

WHY ELECTIONS FAIL AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

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SYNOPSIS

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Unfair, corrupt, or flawed contests are predicted to undermine broader feelings of political legitimacy, including confidence in elected officials and institutions, through satisfaction with the performance of democracy and the record of human rights, and voluntary legal compliance.

Part I of this paper expands upon the theoretical framework and core propositions. Part II outlines the evidence, derived from the 6th wave of the World Values Survey 2010-2014 (WVS). Part III presents the results. The conclusions summarize the key findings and considers their consequences.

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Why mass perceptions of electoral integrity matter for legitimacy (*)

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This paper seeks to determine whether, and under what conditions, electoral integrity reinforces feelings of legitimacy. An agenda-setting model postulates that the general public judges the quality of contests, with citizens responding to real world conditions. Contests which are unfair, corrupt, or flawed serve to strengthen public awareness of electoral malpractices. This process, in turn, is predicted to undermine broader feelings of political legitimacy, including confidence in elected officials and institutions, through satisfaction with the performance of democracy and the record of human rights, and voluntary legal compliance. Weakened feelings of electoral legitimacy are expected to also have behavioral consequences, deterring voter turnout and fuelling protest politics. By contrast, where elections meet international standards, this should strengthen citizen's feelings of political legitimacy, as well as satisfaction with the state of democracy and human rights in their own country.

To buttress this argument, the first part of this paper expands upon the theoretical framework and the core propositions. Following previous research, this section defines the concept of legitimacy as a multidimensional phenomenon and the reasons why incidence of electoral malpractices are expected to weaken feelings of legitimacy, as well as considering alternative performance, cultural, and communication theories.¹ Part II outlines the evidence measuring attitudinal indicators of political legitimacy, derived from the 6th wave of the World Values Survey 2010-2014 (WVS). This survey facilitates comparison of public opinion for citizens experiencing diverse elections in states ranging from Uruguay, Estonia and Mexico to Zimbabwe, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. As a multidimensional concept, the study compares multiple indicators of legitimacy. Part III presents the results of the cross-national comparisons. Even after applying the standard batteries of social controls, perceptions of electoral integrity and malpractice are observed to be significantly and consistently related to confidence in elected institutions (parties, parliaments and governments), as well as overall satisfaction with the performance of democracy, respect for human rights, and voluntary legal compliance.

Part IV discusses the challenges associated with interpreting the direction of causality in this relationship. This difficulty of what-causes-what arises in studies analyzing cross-national observational data concerning a bundle of closely related attitudes and values monitored at a single point in time. On the one hand, a plausible case can be constructed that practices such as electoral fraud, ballot-box stuffing, or vote-buying are likely to corrode ordinary people's faith in broader dimensions of how democracy works in their own country, encouraging cynicism about the legitimacy of elected officials, political parties, or the government in power. On the other hand, it also remains possible that citizens who are critical about the quality of democratic governance and the human rights record in their state are also likely to be skeptical, or even cynical, about the honesty and credibility of elections. The paper's conclusion summarizes the key findings and considers their broader implications. Where electoral malpractices erode feelings of legitimacy, this process is likely to have behavioral consequences, although it remains to be determined in subsequent research whether feelings of political legitimacy are related to political participation, as commonly assumed, including the propensity to engage in protest activism and to vote.

I: Theoretical framework

The general concept of 'legitimacy' represents acceptance of the underlying rules of the game, so that all actors willingly consent to authority of the regime, without the sanction of force. Legitimacy, in Seymour Martin Lipset words: "...involves the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate and proper ones for the society."² For this reason alone, citizens' feelings of political legitimacy should be regarded as a critical indicator of the underlying stability of the regime. Legitimacy has both attitudinal and cultural dimensions. When the public feels that state authority is exercised legitimately, this should encourage voluntary acquiescence

