). The American Bar Association, which started the Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative in 1990, and the International Human Rights Law Group, among others, have provided legal assistance and advice over several decades, often related to election laws.

International legal experts may review draft legislation and offer feedback, sometimes in the form of formal recommendations backed by institutions such as the Venice Commission. They may advise governments on election-related elements within a national constitution, perhaps as part of a constitutional redesign process after a conflict or a revolution (Ginsburg et al. 2008). They may also offer direct advice on the electoral law itself as it goes through reforms, or on regulations governing electoral administration, or on many other aspects of the legal framework for election. The potential areas of advice are very broad indeed, including boundary delimitation, the system of representation, gender or ethnic quotas, the governance of the Electoral Commission body, various elements of election laws (e.g., campaign finance legislation, campaign rules, nomination processes, voter eligibility), and so forth.

Such legal advice provides a different explanation for the diffusion of electoral institutions than a simple story of historical path dependency or voluntary emulation. International legal advisors may diffuse electoral institutions through teaching, but they may also work through more coercive methods, if, for example, international actors link rewards or punishments to the adoption of certain electoral institutions.

As a 2008 National Research Council report stressed, it is very difficult to assess direct assistance programs (Committee on Evaluation of USAID Democracy Assistance Programs 2008). Thus, the body of research about legal assistance is fairly small and relies mostly on case studies. Yet, this research does offer some insights on which mechanisms may be at work. For example, the contributors in Kumar’s (1998b) edited volume on postconflict elections find that in the eight elections they studied, international assistance helped draft new electoral legislation on voter registration, candidates and parties, electoral commission and administration, voting systems, and other matters, and that even if countries used initial drafts only for the first postconflict election, they referenced these laws for future legislation (Kumar 1998a, p. 221). Thus, the importance of path dependency is evident. Also, given the postconflict settings in these elections, the mechanisms at work did not include voluntary emulation; international actors often indirectly forced these new electoral institutions on the countries.

Case study evidence suggests that governments are more likely to follow international advice on electoral laws if external actors connect their advice to strong incentives. Kelley (2012, Appendix E) shows that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the Council of Europe left clear marks on election laws in several countries that sought favor with the European Union or NATO. For example, as long as they relied purely on efforts to persuade, the OSCE and the Council of Europe had no influence on the election laws in Estonia and Latvia. Change only came once NATO admission was on the line. Even such incentives may fail when the domestic opposition is strong: in Slovakia, Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar resisted international pressure to correct an electoral law fixed along ethnic lines, despite the EU linking the changes directly to EU admission (Kelley 2004, pp. 126–27). As Carothers (1998, pp. 96, 104–6) commented on the general rule-of-law phenomenon, external aid cannot substitute for the internal will to reform, and external actors should expect only marginal returns on their efforts. Even if changes occur, governments may thwart them in the implementation stage. In Lesotho, for example, Jørgen Elklit, who served as an expert there, reports that international actors, led by the Southern African Development Community, helped devise a new electoral system to address the winner-take-all concerns that had plagued previous elections, only to have the main players game the system in the next election (Elklit 2005, 2008).

Few quantitative studies have examined the effectiveness of international legal advice. In one notable study, however, Bush (2011) demonstrates that international pressures helped promote women's quotas in legislatures around the world. She identifies two major mechanisms, both of which again stress the value of incentives. First, international peace operations imposed quotas when they recommended new systems of governance after conflicts. This aligns with the findings in the Kumar (1998b) volume about electoral-law advice in postconflict elections. Second, international actors linked foreign aid to the adoption of women's quotas. Finally, although she does not claim this as causal, Bush finds that the presence of international monitors correlates positively with gender quotas, which election observers actually at times recommend.

Overall, the body of research suggests that international legal advice has limited but observable impact under narrow, incentive-based conditions. However, this conclusion is based on few studies, and it is possible that learning and emulation also occur but are hard to document and separate from incentive-based effects. Certainly questions remain about how and with what effect international actors are involved in electoral law reforms. Some of the remaining research questions are descriptive—that is, we still need to understand what is really occurring. For example, what is the most common substance of the electoral law and electoral system recommendations made, and who promotes what systems? Does the success of electoral reform vary across the types of proposed reforms or domestic contexts? More research is needed to cast light on the diffusion of legal norms, the origins and adaptation of electoral laws, and the ability of external actors to bring about legal reforms within countries.

