

Do Elections Create or Further Path Dependencies?

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Abstract

The dramatic expansion of multiparty elections in the post-Cold War period and the emergence of protracted transitions and divergent outcomes caused debates on whether elections create or further path dependencies. Some scholars argued that elections do have the power to usher in an increase in liberties and the level of democraticness in a polity and therefore create a new path dependency whereas others pointed out to the possibility of elections lending legitimacy to authoritarian rulers and enabling them to stabilize their rule through giving them adequate information regarding the level and spatial spread of support for them and hence further a path dependency in place. To solve this puzzle of whether elections create or further path dependencies, this study utilizes a dataset of 652 elections in 93 countries encompassing both the Third and Fourth Waves to examine the effect of elections on tangible changes in quality of democracy measured through indices like electoral integrity. Assessed within a larger supply and demand framework, the findings suggest that reiterated multiparty elections have a significant effect on electoral integrity and hence on creation of a new path dependency on improving the quality of democracy.

Keywords

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Introduction

Do elections matter? Is the perception that electoral assistance does not work justified? Is the fact that electoral authoritarian regimes now constitute the modal category of regimes a further proof that elections do not function as theorized except in developed countries? Are the claims for incremental democratization credible? The vast literature addressing these timely questions has broadly branched into two opposing camps. While one has been theorizing and testing the democratizing power of elections, the other has been advancing the view that elections are but one of the tools to further authoritarian rule. This study aims to provide an answer to the question of whether the holding of reiterated elections has any impact on the quality of democracy. Building on the theoretical insights and empirical findings of the literature and taking stock of the inconsistencies, gaps and shortcomings, I develop a theory of the learning and habituation effects of repeated elections with an emphasis on incremental development of the quality of democracy measured through indices like electoral integrity.

A criticism of tautology has been leveled at this type of reasoning (Morgenbesser and Pepinsky 2019), and it is an issue that needs to be addressed. I am not looking at the quality of elections per se, rather the institutional ramifications of repeated elections which are theorized to further affect the institutions and actors and result in an increase in the democraticness of a country. This, then, in turn is theorized as having possible effects on the greater political rights generally associated with liberal democracy. I argue that this formulation of the question is also in line with the findings from the literature which establish that the transitions among authoritarian forms of

government like competitive, hegemonic and electoral variants and transition to electoral democracy are relatively easier than transition from electoral democracy to liberal democracy.

As the Third Wave of democratization was succeeded by the fourth wave of democratization with the end of the Cold War, hopes initially ran high for the eventual transition of these countries to democracy. The relatively drawn-out transitions in Latin America had helped the construction of a framework of transitions which was meant to map the trajectory as a country was moving – transitioning - from autocracy to democracy (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986). The communist regimes fell faster than expected and this caught the practitioners and academics off guard. The sheer number of new countries which were not authoritarian anymore elicited different responses from these two groups. The practitioners and officials believed they had a roadmap in front of them to inform their best course of action which turned out to be the infusion of considerable sums of money to speed up the development of non-governmental organizations and hence strengthen civil society which was an indispensable component of liberal democracy. There were excesses, but these need to be considered within the theoretical and practical understanding and convictions of the decision makers as well as the perception that the issues could be solved fast.¹ On the other hand, the comparative political scientists were also having a problem with the amount of developments and the difficulties of unifying trying to combine causal processes with the framework and the empirical data they had.² Many regimes did simply not fit into the prevailing paradigm and the fact that there might be more to transition than a linear process was acknowledged (Linz and Stepan 1996, Diamond 2002). After some more years, the fact that there were now countries in between authoritarianism and democracy was internalized and subsequently made the basis of study instead of transition (Carothers 2002, Levitsky and Way 2010).

It is at this juncture that the “essential democratic institution” (Riker 1965) in the current state and trajectory of the countries came to be at the center stage of democratization discourse. The fact that countries can now be positioned on a continuum from closed authoritarian regimes to liberal democracies and that there are transitions in between the categories enable us to discuss the level of democraticness of a country (Lindberg 2009, Schedler 2006). When this is contrasted to the dichotomy of the transition paradigm, it becomes apparent that apart from closed regimes, almost all countries have elections. Therefore, this common denominator and the *sine qua non* of democracy has necessarily been utilized as a main independent variable in studies of democratization. In a seminal study of the sub-Saharan African countries, Staffan Lindberg has found that the successive waves of *de jure* multiparty and free elections lead to the solidification of the *de facto* political rights that the electorate are utilizing in these elections and that this process

¹ Two scholars cite the opening sentences of an article in the January 29, 2000 issue of *The Economist*:

“A young man thrusts his crudely printed calling card at the visitor. After his name are printed three letters: NGO. ‘What do you do?’ the visitor asks.

‘I have formed an NGO.’

‘Yes, but what does it do?’

‘Whatever they want. I am waiting for some funds and then I will make a project.’” See Eric C. Martin and Judith L. Miller (2000, p. 153).

² At a later date, Robert Bates, the president of American Political Science Association’s organized comparative politics section, claimed that the area specialists were working just like “journalists” and they had turned their backs on the scientific pursuit of knowledge (Bernhard 2000).

would open the road to the exercise of further political rights and eventually an increase in the level of democracy in a country (Lindberg 2006). He argues that this will mainly come about due to the relevant actors' acceptance, adaptation and reproduction of actions around the institution of elections (Lindberg 2006, p.74). The studies that came after his seminal work tested his theory not always utilizing comparable time periods, concept operationalizations, or variable definitions. Before I start a concise review of the literature, I want to point out a study which does illustrate the constraining effects of the transition paradigm on fully formulating any theorized power of the elections. It has been argued that transitions to democracy are drawn out in African countries in the first decade of democratization post-1989 due to the prevalence of patronage (Barkan 2000). However, the author recognizes the power of elections as he argues that the legalization of opposition and the holding of multi-party elections will create pockets of opposition control and a change in the composition of the national elites to more propensity for seeking transition. The significance of this cited study is that even though the power of elections was recognized before Lindberg's study, the full effect of the argument is not unpacked as it was essentially framed by the then-prevalent transition paradigm the central tenet of which was the linear one-way movement to democracy.

Within the framework of the proliferation of hybrid regimes and elections, the debate is whether the holding of elections is helping the authoritarian regimes to reproduce themselves and thus further path dependencies due to the prior nature of the regime or whether it is helping in the creation and diffusion of democratic qualities in a polity and thus is generating new path dependencies (Lindberg 2006, Kaya and Berhnard 2013, Gandhi 2015, Knutsen, Nygard and Wig 2019, Miller 2015, Morse 2018 among others). Subjected to numerous tests, Lindberg's thesis came to be referred as "Democratization by Elections" or "Power of Elections" thesis.

