Information and Self-Enforcing Democracy:
The Role of International Election Observation[*]

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Abstract

What motivates leaders to hold democratic elections? Under what conditions does democracy become self-enforcing, and can international actors play a role in bringing about this change? Working from a simple model, we show that if democracy is not yet institutionalized, information about the quality of elections is a necessary condition for leaders to hold clean elections. In the absence of such information, manipulation is highly likely. When credible signals about election quality exist, domestic and international consequences for election fraud are more accurate, thereby making the strategy of clean elections more attractive. We evaluate whether international actors can facilitate democratic elections by providing credible information about election quality. We show that election observation is more likely in low-information environments and that it can work as a substitute for credible domestic sources of information. Supporting our theoretical predictions, our analysis shows that observed elections are followed by increased variance in the allocation of foreign aid, and that post-election protests are more likely and last longer following negative reports from international observers.

"If the government's candidate wins everyone will say it was fraud. If he loses everyone will say it was a fair election. So it is more in our interests than anyone else's to be able to show it was an absolutely fair election."[1]

1   Introduction

Information plays a fundamental role in democratic governance. In institutionalized democracies, citizens and political parties can be reasonably confident that violations of democratic norms will be widely reported. Political actors who might otherwise be tempted to bend the rules in their favor are held in check by an informed public willing to "enforce" democracy should it become necessary.[2] If serious election fraud occurs, media, political parties, citizens, or other members of civil society are expected to blow the whistle, calling on citizens and the judiciary to enforce the democratic rules of the game. Thus, fraudulent elections are rarely witnessed in democracies, in part because the probability of getting caught is high and the consequences for engaging in election fraud are predictably severe.

Outside of consolidated democracies, these electoral dynamics now also involve international actors who attempt to encourage democratization by sponsoring election observation missions and conditioning foreign aid on progress toward democracy. Although some governments work to hold clean elections, problematic elections are much more common, and judging which elections are "good enough" is not trivial. Any national election is likely to experience at least some problems: changing demographics mean that voter registration lists are never without error, poll workers sometimes make mistakes, politicians can misuse state resources for campaigning, unintentional irregularities in the pre-election period can snowball into serious election day problems, and voters face these and other challenges in casting their vote and ensuring that it is accurately counted.[3] In addition, political parties may exaggerate or misrepresent these problems as part of a strategy to discredit political opponents. Given these challenges, citizens and international actors face significant barri-

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[1]General Fernando Matthei on Pinochet's "Insoluble Dilemma", quoted in Huntington 1991, 84.

[2]On self-enforcing democracy, see Przeworski 1991, 2005; Fearon 2010; Weingast 1997.

[3]AUTHOR; Birch, 2008; Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009; Lehoucq, 2003; Myagkov, Ordeshook and Shakin, 2009; Schedler, 2002.

ers in "learning what they need to know"[4] when choosing whether to accept a potentially fraudulent election.

We argue that international election observation has the potential to mitigate these problems because it provides credible and nonpartisan information on election quality and it is often present in environments in which reliable information is lacking. By increasing the available information about whether elections were democratic or not, the institution increases the likelihood that citizens or other international actors will punish those governments that fail to hold democratic elections.

International election observation is supported in part because of a belief that it helps promote democracy, but exactly how election observation promotes democracy is not well theorized or tested.[5] Existing work has focused on explaining why sovereign states invite observers or on criticizing the work of election observation.[6] Despite the lack of systematic evidence regarding how election observation promotes democracy, it has been increasingly common throughout the developing world since the late 1980s, and many international organizations and powerful states have now endorsed election observation as an important method of democracy promotion. Yet how do foreign observers promote democracy?

The aim of this article is to evaluate the role that information provided by international observers can play in bringing about self-enforcing democracy. We focus on two related questions. First, how does the absence of credible and unbiased information on election quality influence the decision by political actors to conduct a democratic election? Second, under what conditions does information increase the incentives for leaders to hold democratic elections?

To explore these questions, we develop a simple model in which the government decides whether or not to manipulate an election. The government's decision is dependent upon two factors: the existence of credible information on election quality and the cost of revealed cheating. Absent reliable information on the conduct of the election even an otherwise popular (and potentially "honest") government lacks the incentive to conduct a free and fair election. This result rests on a simple intuition. Election manipulation increases the

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[4]Lupia and McCubbins, 1998
[5]Bjornlund, 2004; Carothers, 1997.
[6]Bjornlund, 2004; Carothers, 1997; Geisler, 1993; Kelley, 2008; Santa-Cruz, 2005.

government's probability of victory in what is an inherently risky process. Therefore, if the incumbent is accused of election manipulation regardless of his or her actual behavior, the strategy of manipulating the election weakly dominates the strategy of holding a clean election.

Thus, we argue that international election observation can increase the incentives for leaders to hold democratic elections by increasing credible information about the quality of observed elections. If domestic or international actors punish governments that are found to hold fraudulent elections, other leaders (or the same leaders in future elections) should be less likely to manipulate elections. Alternatively, if reliable information on election quality is not available and citizens and political parties are suspicious about the government's motives, the party in power's only way to signal that elections are democratic is to lose the election and peacefully give up power. The empirical implications of our model are examined with a dataset of elections and election observation that covers 141 countries between 1960 and 2006.

Overall, this article suggests that the rise of election observation plays a significant role in promoting democracy by facilitating the imposition of (domestic) costs on leaders who hold fraudulent elections. We find that domestic costs are more likely following fraudulent elections, and that on average, international condemnation plays a more limited role in motivating governments to hold democratic elections. Thus, our results in part support those who argue that domestic forces are fundamental in furthering democracy (Schmitter, 1986). Yet our findings also underscore how international actors could modify their policies in the future in order to further increase the incentives for countries to hold democratic elections.

2   Existing Work on Information and Democratic Electoral Outcomes

Whatever one thinks about the factors needed to sustain democratic elections in a country, there is an important practical point that is often overlooked. With rare exceptions, it is

up to national governments to conduct elections and to announce the outcome.[7] Because they are seldom a disinterested competitor in the lottery for power, governments have both an incentive and the ability to manipulate the electoral context in their favor. Whether incumbents act on this incentive to manipulate the election or not hinges critically on the available signaling technology through which the perceived quality of elections is used to reward or punish governments. In our model, informative signals about election quality are a necessary condition for clean elections, and, by implication, for democracy.

Given that a government chooses to hold elections, the focus of this article is on the incentives of an incumbent government to hold clean elections. In other contexts, it would also be appropriate to ask whether the government decides to hold an election at all. Yet since the 1990s, elections have become nearly universal (author), and the central variation is between clean contests and manipulated ones. We discuss how our theory would apply to previous periods later in the piece. Although there are many potential checks on the government's decision to hold clean elections, we focus on two that we perceive to be central: citizens within the country and pro-democracy international actors. Either (or both) can react to fraudulent elections in a manner that is costly to the incumbent government.

In terms of domestic costs, the main variable of interest is post-election protest. Post-election protest is modeled in at least two different ways in the political science literature. In the literature on self-enforcing democracy, protest, and the associated rights of citizens to speak out against their government, protest is a well-established democratic right and, as some scholars argue, the possibility of mass protest can motivate political leaders to adhere to the democratic bargain.[8] As summarized by James Fearon, "for democracy to be self-enforcing, the public, or some significant part of it, must be motivated to protest or even rebel if democracy is threatened."[9]

For citizens, electoral manipulation is is a blatant violation of democracy and can provide a focal point for coordinated protest that can bring down the government. As Tucker argues,

When the regime commits electoral fraud, however, an individual's calculus re-

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[7]Exceptions are the handful of elections conducted or supervised by the United Nations (Namibia 1990, Nicaragua 1990, Angola 1992, El Salvador 1994, Mozambique 1994, East Timor 1999-2002, Cambodia 2003) and elections conducted in occupied territories (e.g., Iraq 2005).

[8]Dahl, 1971.