**Electoral assistance.** Sometimes poorer countries struggle with basic logistical issues such as the printing or distribution of voting materials. Even wealthier countries may struggle with voter education due to inexperience. Electoral assistance is designed specifically to alleviate such election-related capacity issues that stem from lack of resources or experience. Organizations typically send delegations to the country well before an election to evaluate the country's preparedness to hold elections and consult extensively with national and local officials about how to improve processes.

Electoral assistance is often quite material and technical. For example, international organizations may repair or construct voter lists and teach local authorities how such lists should be assembled and maintained. This can influence who votes in a given country. International actors may also provide ballot boxes, help print and distribute materials, provide computer and

communication equipment, and so forth. The European Commission supervised electoral reform in the Palestinian Authority, but it also financed millions of euros' worth of technical equipment and assistance (European Commission 2006, p. 182). In Nicaragua, international donors spent more than \$8 million to issue national voter identity cards (Lopez-Pintor 1998, p. 48). At times, international actors even organize the entire election, as when the United Nations conducts so-called "election supervision."

The influence of such logistical assistance is clear and observable. A voter card decreases fraud and makes it easier for voters to participate; would it not otherwise have been issued properly, its provision by international actors is important. However, in addition to the direct and immediate observable outcomes, logistical assistance may also influence how elections are run in the future. Furthermore, it may signal international support, which may change the opposition parties' assessment of their chances for success and increase their willingness to invest in the election (Bunce & Wolchik 2010). Thus, even plain logistical support can influence elections in several ways.

In addition to logistical support, international actors reduce inexperience by training administrative officials and poll workers and educating voters. They may even help organize debates. Such direct engagement may socialize domestic actors into international electoral norms. For example, staff training and voter education may teach poll workers, election officials, and voters how to protect the secrecy of the vote. In new multiparty states, such socialization may occur more readily, because novices tend to be more susceptible to outside influences (Johnston 2001). However, it is difficult to demonstrate empirically whether learning and socialization occur and are attributable to outside actors, especially because international actors are involved in elections repeatedly and local actors may accumulate experience simply from holding multiple elections.

Although many organizations attempt to collect evaluation data on their electoral assistance, most organizations lack proficient internal assessment units and thus have little sense of the extent of their influence and effectiveness. Scholars know even less. Individual cases studies provide examples of both successes (Manning & Malbrough 2010) and failures (Elklit 2011) of international election assistance, but few studies compare across countries or over time. One comparison of 11 elections in the postcommunist region (Bunce & Wolchik 2010) found that the international actors often funded or facilitated voter-registration and turnout drives and pressured electoral commissions, and that these and other internationally assisted activities helped explain the variation in the success of the elections. In a rare multicountry quantitative study, Finkel et al. (2007, p. 433) analyze the relationship between USAID democracy and governance assistance and break down the assistance into subsectors, including election assistance. Using statistical techniques to try to address the difficult endogeneity and omitted-variable problems, they find that election-specific assistance improves their measure of free and fair elections. In a three-country case study, Finkel (2003) finds that general civic education increases political participation, but that the effect of education about elections is smaller.

Thus, the effectiveness of electoral assistance efforts is unclear and much more can be done to identify the optimal domestic conditions for providing such assistance. Because assistance is by definition given to countries that lack capacity and experience, which other factors nevertheless render such assistance useful?

**Observation and monitoring.** Other than the capacity issues discussed above, the major domestic factor that influences the conduct of elections and whether international assistance succeeds is the intent of the political actors. Countries with politicians intent on cheating differ greatly from those earnestly struggling with capacity issues such as completing a voter registration list. As Schedler (2002) and others have argued, the "menu of manipulation" for those bent on cheating

is long. When politicians are determined to cheat, it is hard for international actors to assist or educate; they must pressure and discipline. Thus, international actors try to use shaming, political conditionality, sanctions, or even coercion in the hope that politicians will respond rationally to the incentives and disincentives and cheat less. When politicians are dishonest, international electoral norms provide important standards to which the international community can hold a government accountable, but whether the international community succeeds depends largely on the incentives it can provide domestic actors.

One of the most common tools international actors use is election monitoring and observation. These terms are sometimes used to denote different levels of engagement, but often, as here, they are used interchangeably. Election monitoring has risen drastically since the late 1980s and become a near prerequisite for transition states (Rosenau & Fagan 1994, Chand 1997, Hyde 2011). Indeed, depending on the mandate of the attending organization, international election-observation missions often deliver many forms of electoral assistance discussed above, including legal advice and logistical assistance. However, as election monitors, they perform a unique function by observing and reporting on the conduct of the election.