with rulers, without penalty of legal or physical sanctions, even when people disagree with specific decisions or laws. Poorly legitimized regimes lack the capacity to ensure that citizens comply voluntarily with the law and pay due taxes, while failed states, such as Somalia, are unable to maintain security against rebels within national boundaries. If the authority of the government is challenged, this is likely to engender protest demonstrations, opposition boycotts and court battles challenging election results, and in extreme cases, it may even end in revolutionary coups. Ultimately, an extreme lack of legitimacy may fuel grievances which can spark violent conflict and destabilize regimes. Governing parties can exert their rule through many other mechanisms, including through repressive means, if they maintain control of the security forces, the courts, and the state bureaucracy. In his classic typology, Weber emphasized that regimes can govern through traditional sources of authority, derived from appeals to religion (in theocracies) or birthright (in ruling monarchies). Authoritarian regimes may rely upon tribalism, nationalism, and populism (for charismatic leaders), appeals to party loyalties (in one-party states), as well as deploying patronage and clientalism (where state resources and jobs are dispersed to loyal supporters).³ Nevertheless following the global diffusion of elections in the late twentieth century, legitimacy flowing from the ballot box is one of the most effective and efficient mechanism to ensure that citizens comply voluntarily with the authority of elected rulers, in both democratic and autocratic states. Even in electoral autocracies, a decisive victory at the ballot box which is perceived as legitimate can serve to deter rival contenders for the leadership, within or outside a ruling party.

Why elections contribute towards legitimate authority

Feeling that authority arises from legitimate elections is thought important in democratic theory for several reasons. One is acceptance of the rules of the game. Legitimate authority through elections means that all actors go along with the procedures for determining winning candidates and parties, including the contest losers who accept defeat. ⁴ In contests regarded as legitimate, it is widely believed that even the losers will still regard selection procedures as fair and just, acknowledging the legal authority of elected officials and the government. In these circumstances, unsuccessful parties and candidates are likely to consent to the outcome, or they will appeal irregularities through peaceful legal channels, in the belief that they can win subsequent contests through fair and square means. Citizens are also more likely to accept the results as procedurally fair, because they have the right to participate in selecting their leaders. By contrast, if political legitimacy is undermined through electoral malpractices, this is expected to weaken acceptance of the basic electoral rules of the game by opposition parties. If these feelings are shared by their supporters, or by minorities excluded from the vote, these conditions may exacerbate ethnic tensions and inter-communal conflict. Opposition claims of electoral fraud, in combination with long-standing grievances about access to land, are thought to have fanned the flames of communal conflict in the 2007 presidential elections in Kenya. ⁵ Lack of legitimacy is also likely to undermine the authority of elected officials, with particularly severe problems for stability and maintaining rule of law in the world's most fragile states. Without authority derived from the ballot box, rulers may need to resort to other mechanisms of enforcement, such as through deploying the military. Lack of legitimate elections may also have international repercussions, for example where major violations of human rights, such as military coups, trigger cuts in development aid and trade sanctions, and if economic instability arising from electoral violence deters international investment.

Rival theories of the origins of political legitimacy

Nevertheless the claim that electoral integrity is essential for democratic legitimacy has been challenged and the drivers of legitimacy continue to be debated in the literature. If citizens have little faith in their leadership, is this due to the procedural fairness of how representatives were selected for democratic office, the effectiveness of government policies, political coverage in mass communications, or broader cultural values? The main alternative theoretical perspectives have focused on each of these

factors. Hence accounts by political economists have emphasized the role of the government's delivery of collective goods and services. From this perspective, people accept the political authority of leaders primarily because they are satisfied with the performance on the 'output' side of the policy process, such as the quality of living standards and economic growth, health care, schools, and security, rather than the 'input' side of democratic representation. The most forceful recent statement of this claim, by Bo Rothstein, argues that electoral democracy is highly overrated when it comes to creating legitimacy: "Political legitimacy depends on the quality of government, not the quality of elections or political representation."⁶ This argument builds on traditional theories of political economy suggesting that the failure of political institutions to perform according to people's expectations erodes the public's faith in government, particularly if the government is seen as incompetent when managing the economy.⁷ Popular commentary often assumes that this process underlies outbreaks of angry anti-government protests and challenges to elected leaders in Greece, Spain and Cyprus triggered by the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, deep unemployment, threats to bank savings, and the weakness of the Euro.