[9]Fearon, 2010, 5-6.

garding whether to participate in a challenge to the regime can be changed significantly. The likelihood of protests occurring following electoral fraud can greatly lower the perceived costs to any individual of participating in a challenge against the regime. Similarly, if the electoral fraud calls into question the very outcome of the election, then it can significantly increase the expected benefit from participating in the collective action, as the bums literally can be tossed out if things go well. Taken together, the logic of collective action problems can explain why citizens in oppressive societies that seemingly tolerate government abuses most of the time can rise up in the face of electoral fraud.[10]

A number of scholars have paid recent attention to "democratic revolutions," particularly those in the post-communist sphere. At least on the surface, because post-election protest was relatively successful in countries like Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, post-election protest was highlighted as a force for democracy, empowering pro-democratic forces and bringing down autocrats.[11]

Yet this view of post-election protest is not universally shared. Other scholars describe post-election protest as evidence that democracy is not functioning, and that citizens lack appropriate outlets to express their grievances against the government. In these models of elections and democracy, protest is the work of sore losers, disgruntled political players, or forces intent on destabilizing the regime. In literature separate from that on self-enforcing democracy, gaining the support of individuals who voted for losing candidates is often modeled as an essential condition for democracy to continue. As Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan and Listhaug put it, "the continuation of democratic systems depends, in part, on the 'losers' consent'."[12] Without it, citizen disenchantment can threaten democracy.[13]

Within the models that focus on protest in self-enforcing democracy, election fraud – and other violations of democracy – are assumed to be public knowledge. For example, Barry Weingast's model of self-enforcing political institutions focuses on agreement among citizens about the limits of the state.[14] If citizens can also solve the coordination problem following

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[10]See Tucker 2007, 536.

[11]Bunce, 2003; Bunce and Wolchick, 2006; Tucker, 2007.

[12]Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan and Listhaug, 2005, 4.

[13]Nadeau and Blais, 1993.

[14]Weingast, 1997.

any violation of the agreed upon limits, such as that a government will hold periodic elections and respect their outcome, democracy will be self-enforcing. But given the incentives for losing parties to complain about the process in an effort to discredit the regime, information should also be a barrier to citizens attempting to coordinate in response to fraudulent elections. They may adopt a strategy of always rejecting the results of elections that they lose. Given that election fraud is often illicit and trust of government can be low in countries undergoing political change, under what conditions can self-enforcing democracy begin? When are governments motivated to hold democratic elections?

3   A Theory of Information and Election Quality

Assuming incumbent candidates or parties choose to run, they prefer to win elections and accrue the associated spoils of victory. If electoral manipulation increases the chances of winning, why don't governments always steal elections? One may argue that popular governments do not need to cheat because they can win in a clean election. But if any electoral competition is allowed, surprise losses are possible, and even a popular government can increase its odds of victory by engaging in election manipulation. In addition, Alberto Simpser has shown that many governments prefer not only to win, but to win by a very large margin.[15] Therefore, cheating can be a profitable strategy for many election-holding governments.

Cheating is difficult to observe accurately, and reporting on election quality is complicated by the perceived incentives of partisan domestic actors to exaggerate claims against their political opponents. Credible information on election quality can be valuable for citizens, international actors, and even the government. How does a government's decision to cheat change with increases in information? How does punishment interact with information? We offer a simple decision-theoretic model to shed light on these questions. The model rests on three general assumptions: 1) the government prefers to win; 2) elections are risky; 3) the opposition always calls for protest in the absence of credible information about election quality.

In this model, the government decides between holding a clean election C and holding a

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[15]Simpser, 2005.

manipulated election M. This choice results in a probability distribution over three possible outcomes: win and suffer no sanction (payoff of 1), win and suffer sanction (payoff of $1 - s \geq 0$) and lose (payoff of 0). Sanctions may come from domestic or international audiences interested in punishing fraudulent elections.

Suppose that the probability distribution over the $\{1, 1 - s, 0\}$ outcomes is pq, $p(1 - q)$, $1 - p$ for a government that competes cleanly and q, $(1 - q)$, 0 for a government that manipulates. Whether a winning government suffers sanctions or not is determined by the probability $q \in [0, 1]$, whereas $p \in [0, 1]$ measures the popularity of a government. Popularity determines whether elections are won cleanly. Manipulated elections (by assumption) are won with certainty. Given these minimal assumptions, the expected utility of cheating is greater than the expected utility of holding a clean election, even for relatively popular governments:

$$u(C) = p(q + (1 - q)(1 - s)) \leq q + (1 - q)(1 - s) = u(M) \tag{1}$$

All governments cheat except for the special case of incumbents that have no political opposition ($p = 1$). This result is somewhat surprising because more popular governments are more likely to win in clean elections. In this model, the reason that governments with popularity less than 1 do not hold clean elections has to do with how q is specified. In the current setup, governments sometimes pay a price for winning but the price is not conditional on how the election was conducted. With nothing to distinguish them from their cheating counterparts, even governments that could win in a clean election choose to manipulate.

This setup dramatizes a particular problem. When local actors possess no other information about how the election is conducted, the only other visible indicator that an election was clean is an election that is lost by the party in power. Yet cheating governments rarely lose.

This result changes if q is specified more richly. We assume that q depends on the action taken by the government: $q = P(c|C)$ for holding clean elections, and $q = P(c|M)$ for governments who cheat. The quantities $P(\{c, m\}|\{C, M\})$ are state-to-signal mappings: when a government holds clean elections, a message of clean c or manipulate m is drawn with probability $P(c|C)$ and $P(m|C)$ respectively (which sum to 1). When a government

manipulates, a message of c or m is drawn with probabilities $P(c|M)$ and $P(m|M)$ (which also sum to 1). Substantively, one way to think about this specification is that whether a government victory is penalized depends on the message received by other actors: a clean message results in unchallenged victory whereas a message of manipulation increases the probability of sanctions.

The optimal choice hinges on comparing the expected utilities of clean elections vs. manipulated elections:

$$u(C) = p(P(c|C) + P(m|C)(1-s)) \geq P(c|M) + P(m|M)(1-s) = u(M) \qquad (2)$$

Examining this equation, governments expect higher utility from holding clean when: (1) the signals are more informative - $P(m|M) \uparrow$ and $P(c|C) \uparrow$; (2) the government is more popular; (3) the sanction s is greater. Figure 1 provides an illustration.

If information is to have this effect, fraudulent elections must increase the likelihood that other actors to impose costs. We do not attempt to explain why domestic or international actors are motivated to engage in post-election protest or impose international sanctions. Our aim is to show how the existence of costs for fraudulent elections should influence the behavior of incumbent governments.

There are several relevant implications of the model to highlight. First, the effect of increasing the sanction s on governments who cheat depends on the quality of the available information: poor information mis-allocates sanctions and produces little disciplining effect on the government. Second, more popular governments not only are more likely to hold clean elections when there is better information on the quality of the election: they may be strictly better off in expected terms. Popular governments may also benefit from better information by risking election loss (a risk which may be trivial for very popular leaders) and gaining the fruits of winning without suffering sanctions. If election observers provide better information, then popular governments would be most likely to avoid the strategy of cheating when observers are invited (when information is better), as they can win without manipulation and can simultaneously avoid the costs that would normally accrue to an incumbent who wins the election under institutional uncertainty.

