Real Choices: Does It Matter What's On The Ballot?

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Prepared for presentation at the EPOP annual conference
Lancaster University, 13-15 September 2013

Elections serve a number of different functions in a political system. Much of the literature emphasizes elections as instruments of policy accountability, in which citizens have the opportunity to hold governments accountable for their actions *and/or* to choose alternative policy directions in line with their preferences. Different institutional arrangements may make fulfillment of some of these functions more difficult, as for example when governments are coalitions or when power is divided in various ways between an elected president and a legislative assembly. But elections, and particularly parliamentary elections, are also about representation. They are the principal vehicle through which public views and interests are articulated and by which citizens are represented. Even in well established democracies, a given election can fail to fulfill adequately one or more of these functions, at least some of the time (Denk and Silander, 2011; LeDuc and Pammett, forthcoming), When citizens are well represented and governments are truly accountable, elections come closer to achieving a democratic ideal, and citizen satisfaction with the instruments and processes of democracy tends to be higher (Aarts and Thomassesn, 2008; Birch, 2008).

While it has always been a mistake to conflate democracy itself with elections, the relationship between the two concepts has become increasingly complicated now that all but a few of the world's nation states regularly conduct elections of some type. This development has brought about a greater emphasis on the addition of the words "free and fair" in attempting to differentiate elections in authoritarian states from those in established democracies (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009; Schedler, 2002). This concern about the use of elections that in many instances are considerably less than free and fair has in turn spawned a growing industry of election monitoring and new scholarly literatures dealing with electoral fairness, integrity and malpractice (Kelley, 2012; Birch, 2012). While these developments have

opened up new debates about the conduct of elections and their role in fostering and sustaining democratic political cultures, they have also introduced new complexities. What constitutes a free and fair election? What are the essential components of electoral integrity? (Norris, forthcoming).[1] Can the presence of election observers alone assure that international standards are met or that elections are conducted in accord with accepted democratic norms? And what are those norms? It is easy to condemn blatant practices of ballot box stuffing or vote rigging. It is more difficult to determine whether there are biases in media coverage, whether electorates are sufficiently inclusive, or whether the vote itself is meaningful in the process of governance.

Evaluating elections

Munck (2009) proposes four broad categories of standards which can then be subdivided into more specific lists of practices. While conducting **clean elections** – the principal concern of most election monitoring agencies – is one of his four categories, the others are in many respects equally fundamental to the integrity of elections. These are the **inclusiveness** of the electorate, the degree of **competitiveness**, and the nature of the **elective offices**. It is easy to see how these attributes lie at the very center of our conception of what makes an election truly democratic. Beginning with the last mentioned category, we should first ask *who* is being elected. If the officials being chosen are those in whom political power actually resides, then the election comes closer to our understanding of why elections are so important to basic concepts of democracy. In Qatar, for example, one of the few countries remaining in the world which does not hold elections, a new constitution adopted by referendum in 2003 provides for a consultative assembly of 45 members, 30 of whom are to be chosen in an election which is yet to be held. [2] However, the powers of such an assembly, even when elected, will remain only advisory. Real political power will continue to reside in the hereditary ruler of the country, who in turn will appoint the other 15 members of the proposed assembly. No matter how fairly the election in Qatar might be conducted, this structure does not meet even the most basic standards of democratic practice. Yet, in a country that has not experienced *any* type of national elections, it could be reasonably considered as progress in a positive direction. Jordan and Morocco might provide additional examples of other hereditary monarchies in which elected legislative bodies

have more meaningful functions in the political system. But in these also, the king retains considerable power, including extensive reserve powers such as dissolving the assembly or dismissing the cabinet. Less extreme examples of this issue might be drawn from cases in which some offices are subject to election while others are not. British voters, for example, might feel that their influence is limited by the fact that they can vote only for a local member of parliament rather than directly for the prime minister, in whom extensive power resides. When it is considered that many officials appointed by the prime minister also occupy positions of real power, the question of whether simple parliamentary elections are sufficient can be raised, even in the case of one of the world's oldest and most stable democracies. On the other hand, American voters are able to vote for a large number of elected officials at several different levels, including congressmen, senators, governors, and many other state and local officials, as well as judges and ballot propositions in many states. But this wider range of elective offices does not necessarily make the United States "more democratic" than Britain. It does however introduce into the debate the question of what is (or is not) on the ballot when the voter is asked to make her choice in an election.

The criterion of **inclusiveness** raises the question of who is actually doing the voting as well as who has the legal right to vote. Nearly all of the work on electoral integrity to date raises this issue in one way or another, at least at the level of voting rights and registration. If large numbers of citizens are systematically excluded from the electoral rolls, the democratic quality of an election is immediately suspect. But it may not be sufficient to look only at the manner in which voter lists are compiled or the process of voter registration in assessing this standard. If women or racial minorities, for example, were denied the right to vote or intimidated at the polls, the issue would become obvious. But suppose that certain groups simply participate in an election in smaller numbers, sometimes for reasons that are difficult to identify. Or that turnout in an election is so low that the interests of voters and non-voters begin to diverge in ways that potentially might affect public policy. In order to determine whether these are issues of electoral integrity, we may want to look at election *outcomes* in addition to electoral laws and processes of voter registration and administration. Low turnout in an election may not in itself be an issue of electoral integrity. But it may be a signal of other problems, such as a feeling among voters that