My theory contributes to the greater literature on electoral authoritarianism by laying out the causal mechanism where the holding of reiterated elections has a tangible impact on the quality of democracy through electoral integrity. Specifically, I show how learning and habituation have a temporally increasing effect on electoral integrity under a supply and demand framework. The innovation offered in this study has to do with a strict temporal limitation and the utilization of electoral integrity as an indicator of tangible improvement in the quality of democracy. A large-N Most Different Systems Design is utilized to see how this process can be generalized. The analysis finds that for the period starting with the Third Wave and encompassing Fourth Wave, there is evidence for the positive effects of reiterated elections on the level of democracy in a country.

In the next two sections, I discuss elements of the literature on electoral authoritarianism to take stock of findings and the shortcomings. I then present my theory of elections and electoral integrity, and my hypothesis. To test the hypothesis, I estimate multivariate regression models on a dataset of 93 countries. The data and methods used for testing will be presented after the theory. In the remaining sections of the article, I present the results and discuss the implications of the findings.

Path Dependency Through Elections

The theoretical discussions and empirical studies on the role of elections on democratization can be grouped under two main headings: Those that argue that holding elections simply furthers a path dependency that stems from the authoritarian nature of the regime and those that support the view that holding elections help in the overall process of democratization. In order to frame the manner in which this study will offer an answer to this debate, I will unpack some of the arguments at length.

It has been discussed that there is a relationship between institutionalization and the tenure of autocrats (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). Here, the emphasis is on the fact that autocrats use parliaments as a perfect venue for sharing spoils and making policy concessions, the levels for both of which is determined by the perceived level of the necessity of cooptation stemming from threat from outside actors. Related to this finding, recent work has also stressed the importance of administrative capacity and economic control when elections further path dependency for the authoritarian regimes. Specifically, a recent study has shown that elections add to the stability of the regime when state has a strong bureaucracy or has extensive control over the economy (Seeberg 2018, p.44).

Another function of elections is information revelation where the country is not resource dependent (Miller 2015). Under this model, the elections are a venue for the electorate to signal dissatisfaction to the autocrat which then might lead to policy concessions. In order to make the control over the system easier and make it harder for potential opponents from within the ranks to mount a challenge, autocrats sometimes choose to create parties they control to run in elections. This may even include opposition parties in the understanding that a few seats won by the opposition will serve as a safety valve for the regime (Geddes 2005).

Elections may also serve as a tool for elite cooptation. Under this model, it is possible for the incumbent to strategically include leaders from the opposition to the government and hence continuously prevent opposition cohesiveness and unity (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). Continuous electoral malpractice might help the opposition parties to set aside ideological or ethnic differences and unite in a bid to present a credible challenge to the incumbent (Norris 2014). Because the primary aim of the incumbent is to ensure the survival of the regime, they can offer posts to some of the most outspoken critics in the opposition. Also, as certain elites in the opposition will necessarily be spatially closer to the incumbent, the provision of inclusion in the echelons of power may be expected to resonate more with these elites.³

Elections have been shown to lack democratizing power, limiting the applicability of the theory. For instance, a study for Latin America reports no statistically significant difference between the change in scores for civil liberties as a result of holding successive elections between 1978 and 1990 (McCoy and Hartlyn 2009). This study is an example for some of the practices in the literature around the power of elections thesis and therefore I will offer an analysis at some length: First, the researchers have taken differing time periods in their studies rendering temporal

³ Prime examples for this kind of cooptation are Suleyman Soylu, the Interior Minister of Turkey and Numan Kurtulmus, consultant to President. Suleyman Soylu was the leader of the Democrat Party and a very outspoken critic of the regime, whereas Numan Kurtulmus was the leader of the Has Party, an Islamist party which he had founded. He merged the party after being coopted to the ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) of Turkey.

comparisons untenable. The original power of elections thesis covers the period starting from the third wave of democratization. Therefore, as part of a research agenda we may extend the temporal scope towards the future to update and check for validity, but if restrictive time periods are chosen, the theory being tested will not be the one developed by Lindberg. Second, a common occurrence in the research testing the power of elections thesis is the divergent choices of dependent variables. McCoy and Hartlyn employ the type of democracy as defined in a trichotomous fashion in the literature (Mainwaring and Linan 2001). As I discussed above, the fact that we are able to talk of and conceptualize democracy in degrees suggests that continuous variables are better suited to detect changes (even if relatively small in magnitude) over time to give a deeper explanation than dichotomous or trichotomous dependent variables can offer.⁴ Third, based on the number of observations, we should always employ a fully specified model with controls. McCoy and Hartlyn employ a bivariate correlation with no controls. Fourth, related to the second point above, sometimes the discussions are not grounded in democracy theories and the assumptions are not laid out clearly. To give an example from the literature, McCoy and Hartlyn suggest that what Lindberg theorized, i.e. successive elections would result in the solidification of civil rights cannot be distinguished from the concept of competitive elections. They then argue that an expanded definition of democracy would encompass additional dimensions such as accountability, separation of powers, and rule of law (McCoy and Hartlyn 2009, p.49). They fail to present how and why this relates to a test of the power of elections thesis. Fifth, it is not possible to take concepts from the transition paradigm and utilize in a test of the thesis as the two are not compatible. Whereas it is true that the transition paradigm emerged as a study of the drawn-out democratization processes of the Latin American countries, the thesis is directly interested in getting the transition to multiparty elections as the starting point and not the end point. McCoy and Hartlyn take the number of elections to transition and carry out their analysis in this way, which is obviously not measuring the power of multiparty elections.

It has been argued that democratization by elections thesis does not hold for Southeast Asia (Morgenbesser and Pepinsky 2019). These authors criticize that elections are conflated as causes of rather than features of democracy, and use the concepts of democratization and regime change interchangeably without clearly defining them throughout their study and eventually they test the effect of elections on regime change and find no relationship. It is just that this finding does not apply to the power of elections thesis as, once more, the original theory has its focus on the variations of indicators and level of democracy in a polity and not the dichotomy inherent in regime change.