Figure 1: **Optimal Election Strategy and Signal Quality**
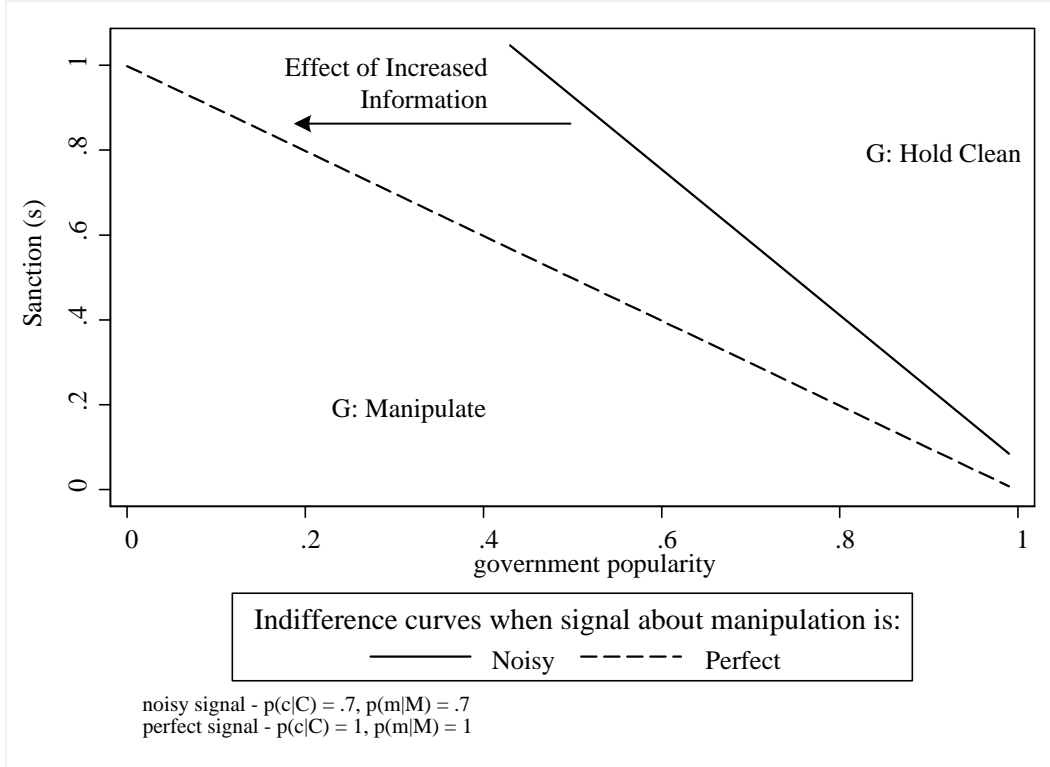
The model also suggests that governments who stand to suffer higher sanctions (greater s) benefit more from increased information because they are likely to experience domestic repercussions no matter what. Better information ensures that sanctions are more discriminately targeted, and thus helps some governments avoid the cost by holding clean elections. Because they benefit more, genuinely popular governments may be more likely to invite observers.

One important prediction is that better information causes some governments to hold clean elections where they would otherwise cheat. If we had access to the relevant counterfactual data, we would predict that a world with better information leads to fewer fraudulent elections. This suggests an experimental setup in which the assignment of observers to elections is random with respect of the underlying propensity of the government to cheat. In subnational data, the random assignment of election observation is feasible, as shown by AUTHOR and Ichino and Schundeln.[16] Yet random assignment of observers at the national

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[16]AUTHOR and Ichino and Schundeln 2009. The studies are consistent with the main prediction of the model: observed polling sections saw less fraud.

level has not yet been possible. In this article, we instead rely on an observational dataset of election events and evaluate whether these data are consistent with our model. Instead of presenting one conclusive test of our theory, we evaluate a number of empirical implications.

Assuming that observers increase information, the model generates three basic insights about when observers should be most likely to bring about democratic elections: (a) where locally available information is poor; (b) where the government is relatively more popular; and (c) where there are higher sanctions for governments accused of cheating.

In cross-national empirical data, we can evaluate conditions (a) and (c). In regard to condition (b), when election fraud is anticipated, information on a government's "true" popularity is difficult to measure. Nevertheless, a number of cases are suggestive, such as the quote from a member of Pinochet's regime that opened this article. In the next section we evaluate conditions (a) and (c) as hypotheses.

3.1 Hypotheses

Increased information about the quality of elections can play an important role in countries without institutionalized democracy, giving leaders the incentive to hold democratic elections. International election observers are capable of providing such information, as discussed in the previous section. Our model highlights the conditions under which the effect of increased information will facilitate democratic elections. If observers systematically go to cases where local information is poorest, they are likely to have a greater effect on outcomes than if they focused on cases where democratic practices are well-established. If governments who invite observers and are accused of cheating are punished by domestic or international actors, the effect of information (election observation) on the probability of democratic elections will be greater.

An important assumption is that international observers provide information in countries in which uncertainty about the government's intentions is high. Thus, one implication of our theory is that observers should be more likely to observe in countries in which the quality of elections is uncertain. A country's first multi-party elections, elections run by transitional governments, and elections held after previous elections were suspended are all markers

of uncertainly and a probable lack of information about election quality.[17] Pre-election concerns among domestic actors about election fraud may also indicate the information poor environments most likely to benefit from the presence of observers.

> **Hypothesis 1** *If international election observers provide information, they should observe in countries with uncertain election quality and/or pre-election concerns about fraud.*

For the information provided by election observers to facilitate democracy, revelations of election fraud must be followed by negative consequences. We evaluate two possible sources of post-election costs on governments that are caught manipulating an election: international sanctions and post-election domestic protest.

Many developing countries depend heavily on foreign support, including (but not limited to) foreign aid. If foreign aid or other international benefits are conditioned on election quality, a negative election report by international observers should be costly to leaders.

The political uses of foreign aid have been well-documented in the literature,[18] and it is relatively well accepted that foreign aid does not simply go to those countries that most need it. If donors adhere to their rhetorical commitments to encourage democracy through foreign aid, and if observers increase the accuracy of information available to Western donors, predictable donor reactions to fraudulent elections can increase a government's incentives to adopt clean elections. If the poll is endorsed by international observers, then aid should stay the same or increase. If elections are criticized, aid should stay the same (if it was already low) or decrease. Thus there should be greater variance in foreign aid following observed elections relative to elections that are not observed, and aid reductions should be more likely following observer reports of election fraud.

> **Hypothesis 2** *Foreign aid levels should be more likely to change following observed elections than unobserved elections.*

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[17]Alternatively, and beyond the scope of our theoretical model, some governments may be able to suppress local whistle-blowers, thus signaling lack of interest in democratic elections. In this case, observers are not likely to have much of an impact and may choose to stay out in order to implicitly condemn the government, as in Turkmenistan. The experience with Russia's most recent parliamentary elections represents such an example in which reputable observers refused to observe under restrictive conditions.

[18]Dreher, Sturm and Vreeland, 2009; Dunning, 2004; Escriba-Folch and Wright, 2010.

Hypothesis 3 *In observed elections, average levels of foreign aid should be lower if election observers issue negative reports.*

These next two hypotheses tap into the domestic sources of sanctions s on cheating incumbents. The occurrence of protest should worry governments, and longer protests should be more costly to the government in power. When protest is conditioned on reputable claims about how the election is conducted, the anticipation of such costs should strengthen the willingness of governments to hold clean rather than fraudulent contests.

Hypothesis 4 *If international observers are present, post-election protest should be more likely when the election is criticized by independent observers.*

Hypothesis 5 *If international observers are present and post-election protest takes place, protest should last longer when the election is declared fraudulent by observers.*

Before we evaluate these hypotheses, we first provide some evidence that foreign election observers are, in fact, add credible information that would not be otherwise widely available. Since this is difficult to test empirically but nevertheless important to our argument, we support this claim with a discussion of mechanisms and cases.

4   International Observers and Information Provision

How do observers increase information about election quality? We build on and extent insights offered in a burgeoning literature on the topic.[19] Observers are usually invited by the host country government, and attempt to observe all aspects of the electoral process using a variety of methods, including information collected by long- and short-term observers who are deployed throughout the country. Within days after an election, observers typically hold a postelection press conference, sharing their preliminary findings about the quality of the election with domestic and international news media. The content of their reports can range

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[19]Bjornlund, 2004; Carothers, 1997; Kelley, 2008.

from enthusiastic congratulations to a country for holding democratic elections to detailed condemnations of the electoral process, including accusations that the elections were stolen from the rightful winner. The reputations of international observers are formed primarily by their work in other countries, and they maintain excellent contacts with international news media. As such, foreign observers are usually much harder for the government to paint as partisan. In addition, they can credibly threaten to leave a country and effectively condemn the election before it takes place, as in the Gabon (1998), Ivory Coast (2000), Panama (1989), Togo (1993), or Uzbekistan (2005) Bjornlund, 2004. These characteristics of international observers make it difficult for a government to discredit them, control their message, or suppress their efforts after they have been invited. The same is not true for other domestic actors such as domestic election observers, who can be more easily intimidated, suppressed, or discredited, and who do not typically have the same access to international media.

Do international election observers actually provide additional information about the quality of elections to domestic or international audiences? The skeptic may point out that domestic political parties, voters, and civic groups are likely to know far more about their country than a delegation of foreigners. All else held equal, we do not disagree. However, in environments plagued by citizen mistrust of government or an absence of checks and balances, observers can be one of the few credible sources of information about the election. Additionally, a close examination of the practices and experience of observers reveals that they have frequently added to the informational environment in two ways: 1) using improved technologies of election observation, they provide new information about election quality and 2) when viewed as impartial outsiders, they provide independent verification of information already available from less-credible outlets.[20]

In the first form of information provision, international observers rely on their experience with fraud detection methodology and superior access to information in order to provide the government, citizens, and opposition parties with information about election quality that they would not otherwise possess. Election observation technology has continued to improve since the late 1980s, and the most reputable international observer missions now include long-term election observers who are stationed throughout the country for the entire

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[20]These two channels of information provision are theoretically equivalent in our model: in an information-scarce environment, a message issued by observers would tend to be more informative than a pronouncement made by some other domestic source.

electoral period, extensive media monitoring, voter-registration audits, coordination with domestic non-partisan election monitoring groups, and other methods tailored to the specific challenges of the country.