their votes do not really "count" or that the act of voting in a particular election is not worthwhile. Likewise, the representation of women in a legislative assembly may not be an issue of integrity in the same sense that their exclusion from the voting rolls might be. But, if we see that few women are actually elected to public office in a given country, it may motivate us to look for other types of possible causes. Why for example are only 9% of the members of the Hungarian parliament female while 24% of the members of the comparable body in Poland are women? Both countries are democracies, given the highest Political Rights score by Freedom House, and both are Eastern European countries that were formerly communist (Freedom House, 2013). Such variations in outcomes can be found in many other countries, and often they cannot be readily accounted for by the sets of variables typically covered by election monitoring. Yet, if popularly elected assemblies are not sufficiently representative of the electorates that chose them, uncovering the reasons why these anomalies exist my take us closer to a position from which we can properly evaluate the democratic quality of the election in which the members of such a body were chosen.

Competitiveness, as discussed by Munck (2009, 87-90) is also central to his understanding of the concept of a democratic election. Clearly, the provision of a meaningful choice between candidates or parties is of critical importance. If only one party's candidates appear on the ballot, or if certain parties or groups are systematically excluded by the electoral law or by other means from fielding candidates, the election is suspect. But there are gradations of competitiveness within most elections, as well as other subtleties. The appearance of candidates on ballots who have little or no chance of being elected adds little to the real competitiveness of an election. Gerrymandering of district boundaries may create large numbers of "safe" seats in district based systems, thereby tilting the contest heavily in favor of one party or candidate. Some of the attributes that we might associate with competitiveness are often included in election monitoring studies, e.g. the ease or difficulty of becoming a candidate, access to information via the press and other sources, or freedom of expression and assembly over the course of a campaign. But data on election outcomes can also be of value in assessing competitiveness. It is only *after* an election has taken place that we often have the data necessary to round out a picture of its competitiveness. How many opposition candidates were actually

elected? What were the margins of victory? How many parties gained representation in a legislative assembly? Common measures such as winning margins, proportions of seats, or ENPP (effective number of political parties) can help us to assess the competitiveness of an election and, more importantly, to provide a means of comparing elections between countries and over time on this dimension.

To summarize, we would expect that a democratic election should provide for election of the public officials who will actually conduct the business of government, should be impartially administered, provide for an inclusive electorate and be genuinely competitive. If it meets these four broad standards, the evidence will be seen on the ground as the election campaign is being fought, at the polls when citizens vote, *and* in the outcome. Good election monitoring by international election observers helps to provide measures in the first two phases. But data on the election itself, both in the aggregate and from surveys, can help a great deal in examining outcomes. If an election produces a representative assembly that actually reflects the composition and interests of the electorate that chose it, if there is a strong and coherent opposition *after* the election as well as before, and if the process of governance that follows continues to conform to democratic practice to the same degree as the election, we (and the public at large) might have more confidence in a country's democratic institutions and processes.

The World Values Survey

Conducted in a large number of countries since 1990, the World Values Survey contains variables relevant to measuring the democratic quality of elections conducted under different electoral rules and in varying political contexts. Not all of the countries included in the World Values Surveys would objectively be classified as democracies even though nearly all of them hold elections of some kind. To initially categorize the overall state of democracy in each country, I use the Political Rights score compiled annually by Freedom House (www.freedomhouse.org). Countries that score '1' or '2' on this measure are considered "free" while those at the opposite end of the scale (6-7) are rated "not free." Countries placed in the middle part (3-5) of this measure by Freedom House are considered "partly free." While this indicator is only a rough approximation of the state of democracy in a country at any given time,

it correlates well with many other similar measures and is sufficient here for distinguishing between elections held under widely different types of political conditions (Norris, 2013; Bollen, 2000).

In the analysis to follow, I begin with data from 35 countries which to date have been included in Wave 6 of the World Values Survey. However, these countries are a mix of democratic and authoritarian states, with considerable diversity in political institutions and the degree and quality of electoral practices. As is seen in table 1, the Freedom House political rights scores for these countries include extremes such as Belarus and Uzebekistan (both rated 7) as well as long established democracies such as Australia and the United States (rated 1). There are also a number of newer democracies which receive equally high ratings (1) from Freedom House such as Estonia and Ghana as well as states which would be considered electoral democracies, but in which the political rights scores are substantially lower, e.g. Colombia, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, The Philippines, Turkey, Ukraine. We thus have a range of cases to examine in which the quality of electoral democracy varies considerably.

There are two key questions included in the World Values Surveys conducted between 2010 and 2012 which I will use as dependent variables in some of the analyses to follow. The first of these, which falls under the category of the inclusiveness of the electorate as discussed above, measures the propensity of citizens to participate in elections by asking respondents whether they "always" vote in national elections.[3] Of course, we know that survey respondents typically tend to overestimate their participation in elections, and the replies to this question are no exception. Nevertheless, the responses do vary with actual turnout levels in the various countries. For example, 95% of respondents in Australia, which has compulsory voting, indicate that they "always" vote while only 59% respond similarly in Japan. These figures are fairly close to actual turnout in the most recent parliamentary election in both countries (table 1). The results for other countries are more mixed, but in general the responses to this question may be expected to reflect respondents' *attitudes* toward the act of voting in elections in their respective countries, even where they vary from actual turnout rates. In fact however, the correlation between the percentage responding positively to this question and the actual turnout recorded in the last parliamentary election is a robust .64 for the 35 WVS countries, (table 2).