Within the wider category of studies that are critical, there are works on the post-Communist countries of the fourth wave of democratization. It has been argued that in this geographic region elections do not strengthen authoritarianism or promote democracy (Kaya and Bernhard 2013). The authors argue that the relative mobilization capacity of the opposition and the incumbent is the determining factor for the outcome of elections. They are placing an undue stress on the electoral model which is the combination of the tools and strategies deployed by the opposition in the color revolutions like in Ukraine (2004) and Georgia (2003). There are other

⁴ This study employs a continuous dependent variable as will be fully described in the Data section and Appendix.

authors arguing along similar lines. For instance, there is work that finds structural factors are not significant in explaining whether elections result in turnover and subsequent democratization. Instead, the interaction of regime vulnerability and electoral model have the greatest power over the outcome of the elections. (Bunce and Wolchik 2009, 2010). The economic collapse brought on by the end of the Cold War had a lasting effect on certain countries. In the case of Russia, it has been found that evaluations of government performance is the primary indicator for electorate's preference, and therefore, it can be argued that the holding of elections will help sustain the regime (Rose and Mishler 2009). These authors argue that when the elections no longer provide the results in terms of legitimacy the governing elite might decide to switch to an unqualifiedly authoritarian system. As will be evident in the argument below, I do think there will be constraints on such maneuvers of the elite chiefly stemming from the habituation and learning that the electorate will have received and internalized simply by the virtue of participating.

A further branch whereby scholars have been critical of the power of elections thesis has to do with the relative position and strengths of opposition and incumbents in an authoritarian regime. It has been argued that it is important to study the actors more closely as any noticeable development stemming from elections may be part of larger sequence of events which are manifestations of underlying processes (Gandhi 2015). This argument is not necessarily contradicting the tenets of the thesis, and we can argue that political actors act in a space conditioned by processes, one of the most consequential of which is the holding of elections with all the associated norms, expectations and ways of behavior. It has also been illustrated that elections reduce the probability of democratization in the short term but may increase it in the long term (Knutsen, Nygard and Wig 2017). The problem with this last study is the actual dependent variable utilized in the study. These authors are actually looking at and testing regime survival and no democratizing variables. Taking the dependent variable as a dichotomous one ignores the possible variations in the level of democratic development.

Another study that sets out to show that elections do not have a democratizing power just gets the dataset of a global test of the power of elections thesis (Edgell et al. 2018) and shows that when you add a lag of the dependent variable, the effect of reiterated multiparty elections disappears (Kim 2019). The author argues that using the lagged dependent variable rectifies the supposed omission of the persistent nature of democracy. The dependent variables in question are liberal, deliberative and egalitarian dimension from the V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) dataset. By using the lagged dependent variable, the author is essentially suppressing the explanatory power of other independent variables in the model (Achen 2000). His statement about the persistence of democracy is also subject to many unstated assumptions. He fails to demonstrate theoretically and empirically that the supposed persistence of democracy is of such a magnitude that inserting lagged dependent variable is justifiable. This also points to my contention above where I stated the need to ground all these discussions and theory building in a sound discussion of democracy. Although the thesis and the research are related to democracy, the theoretical frameworks and models are using certain assumptions in passing and this is one of the main reasons why it is not always clear what is being measured or tested.

The studies which lend support to positive effects of elections are exemplified by the stress on opposition actors, their strategies to benefit from the institution of elections to usher in democratic change (Howard and Roessler 2006, Wahman 2013), on the specific attributes of the authoritarian system which facilitates improvements through elections (Hadenius and Teorell 2007, Roessler and Howard 2009, Donno 2013a), on unintended side effects of authoritarian emulation of democracy in the form of regime vulnerability to democratic change (Bernhard, Edgell and Lindberg 2019), on the impact of elections undertaken prior to democratization (Brownlee 2009, Miller 2013), on large-N studies to check the effect of holding repeated elections on democratization (Edgell et al. 2018), on the effect of electoral protests on democracy (Beaulieu, 2014), and last but not least, on the effect of international actors in democratizing outcomes of elections (Donno 2013b).

The first group of studies in support of the power of elections thesis is centered around the idea that it is not constricting to operationalize democratization as turnover. Turnovers do not necessarily mean a democratic outcome but rather the change in a combination of the leading democracy indices around an election. The formation of electoral coalitions is a key feature in the emergence of democratic improvement. The second group of studies report in their results that the type of authoritarian regime is an important determining factor on the effect of elections on democratization. The general finding is that elections (however flawed they may be) have an effect in competitive authoritarian regimes. However, it must be noted that Donno demonstrates that the type of the authoritarian regime is not conducive to democratic change *per se*, but rather that pressures in the form of opposition electoral coalition and international conditionality do have an effect on competitive authoritarian regimes but not on hegemonic authoritarian regimes (Donno 2013a, p.705). The third group of studies centers on the time period between the onset of authoritarian elections and the point where it can be seen that the authoritarian regime is effectively starting to reduce the electoral uncertainty. Although the scope of the fourth group of studies do not match with the original specification of the power of elections thesis and have more in common with the studies that focus on elections under authoritarianism, the findings are consistent and suggest that the prospects of democracy are affected by the electoral process under authoritarianism. Specifically, it is found that the cases in which the opposition was performing strongly in elections before regime change were more likely to be followed by electoral democracy (Brownlee 2009) and that the presence of autocratic elections prior to democratization increases the survival chance of democracies (Miller 2013). The next group of studies deal with the global stock of elections to test their effect on democratization. Both studies cited here report an effect for elections, though by the way they operationalize their dependent variables and the criteria used for observation inclusion are not without controversy as will be discussed below at length. There have been instances when the results of elections have been contested and the effectiveness of these protests are conditioned by the level of domestic support and the international conditionality on the country. Regardless of the level of manipulation of elections, they can still have democratizing effects when democratization is understood as not regime change but incremental changes and this depends on whether the opposition decides to undertake electoral protest and what kind of support the protest receives (Beaulieu 2014, p.10). Recent study has established the effects of enforcement of norms by international actors through the means available to them on an increase in the quality of democracy (Donno 2013b). Bridging the divide between the democracy

and dictatorship measures, it has recently been shown that the framework for executive dismissal and appointment are as relevant in authoritarian regimes as they are in democratic regimes (Teorell and Lindberg 2019).