Kelley (2012, ch. 6) argues that international monitoring can change politicians' incentives in three ways. First, by signaling that the international community is paying attention and making it more likely that cheating will be exposed, monitoring raises the expected cost of cheating. Second, by documenting the election conduct and assuring citizens of international attention, monitors make it easier for domestic actors to protest, which again increases the risk of negative repercussions of cheating. Third, by playing an external verification role, monitoring increases the value of honesty, because it is harder for domestic actors to tarnish an election by accusing the winners of fraud. Hyde (2007) has likewise made the domestic-protest argument, noting too that it generally resonates with arguments about the coordination problem associated with opposition reaction to fraudulent elections (Przeworski 1991, Weingast 1997, Tucker 2007). These expectations are also consistent with work by Donno (2010, 2011), who has analyzed data on opposition mobilization after flawed elections in Latin America and the postcommunist region, and finds that election observers and external denouncement of electoral fraud help mobilize opposition forces and increases the likelihood of transitions to democracy.

Research on the activities of international observers began in the 1980s, although most of the early work consisted of commentaries on individual elections. Many of the early case studies did not evaluate the effect of monitors on the election but discussed problems with the monitoring process in a given setting. An important contribution was Middlebrook's (1998) edited volume, which also included regional comparative analysis by McCoy (1998). Abbink & Hesselning's (2000) edited volume on election observation in Africa also provided well-grounded discussions of the merits and challenges of election observation. Bjornlund (2004) contributed to more cross-national comparison by presenting aggregate overviews of monitoring efforts. Still, these works all focused on the policy issues and practical choices facing monitors, rather than systematically assessing their effects on election quality.

Statistical work has begun. Hyde's (2007) analysis of Armenia shows that monitored polling stations had lower rates of votes for the incumbent. In a global study, Kelley (2012) finds that monitored elections are of higher quality and result in greater rates of turnover. The major challenge for such studies of effect is the concern about reverse causality, which would be present if monitors go to elections predisposed to demonstrate progress. The studies try to address this selection problem in different ways. Hyde relies on the fact that in the given election in Armenia, monitoring missions were almost randomly assigned to different polling stations. Kelley uses genetic matching techniques to approximate random assignment. Neither of these studies claims the effect of monitors to be unambiguously positive. In Armenia, the election was still highly

problematic. Monitors deterred cheating in observed polling stations, but lot of other problems were obvious to observers elsewhere.

The most difficult research challenge is to discover when election monitoring works best. Kelley (2012) finds that monitors are most likely to improve the election quality in transition states without strong winner-take-all systems or high levels of conflict. Monitoring organizations that are credible and consistent are also more likely to work, especially if they can offer incentives such as EU or NATO membership. In contrast, monitoring organizations can do little in strong autocratic states with external support from other autocracies.

One technique observers use occasionally is the quick count or parallel vote tabulation: observers use statistical sampling techniques to predict the outcome of the election and announce those results in an effort to provide a “reality check” on the official results. Today this technique is often used entirely without international support, but international donors still are often central to funding this activity. Although quick counts are mentioned in some work, not much research has been done on how they influence election quality and the resolution of disputes. When the practice was new, Garber & Cowen (1994) argued anecdotally that it effectively reduces cheating at the tabulation stage of the election. A few case studies do support this. Bunce & Wolchik (2010) note the importance in postcommunist countries of externally funded exit polls, which, although not quite the same, serve a similar function. Bjornlund (2006) has also provided case study accounts of the importance of quick counts, but more systematic research would be welcome.

International actors have also helped create domestic monitoring organizations. Domestic election monitoring began in 1983 with the National Citizens’ Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) in the Philippines and went on to play a major role in that country’s 1986 presidential election. Since then, domestic monitoring has spread rapidly to other countries. Sometimes the diffusion mechanism was mimicry: domestic monitoring organizations would model themselves on organizations in other countries. Other times the mechanism was international assistance: international actors would promote domestic-monitoring capacity as part of their election-promotion agenda. For example, the National Democratic Institute has worked with the Egyptian Association for the Support of Democracy to train thousands of domestic observers since 1995. Although Egypt remained closed to international observers for the 2005 parliamentary election, the National Democratic Institute trained more than 8,000 volunteers as domestic observers (National Democratic Institute 2010). Lean (2007, p. 291) argues that in Latin America domestic election monitors sought to imitate NAMFREL, the successful Philippine domestic monitoring organization, but that international organizations facilitated this by providing networking opportunities, resources, and expertise. Lean argues that this direct contact with NAMFREL workers taught Latin American organizations how to run domestic monitoring organizations, and that international actors in this way helped create social capital.