TABLE 1
Countries included in wave 6 of the World Values Survey and key measures

Country	Electoral system	Compulsory voting	Election (year and turnout) Parliamentary yr	Parliamentary %	Presidential yr	Presidential Rnd 1	Presidential Rnd 2	FH[1]	ENPP	%W[2]	%AV[3]	M-HD[4]
Armenia	Mixed	N	2012	62	2013	60	(y)	6	6	9	76	3.9
Australia	Majority-AV	Y	2010	93				1	3	25	95	7.0
Azerbajian	Plurality	N	2010	50	2008	75	(y)	6	3	16	44	5.9
Belarus	Majority-Pl	N	2012	74	2010	91	(y)	7		32	55	4.6
Chile	Plurality (a)	Y	2009	88	2009	88	87	1	7	14	76	6.2
Colombia	PR (b)	N	2010	44	2010	49	44	3	2	13	67	6.3
Cyprus (G)	PRo	Y	2011	79	2013	90	91	1	5	11	80	5.3
Ecuador	PRo	Y	2013	81	2013	81	(y)	3	5	32	93	6.8
Estonia	PRo	N	2011	64				1	7	20	44	5.2
Ghana	Plurality	N	2012	80	2012	80	(y)	1	2	8	69	7.3
Japan	Mixed	N	2012	59				1	6	11	59	6.7
Kazakhstan	PRc	N	2012	75	2011	90	(x)	6	4	18	51	6.8
Kyrgyzstan	PRc	N	2010	57	2011	61	(y)	5		23	66	6.0
Malaysia	Plurality	N	2008	76				4		10	41	7.2
Mexico	Mixed	Y	2012	63	2012	63	(x)	3	3	26	68	6.2
Morocco	PRc	N	2011	45				5	8	17	16	4.3
New Zealand	Mixed	N	2011	74				1	6	32	83	7.4
Nigeria	Plurality	N	2011	29	2011	54	(x)	4	3	4	43	5.7
Pakistan	Plurality	N	2008	45				4		22	37	6.5
Peru	PRo	Y	2011	84	2011	83	84	2	7	22	91	5.9
Philippines	Mixed	Y	2010	74	2010	74	(x)	3	5	22	80	7.3
Poland	PRo	N	2011	49	2010	55	55	1	4	24	63	5.9
Qatar	(c)							6				
Romania	Mixed	N	2012	42	2009	54	58	2	7	11	70	5.1
Russia	PRc	N	2011	60	2012	65	(y)	6	6	14	44	4.6
Rwanda	PRc	N	2008	98	2010	99	(y)	6		56		7.2
South Korea	Mixed	N	2012	54	2012	76	(x)	1	3	15	58	6.0
Spain	PRc	N	2011	69				1	3	36	64	6.6
Sweden	PRo	N	2010	85				1	7	45	86	7.6
Turkey	PRc	Y	2011	83				3	5	14	79	6.3
Ukraine	Mixed	N	2012	58	2010	67	69	4	8	8	63	4.5
United States	Plurality	N	2012	58	2012	58	(x)	1	2	17	64	6.4
Uruguay	PRc	Y	2009	90	2009	90	89	1	4	15	91	7.7
Uzbekistan	Plurality	N	2009	88	2007	91	(y)	7	5	22	55	
Zimbabwe	Plurality	N	2008	41	2009	42	(y)	6	2	15	38	5.4

1. Freedom House Political Rights score
2. Percent of women in the national legislature (lower house if bicameral)
3. Percent of respondents indicating that they “always vote” in national elections
4. Mean rating of country’s democracy (10 point scale)

a. Elected in two member districts
b. Political parties determine the structure of their own lists
c. No election yet held in Qatar
x. Single round by plurality vote
y. Second round not required

TABLE 2
Correlations between aggregate and attitudinal measures in the World Values Survey Pearson r. [Wave 6, 35 countries]

	Freedom House PR (inverted)	Turnout in last election[1]	Percent women in legislature[2]
Always vote? (%)	.52	.64	.30
How democratic? (mean/10)	.44	.51	.39

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1. Parliamentary election (lower house). IDEA. www.idea.int
2. Lower house. IPU. www.ipu.org

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The second question to be used as a dependent variable measures citizen perceptions of the level of democracy in the country. Respondents were asked to rate the level of democracy in their country on a 10 point scale.[4] The mean scores on this measure are also shown for the 35 WVS countries in table 1 (far right column). The distribution on this measure is revealing. Even in established democracies, respondents are disinclined to rate their countries as "completely democratic". The mean scores in countries such as Sweden (7.6), Australia (7.0), or the United States (6.4) suggest that the concept of democracy is not an absolute and that citizen perceptions are subjective. We can also see that, even in countries that would be classified as autocracies by international agencies such as Freedom House, citizen perceptions can be more positive. Countries such as Russia, Morocco or Zimbabwe achieve mean scores on this measure that, while substantially lower than those of liberal democracies, are nevertheless closer to the middle of the scale than to the lowest point. Respondents therefore appear to feel that elections in these countries have some meaning, and/or that there are other mechanisms through which their

influence might be exercised. Encouragingly, there is also a fairly robust correlation (.44) between the mean scores on this measure and the Freedom House Political Rights scores, as well a positive correlation (.51) with voting turnout (table 2). Wave 6 of the World Values Survey also included a bank of nine questions specifically designed to measure perceptions of electoral integrity (table 3). Several of these items such as the fair counting of votes or the threat of violence at the polls are familiar from the literature on election monitoring and electoral malpractice (Kelley 2012; Birch, 2012). But the sequence includes some additional elements such as the quality of information or the meaningfulness of the voting choice that provide us with an opportunity to probe more deeply into the concept of electoral integrity as understood by voters.