A Theory of Elections and Electoral Integrity

The power of elections and the habituation framework first advanced by Lindberg for Sub-Saharan Africa theorizes that the practice of holding *de jure* multiparty and free elections will lead to the solidification of the *de facto* political rights the electorate is exercising in these political contests. In its original configuration, Lindberg has only offered a descriptive analysis and the causal pathway he theorized from the exercise of political rights related to elections to the increase in the level of democracy in a country remained underspecified. The literature review offered above shows that the divergent ways of testing this theory suffered from operationalization and temporal scope. That is why, as a correction, the I theorize here that encompassing the Third- and Fourth Waves, the experience of holding reiterated elections will have a tangible effect on the level of democracy in a country. The dependent variable of electoral integrity which covers the entire electoral process is a good indicator to gauge the overall increase in the level of democracy of a country.

Having applied the correction discussed above, a further contribution is to extend the scope of the study. The theory I offer covers all countries in the world that started the practice of holding elections as part of the Third- and Fourth-Wave of democratization. The two corrections I apply to the power of elections thesis without succumbing to the inconsistencies in the literature I discussed above enables the building of a parsimonious theory which is a direct and empirically focused extension of the original Lindberg thesis. In other words, the question of how the power of elections on electoral integrity can be generalized using a MDSD approach is the innovation offered here.

The original formulation offered by Lindberg states that holding of reiterated multiparty elections will affect the greater political rights. He does not offer a mediating factor for this process. I theorize that the holding of multiparty elections affect a country's quality of democracy through the learning and habituation process and under a supply and demand framework. It has been shown in a study of 12 democratizing African countries for the period of 1999 to 2001 that political learning affects the demand for and the perception of the supply of democracy (Mattes and Bratton 2007). The subsequent change in the quality might then have further effects on democratization, significantly on the greater political rights. Therefore, the present theory also provides a potential missing link in that theory and argues that the relationship as theorized by Lindberg might be mediated by the level of a country's quality of democracy. The definition of democracy as used widely in the democratization literature is also adopted in this theory. This is the procedural definition as formulated by Robert Dahl. As he realized that achieving the real democracy was nigh-on impossible, he coined the term "polyarchy" which will correspond to electoral democracy (Dahl 1971). The realization that there are transitions in between authoritarian forms of government makes the category of electoral democracy as the ideal end point for the study of a country's achieved level of democracy (Wejnert 2005, p.57). The transitions between

authoritarian forms up to the category of electoral democracy is easier to achieve than a transition from electoral democracy to liberal democracy (Diamond 2002, Lindberg 2009).

Elections do not happen in a vacuum. As in every other situation which involves a provider of a service and a user of that service, the holding of multiparty elections should be considered in a supply and demand framework. Where we can discuss about supply- and demand-driven developments or equilibrium conditions in economy and religion, we can envision the same state of affairs for multiparty elections. Under this framework, there will be divergent outcomes for when demand outpaces supply, when demand is inelastic with a constant supply and where there is a moving equilibrium. In our case, supply is associated with governments and demand is associated with the electorate. I theorize that as multiparty elections start, this results in a learning process whereby the electorate gets habituated to the game of elections which is mirrored by the government. This, then will lead to more demands from the electorate to be met with a response regarding supply from the government. An example of such an action can be as follows: After taking part in a number of multiparty elections, the electorate perceives that the electoral management bodies can do better in terms of independence, and demand that these institutions be granted independence from political meddling in their affairs. The electorate, in their learning and habituation, is driven to make demands and the government will respond based on their own habituation and a number of other factors, most of which are laid out as part of the literature review above. The utility of such a framework is twofold: First, agency is not ignored, meaning the electorate and government do have different choices available to them, therefore any deterministic assessment is avoided. Second, it is realized that in their current choice of action both the government and the electorate will be informed and framed by prior beliefs and acts. While it is possible due to agency that unforeseen outcomes may happen at any junction, this framework allows us to build a model to gain explanatory power on the phenomenon investigated here.

While there is always the potential danger of placing too many assumptions as part of modelling as specified above, here these assumptions are deliberately kept to a minimum to make the results from the empirical analysis more generalizable. The level of abstraction necessary for a large-N study aids in this respect. I theorize that the length of the sequence of electoral cycles, namely the number of reiterated elections will have a positive effect on the quality of democracy. Based on the supply and demand framework, the interruptions to this sequence of elections is consequential. Successful coup events define the agenda for the elections on the eve of and in the wake of the event. As the interactions will not work as theorized and learning and habituation will not take place due to limited choices, these elections are not part of the theory. But, in an important divergence from the literature, I do not discount the entire prior stock of elections of a country because of a successful coup event. I theorize that only the elections surrounding the coup events are structured in a way that would not work under the framework of the theory and hence will not contribute to any habituation, meaning it will not have any positive reinforcing effect on the electorate. Elections before this kind of interruption still carry their effect on the overall levels of quality of democracy. The strict temporal delimitation is helpful in this regard. It is theorized that the passage of time since the onset of Third- and Fourth-Wave of democratization is sufficient for the learning and habituation effects to become apparent. This facet of the theory allows a parsimonious investigation of the effects of electoral cycles as each and every election has the

same weight as they are all in the same temporal delimitation whereby same electorate will be able to take part in most of them. It follows that the length of the sequence of electoral cycles in my theory is understood as the sum total of the number of electoral contests, that is to say, an election that took place two elections before a coup event is part of the same sequence with an election that took place in 2019, provided that the election in 2019 is not the first election to take place after a coup.

The logic of path dependency as it applies to the holding of elections, then, can be summarized as the total of the effects of learning through habituation on subsequent actions of the participants of the election game. It will also serve as a template upon which we can model more effectively.

This argument is illustrated in below.

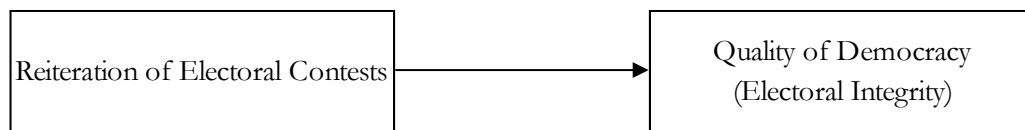


Figure 1. The effect of electoral cycles on electoral integrity.

Based on the aforementioned theoretical discussion, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Countries that have a higher number of reiterated elections are more likely to have a higher quality of democracy as measured by electoral integrity.