Although international donors now routinely support domestic election observers, there is little work specifically on whether domestic observers are effective (Nevitte & Canton 1997). Lean (2007) argues that international assistance to domestic election observation has had mixed results. However, her study of six domestic monitoring organizations in the Americas leaves room for larger-scale studies to help sort out the many causal factors she discusses. Bjornlund (2004), in a case study of Zambia, concludes that foreign engagement facilitated the domestic monitoring, which in turn, despite problems, improved elections and boosted civil society. But in Indonesia, he argues, foreign support for domestic monitoring efforts actually undermined larger democratization efforts by shifting resources and focus to election day, and by spurring the overpopulation of new monitoring organizations to compete for funding rather than cooperate for democratization. The work on domestic election monitoring is thus brief and observational

in nature, based on a few case studies, and the interaction between international and domestic observers remains understudied.

**Post-election engagement.** International actors also focus attention on fraud after an election. The 2003 election in Georgia and the 2004 election in Ukraine are famous examples of such international pressure. A similar concerted effort occurred in the Ivory Coast in 2010 after the incumbent refused to step down after losing the election. The World Bank reinforced the message of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States by closing its office and ceasing to lend and disburse funds in the Ivory Coast (World Bank 2010). In many other cases the international community has protested against fraudulent elections. Donno (2011) reports that intergovernmental organizations are more likely to sanction states when they violate electoral norms severely, and to use softer forms of punishment such as shaming when the norm violations are less severe. She also demonstrates that the involvement of intergovernmental organizations, both alone and especially in combination with opposition movements, makes it more likely that flawed elections will eventually spur democratic change.

International actors have also helped mediate election disputes (Pastor 1998). International actors have served as brokers in many elections, such as Guyana's in 1997, Ukraine's in 2004, and Kenya's in 2007. The research, once again, is mostly case study-based. Elklit (2011) argues that after the 2007 election in Kenya, the Independent Review Commission (IREC) (spearheaded by Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on behalf of the African Union and with UN support) was essential to solving the postelection conflicts and that international actors also played important mediation roles following the Lesotho 1998 election and again in Lesotho from 2007 to 2010. McCoy and others also report (Pastor 1998) several successful cases when former president Jimmy Carter, working with the Carter Center, has negotiated with losing incumbents and persuaded them to leave office (McCoy 1998; McCoy et al. 1991). In 2011, UN and French forces eventually intervened in the Ivory Coast after strongman Laurent Gbagbo refused to step down following his loss. However, although Donno's (2010) study did examine whether countries were more likely to move toward democracy if international actors penalized election fraud, and although numerous case studies have examined external engagement in individual elections, research remains to be done on the frequency of such direct postelection mediation and intervention efforts, and their effects on local tension and conflict in the short and long term.

## The Dark Side

Although the above discussion has focused on whether international influences improve elections, as the popular debate suggests, international efforts are not uniformly good. Some international actors seek to undermine elections, and even some of the well-intended efforts may have unintended consequences.

**Black knights.** Some countries may play what Hufbauer et al. (1990, p. 12) call "black knights"—actors that deliberately seek to lower the quality of an election to manipulate its outcome in their own favor. Levitsky & Way (2010a) argue that black knights are among the main factors that undermine transitions to democracy by weakening the leverage of prodemocratizing influences.

This is similar to what the United States used to be accused of during the Cold War, but such efforts by various actors continue today. Russia is the most conspicuous (Tolstrup 2009, Jackson 2010). For example, after the OSCE's active role in the colored revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia (unsuccessfully) pushed for institutional reforms to curtail the independence of OSCE observers (Fawn 2006). Russia also attempted to undermine Ukraine's 2004 election, where

Russian public relations experts participated directly in Viktor Yanukovich's election campaign and where Russia offered political and economic incentives to convince voters of the importance of maintaining good relations with Russia. President Putin even made a visit shortly before election day. In Ukraine's case, however, Petrov & Ryabov (2006, p. 145) note that Russia's role turned out to be a massive blunder because its conspicuousness fed right into the hands of the opposition.

Relatedly, Bader et al. (2010) have begun to explore the concept of "autocracy promotion." They argue that autocracies, while prioritizing stability, have a clear interest in promoting autocracy in their neighbor states. Bader et al. illustrate this with cases of Chinese efforts in Myanmar and Cambodia and Russian efforts in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. Sometimes these efforts are more broadly aimed at regime support, but they may also focus on elections. For example, Russia infused Kyrgyzstan's incumbent Kurmanbek Bakiev with funds right before the 2009 presidential election to boost his reelection chances (Bader et al. 2010, p. 96). Russia has also supported the development of election observation within the Commonwealth of Independent States to endorse Russia's views of elections in its "near abroad."