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TABLE 3
Electoral Integrity items in the World Values Survey [Wave 6, 20 countries]
Percent of total sample [N=25037]

	Very often	Fairly often	Not often	Not at all often
Votes are counted fairly	28	34	26	12
Opposition candidates are prevented from running	11	27	32	29
TV news favors the governing party	22	36	28	14
Voters are bribed	23	28	28	21
Journalists provide fair coverage of elections	19	41	30	11
Election officials are fair	20	34	32	14
Rich people buy elections	24	28	27	20
Voters are threatened with violence at the polls	13	19	26	43
Voters are offered a genuine choice in the elections	**30**	**34**	**24**	**12**

Public perceptions of electoral integrity

It is clear that, while there are a number of specific variations, the concept of electoral integrity resonates broadly with voters. A factor analysis of the nine items finds two clearly defined dimensions (table 4). The first of these fits neatly with a negative definition of the concept – i.e. the existence of various forms of malpractice. This factor, on which items such as bribery, violence, or media bias have significant loadings, is the strongest of the two factors extracted, accounting for about a third of the variance. The second factor however, accounting for 22% of the variance in the structure, captures the concept of a "fair" election, incorporating both the conduct of the election itself *and* the choices presented to the voter. In other words, the need for elections to provide a real choice to voters is a part of their understanding of the concept of fairness. Electoral integrity therefore involves more than simply the absence of corrupt practices or various other abuses.

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TABLE 4
Factor analysis of Electoral Integrity items – 2010-12 World Values Survey

	Factor 1 (30.3%) Electoral malpractice	Factor 2 (22.2%) Election fairness
Voters are bribed	**0.814**	-0.101
Rich people buy elections	**0.792**	-0.108
Voters are threatened with violence	**0.738**	-0.048
TV news favors the governing party	**0.601**	0.016
Opposition prevented from running	**0.593**	-0.017
Election officials are fair	-0.213	**0.774**
Journalists provide fair coverage	0.157	**0.685**
Voters are offered a genuine choice	0.049	**0.675**
Votes counted fairly	-0.324	**0.669**

Nevertheless, there is considerable variation in responses to the specific items both between and within the 20 countries in which the sequence was asked (table 5). Candidates kept off the ballot is seen as a substantial problem in some countries but not others. It is mentioned as occurring "very often" or "fairly often" in countries such as Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, or Nigeria, but also rather surprisingly in a more established democracy such as Uruguay. Biased news coverage favoring the government is widely mentioned in both established democracies and those where democracy is fragile or highly suspect. Violence at the polls is sporadic, but where it occurs it is clearly recognized by voters as a problem of integrity. Respondents in Ukraine have highly negative views of the integrity of their elections on many of the other attributes, but for the most part they do not fear violence at the polls. In Ghana however, which receives high ratings from Freedom House and other international agencies, violence is still perceived as a problem, as it is also in The Philippines and Mexico. On the items connected with the second electoral integrity factor (fairness), responses overall tend to be generally positive, but there is also considerable variance both within and between countries. Despite concerns expressed by respondents in Uruguay or Estonia on one or more of the malpractice items, they are highly likely to believe that counting of votes is fair and that officials administer elections fairly. But the percentage of respondents who perceive fairness in the administration of elections and the counting of votes drops off rather sharply in Colombia, Peru and Romania. Respondents in Ukraine, reflecting their perceptions of the conduct of elections more generally, are the most negative on these items.

The responses of those interviewed in the twenty countries on the "genuine choice" item are particularly interesting. In *all* of the countries except Colombia and Ukraine, a majority of those replying to this question believe that elections offer a genuine choice. Even in some of the countries where the quality of democracy is wanting according to more objective indicators, there is a perception that elections do in fact offer voters a choice. It is perhaps surprising to find citizens of Kazakhstan, Malaysia or Zimbabwe feeling this way. However, it is also evident, as the factor analysis suggests, that the perception of choice varies in concert with some of the other "fairness" items in the set. The 2009 presidential election did indeed offer voters in Zimbabwe a

TABLE 5
Distribution of responses[1] to Electoral Integrity items, World Values Survey 2010-12 [20 countries]