The information-providing role of observers is widely supported. As Thomas Carothers writes, "A basic function of international election observation is detecting – and, if possible, deterring – electoral fraud."[21] Eric Bjornlund offers a definition that highlights the information-providing role of observers:

> International election observation is the purposeful gathering of information about an electoral process and public assessment of that process against universal standards for democratic elections by responsible foreign or international organizations committed to neutrality and to the democratic process for the purpose of building public and international confidence about the election's integrity or documenting and exposing the ways in which the process falls short.[22]

Election observation has also been widely criticized for falsely legitimizing elections that others believed to be fraudulent, or for using inconsistent standards to judge elections.[23] However, these criticisms are in part based on the fact that the opinions of international observers play a visible and often important role in endorsing or criticizing elections. Since the early-1990s when observers began to be invited to manipulated elections, observers have worked to improve their approach and methods.[24]

For example, observers rely on methods like the parallel vote tabulation (PVT), a technology used to verify the official vote count independently and quickly. International observers (frequently coordinating with domestic nonpartisan observers) have conducted, publicized, and funded a number of PVTs that have resulted in credible validation of "surprising" results of various forms. Although it is difficult to prove, it is widely speculated that PVTs were instrumental in political transitions ending the regimes of Manuel Noriega (1989), Augusto Pinochet (1988-9), and Daniel Ortega (1990), among others. When these leaders were faced with a credible PVT demonstrating they lost the election and the threat of a

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[21] Carothers, 1997, 19.
[22] Bjornlund, 2004, 40.
[23] See Carothers, 1997; Geisler, 1993.
[24] Davis-Roberts and Carroll, 2010; AUTHOR.

critical report from observers, they were constrained in their actions and arguably less able to discredit the charges against them. International observers also typically have access to the election administration body and meet with representatives of all willing political parties and civic groups. This access gives them the ability to collect and investigate complaints about technical preparations for the election, and because of their status as impartial observers, allows them to report on the behavior of distrusting stakeholders in a more credible manner.

In the second and related form of information provision, international observers validate reports of manipulation already reported by citizens, political parties, or other organizations. This may seem inconsequential, but case-based evidence suggests that international observers are uniquely situated to validate (or invalidate) allegations of fraud, and their evaluations can influence post-election behavior as well as the existence and timing of post-election protest.

International observers influence the credibility of complaints that are made by domestic actors. When international observers are present post-election protests are more easily discredited in the absence of validating international criticism. Contrast the following news reports following protested elections, the first from Ethiopia when observers initially approved the election, and the second from Azerbaijan, where they criticized it:

Ethiopia 2005 Parliamentary Elections

> Foreign observers said they could not verify opposition claims of rigging. The chief European Union election monitor, Ana Gomez, called the election a victory for democracy, and a credit to all parties who had participated. She told the BBC it was a bit absurd for the opposition - who have alleged fraud and intimidation - to dismiss the poll at such an early stage.[25]

Azerbaijan 2005 Parliamentary Elections

> An estimated 10,000 people gathered in Victory Square, on the outskirts of the capital, Baku, to protest against the results of parliamentary elections on November 6 which international observers said were marred by fraud.[26]

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[25] "Ethiopia poll prompts protest ban" BBC News. May 16, 2005.
[26] "Azerbaijan condemned for crackdown" by Nick Patton Walsh, Moscow. The Guardian. November 28, 2005.

Observer statements, moreover, are often widely transmitted, and international observers invest time and money in publicizing their findings. Procedurally, distribution of information from international observers takes several forms. The most wide-reaching form of communication from observers is the post-election news conference and preliminary statement. These statements are widely reported on by journalists,and stake-holders in the election frequently participate in the press conferences. In addition to the post-election announcement of findings, observer missions issue interim statements on the election and the electoral process. Reputable missions produce an extensive final report detailing their methodology and their overall analysis of the electoral process, including recommendations for improvements in future elections.

Although international observers are able to improve the accuracy of signals about election quality, they are far from perfect at detecting election manipulation. Observers tend to be risk-averse when deciding whether to criticize an election. In practice it is more likely that a truly clean election will be declared clean by international observers than a truly manipulated election will be declared fraudulent by international observers. This is because observers often collect enough information to know that an incumbent has certainly not rigged the vote, but hesitate to call a contest fraudulent even when they do encounter some evidence to that effect. For most organizations, widespread and incontrovertible evidence is required to call an election fraudulent. Because this evidence is not likely to appear when an election is actually clean, the most common error committed by observers is validating a somewhat manipulated election. However it is also clear that they are able and willing to find election fraud, as evidenced by the more than 150 elections they have criticized since the mid 1980s.[27]

Although the precise amount of information added by observers may be difficult to measure, the record of election observation suggests that they are able to confirm or disprove existing suspicions about election fraud, and, through their access and technical expertise, they are also capable of providing new information about election quality to domestic and international audiences.

We next examine Hypotheses 1-5, evaluating whether the evidence is consistent with our argument that observers can facilitate self-enforcing democracy.

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[27]The data is based on appears in the next section.

5   Data

We rely primarily on the AUTHOR Dataset.[28]   The dataset covers all elections between 1960 and 2006, excluding consolidated democracies.[29]   Each observation in the dataset is an election, rather than a country-year. There are more than 1,800 distinct election events, taking place in 141 countries.

As an overview, Figure 2 illustrates some relevant trends in the data. Note the dramatic increase in elections held around the world and the no less dramatic rise in election observation. Only a handful of elections were observed in the 1960s. Since 1990 electoral observation has become a nearly universal phenomenon.[30]

Our model does not speak as to why observers go to some places but not others. The biggest problem this could induce is that observers could be highly selective in where they observe, and only be present at elections where the government was likely to hold a clean contest anyway. Similarly, they could disproportionately be invited to elections where the costs of cheating are negligible. Such concerns diminish in the 1990s as election observation becomes nearly universal in the developing world. With up to 80 % of all elections being subject to observation (and even more in some regions), there is nearly universal assignment and so the opportunities for selection problems are more limited.

Thus, our analysis focuses largely on the post-1990 period. The informational problem we identify also plagued democratic transitions during the Cold War, and the absence of signaling technologies may have influenced the calculus of governments choosing whether to hold democratic elections (or any elections at all).

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[28]AUTHOR.

[29]See codebook for more information on variable descriptions, coding methods, and inter-coder reliability tests at `http:\\AUTHOR`

[30]See Bjornlund 2004; Kelley 2008; AUTHOR for explanations of this trend. Data on who is observed is discussed in the following section. Elections included in the graph are those allowing at least some competition for national-level offices.

Figure 2: **Emergence and Scope of Election Observation**
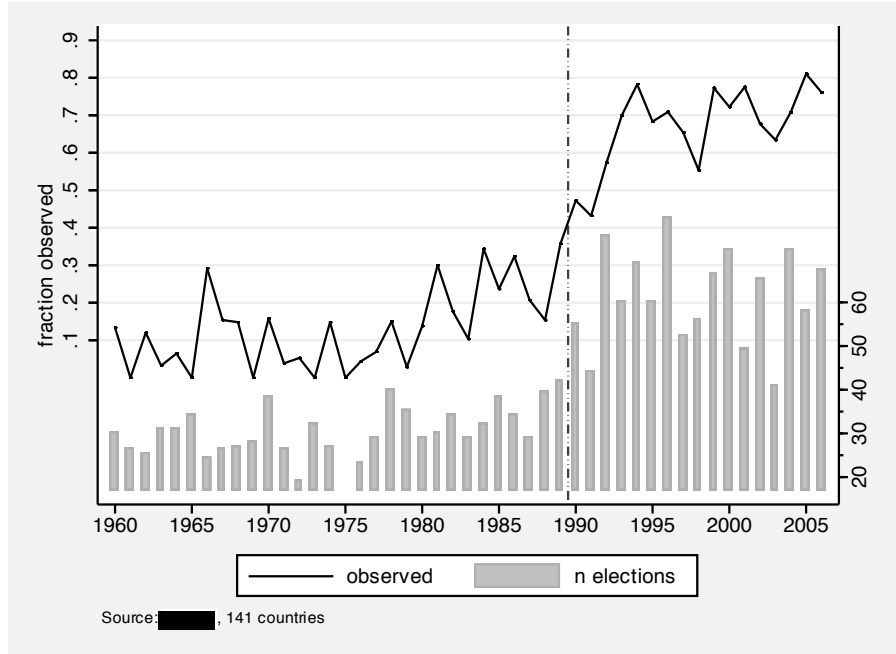
5.1   Variables

We evaluate the possibility of international and domestic consequences of fraudulent elections in three empirical sections: the first evaluates Hypothesis 1, the second section evaluates donor reactions to reports of fraud (Hypotheses 2 and 3), and the third section evaluates the relationship between fraud and post-election protest (Hypotheses 4 and 5). There is some overlap in the variables used in each section, so all variables are summarized here.