But Russia is not the only black knight, and indeed, whether a country is labeled as such depends on where one stands. Certainly other countries continue to meddle in elections. Levitsky & Way (2010a) point to France's support of regimes in Gabon and Cameroon. For example, as Emmanuel (2010) notes, France endorsed the 1992 election in Cameroon although monitors criticized it strongly. In Nicaragua, Venezuela and the United States have vied for electoral influence (Lopez-Pintor 1998). Their efforts reached a new high in 2006, prompting the Carter Center (2006, p. 16) to remark: "Attempts by foreign countries to influence Nicaragua's election outcome reached a depth and visibility unmatched since 1990. While the U.S. government once again maneuvered to unify the Liberal forces to thwart a comeback by Daniel Ortega, Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez came to Ortega's aid as a key ideological ally." This comment raises the point that which side an external actor chooses to support, and how, is unlikely to be devoid of self-interest and bias, even if veiled in the language of "democracy promotion." One regime's white knight might be another's black knight.

Like much of the work discussed in this article, research on black knights and autocracy promotion is still slim and mostly limited to empirical description. It is also interesting to note that although such activities are argued to weaken democratic transitions, in Ukraine, they inadvertently spurred it. Thus, we do not understand the conditions that make such activities effective or prompt a backlash. The case of Ukraine suggests that backlash is likely when the efforts are blatant. However, given the lack of research on different types of activities by different states in different regions, this may be an oversimplification. It may be that economic dependency equally well facilitates black knight influence or that the effectiveness of black knights depends on the strength of domestic opposition movements.

**Unintended consequences.** Even well-intentioned external assistance may have unintended side effects. For example, the technology and methods transferred through technical assistance may influence ballot design, tabulation processes, and many other fundamental practices in the future. Some of these technology transfers may be entirely inconsequential, but if they lack domestic ownership, they could have unanticipated consequences. On the flip side, other forms of assistance may not be sustainable, leaving dangerous holes in the system for future elections. Relatedly, election assistance may also undermine local capacity building in the long run, a charge sometimes leveled at international nongovernmental organizations more generally. Furthermore, improving logistical aspects of an election may provide a false sense of security in contexts where many other factors undermine election integrity. Such effects remain open for empirical inquiry. Right now, we simply do not know.

International election monitoring may also have unintended effects. A common criticism is that monitors sometimes legitimize fraudulent elections (Abbink & Hesselting 2000, Carothers 1997, Geisler 1993, Kumar & Ottaway 1998), something Kelley (2009) has demonstrated more systematically. This may have a host of other unfortunate effects on the political situation in the country. Such second-order effects have not been studied, and proving causality in such claims would be difficult but very important. Other unintended effects are also possible. For example, Beaulieu & Hyde (2009) argue that monitors can cause politicians to switch to less blatant forms of cheating and that this indirectly causes boycotts, although Kelley (2011) does not find evidence of this, and even finds that monitors may decrease boycotts.

Another example of unintended consequences of international election-promotion efforts might be what Silitski (2010) calls the “Darwin Effect”: dictators who anticipate trouble react by entrenching their power further. Thus, Silitski (2010, p. 339) argues that the colored revolutions led other post-Soviet countries to attack and obstruct opposition challenges, a point also made by Ambrosio (2009). Indeed, China and Russia also reacted to the Arab Spring of 2011 by cracking down on information and protest. Thus, if international efforts to improve elections are effective, they can lead to backlashes in autocracies.

## CONCLUSION

It is no longer accurate to dismiss international influences on elections. A multitude of international activities and processes permeate elections in new multiparty states in particular, and they epitomize the prevalence of international influences on domestic politics even in a realm once thought to be strictly domestic. Not only have colonial legacies influenced electoral institutions, but countries may adopt electoral technologies or institutions because they learn from or are pressured by international actors, or because they emulate other countries. Domestic actors may use international electoral standards to mobilize protests, just as the international community may use these standards to justify interference. Citizens and politicians may learn electoral norms from their repeated interaction with international organizations and agencies. Finally, and most directly, domestic politicians may cheat less or compromise on election disputes because international actors change their incentives for cooperation. Unfortunately, there may be both intentional counter-efforts and unintended negative consequences of well-intentioned efforts to improve elections. Thus, for better or for worse, many different mechanisms can shape electoral institutions, electoral conduct, and even whether elections are held at all.