	Candidates prevented	News is biased	Voters are bribed	Rich buy elections	Violence at polls	**Genuine choice**	Fair count	Fair coverage	Officials are fair
Australia	10	41	17	27	3	**87**	96	63	91
Azerbajian	28	44	14	16	7	**65**	54	57	52
Chile	21	41	16	27	9	**51**	89	67	75
Colombia	43	61	72	80	46	**48**	42	54	40
Estonia	45	62	41	35	5	**78**	80	62	71
Ghana	25	48	70	61	52	**71**	61	65	63
Kazakhstan	31	61	29	39	11	**64**	62	59	48
Kyrgyzstan	56	70	68	63	35	**61**	53	56	34
Malaysia	24	55	36	25	17	**69**	80	65	71
Mexico	49	64	75	72	54	**72**	52	69	50
Nigeria	54	65	71	70	67	**54**	53	62	50
Pakistan	66	61	62	64	55	**53**	64	58	49
Peru	33	68	46	58	23	**51**	41	48	36
Philippines	42	57	80	78	67	**84**	61	74	52
Poland	15	62	25	29	3	**65**	86	67	89
Romania	26	52	54	61	19	**74**	42	44	42
Rwanda	19	15	10	11	13	**54**	77	49	38
Ukraine	59	72	72	79	19	**48**	38	57	25
Uruguay	62	41	15	24	4	**66**	91	73	81
Zimbabwe	40	72	50	52	55	**54**	47	46	50

1. “Very often” or “fairly often”

TABLE 6
Responses[1] to Electoral Integrity items, by institutional characteristics [20 countries]

		Candidates prevented	News is biased	Voters are bribed	Rich buy elections	Violence at polls	**Genuine choice**	Fair count	Fair coverage	Officials are fair
Electoral system	Plurality (8)	36	55	52	51	43	**67**	64	61	60
	Mixed (4)	45	63	68	70	36	**67**	46	58	42
	PR (8)	38	57	41	46	19	**60**	66	59	55
Elected president	Y (16)	40	58	54	37	36	**62**	57	60	50
	N (4)	35	53	37	57	18	**73**	81	62	72
% Women	Low (4)	41	59	64	61	45	**60**	57	63	53
	Average (6)	37	55	43	49	28	**59**	56	55	53
	H igh (10)	38	58	50	51	30	**68**	66	62	56
ENPP	2 (6)	37	56	55	56	39	**67**	63	62	61
	3 (6)	37	55	48	51	28	**60**	55	56	49
	4 (4)	32	64	58	60	36	**65**	55	60	42
	5+ (3)	42	53	32	29	10	**69**	82	64	72

1. “Very often” or “fairly often”

choice between competing candidates. But they had little confidence in the fairness of the count or in the ability or willingness of officials to protect voters from violence at the polls.

Institutions and voters

Prior to examining some of the possible effects of these varying perceptions of the integrity and fairness of elections on the attitudes and behavior of voters, we will consider the extent to which they may be influenced by macro level variables such as the structure of political institutions. Literature on these topics suggests that we should expect that factors such as the form of electoral institutions, the number of political parties in the system, or the inclusiveness of electorates should at least act to shape the context in which voters make choices. However, propositions that such system level variables will more directly affect the *perception* of those choices or the actual *behavior* of voters are difficult to test – in part because of the dearth of comparable survey data but also because of the complexity of comparisons involving many variables and relatively few cases. Recent work drawing on evidence from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project utilizing data from approximately 40 countries has helped to advance our understanding of the interaction of institutional and behavioral effects (McAllister, 2008; Aarts & Thomassen, 2008; Wessels and Schmitt, 2008). Nevertheless, the evidence based on these efforts is somewhat inconclusive, in part because, even with better data and more cases, the ability to examine the effect of institutions alone while controlling for a multiplicity of other factors is necessarily limited.

In table 6, we consider the distribution of the responses to the nine Electoral Integrity items in the WVS within the context of four institutional variables characterizing the 20 countries in the study. Of the 20 countries in which the Electoral Integrity sequence of questions was asked, eight had proportional electoral systems and an equal number were plurality models. The remaining four (Mexico, The Philippines, Romania and Ukraine) had mixed systems, which incorporate both proportional and plurality components. Within the sets, there were other variations that may be of significance in terms of the choices that are presented to voters, but that are difficult to interpret other than in the context of the specific cases within which they occur. Of the PR countries for example, four utilize closed lists while three provide for open lists,

thereby allowing voters to express a preference for a candidate as well as for a party. In one instance (Colombia), the political parties themselves determine whether their lists are open or closed.

As is seen in table 6, the structure of electoral institutions appears to bear little relationship to the electoral integrity items per se. We will avoid any attempt at interpretation of the mixed systems because of the small number of cases and the likelihood of country specific effects. However, there is little difference on most of the attributes of electoral integrity between the main system families – proportional and plurality – in areas such as hindering candidates from running, biased coverage of campaigns, the role of money, or the perceived fairness of the administration of elections. Respondents in plurality or mixed systems are slightly more likely to feel that they have a genuine choice in elections, perhaps due to the use of closed lists in more than half of the PR cases. The item that stands out is the threat of violence, but it is doubtful that this has much to do with the structure of the electoral system. As was noted earlier (table 5), there is wide variation between the countries on this item, and it is more likely that this effect is specific to particular countries (e.g. Nigeria, Pakistan, Ghana). Nevertheless, we should also consider the possibility that plurality rules may raise the stakes of an election because losing parties will see their candidates removed from office while the effects of losing an election may tend to be more moderated under many PR list systems – particularly those that employ closed lists, under which parties may be able to protect certain of their candidates from outright defeat.