In all three empirical sections, data on election observation includes three variables. The first variable, *Observed*, is a binary indicator equal to one of one or more official delegations of international observers were invited to the election.[31] Journalists, individual academics, embassy staff, and tourists are not considered observers. International observers are typically given credentials by the host government. The second variable is *Reputable Observers*, equal to one of the election was observed by one or more "reputable" international observer groups, defined as those groups that are willing to criticize a fraudulent election as such. In the period that we study, reputable delegations attempt to observe all aspects of the electoral process, beginning well before an election takes place, and departing after post-election disputes have

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[31]AUTHOR.

been resolved. The third variable is *Negative*, coded from the official reports and press releases from international observers, and equal to one if observers seriously questioned the winner of the election or the legitimacy of the process (132 election events). Most observer reports include some criticism, and only those statements that are quite critical are considered to be *Negative*. The majority of election observation reports are neither overtly negative nor overwhelming endorsements of the election process.[32] Multiple observers may be present at a given election, and they do not always agree.[33]

We use the AUTHOR dataset's variables *Q1, Q2, and Q10* to identify when countries held elections of *Uncertain Quality*, as referenced in Hypothesis 1.[34] *Q11* measures whether there were significant pre-election concerns that the elections would not be free and fair, called *Pre-Election Concerns*.

The second empirical section focuses on the possibility of international consequences for elections revealed as fraudulent. The dependent variable, *Aid*, is the smoothed 3-year average of bilateral aid receipts, beginning with the year of the election and including the subsequent two years. We log total aid receipts, adding one to cases of zero aid. Because we are interested in changes in aid, we include the lagged aid receipts (constructed the same way as *Aid*, taking the average of the three years prior) from that donor as an independent variable.

The dependent variable in the section on domestic consequences, *Protest*, comes from the AUTHOR dataset and is a binary indicator equal to one if "there were riots and protests after the election" that "involved allegations of vote fraud." In the foreign aid models we include several other variables that are believed to determine foreign aid flows, including measures of total *GDP* (logged), *Population* (logged), and UN General Assembly voting. This measure is called *UNGA Voting w/ Donor* and represents the degree to which foreign policy preferences between the donor specified in the model and the aid recipient are similar (measured as a 0 to 1 correlation, lagged).[35] Following Alesina and Dollar, *Population* and

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[32] AUTHOR.

[33] Kelley, 2009*a*,*b*.

[34] The variables are binary measures of the following questions: Q1: Were regular elections suspended before this election? Q2: Were these the first multiparty elections? Q10: Was the country ruled by "transitional leadership" tasked with "holding elections?"

[35] Our source of the UN data is Dreher and Sturm 2006, who in turn draw on a dataset by Voeten, 2000. The *UNGA Voting w/ Donor* variable for the European Union is constructed by taking the average of the correlations of country-members of the Union and the country recipient of EU aid.

Wealth are included to account for economic determinants of aid, and *UNGA Voting w/ Donor* is intended to capture strategic interests between donors and recipients.[36] We also control for the calendar year (*Year*) in which the election takes place to capture increases or decreases over time in aid.

In the empirical section on post-election protest, we include several additional variables. For all models, we include a measure of whether there were pre-election concerns (from any domestic or international actors) that the elections would not be free and fair, labeled *Pre-Election Concerns*. We also include a measure of whether the vote represented a gain for the opposition, labeled *Opposition Gain*. All models are binary logit, with robust standard errors clustered by country. Because country fixed-effects predict "failure" (no protest) perfectly in a large number of cases, we instead account for unmeasured country characteristics and temporal dependence with an indicator of whether the country has previously experienced post-election protest, called *Previous Protest*.

To evaluate Hypothesis 5, and to further investigate the relationship between protest and the information provided by international observers, for all elections that were either protested or received a negative report from observers, we coded several additional variables: whether any candidates or parties in the election called for protest, whether they accepted the results, the timing of international observers' post-election announcement about election fraud, and data on the timing and duration of protest.

6 Analysis

6.1 Uncertainty and the Presence of International Election Observers

For our argument to be supported, observers must not observe exclusively in elections that are already going to be democratic. While we argued that after 1990, the assignment of observers to elections is nearly universal in the developing world, there is some selection, as the rate of observation is not 100%. Selection would be especially worrisome if those states

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[36]Alesina and Dollar 2000.

Table 1: **Election Observation and Uncertainty about Election Quality**

	Not Observed	Observed
Not Uncertain Quality	191	41
Uncertain Quality	337	121

where concerns with the quality of elections were highest were systematically more likely to refuse to invite observation. If observers are more likely to be invited to countries in which the quality of elections is uncertain, then they are more likely to encourage self-enforcing democracy, as in Hypothesis 1.

Using two measures described above, *Uncertain Quality* and *Pre-Election Concerns*, we find that observers are more likely to observe elections of uncertain quality than those that are not, and more likely to be present for elections with pre-election concerns about fraud than those that were not. These trends become stronger over the time period we study.

For example, out of the 27 total observed elections in 1992, 18 (or 75%) were of *Uncertain Quality*. Just three years later, 90% of all elections of *Uncertain Quality* were observed. Table 1 shows the overall number of elections by whether the election was of *Uncertain Quality*, 1990-2006.

Turning to pre-election concerns about fraud, we see that throughout the period under study, election observers were present at most elections with *Pre-Election Concerns*. This figure excludes elections in which competition is impossible. In 1992, 63% of elections with pre-election concerns about fraud were internationally observed. By the end of the period under study (2006), 100% of these elections were observed.

Although these are simple descriptive statistics, they support our first hypothesis, reduce selection concerns (if anything, the 'right' selection is at work in that observers are more likely to go where credible information is lacking), and also offer a stark picture of the demand for better information in electoral contests around the world: in most elections outside the West, there are persistent doubts about the procedural integrity of the contest.

Figure 3: **Pre-Election Concerns about Fraud and the Demand for Election Observation**

Legend:
■ Elections with Pre-Election Concerns and Observed
□ Elections with Pre-Election Concerns about Fraud and Not Observed
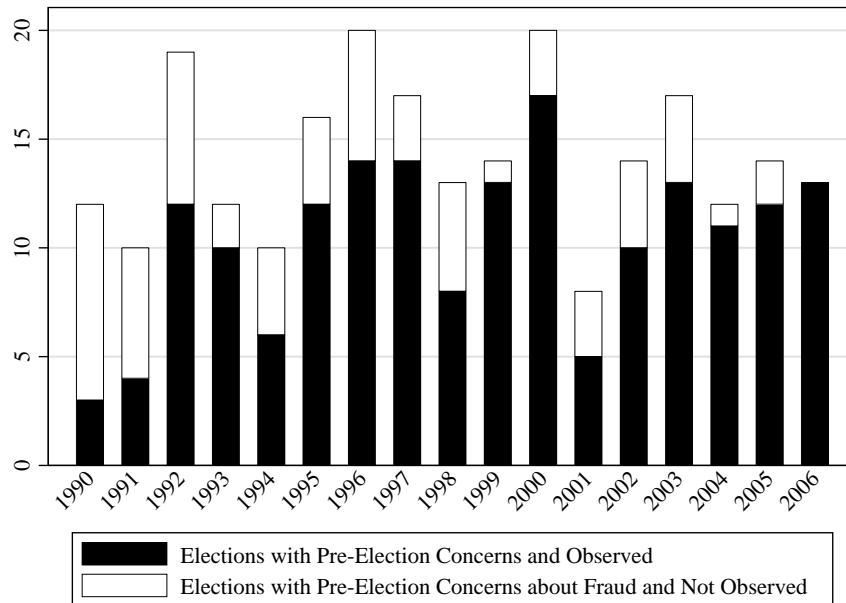
## 6.2   International Response to Election Fraud?