Alternative studies in mass political communications, however, have commonly emphasized the importance of negative news for the presumed erosion of government legitimacy, especially the supposedly damaging effects of television news coverage about major political scandals, such as the role of Watergate or the Monica Lewinsky scandal in American politics. For many decades, a series of scholars have emphasized that a growing diet of negative television news in the race to the bottom of tabloid journalism has fuelled a rising tide of political disenchantment.⁸ Theories of political communications are related to an extensive body of historical research seeking to explain eroding trust and confidence in American government which has emphasized the impact of specific events in the United States which are unrelated to elections per se– such as the role of Watergate, Vietnam, urban riots, and culture wars during the late-1960s and early-1970s.⁹

Finally, cultural theories suggest that many societies have experienced a loss of legitimacy weakening many traditional sources of authority, including governments, churches, and interest organizations, a process which Ronald Inglehart suggests has been driven by long-term generational changes in social values.¹⁰ Thus trust in government and satisfaction with democracy are attributed to processes of human development, especially growing levels of literacy, education, and cognitive skills, leading towards emancipative values demanding more of governments. ¹¹ For Inglehart, "The emergence of post-industrial society is conducive to rising emphasis on self-expression, which in turn brings rising mass demands for democracy." ¹² Likewise accounts based on Putnam's theory of social capital predict that a long-term erosion of social trust and community networks undermines faith in democratic governance.¹³ In short, there is no shortage of theories debating the roots of any contemporary public disaffection with the way that democratic governance works and thus a supposed erosion of political legitimacy. Therefore the role of electoral integrity in generating legitimate authorities, although widely regarded as important in popular commentary, may be only one piece of a broader and more complex puzzle about the underlying drivers of political legitimacy.

II: Attitudinal evidence of political legitimacy

The core idea of political legitimacy refers to the general sense that citizens accept the authority of their political leaders. Nevertheless, ever since the early work of David Easton, it is widely recognized that political legitimacy is a multidimensional concept depending upon the object of support. ¹⁴ Thus ordinary Americans may well have confidence in their locally-elected member of the House of Representatives or support their local mayor, but still prove cynical about shenanigans in Congress or Washington politics in general. Or they may respect the decisions of the Supreme Court, and have patriotic pride in the U.S. constitution, but continue to harbor grave doubts about the specific administration in

the White House. The complexity of this multidimensional concept makes it difficult to measure directly in empirical research.¹⁵

Bo Rothstein suggests that the most obvious signal of a breakdown of regime legitimacy comes from macro-level historical cases of armed rebellion and the disintegration of former nation-states.¹⁶ Recent examples include the 2012 Taureg insurgence in northern Mali or the civil war in Syria, and autonomous regions seeking to succeed from the constitutional authority of the nation-state, such as the division of the former states of Czechoslovakia or Sudan. These are extreme cases, however, and regime legitimacy can weaken and become frayed without such dramatic consequences, for example if rulers such as President Bashar al-Assad cling to power through repressive means. Conversely, rulers commanding widespread popular support among their own peoples can fall from power due to external forces, notably military defeat. Arguably other macro-level event indicators could also potentially be employed to monitor a breakdown of electoral legitimacy, such as contests boycotted by opposition parties, legal irregularities adjudicated by the courts, or outbreaks of violent riots after polling closes. Nevertheless each of these types of actions may arise from purely strategic considerations, such as opposition calculations, as much as from genuine doubts about the procedural fairness of these contests. In the case of the 2007 presidential elections in Kenya, for example, there is evidence that the intercommunal riots were planned by leaders well before the campaign actually started.¹⁷

Several alternative proxy indicators of the latent concept of legitimacy are available from survey data, including attitudinal and behavioral measures among individual citizens, and these have been widely employed in previous research.¹⁸ This study therefore examines survey evidence to see whether perceptions of the quality of elections exert a strong and consistent impact on attitudinal indicators of legitimacy, including feelings of satisfaction with the overall performance of democracy, evaluations of the state's record of human rights, confidence in elected institutions, and willingness to comply with the law. As discussed in the introduction, the agenda-setting theory predicts that *public confidence in electoral integrity will influence broader feelings of political legitimacy (H²)*. The traditional foundation for understanding how citizens orientate themselves towards the nation state, its agencies and actors rests on the idea of *'system support'*, originally developed by David Easton in the 1960s. ¹⁹ Subsequent work in *Critical Citizens* expanded the Eastonian conceptual framework to distinguish five dimensions of system support and survey evidence demonstrates that these distinctions continue to prove robust.²⁰ This includes the following components, ranging from diffuse to specific levels:

- (i) The most general and fundamental feelings of citizens towards **belonging to the national community**, exemplified by feelings of national pride and identity;
- (ii) **Support for general regime principles**, including approval of democratic and autocratic attitudes and values;
- (iii) **Evaluations of the overall performance of the regime**, exemplified by satisfaction with the workings of democracy;
- (iv) **Confidence in state institutions,** notably government, parliaments, parties, the civil service, the courts, and the security forces; and
- (v) **Trust in elected and appointed office-holders,** including politicians and leaders.

Confidence in electoral integrity is expected to be closely related at the most specific levels to popular acceptance of the outcome and thus trust in the legitimate authority of elected officials and elected institutions. By contrast, public perceptions of electoral fraud, vote stealing or administrative malpractices (whether based on true or false claims) are likely to weaken confidence in elected authorities. Feelings that electoral contests reflect international standards of integrity should thereby

strengthen confidence in political parties, parliaments, and elected presidents, with weaker and more indirect impact on the judiciary, civil service, and military. There may also be long-term consequences at more diffuse levels; an extended series of flawed and fraudulent contests may also be expected to corrode general satisfaction with the performance of democracy and the record of human rights in each country.²¹ Since stronger feelings of legitimacy are associated with the propensity to obey the law voluntarily (even where statutes are regarded as unfair or unjust), greater electoral integrity is also predicted to be displayed through legal compliance.

Some empirical evidence from previous studies supports these propositions. A growing body of studies suggest that in Africa, ordinary people who express confidence in the quality of their elections are also more likely to have positive evaluations of democratic performance and to believe in the legitimacy of their regime.²² Survey data suggests that many Africans consider elections to be the best means of forming a government; and they judge the quality of democracy accordingly. ²³ Elections with integrity in the region are found to strengthen feelings of legitimacy. In Russia, as well, those who thought that the Duma elections were unfair were also less proud of their country, as well as proving mistrusting of parties and parliament, and less likely to endorse the regime. ²⁴ In Western Europe, studies have found that perceptions of bribery and corruption depressed trust in political institutions.²⁵ Moreover one of my last books, comparing countries worldwide based on the 5th wave of the World Values Survey (2005-7), citizen satisfaction with democracy in each society proved to be closely related to the procedural performance of democratic governance. This was measured at macro-level by objective macro-level indices for levels of democratization, good governance, and human rights in each society. By contrast, satisfaction with democracy was usually unrelated to most macro-level indicators of *policy* performance, reflecting the capacity of governments to manage the delivery of basic public goods and services, such as levels of economic growth, human development and social welfare. It is often believed that the general public has little awareness of many basic political facts, when using conventional 'civics' tests where citizens are asked about their understanding of the numbers of members of Congress or the names of public leaders. The evidence from the WVS suggests, however, that the public is capable of making fairly rational and accurate evaluations about the performance of democracy, based on how well democratic procedures actually work. This relationship strengthened with each country's historical experience of liberal democracy, suggesting a learning process in each society. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, when people were asked in the World Values Survey about how they understood the notion of democracy, a procedural conceptualization also proved by far the most common in every type of society. Thus eight out of ten people saw free elections in which 'people chose their leaders' as an essential characteristic of democracy.²⁶

Winners and losers

In addition to these considerations, research suggests that the 'winners' and 'losers' of any election are also likely to feel differently about the fairness of the process and procedures. Thus Anderson and colleagues found that those who backed the governing party or parties in coalition cabinets in the previous election were generally more satisfied with democracy and more trusting of political institutions.²⁷ By contrast, those who had supported the opposition which lost in the previous contest were more frustrated by the outcome, and this spilled-over into stronger general disaffection ranging from specific institutional evaluations to more diffuse aspects concerning democratic principles and procedures. Subsequent studies have largely confirmed and refined these findings and expanded the countries under comparison. ²⁸ For all these reasons, the theory posits a three-step process: poor quality elections which fail to meet international standards are expected to shape public perceptions (as demonstrated elsewhere) and, in turn, citizen's evaluations are predicted to influence feelings of political

legitimacy. Further, these general patterns are expected to be conditioned by whether respondents were winners and losers from the electoral process.