We might consider a similar hypothesis in the case of presidential elections, since these by definition are "winner take all" contests in which only a single candidate can be elected. However, because 16 of the 20 countries in which the electoral integrity items were asked have elected presidents, considerable caution is required in drawing any conclusion from this comparison. For the most part, variations in the items between the presidential and non-presidential systems are inconsequential. However, differences on items such as violence, bribery, or the fairness of the count may reflect the higher stakes of these elections. Somewhat counter-intuitively, voters in the four non-presidential systems appear slightly more likely to feel that they are presented with a "genuine choice" than are those in systems that feature directly elected candidates for executive office.

Table 6 also displays the distribution of responses for two other macro level variables – namely the proportion of women holding seats in the legislature and the number of political parties represented (ENPP). We might hypothesize that perceptions of electoral integrity will be enhanced when the lists of candidates presented are more inclusive and/or when there are more parties contesting an election. But the differences seen on these items are at best very modest, and are not always consistent in terms of the direction of the patterns observed. Perceptions of a "genuine choice", for example, are only slightly greater in systems where the representation of women is higher than the global average. And the presence of more political parties appears to do little or nothing in the direction of enhancing the perceived choice available in an election, even though more parties on the ballot might, on the surface, seem to provide more choice. But whether more parties of itself provides a more *genuine* choice is doubtful, since it is not the number but rather the nature of the parties, and the context in which they compete, that may convey a sense of greater choice to the voter.

Electoral participation and perceptions of democracy

We return now to consideration of the two dependent variables discussed earlier – the propensity of citizens to vote in an election and their perceptions of the quality of democracy in the country in which they live. The hypotheses are straightforward. If citizens perceive that an election is fairly conducted and that it offers a meaningful choice between parties and candidates, we would expect that they would be more likely to vote (Wessels and Schmitt, 2008; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998). Such an effect would be observable both in the responses to a survey question concerning a respondent's intention to vote (see note 2, p. 26) and in actual turnout in elections, allowing of course for the effects of institutional factors such as compulsory voting, registration rules, etc. We should also expect that perceptions of an election's fairness and choice would have an effect on the way in which democracy is viewed.

In table 7, we find bivariate correlations between two summary measures of perceived electoral malpractice and election fairness/choice respectively, based on individual factor scores computed from the two electoral integrity factors discussed earlier and the two main dependent

TABLE 7

Correlations between institutional characteristics and attitudinal measures in the World Values Survey, Wave 6, 15 countries [N=18425][1]

	Pearson r					
	Electoral System(PR)[2]	Percent women in legislature[2]	Elected president	ENPP[3]	Electoral malpractice[6]	Election fairness/choice[6]
Probability to vote[4]	**.06**	**.05**	**.10**	**- .07**	**-.08**	**.09**
How democratic[5]	**-.12**	**.03**	**-.05**	**-.06**	**-.16**	**.21**
Electoral malpractice[6]	**-.12**	.02	**.25**	**-.19**	**----**	**----**
Election fairness/choice[6]	**-.08**	**.10**	**-.18**	**.07**	**----**	**----**

……..

1. Freedom House PR < 5. Bold coefficients significant @ .001
2. Lower house. IPU. www.ipu.org
3. Effective number of political parties, lower house.
4. See note 2, p. 26
5. See note 3, p. 26
6. Factor scores. See table 4.

variables – intention to vote and perceptions of democracy. We include here also the correlations between these variables and the four institutional characteristics of elections previously considered – i.e. the type of electoral system, an elected president, percentage of women in the legislature and number of political parties (ENPP). Given the size of the total WVS sample, it is not surprising that nearly all of these relationships are statistically significant, although many are fairly weak. All however are in the direction that we would hypothesize, based on the expected effects of perceived electoral integrity and fairness/choice. Noteworthy are the correlations between the factor scores on these items and the two dependent variables. Respondents who perceive electoral malpractice in their countries are less likely to vote and also tend to rate the quality of democracy lower on the ten point scale than do those whose perception of the conduct of elections is more positive. But we can also see that the perception of overall fairness and genuine choice has a stronger positive effect on both variables. Respondents who see elections as fairly conducted and offering a genuine choice are more likely to want to participate in them, and their perceptions will be reflected in their feelings about the overall quality of democracy in their respective countries.

A more detailed representation of these patterns can be obtained by examining the individual items that comprise the two dimensions of electoral integrity captured in the factor scores. We do this for participation by comparing the net increase or decrease in the percentage of respondents who report that they "always vote" according to their responses to each of the nine Electoral Integrity questions (table 8). It is clear that each of the four "fairness" items is capable by itself of bringing about an increase in participation, but that the largest net changes are seen in the perceptions of the administration of elections and in the quality of choice. Both the "fair officials" and "genuine choice" items account for approximately an eight point increase in the percentage of respondents reporting that they will "always vote" across the 15 countries surveyed.[5] The five "electoral malpractice" items also have an effect on depressing participation, but the net change is somewhat smaller and more specific to the particular malpractice. The threat of violence at the polls, bribery, and the prevention of some candidates from running each appear to have the capability of depressing intended voting participation by about seven percentage points in the survey.