We next evaluate hypotheses two and three regarding whether international actors respond to increased information about elections. Recall that Hypothesis 2 is that foreign aid levels should be more likely to change following observed elections than unobserved elections. To test this hypothesis, we compare the variance in aid changes after observed elections to unobserved elections. Because the *Aid* variable measures the year of the election and the subsequent two years, this part of the analysis is restricted to 1990-2004.

Figure 4 shows changes in aid following internationally observed elections relative to changes in aid following all other elections. Hypothesis 2 predicted greater variance following observed elections, as reports of clean elections should increase aid levels, whereas reports of fraud should reduce aid.

Consistent with this expectation, average aid changes swing more widely around their mean after observed contests than after unobserved contests, and (nonzero) change in aid is much more likely. Equality of the standard deviations in the two groups (equaling 130 and 112

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respectively) is strongly rejected, a result confirmed by a test of equality based on Levene's robust test statistic W_0 (significance level of < 0.001 in both cases).[37]

Figure 4: **Comparing Aid Changes After Elections**
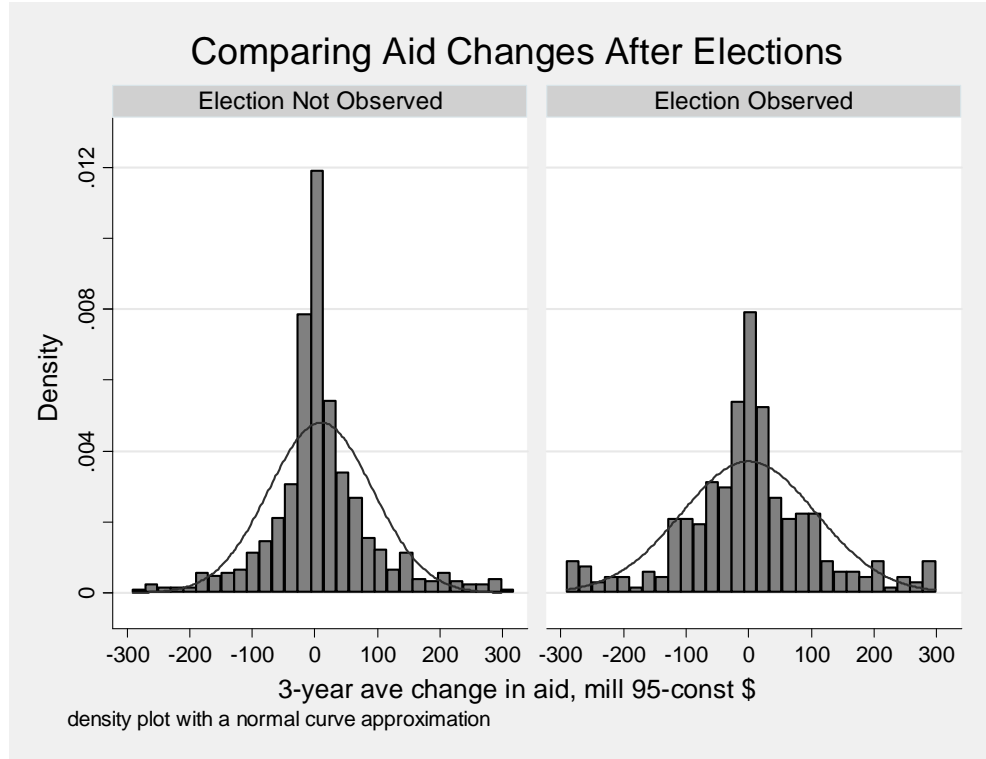
Our third hypothesis suggests that aid reduction should be more likely following fraudulent elections than elections that are not evaluated as fraudulent by international observers. We focus on changes in aid receipts from four major donors: the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom and France. This set of foreign aid donors includes major providers of aid to numerous countries throughout the world, while also incorporating variation in the geostrategic objectives of the donors that might override other objectives such as democracy promotion. We also include a model featuring total ODA receipts for the country in question (by all donors reporting ODA numbers).

Selection effects could be a serious problem in such a model, especially if observers go to countries in which foreign aid reduction is more likely for reasons unrelated to election fraud.

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[37]The first test was implemented via the *sdtest* and the second one via the *robvar* commands in STATA 11.

This concern is again lessened by focusing on the 1990-2006 period featuring nearly "universal assignment." High U.S. and E.U. interest in many post-1990 elections, the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as the availability of observers from organizations such as the Carter Center, the OAS, the OSCE, produced a supply of observers together with a norm that made not inviting observers illegitimate and punishable.[38]

Table 2 reports regression results from an OLS model of changes in aid after elections in 120 countries, by donor. Our unit of analysis is the country-year, limited to country-years in which at least one observed election was held.

Consistent with other research on foreign aid, the results confirm that all four donors allocate future aid based on past receipts, and UN Voting, GDP and population sometimes predict aid allocations.

Contrary to Hypothesis 3, there is not a statistically significant relationship between aid allocations and declarations by observers of election fraud among three of the four major Western donors that we analyze and for total receipts. Only the European Union appears to respond consistently to observer reports of election fraud, which is consistent with other research.[39]

As robustness tests, we change the period lag in aid allocations (it could be that a shorter or longer time-horizon picks up aid changes more reliably), and altered the subset of country targets (focusing on Latin America for the US, Eastern Europe for the European powers, etc.). We still find no systematic effects for three of the four donors in their reactions to negative reports.

There are many anecdotal examples of aid reduction caused by fraudulent elections. Donors do reduce aid following election fraud some of the time, as in Togo in 1993 and Zimbabwe in 2006. It is clear, however, that these donors do not consistently respond to observer reports of fraud.

It is also possible that donor reaction is much more complex. It could be that governments who know they would be punished do not cheat, and the only governments who cheat are whose who do not need foreign aid or know think they can get away with manipulation. In

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[38]Kelley, 2008; AUTHOR.
[39]Voeten and Lebovic, 2009.

Table 2: **Model of Change: Election Verdicts and Foreign Aid Flows 1990-2006.**
OLS model of observed elections, DV = log aid average for three years following election as a function of log average for three years prior.

VARIABLES	(1) US	(2) UK	(3) France	(4) EU	(5) ODA Total
NEGATIVE REPORT	0.090	0.101	-0.0264	-0.228**	-0.049
	(0.117)	(0.078)	(0.084)	(0.108)	(0.061)
PAST US AID	0.651***				
	(0.039)				
PAST UK AID		0.889***			
		(0.033)			
PAST FRENCH AID			0.795***		
			(0.0284)		
PAST EU AID				0.515***	
				(0.045)	
PAST ODA TOTAL					0.620***
					(0.030)
VOTING W/ DONOR UNGA	0.101	-0.485	-0.684	2.218***	
	(0.471)	(0.386)	(0.431)	(0.561)	
GDP$_{log}$	-0.051	0.005	0.058	-0.027	-0.099***
	(0.053)	(0.039)	(0.042)	(0.056)	(0.0287)
POPULATION$_{log}$	0.386***	0.118**	0.043	0.253***	0.245***
	(0.078)	(0.057)	(0.058)	(0.077)	(0.042)
YEAR	-0.094	-0.138***	-0.038	-0.305***	-0.072**
	(0.063)	(0.0512)	(0.049)	(0.065)	(0.033)
CONSTANT	-3.075***	-0.423	-0.846	-0.474	1.014**
	(0.945)	(0.683)	(0.671)	(0.854)	(0.461)
Observations	262	262	262	262	306
R-squared	0.66	0.81	0.80	0.51	0.75

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p< 0.01, ** p< 0.05, * p< 0.1

that case, our results would fail to capture an existing disciplining effect of the threat of aid withdrawal in at least some cases. Even so, bilateral donors do not appear to systematically punish cheating when it is revealed by international observers, weakening one possible mechanism through which observation can contribute to clean elections.