The core model in this book predicts that public perceptions of electoral integrity and malpractice will have a direct impact on feelings of political legitimacy. Although this may seem to be an obvious claim, it is striking that some previous attempts to monitor and compare state legitimacy have not considered the proposition.²⁹ To test the core argument, evidence of public opinion is derived from the 6th wave (2010-2013) World Values Survey. Feelings of political legitimacy are measured and analyzed using several indicators from this survey, tapping into multidimensional notions of system support. This included overall satisfaction with the performance of democracy and respect for human rights in each county, as well as confidence in elected political institutions (parties, parliaments and governments). Testing each of these dimensions increases confidence in the robustness of the results. Models in this paper control for many micro-level social and demographic characteristics which have commonly been found to shape political orientations. This includes the standard characteristics of age (in years), sex (male), education (educational gualification 9-point standardized scale, household income scale, and urbanization (an 8point scale for the size of urban-rural communities).³⁰ Models also control for many political attitudes which the previous literature has often associated with feelings of political legitimacy, including national pride, democratic values, political interest, and life satisfaction.³¹ To provide a partial test for rival alternative accounts, the models also include variables for cultural factors (post-material values and social trust), political communications (a standardized scale of media use), and government performance (macro-level measures of economic development and economic growth). All measures are described in the technical appendix. Voting preferences were classified by the party which respondents said that they would support in the next general election. Citizens were then classified into 'winners' and 'losers' depending upon which party or parties were returned to government in the most recent presidential or parliamentary election immediately prior to the survey fieldwork. The multivariate models use Hierarchical Linear Models (HLM) with REML regression to take account of the use of macro and microlevel data. All the variables are standardized using means-centering (Z-scores), which has the advantage of facilitating comparison of the strength of the beta coefficients as predictors of the dependent variables.

III: The impact of electoral integrity on feelings of political legitimacy

The agenda-setting model proposes (H^2) that public perceptions of electoral integrity and malpractices shape feelings of political legitimacy. We can start to examine the evidence for this claim by looking at the descriptive bivariate relationships before then applying HLM multivariate analysis with the full battery of controls. Figure 6.1 illustrates some of the relationships in the pooled World Values Survey where public perceptions of electoral integrity are observed to be associated with greater confidence in three types of elected institutions – namely governments, political parties and parliaments – with the pattern suggesting a linear progressive relationship. The fact that similar patterns can be observed across three different types of institutions increases confidence in the robustness of the results.³² Moreover this relationship is not simply reflecting a general orientation or psychological disposition towards greater trust in all types of institutions; it is also striking (although hardly surprising) that contrasting patterns can be observed for public confidence in the church, which is logically unrelated to electoral integrity.

In addition, the observed findings are robust even when tested using more diffuse indicators; at a broader level, similar patterns can be seen for how perceptions of electoral integrity relate to increased satisfaction with the overall performance of democracy. The more people believe that contests in their country are honesty and fair, the more they seem to approve of how democracy works in general. This linkage is again not surprising, given the centrality of elections to most people's understanding of the characteristics of democracy.³³

Finally, one important consequence for any loss of legitimate authority is thought to be the breakdown of rule of law, as unless there are effective sanctions, ordinary people fail to observe or respect regulations, exemplified by reports of widespread abuses where Greek citizens fail to report taxable income honestly, deepening the state fiscal crisis. Measure of voluntary legal compliance are measured in the World Values survey by asking respondents whether they believe that a series of acts are justifiable, using 10 point scales, such as cheating on taxes, avoiding a fare on public transport, or claiming unentitled welfare benefits. The five items (listed below Figure 6.3) can be summed into a standardized 100-point legal compliance scale. The results, presented in Figure 6.3, show that those citizens who believed that their elections were generally free and fair also adhered most strongly to the principle that it was never justifiable to break the law. By contrast, ordinary people who thought that electoral malpractices were common in their country's elections were less likely to feel that breaking the law was unjustifiable.