TABLE 8

Effects of perceptions of electoral integrity on voting participation and perceptions of democratic governance. World Values Survey 2010-12, 15 countries. [N = 17836]

	Always vote[1]	How democratic?[2]
Election officials are fair	+8.4	+0.9
Voters are offered a genuine choice	+7.7	+0.7
Votes are counted fairly	+6.6	+1.1
Journalists provide fair coverage of elections	+2.4	+0.6
Voters are bribed	-7.6	-0.7
Opposition candidates prevented from running	-7.2	-0.5
Voters are threatened with violence	-6.7	-0.2
Rich people buy elections	-4.0	-0.8
TV news favors the governing party	-2.8	-0.7

1. Net increase/decrease in percent reporting that they "always vote."

2. Net increase/decrease in mean score on ten point scale.

……

The patterns found in the effects on the overall ratings of democracy are somewhat different in magnitude, although similar in direction. Those who perceive elections as fairly conducted are likely to rate their countries about a point higher on the ten point democracy scale than are those who perceive the opposite. Effects of the "choice" and "fair coverage" items are in the same direction, but slightly smaller in magnitude. Perceptions of electoral malpractice also cause respondents to lower their ratings of the quality of democracy, but here the effects are greater for the items dealing with the role of money in elections and biased coverage. In other words, the threat of violence and the deterrence of certain candidates from running may discourage people from going to the polls. But it is the perceptions of "fairness" in both administration and competition that are more likely to affect their perceptions of the overall quality of democracy.

A basic multivariate analysis of the items produces relatively few changes in our interpretation of the effects of electoral integrity and choice on voting participation and citizen perceptions of the quality of their democracy (table 9). For participation, we examine data from nine of the countries, eliminating for this purpose those with the lowest Freedom House scores as well as countries that employ compulsory voting. Within this set, well known demographic factors such as age and education are significant predictors of voting participation. However, the perception of fairness and genuine choice in elections, as measured by the factor scores on this cluster of items, is also a significant predictor of turnout at the individual level. Perceived malpractice is not significant here. Certainly, as we have seen in the bivariate analyses discussed earlier, some types of malpractice – e.g. the threat of violence or the exclusion of candidates – can deter participation in elections in some circumstances. But malpractice can take different forms, and some abuses are not as frequent in some of the countries surveyed by WVS. It should also be noted that the analysis in table 9 does not include some of the countries with the greatest level of abuses on these items – e.g. Kyrgyzstan or Zimbabwe. Electoral malpractice however, where it occurs, does have a strong effect on people's perceptions of the quality of democracy. Respondents who perceive malpractice in its various forms are significantly more likely to downgrade the ratings of the overall quality of democracy in their respective countries. An even stronger predictor of these ratings on the ten point scale is the perception of fairness and choice in elections. Among this somewhat larger set of countries (15), which cover a variety of different institutional and political contexts within at least a minimally democratic framework, citizens' perceptions of the fairness of elections and the meaningfulness of the choices presented to them matters a great deal in shaping their opinion of the quality of democracy in their respective countries.

TABLE 9

OLS regression analysis: electoral participation and perceptions of democracy

	Dependent variables	
	Probability to vote[1]	Evaluation of democracy[2]
Gender (F)[3]	**-.043**	-.007
Age	**.276**	**-.039**
Education	**.042**	**-.068**
Income	-.010	**.078**
Ideology (left → right)	.026	**.104**
Electoral malpractice (F1)[4]	-.011	**-.162**
Fairness/choice (F2)[4]	**.058**	**.188**
Adjusted R^2	.082	.087

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1. See note 2, p. 26. Nine countries [Colombia, Estonia, Ghana, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Ukraine]. N= 8376.

2. See note 3, p. 26. Fifteen countries [Australia, Chile, Colombia, Estonia, Ghana, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Uruguay]. N=16759.

3. Bold coefficients (standardized BETA) significant @ .001

4. See table 4, p. 11 for interpretation of factor scores (F1, F2).

Four cases

The interpretation suggested by the above analysis is reinforced by replicating it separately in four of the countries included in the WVS. Here, one can control for both a number of institutional characteristics as well as for the political context in which an election occurs, a factor which is much more difficult to operationalize. We examine here four specific cases – Colombia, Estonia, Ghana and Malaysia. Two of these countries – Estonia and Ghana – receive Freedom House' highest rating on the political rights scale (1), while Colombia and Malaysia fall at the middle of that measure (3 and 4 respectively). There is thus substantial variation among the four countries in terms of the quality of electoral democracy, although none would be considered autocracies. There is also considerable variation in the institutional structures under which elections take place in these four countries. Two (Colombia and Ghana) elect presidents directly as well as members of legislative assemblies. Estonia and Malaysia, in contrast, have unicameral parliaments and do not directly elect an executive. At the legislative level, two of the countries (Colombia and Estonia) have systems of proportional representation while Ghana and Malaysia choose members of their legislative assemblies by plurality elections in single member districts. We are thus able to examine the effects of citizen perceptions of electoral integrity in a variety of different institutional and political contexts.