The case of the European Union is different. Here we see a statistically significant and relatively large average effect of reports of fraud on aid allocations. A negative report tends to cut EU aid receipts by approximately 20%. This finding reinforces the view that only actors relatively free of competing geopolitical interests can be expected to consistently promote democracy. The European Union has a strong organizational commitment to democracy, as well as a degree of bureaucratic independence from individual member countries Donno, 2010. That it is able to act in a principled manner with respect to election manipulation is in line with the organization's structure and mission.[40] It is also one of the few organizations that allocates foreign aid directly and sends election observation missions.

Thus, for three of the four major donors examined, there is limited support for the notion that the average government committing election fraud is dissuaded by the expectation of international punishment. Hypothesis 3 is only supported in the case of the EU. For countries that interact extensively with the EU and depend on European foreign aid, the consequences of receiving a negative election report are not trivial and could enhance the effect of better information on future incentives to hold clean elections.

We also examine a similar model for the four donors, but include country fixed effects rather than a lagged dependent variable. Colonial ties and many other factors tend to explain why a particular donor provides aid to a particular recipient. Because these tend to be constant over time, we can capture them through recipient fixed effects. In this model, the unit of the observation is the country-year but the set of observations is not confined to years in which elections are observed. We can thus estimate the effect of whether the country held an observed election in a given year plus the effect of a negative report. The dependent variable of interest is aid receipts as percentage of the country's GDP, and varies from a theoretical 0 to 100. We are able to include 397 observations from 120 countries.

As shown in Table 3, in this specification, the effect of holding an observed election is some-

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[40]See Pevehouse, 2002; Vachudova, 2005.

times positive and sometimes negative. In terms of total aid receipts, *Election* is statistically significant and negative, indicating that observed elections are associated with lower levels of aid dependence. This result is not consistent with our hypothesis. The effect of receiving a negative observer report is always negative with the exception of France. Because negative report here is an interaction with whether the election is held and observed, we need to take the linear combination of these terms to evaluate the statistical significance of receiving this type of report. When we do that, we find a statistically significant negative effect only for the case of the United States and total ODA receipts. The results of this model then provide a somewhat stronger support for the claim that cheating is punished: reducing the percent of GDP derived from Western aid by 0.7 %. However, we emphasize that the picture here is not radically different from the one in the model of change. Many donors do not appear to react to the information on election quality at all.

6.3   Costly Cheating via Domestic Protest

Does post-election protest become more or less likely based on the reports of international election observers? This section turns to the final two hypotheses. Between 1960-2006, there were 1,439 elections, with 160 post-elections protests involving allegations of election fraud (representing 11% of all elections). An additional 5% of elections experienced other forms of post-election protest that were not related to election fraud. In the 1990-2006 period, 729 elections occurred, 91 of which were followed by protests involving allegations of election fraud, or 13% of all elections.

In this section, the unit of observation is the election, and we allow for the possibility that some countries have more than one election in a given year. To limit the sample to cases that are of theoretical interest to our research questions, we also exclude elections in which there is no chance of electoral competition. This excludes elections in which there is no opposition, opposition is illegal, or there is no choice of candidate on the ballot.

In all models, we include *Pre-Election Concerns* to account for domestic expectation, if any, that elections will be fraudulent. *Opposition Gain* is included in all but one model, as partisan protest (i.e. the protest of sore losers) may also determine when elections are protested, as protest is unlikely when the opposition performs well. *Reputable Observers*

Table 3: **Country Fixed Effects: Foreign Aid Receipts as % of GDP and Electoral Observers 1990-2006.** OLS model of country-years.

VARIABLES	(1) US	(2) UK	(3) France	(4) EU	(5) ODA Total
ELECTION	0.125	0.069	-0.546**	-0.140	-0.904
	(0.225)	(0.264)	(0.153)	(0.220)	(1.274)
OBSERVED	0.101	0.0005	-0.351**	0.065	-2.281***
	(0.115)	(0.178)	(0.153)	(0.148)	(0.866)
NEGATIVE REPORT	-0.332**	-0.107	0.267	-0.031	-0.748
	(0.158)	(0.184)	(0.158)	(0.0.153)	(0.876)
VOTING W/ DONOR UNGA	-0.537	1.26	0.347	-0.110	
	(0.73)	(1.01)	(0.863)	(0.863)	
GDP$_{log}$	-0.777**	0.020	0.186	-0.896***	-5.075***
	(0.319)	(0.36)	(0.313)	(0.304)	(1.647)
POPULATION$_{log}$	-0.518	0.135	-5.18***	0.204	-10.24**
	(0.883)	(0.102)	(0.879)	(0.851)	(4.915)
YEAR	-0.037	0.133	0.129	0.204	-0.066
	(0.101)	(0.139)	(0.108)	(0.851)	(0.473)
CONSTANT	26.00**	2.04	80.8***	18.2	291.0***
	(12.90)	(15.00)	(12.9)	(12.5)	(72.87)
Observations	397	397	397	397	403
N Countries	120	120	120	120	120
R-squared	0.067	0.007	0.264	0.045	0.163

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p< 0.01, ** p< 0.05, * p< 0.1

Coefficients and SEs on Models (1)-(4) need to be divided by 10^6

is intended to evaluate whether protest is more likely simply because better observers are present. *Previous Protest* is included to account for unmodeled country characteristics that may make protest more likely.

The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: **Post-Election Protest, 1960-2006. Binary Logit.**

| VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		—— all elections ——		observed only
PRE-ELECTION CONCERNS	0.555*	0.761**	0.323	0.158
	(0.304)	(0.305)	(0.336)	(0.378)
OPPOSITION GAIN	-0.973***		-0.901***	-0.877***
	(0.233)		(0.256)	(0.292)
PREVIOUS PROTEST	2.252***	2.086***	2.222***	2.161***
	(0.272)	(0.269)	(0.285)	(0.309)
REPUTABLE OBSERVERS		0.640**	0.436	0.204
		(0.274)	(0.306)	(0.365)
NEGATIVE REPORT			0.659*	0.696**
			(0.312)	(0.318)
CONSTANT	-2.977***	-3.775***	-3.320***	-2.973***
	(0.256)	(0.290)	(0.288)	(0.333)
Observations	658	658	658	440
Log pseudo-likelihood	-206.78	-210.52	-201.75	-157.36
Pseudo R-squared	0.21	0.19	0.23	0.21

Robust standard errors in parentheses, adjusted for clustering on country
*** p< 0.01, ** p< 0.05, * p< 0.1

Model 1 provides a base model, excluding variables related to election observation. Models 2-4 introduce variables relevant to Hypothesis 4, with Model 4 limiting the sample to observed elections only. Model 2 shows that *Reputable Observers* are associated with higher rates of post-election protest, which would not be true if, for example, observers were going only to elections that were likely to be free of fraud. Model 3 shows that although there is a positive relationship between the presence of reputable observers and post-election protest, this relationship is heavily conditioned on what observers say, consistent with Hypothesis 4. A negative report from international observers is associated with a significantly higher likelihood of *Protest* than elections that are not criticized by observers. This relationship holds even when the sample is limited to only observed elections (Model 4).

Because the estimation technique is binary logit, the substantive effect of these variables is not clear from Table 4. Therefore, Figure 5 presents the predicted probability of protest across several categories of interest, holding all other variables at median values. Predicted probabilities are computed from Model 3. Note that when domestic actors are not suspicious about election fraud in the pre-election period and observer reports are positive, the estimated probability of protest is almost 15%. When domestic actors have pre-election concerns that the election will be fraudulent, a positive report from observers is associated with an estimated probability of protest of 24%. This is nearly identical to the estimated rate of protest when domestic actors do not have pre-election concerns that the election will be fraudulent but observers issue a negative report. Finally, and consistent with our theory, when domestic actors are concerned about fraud and observers issue a negative report, the estimated probability of protest jumps to 36%. This is suggestive an interactive dynamic at work, where negative reports from international observers lend credibility to already existing suspicions among domestic actors.