Nevertheless although strikingly similar, the descriptive bivariate patterns we have examined could potentially prove spurious without controlling for many other factors. For example, strong feelings of national pride and patriotism, or support for the winning party, could encourage people to express satisfaction with the quality of their elections as well as with the performance of democracy in their own country. Similarly previous studies commonly relate political attitudes to individual characteristics such as sex, age and education. Table 6.1 therefore presents a series of Hierarchical Level Models using REML regression to analyze the effects of public perceptions of electoral integrity and malpractices on four indicators of legitimacy: confidence in elected institutions (parties, parliaments and governments), satisfaction with the performance of democracy, respect for human rights, and voluntary legal compliance -- controlling for many other related political attitudes and social characteristics which have commonly been found to shape political orientations. Several variables included in the models test the effects of rival hypothesis, including cultural theories (post-material values and social trust), government economic performance theories (macro-level economic growth and level of economic development), and political communications (media use).

[Table 6.1 about here]

The results presented in Table 6.1 confirm that perceptions of electoral integrity and malpractice were significantly related, as expected, to all but one of the attitudinal indicators of political legitimacy. Thus perceptions of electoral integrity were positively related to satisfaction with democracy, respect for human rights, and confidence in electoral institutions (although not to voluntary legal compliance). By contrast, perceptions of electoral malpractice were consistently negatively related to each of the indices of legitimacy. These effects persisted as relatively strong and significant despite the battery of attitudinal and social controls which are incorporated into the models, including the standard social and demographic controls for sex, age, income, education and urbanization. Moreover comparison of the standardized beta coefficients in each of the models can be used to compare the relative importance of each of these factors and how these compare with alternative accounts. The analysis demonstrates that in each of the models, electoral integrity and malpractice were consistently stronger predictors of satisfaction with democracy, respect for human rights, and confidence in elected institutions than the effects of either sex, age income, education, or urbanization. The other variables suggested by rival theories failed to behaved as expected on a consistent basis, for example post-material values were negatively related with satisfaction with democracy and respect for human rights, although the effects were weak, and they were insignificant for the other two indicators. Social trust was strongly and significantly associated positively with confidence in elected institutions, but it was negatively related to satisfaction with democracy. The measures of economic performance (per capita GDP and growth in per capita GDP) were both insignificant predictors of legitimacy except for the negative relationship with confidence in elected institutions, the contrary direction to the predicted theory. Therefore overall perceptions of electoral integrity and malpractices

were consistent, significant, and strong predictors of the four legitimacy indicators, with one single exception which failed to approach significance.

Does it also matter whether citizens supported the winning side in an election, or whether they voted for the candidate or parties which lost? The regression analysis models also confirmed that across all indicators, those who voted for the winning party expressed greater satisfaction with the performance of democracy, respect for human rights and confidence in elected institutions. To examine this in more detail by country, we can contrast the perceptions of electoral integrity among those who supported the 'winners' and 'losers', classified by voting for the governing and opposition parties in the most recent national election prior to the survey. The largest governing party or parties which held ministerial office as part of governing coalitions were categorized as 'winners' from a contest. Positive gaps indicate that losers perceive more malpractice than winners. The pattern in Figure 6.4 illustrates how supporters of the losing side were consistently more likely to believe that electoral malpractices had occurred to influence the outcome. Although the size of the winners-losers gap in most countries is often relatively modest, nevertheless it is substantial in several states where there have been widely publicized challenges to electoral integrity, notably Malaysia, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe.

[Figure 6.4 about here]

We can also explore the overall pattern in more detail by examining which specific components of electoral integrity and malpractices are most closely linked with feelings of legitimacy. Does the public distinguish further about common problems such as vote-buying, ballot-stuffing and media bias, or do they form a blanket opinion about the overall honesty of elections and politicians? As Table 6.2 shows, all aspects of the WVS battery on electoral integrity and malpractices were significantly correlated with system support with a single exception. The perceived procedural fairness of the vote tabulation process and of electoral authorities were strongly related to institutional confidence and democratic satisfaction. Conversely, vote buying and the corrupting role of rich 'fat cats' display the reverse effects. All these aspects can be regarded as central aspects of the fairness and honesty in elections. Other challenges of electoral integrity, such as the role of the media, while statistically significant, were more weakly related to system support. The correlations suggest that no single aspect of electoral integrity or malpractices drive the link with legitimacy but fairness of the electoral process and the role of money in politics are particularly important components contributing towards feelings of political legitimacy.