Data and Method

The dependent variable in this study is the quality of democracy which is theorized to depict the level of democracy in a country. It is worth remembering that the primary focus is electoral democracy. The measurement of this variable is done through the utilization of the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI) Index (Norris 2014, 2015, 2017, Norris and Gromping 2019, Norris, Frank and Coma 2014). The PEI Index is a composite score for the entire electoral process containing individual scores for 11 dimensions which are in turn divided to 49 components in total. The construction of this index is based on the normative approach that international norms and standards apply for elections worldwide. It gives us an unprecedented level of nuance regarding the quality of electoral contests. I argue that the prevalence in the studies of Freedom House and Polity are not deep enough (Peceny 2010) to capture the incremental increases that happen around the electoral process and point to an increase in the level of democracy in a country. Prior to the introduction of the PEI Index, electoral malpractice was still studied and tested but the scope of such studies would of necessity remain limited (for instance, Birch 2011). In the tests of the power of elections thesis, a lot of emphasis has been put on individual elections and “democratic outcomes” has been associated with change in country scores on Freedom House and Polity indexes. When we consider electoral democracy the highest type to be achieved as part of the analysis, the adequacy of using the PEI Index becomes more apparent. Instead of putting undue stress on individual elections, we can investigate the incremental increases in the quality of electoral contests over time. Empirical studies have also established that when election outcomes

have a significant weight or are decisive in indexes designating a country as democratic or not usually result in disparities as there are unremarked and unresearched assumptions about the relationship between election outcomes and democracy. As competition is at the heart of whether a country is democratic, we need to assess the structure and process of competition (Bogaards 2007, p.1233). The dependent variable of this study, the PEI Index gives us all relevant facets of electoral administration. Recognizing that multiparty elections are subject to manipulation, some scholars have essentially defined democratization as a gradual process where elections become less manipulated over time (Wahman 2012, p.30). In my formulation that I am offering here, the quality of electoral contest is a mediating factor on possible further democratization. A group of researchers have tried to measure polyarchy using expert opinions on five dimensions (Teorell et al. 2019). As even these same authors concede that polyarchy corresponds to electoral democracy (Teorell et al. 2019, p.82), it is apparent that their five dimensions will not have the same level of fine-grained incremental changes as the PEI Index utilized in the present study.

The main independent variable is the number of multiparty elections. In line with the theorized learning and habituation effects of multiparty elections, it is calculated as the number of elections that a country has had since the onset of multiparty elections in the third- and fourth-wave of democratization. In order to account for the effects of successful coup events in countries during this time period, the elections that surround these events are taken out of the count to prevent the inflation of the main independent variable. The learning effects of elections immediately around the time of a coup event are not comparable to a multiparty election under relatively normal circumstances. A brief discussion of the divergent ways that it has been counted in the literature will lend support for the operationalization adopted in this study: First, the temporal scope of the variable differs. Some studies use specific subsets of periods after the onset of the third wave, whereas some others take the count all the way back to 1919 (for instance, Wahman 2012). Still others count the number of elections until the onset of the multiparty elections (for instance, McCoy and Hartlyn 2009). There is also the practice of qualifying each election in accordance with indexes and include in the count based on the perceived quality of that particular election. The authors also reset the count of elections when they come across a coup event in the datasets they are using. I argue that if we go back to 1919, then apply certain instruments to account for the diminishing effect of elections, we will be losing capability to expose the learning and habituation effects. These take time, but will necessarily be expected to be apparent within the space of two generations. Hence, the starting point for the count is the onset of the third wave and the end point is 2019. The choice of temporal delimitation is consequential in that democracy is unlike totalitarian and authoritarian regimes in its limitations on the amount of time available to the regime (Linz 1998, p.21). Just like democracy is subject to time constraints, it is beneficial to limit the scope of the period to one where the learning effects of elections can be unpacked. If we qualify each election, we will be missing the point about the cumulative effect of elections as it is theorized that regardless of the quality of each contest, the cumulative effect of multiparty elections will have an effect on the level of democracy in a country. Hence, in the present study, the count of elections include all multiparty elections regardless of the quality of contest in each particular election. Resetting the count of elections effectively deletes the cumulative effect of elections preceding the event which some researchers take as a point of inflection. I argue that the elections surrounding a successful coup event are to be evaluated in a different qualification than other

elections. Hence, only the elections surrounding successful coup events are removed from the count. Finally, in order to see how the power of elections on electoral quality can be generalized, a large-N Most Different Systems Design is used. The final dataset does have 652 elections in 93 countries.

A number of controls have been employed informed by the substantial literature on the determinants of electoral integrity. These are parliamentary fractionalization, wave of democratization, existence of successful coup events, legacy of civil war (Birch 2011), ethnic fractionalization (Birch 2011), inequality (Birch 2011), wealth as measured by GDP per capita (PPP) (Birch 2011), population (Birch 2011), legacy of British colonialism (Birch 2011), parliamentary form of government (Norris 2014) and proportional representation (Norris 2014). The last two variables are entered into the analysis as dummy variables and as the effects of these particular values have been studied and theorized, the other categories for the form of government and electoral system have been collapsed to arrive the dichotomy and control for their effects, respectively. An additional control utilized for this study is the year of the first multiparty elections to check for the presence for any significant direction in a temporal sense. A list of the data sources is offered with summary statistics in Appendix B.

As the focus of this study is to test whether the holding of elections has an effect on the level of democracy in a country as measured through electoral integrity and that the dependent variable is continuous, it follows that for the period starting with the onset of the third wave up to 2019, the suitable method to test the effect of elections on electoral integrity is through ordinary least squares (OLS) regression as a cross section analysis as of 2019. This fits into the overall discussion here on the timeframe necessary for the learning and habituation effects to become apparent in a supply and demand framework. As PEI Index started to be released in 2014, the scores from releases 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5 and 7.0 will be included in the analysis as separate models to further illustrate the importance of the cumulative effects of elections, though as discussed above, the analysis of 2019 as indicated in the model with PEI 7.0 is of primary importance. After estimations, I ran Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to check for potential multicollinearity problems and encountered none. To address heteroskedasticity, I ran the models with robust standard errors.

Findings

Table 1 lists the results of the OLS regression analysis where the Overall PEI Index Scores from the project releases version from 3.5 to 7.0 are the dependent variables in each of the five models, respectively. A note of caution is necessary at the outset before I get into the discussion of the results: As mentioned above in the presentation of the data, the four models prior to the last one are offered as robustness checks and provide a deeper understanding of whether there is any discernible trend in the inquiry offered here. As the discussion is that the time period starting from the onset of the third wave up to 2019 is sufficient and adequate to study the effects of elections through learning and habituation, the last model is of primary importance in the interpretation of the results as it provides us a cross section of the entire population of the countries as of 2019.

We can see that the number of elections has a statistically significant positive relationship with the perception of electoral integrity when the effect of other relevant variables are controlled.