Indeed, the international influences on elections are likely even wider than this article has covered. For example, this article has ignored the growing literature on international assistance to political parties—a theme covered in depth in a special 2010 issue of the journal *Democratization* (Vol. 17, issue 6), or questions on how international actors may help to level the electoral playing field in other ways (Levitsky & Way 2010b, p. 67). Relatedly, Bunce & Wolchick (2006b, p. 286; 2010) have argued that electoral revolutions in Eastern Europe spread through transnational networks, which international actors facilitated by helping to establish cross-national ties between parties and activists. And this article has also touched only briefly on international involvement in postconflict elections. Many other international events and actors may also influence elections in several others ways too subtle for inclusion here.

Much of the research on these international influences on elections is still young, and the evidence is insufficient to settle the debate about the merits of international involvement in elections. Many questions remain.

What explains the variation in the effectiveness of international involvement? Do the domestic factors and the incentive structures identified in the research on election monitoring apply to other

aspects of electoral involvement? How applicable are the factors from Levitsky & Way's (2010a) linkage and leverage framework: a dense social and economic network with democracies, the target state's weakness, the intervener's lack of policy conflicts, and the absence of black knights?

Scholars have argued that democratization can lead to instability and even war. Do international actors change the level of violence and protest during elections? How does international involvement change the incentives of local actors? Does international attention provide a focal point for domestic actors? Does the assurance of the attention of the international community quell or stoke violence?

Does international attention boost voters' and domestic opposition parties' confidence in the election? Do more parties participate in monitored elections, for example? Are turnout rates higher, and do public opinion data reveal greater confidence in the quality of the election, when monitors or another form of international involvement is present?

What explains whether international actors become involved in elections in the first place? If they deem an election fraudulent, what determines whether they punish the country and which tools and punishments they choose to apply? And does the effect of various tools depend on who imposes them?

The research on international involvement in elections discussed in this article has focused mostly on whether it improves elections. This relatively modest analytical goal is probably appropriate to establish first. But eventually it is necessary to return to the questions posed earlier: do elections spur democratization, and can international involvement in elections help explain variation in whether elections ultimately promote democratization? These questions have not yet been answered, partly because a number of nonrandom considerations determine international involvement, which introduces selection problems in the analysis. Furthermore, as discussed above, data on elections and democracy are difficult to separate. It is also important to be aware of the difficulties inherent in comprehensively defining and studying "international involvement." Indeed, most types of international involvement are studied separately: scholars may focus on evaluating election monitoring but neglect civil society aid, or vice versa. This segmentation occurs because it is difficult to be both comprehensive and focused within the framework of a single study, but it limits the understanding of the relative importance of different forms of engagement and possible interactions among them—a point also made by Pevehouse (2005, p. 204) and Levitsky & Way (2010a, p. 39) about international influences on democratization more broadly.

All these questions require better data on elections, electoral institutions, and processes. Some data-creation efforts have begun (Elklit & Reynolds 2005, Hyde & Marinov 2010, Kelley & Kolev 2010), but many more will be needed to approach the questions above. It may be particularly important to gather data that separate conditions before and after elections, so that analysts are not forced to rely on annual data, which conflate pre- and postelection conditions.

Despite the challenges, it is important to continue research in this area. Scholars have long debated whether domestic factors alone determine the course of democratization or whether external actors can influence the process more than marginally. The research on the international influences on elections discussed in this article suggests that purely domestic theories about elections and democratization are incomplete. Thus, further research about the role of international actors in elections can shed more light on the role of elections in democratic transitions, the role of international actors in improving or harming the quality and conduct of elections, and thus on the role of international actors in democratization.

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## RELATED RESOURCES

- The Database of Obligations for Democratic Election Standards, <http://www.cartercenter.org/des-search/des/>
- European Commission, election observation and assistance, [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/human\\_rights/election\\_observation/index\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/human_rights/election_observation/index_en.htm)
- USAID Impact Blog, <http://blog.usaid.gov/>
- National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy, <http://hyde.research.yale.edu/nelda/>
- Project on International Election Monitoring, <http://sites.duke.edu/kelley/>
- PARLINE database, <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp>
- United Nations Department of Political Affairs Electoral Assistance, <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/main/issues/elections/overview.html>
- Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org>
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance Voter Turnout database, <http://www.idea.int/vt/>