[Table 6.2 about here]

IV: Do failed elections cause dissatisfaction with democracy?

The evidence considered so far, comparing several different attitudinal measures, therefore provides confirmation of the second proposition (H²): *public perceptions of electoral integrity and malpractices are strongly and consistently associated with feelings of political legitimacy*. The observations remain robust across indicators and countries, even with a battery of attitudinal and social controls.

But can we go further to make the stronger claim that electoral malpractices *weakened* feelings of legitimacy? One important limitation in attempting to determine the direction of any causal relationship is that the new battery of items measuring perceptions of electoral integrity is only currently available for a single point of time, from the 6th wave of the World Values Survey. Therefore one plausible interpretation, suggested in the book's core model and consistent with common sense assumptions, is that, like floorboards infected by termites and wet rot, direct and mediated information about rigged and stolen elections serves to undermine broader faith in electoral institutions and the foundation of citizen's confidence in democratic processes. Yet skeptics could always point out that, despite the robust correlation, in fact it is general cynicism about regime legitimacy which shapes perceptions about the integrity of any particular electoral contest. If regimes consistently suppress opposition parties, independent media, and dissident movement, such as is repeatedly reported by human rights monitors in Kazakhstan, Zimbabwe and Azerbaijan, then it would not be surprising if citizens in these countries became more cynical about the honesty and fairness of the electoral authorities and voting process. In the United States, for example, pre-election surveys found that registered voters with less trust in the federal government were more fearful about voting irregularities occurring during the 2008 contest.³⁴

To help determine the direction of causality in this complex relationship, as mentioned earlier, one strategy is to examine the dynamics of political legitimacy in quasi-experimental 'before-and-after' cases where major changes in electoral integrity occur over successive pairs of contests. Cases can be selected which have experienced a positive improvement through liberalizing reforms which strengthened party competition, the independence of the EMB, or freedom of the campaign media, such as founding elections held in regime transitions from autocracy, in newly-autonomous states, and in the peace-building process. By piecing together several sources of public opinion polls, analysts could attempt to document and compare trends in citizens' feelings of legitimacy over time, such as contests held in Tunisia before and after the fall of President Ben Ali. Two main limitations hinder this strategy, however. One practical obstacle is that reliable survey data is commonly unavailable prior to regime transitions and democratization. Repressive regimes restrict official permission to conduct independent social surveys monitoring public attitudes towards sensitive political issues. In states lacking freedom of expression, ordinary people may well be reluctant to voice critical opinions about the regime. Similarly there were no prior elections for comparison in cases such as post-Gaddafi Libya, post-Taliban Afghanistan, or in newborn Timor-Leste and Southern Sudan. A more fundamental problem is that major regime transitions from autocracy catalyze multiple social, economic and political changes, so that it remains difficult to use before-and-after comparisons to disentangle and isolate the impact of gains in electoral integrity from a host of other developments; satisfaction with democracy and improvements in electoral integrity are both likely to improve in the initial optimism associated with founding contests.