This provides support to the hypothesis offered here, and we can say that there is a general trend where countries with a higher number of reiterated elections are more likely to have a higher quality of democracy as measured by electoral integrity. Further, we need to note that starting with the third model and with the increasing number of observations denoting larger data availability, the main predictor variable is showing an increasing effect in terms of coefficients in line with the arguments offered in this study with respect to the timeframe for the learning and habituation effects of elections to kick in within a supply and demand framework. Supply of electoral democracy in the form of contested elections in varying degrees of fairness informs the demand for democracy in the electorate. It means that the provision of this good will change the expectations of the end user. Although the demand may have been present for a while, the holding of reiterated elections will induce the electorate in their demands and the actors in their practice to act along their democratic learning and habituation. This is the main causal link that is theorized in the present study and the finding of a significant relationship lends support to the main claim.

We can discern several trends from the results in Table 1. First, among the controls, legacy of civil war is showing consistent statistical significance across five models and the significance level actually increases with the fifth model where the PEI Index Score from release version 7.0 is the dependent variable. Second, wealth as measured by the per capita GDP is showing a decreasing statistical significance across the models. In the first two models, this control variable has a statistical significance of ($p < .001$) whereas in the last model while it is still significant, the level is down to ($p < .05$). A look at the change in significance levels in several variables suggests the increasing level of impact for these controls as compared to wealth. This can be due to the increase in the number of observations and the passage of time for these effects to become apparent. The year of the first multiparty elections and population variables reach marginal significance ($p < .1$) with the last model and based on the steady increase in their coefficients, it would be fruitful to check for further increase in their effectiveness with the availability of new data in the coming years. It needs to be noted that the wave of democratization variable which was entered as a dummy variable to show the effect of fourth wave of democratization as compared with the third shows a negative coefficient for the last four of the five models and with an increasing effect. This is in line with the sheer number of countries that became hybrid regimes starting with the fourth wave. Third, system of government and electoral system which have been entered here as dummy variables to check the effects of parliamentary system of government and proportional representation as opposed to presidential systems and majoritarian systems, respectively, show no statistical significance across the five models offered here. The finding has potential consequences for over-emphasizing institutional design as opposed to other variables to increase the quality of electoral contests. At this juncture, it is important to note the parliamentary fractionalization control variable. A higher score on this variable denotes a higher probability of two members of parliaments to belong to different parties. Across the five models, it shows an increasing level of statistical significance. In the first model, it has marginal significance, whereas by the fifth model it reaches a significance level of ($p < .01$). When we analyze the trend together with the institutional control variables of government and electoral system, we can see that whereas parliamentary system has a negative effect on electoral integrity, fractionalization has a significant positive effect lending support to arguments to the effect that the parameters of competition are indicators of the quality of contests. Fourth, the regional controls show that except for the first model where it has

Table 1: Impact of Electoral Cycles on Perception of Electoral Integrity

	PEI 3.5	PEI 4.5	PEI 5.5	PEI 6.5	PEI 7.0
Number of Elections	1.0791 (1.0306)	1.5210 (1.0051)	2.0369* (0.8836)	2.1371* (0.8695)	2.2014* (0.8739)
Parliamentary Fractionalization	17.8641† (9.6026)	17.0751* (8.5196)	17.5859* (6.8934)	18.2164** (6.7471)	17.8745** (6.5502)
Fourth Wave of Democratization	0.9691 (4.3602)	-0.5901 (3.4187)	-2.9270 (3.6150)	-2.1154 (3.6311)	-3.5763 (3.5100)
Year of First Multiparty Election	0.0651 (0.3404)	0.2124 (0.3467)	0.5543† (0.3186)	0.5168 (0.3223)	0.6084† (0.3113)
Coup Event	2.0497 (3.8575)	0.8440 (3.7823)	0.5722 (3.5830)	-0.1379 (3.4510)	-1.1380 (3.3287)
Legacy of Civil War	-9.3321* (3.8096)	-9.3424* (3.8759)	-8.4574* (3.5231)	-7.7814* (3.4092)	-8.7261** (3.1793)
Ethnic Fractionalization	-4.4382 (5.6397)	-1.5294 (5.5922)	-3.3230 (5.7691)	-1.5851 (5.6785)	-3.5715 (5.6206)
Inequality	-0.0349 (0.2398)	-0.0823 (0.2185)	0.1146 (0.2087)	0.0939 (0.2106)	0.1596 (0.2004)
Wealth GDP per capita, PPP	8.5426*** (2.3320)	8.2606*** (2.2001)	5.8154** (2.1460)	6.0488** (2.1850)	5.3900* (2.2035)
Population	-0.8230 (0.8874)	-0.9826 (0.8377)	-1.2705 (0.8035)	-1.3006 (0.7866)	-1.4117† (0.7589)
Legacy of British Colonialism	-0.6279 (3.2938)	-0.5548 (3.1675)	0.4404 (2.9410)	0.2283 (2.9676)	0.7804 (2.8722)
Parliamentary System	0.9298 (2.9689)	0.5912 (2.6822)	-0.7065 (2.6041)	-1.5126 (2.6782)	-1.7123 (2.7333)
Proportional Representation	2.6004 (0.3404)	2.0518 (2.7253)	1.2854 (2.5029)	0.5035 (2.4087)	0.3433 (2.4504)
Regional Controls					
Africa	9.9061† (5.1440)	11.9677* (4.7955)	10.9191* (4.3587)	11.1255* (4.2262)	10.9340* (4.3205)
Asia	-2.3939 (4.3423)	-0.7900 (4.1428)	3.2890 (4.4139)	3.3142 (4.4537)	4.4748 (4.2999)
Europe	-3.6829 (5.3033)	-2.7385 (5.4593)	2.0837 (5.1425)	2.4449 (5.2999)	3.1666 (5.2804)
Constant	-157.7345 (671.133)	-447.9981 (684.481)	-1112.24† (629.472)	-1040.569 (636.936)	-1216.409† (615.766)
F-statistic	6.52***	7.47***	7.54***	7.98***	8.28***
R-square	0.5585	0.5725	0.5477	0.5474	0.5654
Root MSE	10.293	9.944	10.007	9.996	9.884
Number of Observations	68	77	85	87	87

Unstandardized coefficients with robust standard errors are reported. Models were checked for multicollinearity.