Figure 5: **Estimated Probability of Post-Election Protest by Category**
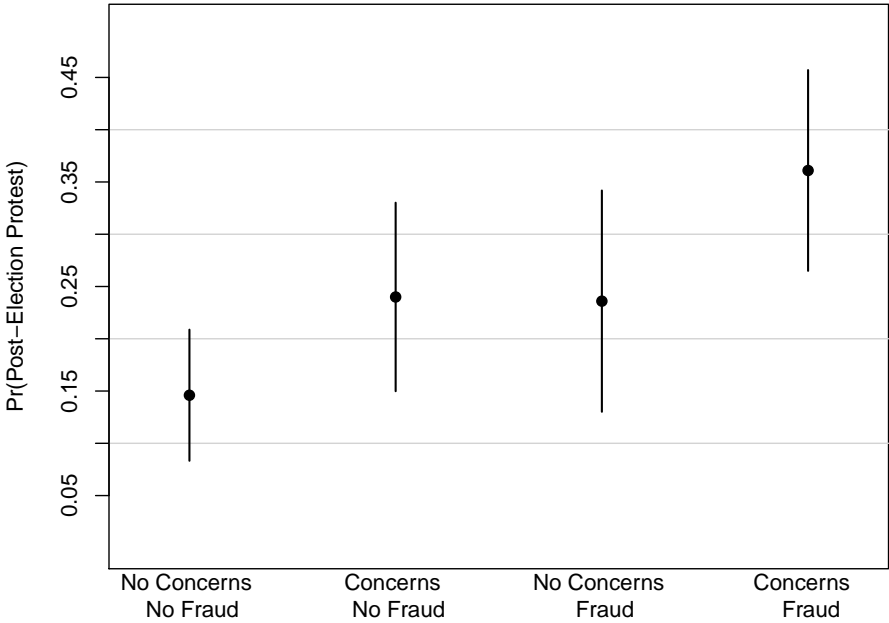
Between 1990 and 2006, out of all potentially competitive elections that were criticized by international observers, 30% also experienced post-election protest. Out of potentially competitive elections that were observed but not criticized, only 12% experienced post-

election protest. The percentages are almost the same when only elections observed by *Reputable Observers* are included.

A strong correlation between protest and observer reports of fraud may be due to reverse causality. What if protest causes a negative report, rather than the other way around? As outlined in Hypothesis 5, negative reports from international observers should be more likely to be followed by protest. Following the same logic, if protest does begin before observers issue a report, the size and duration of the protest should be conditioned on the content of observers' report. In other words, if protest is ongoing when observers issue their report, a negative report should increase protest, and a positive report should have a dampening effect.

To further evaluate the relationship between reports of fraud and post-election protest, we created a new dataset on the sequencing of protest-related events and their duration between 1990-2006. This secondary dataset includes all elections that received a negative report from observers or that were protested, totaling 150 elections. We coded the date of international observers' post election statement, the date of domestic contestants decision to accept the results of the election or protest them, and the duration of post-election protests. In 138 of these cases, either international observers or domestic contestants criticized the election. If domestic contestants criticized, they nearly always called for post-election protest, although their calls were often not met with significant participation.

In 94 elections in the supplementary dataset, we were able to establish the dates that both domestic contestants and international observers issued statements on the quality of the election. Consistent with our expectations, when negative observer reports precede the reports of domestic actors, the mean protest duration is 11 days. If positive observer reports follow a negative report from domestic actors, they are associated with a mean protest duration of just 4 days.

More generally, given that protest occurred, if both domestic contestants and international observes declare the election fraudulent, the average protest lasts 14 days. If domestic contestants in the election complain of fraud (after the election) but observers do not issue a negative report, the average protest duration is more than halved to 6 days. Also consistent with our expectations, even when the initial reaction by domestic observers is positive,

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protest is rare but lasts slightly longer when observers issue a negative report.

It is important to note that these final comparisons do not include cases in which there was no post-election protest or cases in which election observers were not invited. Including these cases would be a much more extensive coding exercise. Preliminary investigations of a number of cases suggests that the general pattern would be the same, but the numbers would shrink with the inclusion of many more elections that had zero days of protest.

Table 5: **Duration of Post-Election Protest by International and Domestic Contestants' Verdicts.** Average number of days (number of elections.)

	Domestic Contestants in Election	
International Observers	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
POSITIVE (NOT NEGATIVE)	1.2 (n 6)	6.1 (n 17)
NEGATIVE	3.2 (n 5)	14.1 (n 48)

Part of the relationship between observer-declared fraud and protest may result from the fact that when monitors do not declare an election fraudulent, they may work to prevent post-election protest by discrediting the claims made by losing political parties. There are a number of cases in which declarations of fraudulent elections appear to legitimize post-election protest. The well-publicized "colored revolutions" fall into this category,[41] as do a number of other prominent cases throughout the developing world. For example, prior to the November 2005 election in Azerbaijan, even though the government was widely expected to steal the election, opposition groups held off their decision to protest on election day until observers announced their evaluation of the election. Observers from the OSCE validated opposition claims of fraud, and post-election protests were carried out.[42] Conversely, there are examples in which protesting opposition parties are not validated by a negative report from observers and are unable to garner the support to overturn the election results, as in Ethiopia 2005 and Mexico in 2006.

It is also possible that the informational story could be reversed, and protesting by domestic groups could cause negative reports by observers. Based on close examination of the role of observers in dozens of elections, we think this is an unlikely chain of events, as many protests

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[41]Bunce and Wolchick, 2006.
[42]See Ismail 2005; OSCE/ODIHR 2006.

are only launched following the first post-election statement from observers. In many cases, domestic groups have announced that they are waiting for the post-election statement from international observers before engaging in protest. Additionally, even if it were initially the case that domestic protests led to negative observer reports, it appears that criticism from international observers and protest by domestic groups reinforce each other to amplify the consequences of fraud and reduce the legitimacy of fraudulent election results. Over time, anticipation of this dynamic should increase incentives for popular incumbents to hold clean elections.

7   Conclusion

Given the frequently illicit nature of election fraud and the difficulty in judging the overall quality of an election, it is likely that not all fraud is detected by international observers. It is also likely that international monitors fail to criticize some manipulated elections, and this failure to criticize may serve to legitimate some leaders. We concede this point, but do not think that this possibility undermines the claim that election observers can make democratic elections more likely. The relevant comparison is not whether imperfect monitoring legitimizes some dictators, but how elections would have proceeded without foreign monitors. If election observation did not exist, dictators would probably be just as likely to be viewed as legitimate winners of democratic elections. At the same time, it is likely that monitoring improves the chances that a clean contest will be recognized as clean. It follows that without observers, the same or greater number of cheaters are likely to be deemed legitimate winners of stolen elections, whereas more governments will be un-deservedly accused of manipulation and punished. Knowing this, their incentives to hold clean elections diminish.

The net result is that, in this counterfactual world, fewer governments would be motivated to hold clean elections. Our argument does not depend on perfect signaling about election quality, but on improved signaling. Some legitimated dictators are the price for rewarding more genuine democrats.

We have argued that within the dynamic process of democratization in which governments prefer to stay in power, and must be motivated to allow democratic elections, information

is an important but neglected variable, and is one way in which international actors can encourage democratization. In the absence of institutionalized democratic practices, it is not clear why leaders choose to hold democratic elections. We have argued that in order for leaders to have an incentive to hold clean elections, there must be an informational mechanism, such as international election observation, that signals the quality of the election to the public. Given credible information about the quality of elections, there must also be domestic or internationally generated costs for those leaders who are revealed to be cheaters. If information is provided and costs are conditioned on this information, governments have greater incentive to hold clean elections. International election monitors are one source of increased information about election quality. We have shown that even imperfect election monitoring (and the associated imperfect increases in information) can result in increased domestic costs for leaders who manipulate elections, indicating that election observers (or other institutions that increase information about election quality) can facilitate democratic elections. Our findings also highlight the crucial role of domestic actors in encouraging governments to allow democratic elections.

The aim of this article is to outline how externally-provided information about election quality can help domestic and international actors encourage democratic elections and decrease the use of election manipulation. Combined with election observation, if international actors more consistently enforced their rhetorical commitments to promote democracy via foreign support, they could further increase incentives for leaders to hold democratic elections. The consequences of international involvement in the democratization process remain under-explored. In the policy world, efforts to promote democracy routinely underestimate the strategic behavior of leaders. More attention to the mechanisms by which even imperfect election monitoring can encourage self-enforcing democracy may be useful in designing future policies. We hope that this article helps to encourage more theoretical and empirical research on the interaction between domestic and international variables in democratization.

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