Turnout varies in the four countries from a high of 80% in Ghana in the 2012 presidential election (held concurrently with the parliamentary elections) to a low of 44% in Colombia in the second round of the 2010 presidential election. Turnout in the parliamentary elections in Malaysia (2008) and Estonia (2011) was 76% and 64% respectively. The degree of competitiveness also varies considerably among the four cases. The 2012 presidential election in Ghana was highly competitive, with the losing candidate taking 48% of the vote, while Colombia's was somewhat less so, although there were ten candidates in the first round of that election. Estonia's 2011 parliamentary election was also highly competitive, with the winning party achieving less than 30% of the vote and four parties in all gaining parliamentary representation by clearing the 5% threshold. Malaysia's politics have been much less competitive, with the ruling coalition having held power throughout the country's modern

TABLE 10
Summary of individual level OLS regression analyses for four countries: electoral participation and perceptions of democracy

	Dependent variables	
	Probability to vote[1]	Evaluation of democracy[2]
Colombia (N=968)	R^2 =.088	R^2 =.090
Electoral malpractice (F1)[3]	-.009 (.013)[4]	- **.262 (.091)**
Fairness/choice (F2)[3]	023 (.011)	**.452 (.081)**
Estonia (N=851)	R^2 =.198	R^2 =.290
Electoral malpractice (F1)[3]	-.019 (.016)	- **.596 (.087)**
Fairness/choice (F2)[3]	**.113 (.014)**	**.646 (.079)**
Ghana (N=1324)	R^2 =.153	R^2 =.024
Electoral malpractice (F1)[3]	.003 (.012)	- **.315 (.070)**
Fairness/choice (F2)[3]	.018 (.011)	**.242 (.067)**
Malaysia (N=811)	R^2 =.212	R^2 =.183
Electoral malpractice (F1)[3]	-.023 (.014)	- **.378 (.071)**
Fairness/choice (F2)[3]	-.007 (.012)	**.424 (.062)**

……

1. See note 2, p. 26.
2. See note 3, p. 26.
3. See table 4, p. 11 for interpretation of factor scores (F1, F2).
4. Unstandardized coefficients (standard error in parentheses). Bold significant @ .01

history. Nevertheless, in the 2008 election, the main opposition grouping in Malaysia obtained 47% of the total vote and 82 of the 222 parliamentary seats.

As is seen in table 10, despite these differences in institutional structures and the political context of elections in the four countries, similar results are obtained upon entering the electoral malpractice and fairness/choice variables into regressions structured in the same manner as that shown in table 9. When other factors are controlled, perceptions of electoral malpractice do not appear to influence individual decisions to vote or not, and the fairness/choice variable is a significant predictor only in the case of Estonia. In all four countries however, both of the electoral integrity variables have a clear effect on the way in which citizens think about democracy in their respective countries.

Conclusion

The analysis provides support for the idea that the concept of electoral integrity has several distinct components, and that one of these concerns voters' perception of the "fairness" of the choices presented to them in an election and the circumstances under which they cast their ballots. As Munck (2009) has argued in setting out a conceptual framework for the analysis of democratic elections, we should begin with the question of what officials are being elected. The choice(s) presented to the voter set the limits within which voting decisions are made. But it is the perceived *meaningfulness* of those choices that matters, in terms of both representation and accountability (Aarts and Thomassen, 2008; Wessels and Schmitt, 2008). Institutions contain a part of the explanation, but only a part. Plurality elections, which are generally thought to enhance accountability, are perceived by the wave 6 WVS respondents as "more democratic", but this does not generally have positive effects on voting participation. Proportional systems, generally considered more representative, are more likely to increase turnout. The presence of an elected president on the ballot improves both, as does the presence of more women in politics. Thus, voters presented with more important offices to vote for and more inclusive sets of candidates for those offices are both more likely to vote and to view the political system as more democratic. The presence of more political parties on the ballot, in and of itself, accomplishes neither.

However, the argument presented here goes beyond simply the supply side. It is not just the choices presented to the voters that matters, but their *perception* of those choices. The institutional patterns, familiar though they are, are quite weak, and they explain little of the variation that we find at the individual level within the various countries. When voters see the choices presented to them as fair and genuine ones, they are more likely to view the political system as democratic and, in some instances, more likely to vote. These patterns, observed over a range of different countries and varying levels of democracy, are mutually reinforcing, and occur under a variety of different institutional arrangements. Voters are not comparativists, and they are invariably operating *within* the context of the institutional arrangements that define the choices with which they are presented. Elections in a democratic society must perform the necessary functions of representation and accountability, and be perceived to do so by citizens. Electoral malpractice erodes citizens' perceptions of democracy and may, in some instances, depress participation. But the positive side of electoral integrity – i.e. perception of a fair and genuine choice – both enhances participation and builds popular confidence in democratic institutions and practice. In both established and newer democracies, there are issues regarding the meaningfulness of electoral choices, even in many instances where actual malpractice is minimal. A better understanding of the various factors that build confidence in democratic processes both widens and deepens our conceptualization of electoral integrity.

Notes

1. This paper is part of the Electoral Integrity Project at the University of Sydney. I am grateful to Pippa Norris, Ben Goldsmith, Carolein van Ham, and Sandra Urquiza for comments and suggestions on an earlier version.

2. The election in Qatar has twice been postponed, but is presently scheduled to take place in June 2013. *IFES Election Guide* http://www.electionguide.org/

3. The question asked: "When elections take place, do you vote always, usually or never? Please tell me separately for each of the following levels : (1) Local level (2) National level"

4. The question was worded as follows:

"And how democratically is this country being governed today? Again using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that it is "not at all democratic" and 10 means that it is "completely democratic," what position would you choose?"

Not at all democratic									Completely democratic
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

5. For this purpose, we include only countries with Freedom House Political Rights scores < 5.

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