†p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

marginal significance, Africa as a region shows statistical significance for the subsequent four models. For these controls, Latin America is the omitted category as there is a significant literature regarding the effects of elections in the third wave democratization in Latin America. Therefore, the categories of Africa, Asia and Europe are all being contrasted to the base category of Latin America. The fact that Asia and Europe show no significance means that the differences in the dependent variable of the study (PEI Index Scores from releases 3.5 to 7.5) among these regions are largely accounted for by variations in the main independent variable and control variables. In the case of Africa, the statistical significance of the coefficient tells us that there are further factors to be studied.

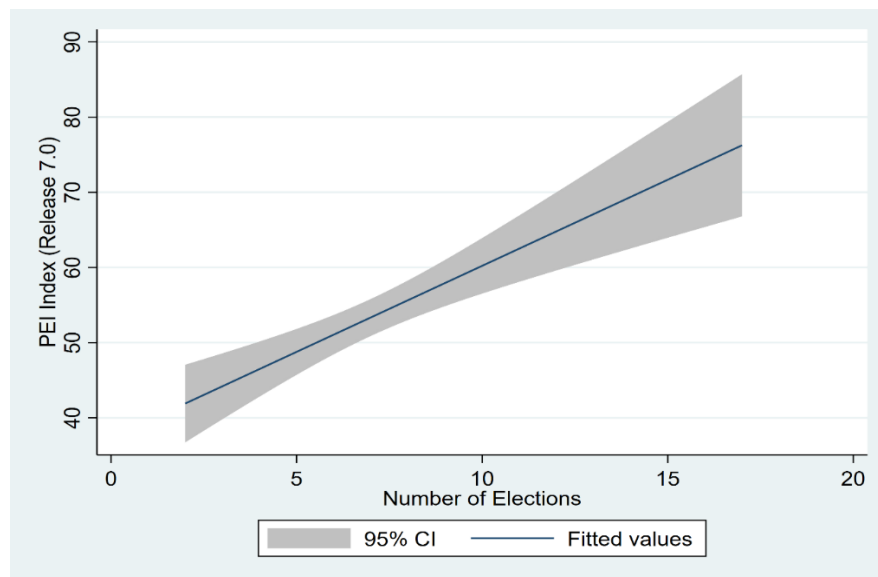


Figure 2. Marginal effect of the number of elections on PEI Index. Predicted estimates are presented holding all control variables constant at their means and modes.

In order to check whether the independent variable is not only statistically significant, but also carries substantial magnitude, the predicted estimate of the number of elections on PEI Index is presented in Figure 2. It can be seen that higher number of elections is more likely to generate a higher PEI Index score, namely the longer the experience of reiterated multiparty elections, the higher electoral integrity.

Case Study

Having established the presence of a process whereby the number of elections is a significant predictor of the quality of electoral contests, *how* it works or fails to work in practice needs to be examined to gain a fuller picture. It is insightful to compare and contrast two countries where the elections had divergent effects on electoral integrity. Therefore, for this comparison two countries from two disparate regions of the world are chosen. These countries had both some democratic beginnings before the onset of the third wave but their trajectory of transition of democracy will

allow for a comparison during the same timeframe under study. The countries for this case study are Uruguay and Turkey.

As part of the third-wave, the onset of multiparty elections was realized in 1984 in Uruguay and 1987 in Turkey, respectively. Whereas Uruguay has seen an increase in electoral integrity which has reached a high score of 75 with the release of the PEI version 7.0, Turkey has seen a decrease in electoral integrity which has reached a low of 44.5 with the latest data release. In order to see how the holding of reiterated multiparty elections has created path dependencies in opposite directions in these countries, let us first consider the countries experience with successful coups and subsequent military rule. In Uruguay, there was a prolonged military rule lasting 12 years between 1973 and 1985. In Turkey, the military rule was relatively short-lived from 1980 and 1983. Both episodes were subject to excesses like regression on rights, dismissals and executions. The dominance of the two parties of Uruguayan politics continued in the wake of the start of multiparty politics which was not the case in Turkish politics. The secular nature of the Uruguayan state was well-established whereas the secular nature of the Turkish state was hotly contested. The conflation on religion was a complication factor in the Turkish sense as the center right continued to dominate through new parties and the left was marginalized as an electoral bloc. The electoral system prompted actors to act in a similar way: In the case of Uruguay, the direct democracy provision was utilized by the electorate to initiate a referendum to enact a law to prevent the prosecution of the members of the military rule charged with human rights violations. In the case of Turkey, the high electoral threshold of 10% meant that an Islamist party would form a single government for the first time, and the state elite finally relented in their opposition to the formation of governments by parties they deem harmful for the governing ideology.

From that point onward, the divergent paths become clearer. With each election, the quality of contest in Turkey started worsening as the democratically-elected government engaged in utilizing the “menu of manipulation” available to autocrats everywhere, and at the same time the configuration of politics and the high electoral threshold prevented a credible challenge to the governing party. It is at this juncture that the elections lost their power. The governing party essentially used its early popularity to call for referendums and through a society-wide coalition expecting long-overdue liberalizing reforms, used elections to enact laws and carry out major amendments to the constitution. The liberalizing, democratizing intention of the new incumbent was always an unspoken assumption. When the state capacity, clientelism and religion were also thrown into the mix, we see that in Turkey elections currently serve to prolong the increasingly authoritarian rule of AKP. In Uruguay, the consistent utilization of referendums by the electorate, the election of a former guerrilla leader, the electoral reforms and the successful coalition of the left-leaning parties and their subsequent electoral victories served together to have elections and the logic of electoral system internalized by all the actors in the game which eventually resulted in the increase of the greater defined rights to such an extent that as of 2018, Uruguay became one of the full democracies in the world.⁵ We see that a key difference between Uruguay and Turkey was the successful coalition of the opposition forces in Uruguay which had an exponential effect on the perceptions of the electorate regarding their efficacy. This did create a reinforcing effect on the

⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/uruguay> Accessed January 3, 2020.

demands of the electorate which was met by the government in supplying a better governance and that is how Uruguay became a full democracy.

In the comparison of these two cases, we find evidence of the process of learning and habituation discussed here as well as the democratic backsliding from electoral democracy to competitive authoritarianism.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study provides empirical evidence for the power of elections in the sense that holding reiterated multiparty elections initiates a learning through habituation process for the actors in the game under a supply and demand framework and that this leads to electoral contests of higher quality. The temporal limitation as employed here is meant to standardize the frame of reference for the effects to become apparent or run its course. The results have shown that a unified time frame including third- and fourth-wave is well-suited for an investigation of the theorized power of elections. It is within the general theoretical framework and the empirical studies in the literature that this effect is understood to have possible impact on the greater political rights and hence on democratization.

The finding that regardless of the quality of individual elections, the experience of a series of contests will have a positive impact on electoral integrity has certain implications for the literature. First, it brings the emphasis on the outcome on individual elections as instances of democratization into sharp contrast with the incremental yet concrete changes in a polity. Based on the results of this study, it becomes apparent that placing undue significance on a single election might distort democratic development. This can happen through the intensive international campaigns on a single election as happened in Democratic Republic of the Congo. It can also happen through the application of frameworks by scholars. Second, it brings the widespread usage of Freedom House civil liberties scores for the period before and after elections and designating elections as “liberalizing” or otherwise into sharp contrast with the theory demonstrated here. The theory illustrates that it is the sustained experience of elections that has a direct influence on quality of democracy which then might have an effect on greater political rights as was originally theorized (Lindberg 2006).

This finding has policy implications as well. On the one hand, the undue emphasis and expenditure by the international aid community and organizations on certain elections and the resulting perceived lack of progress caused these actors to deemphasize electoral processes and stress economic development. While this approach is in the right direction with respect to addressing certain prerequisites, the evidence illustrated in this study points to the necessity of continuous engagement with the actors and bodies in developing countries on electoral processes. The implication here is that the expectations should be moderated by the fact that there is evidence of incremental changes in democratic quality as a result of the experience with elections. On the other hand, as has been demonstrated in the literature, efforts should be aimed at facilitating the establishment of credible challenges to governments in electoral contests for the process discussed in this study to have the maximum possible impact without placing undue stress on electoral turnovers.

The study is subject to the limitations of a typical MDS large-N setup where high level of abstraction leads to generalizability but lacks the depth of explanation that can be found in a comparison of few countries. The world is in the middle of an autocratization wave. Further research along the lines of the theory presented here might lead to substantive results. It will be interesting to check if the trend depicted here will hold in the near future in the face of democratic decline even in the established democracies. Further studies can check for additional causal factors affecting the theory presented here. The most promising further research along these lines is to extend the empirical testing of learning and demand for democracy (Mattes and Bratton 2007). As long as the equivalence issue in such a research design is handled, it can be combined with macro level data in a multi-level regression model and give further explanation on the theory developed here. I am of the opinion that future research on the topic along these lines based on data availability will lead to highly consequential results on the all-important question of the ascendancy of democracy in the world.

Appendix A: List of Countries

State	First Election to be Included in the Dataset	Number of Elections As of 2019	
Albania	1991	9	
Angola	2012	2	
Argentina	1983	17	
Armenia	1995	7	
Azerbaijan	1995	5	
Bangladesh	1991	6	
Belarus	1995	6	
Benin	1991	8	
Bolivia	1985	8	
Bosnia & Herzegovina	1996	8	
Brazil	1986	9	
Bulgaria	1991	9	
Central African Republic	1993	4	
Cambodia	1993	5	
Cape Verde	1991	6	
Chile	1989	8	
Comoros	1990	6	
Republic of the Congo	2002	3	
Croatia	2000	6	
Cyprus	1976	9	
Czech Republic	1990	9	
Dominican Republic	1986	8	
Ecuador	1979	13	
El Salvador	1994	8	
Ethiopia	1995	5	(continues)

Estonia	1990	9	
Fiji	1992	6	
Gabon	1996	5	
Gambia	2002	4	
Georgia	1995	6	
Ghana	2000	5	
Greece	1977	13	
Guatemala	1999	6	
Guinea-Bissau	1994	5	
Guyana	1992	5	
Haiti	1995	5	
Honduras	1985	8	
Hungary	1990	8	
Indonesia	1999	4	
Iraq	2014	2	
Kazakhstan	1994	7	
Kenya	1992	6	
Kyrgyzstan	1995	6	
Latvia	1990	10	
Lebanon	2005	3	
Lesotho	1993	7	
Lithuania	1990	8	
Macedonia	1990	9	
Madagascar	1993	5	
Malawi	1994	5	
Malaysia	1978	10	
Mali	1992	4	
Mauritius	1976	10	
Mexico	2000	7	
Moldova	1994	8	
Mongolia	1990	8	
Montenegro	2006	4	
Mozambique	1994	5	
Namibia	1994	5	
Nepal	1991	7	
Nicaragua	1990	6	
Niger	1993	6	
Nigeria	1999	6	
Pakistan	1993	6	
Panama	1994	6	
Papua New Guinea	1977	9	
Paraguay	1998	5	
Peru	2000	5	(continues)

Philippines	1987	11
Poland	1989	9
Portugal	1975	15
Republic of Korea	1988	8
Romania	1990	8
Russia	1993	7
Rwanda	1981	7
Senegal	2001	4
Serbia	2000	7
Slovakia	1990	9
Slovenia	1992	8
South Africa	1994	6
Spain	1979	13
Tajikistan	1995	5
Taiwan	1980	14
Tanzania	1995	5
Thailand	1992	8
Tunisia	2011	2
Turkey	1987	10
Uganda	1996	5
Uruguay	1984	7
Uzbekistan	1994	5
Ukraine	1989	6
Zambia	1991	6
Zimbabwe	1980	8

Appendix B: Summary Statistics & Data Sources

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max	Source
Number of Elections	93	7.010	2.712	2	17	International IDEA
Electoral Integrity	93	53.105	13.372	23.911	78.840	Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Project
Parliamentary Fractionalization	87	0.622	0.195	0.097	0.999	DPI Dataset
Wave of Democratization	93	0.526	0.502	0	1	Author's Coding
Coup Event	93	0.193	0.397	0	1	Powell and Thyne (2011)
Legacy of Civil War	93	0.193	0.397	0	1	QoG Dataset (continues)

Ethnic Fractionalization	93	0.466	0.246	0	0.930	Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat and Wacziarg (2003)
Inequality	93	38.691	8.668	14	63	World Bank Development Indicators (2019)
Wealth per capita GDP (PPP) (Natural log)	93	9.166	1.031	6.770	10.829	World Bank Development Indicators (2019)
Population (Natural log)	93	16.270	1.463	13.206	19.405	World Bank Development Indicators (2019)
Legacy of British Colonialism	93	0.215	0.413	0	1	QoG Dataset
Parliamentary System	93	0.225	0.420	0	1	QoG Dataset
Proportional Representation	93	0.505	0.502	0	1	QoG Dataset

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