As an alternative approach, cases can also be selected in stable democratic regimes where major problems about electoral integrity which had received little previous attention, suddenly came to public attention during a particular contest, such as through news reporting about irregularities in the postal ballots in the UK, headlines revealing campaign funding scandals in Spain, or problems over voter registration, voter fraud and the vote count in Florida. In such cases, where before-and-after polls monitor public opinion consistently over two or more successive elections, we have an opportunity to see whether ordinary people respond to news coverage of these events, so that they thereby become more critical in their perceptions of electoral integrity and, in turn, if this damages confidence in elected institutions at a more diffuse level. In the United States, the problems of the Bush v. Gore 2000 Presidential election could be suggested as a suitable case for analysis, where a range of issues in a razor-tight contest suddenly brought problems of electoral administration to the forefront of public attention. ³⁵ Nevertheless while the Florida butterfly ballot and subsequent controversies damaged trust in the electoral process especially among Democratic losers – many other factors which occurred fairly soon afterwards, notably the events of 9/11 and a 'rally-around-the-flag' effect, also exerted a tremendous impact on public confidence in government. Hence trends in U.S. trust in government, using the standard composite indicator included in the American National Election Study in every campaign from 1948-2008, shows political trust increasing slightly from the 1998 to the 2000 election, and then soaring higher from 2000-2002, before subsiding in the next election to roughly the level it was in 2000. Moreover the ANES does not directly monitor perceptions of electoral integrity or satisfaction with democracy. Other surveys have monitored voter confidence in the American electoral process after every federal contest, notably those conducted by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and by the Pew Center for People and the Press – but both these series only started in 2004.³⁶ Thus it remains difficult to use trend analysis with survey data to establish any plausible evidence about the long-term impact of the events in the 2000 election on American perceptions of the integrity of the voting procedure, whether this caused ordinary people to doubt whether their votes are counted accurately and fairly, and whether this, in turn, reduced American confidence in elected institutions and satisfaction with democracy.

IV: Conclusions and implications

Therefore the initial evidence compared in this research has amassed considerable empirical support for the agenda-setting model, although further questions still remain. Previous research has offered many theories about legitimacy, suggesting that confidence in political institutions and satisfaction with the performance of democracy arise from a deep-rooted changes in the civic culture, from more specific judgments of the regime's 'output' performance in managing the delivery of basic goods and services, and from negative political communications. Whilst not seeking to undermine these arguments, the claims made in this book suggest that one other factors – and indeed a neglected explanation in the previous research literature – concerns the public's perception about the quality of their elections.

To recapitulate the key findings in this paper, the analysis supports several core claims in the agenda-setting theory. In particular, public perceptions of electoral integrity and malpractices are observed to be related to several proxy attitudinal indicators of political legitimacy, monitored by satisfaction with the performance of democracy, satisfaction with respect for human rights, confidence in elected institutions, and willingness to obey the law. The findings remain significant and consistent even after controlling for many other political attitudes and social factors, such as education and age, which are often found to be closely linked with feelings of legitimacy. Given the evidence presented here, it is not possible to establish that changes in electoral integrity alter feelings of legitimacy, in particular that flawed elections lead towards a loss of institutional confidence. Over successive elections, the complex web of attitudes between perceptions of integrity and feelings of legitimacy are probably interactive. Nevertheless In understanding the phenomenon of critical citizens, it seems that the quality of elections is a previously largely over-looked 'missing link', as the public assessments of democratic performance are closely associated with their experience of the way that elections work – or fail to do so. The observations remain robust across indicators and the diverse countries under comparison and they also hold up well compared with rival factors which are analyzed for comparison in the models, including post-material cultural values, economic performance, and media attention.

We should still remain cautious before making the stronger claim that failed elections *cause* dissatisfaction with democracy. One important difficulty to be acknowledged in determining the direction of any causal relationship at the current state of research is that the cross-national survey evidence monitoring multidimensional perceptions of electoral integrity is only currently available at a single point in time. Therefore although it seems likely that rigged elections undermine faith in democratic processes and procedures, it remains possible that there is a reverse flow in complex patterns of reciprocal causation. Cynicism about the performance of democracy in general is also likely to encourage more critical attitudes towards the quality of elections. In future research, detailed case studies of public opinion in countries experiencing radical processes of electoral and regime change, social psychological experimental studies, and time-series survey analysis, are useful techniques which could help to unravel these relationships.

Are there behavioral consequences as well? It seems plausible to assume that perceptions of electoral flaws, fraud or manipulation will trigger popular protest, while by contrast belief in the fairness of elections should encourage voter turnout. Subsequent research needs to analyze the behavioral impacts including distinguishing the behavior of election 'winners' and 'losers', which can well be expected to differ.³⁷

Table 6.1: Electoral integrity strengthens political legitimacy

	Satisfaction with democracy			Respe	Respect for human		Confidence in elected			Obey law		
				rights			institutions					
	b	S.E.	Sig.	b	S.E.	Sig.	b	S.E.	Sig.	b	S.E.	Sig.
PERCEPTIONS OF ELECTION QUALITY												
Perceived electoral integrity	.140	.007	***	.096	.007	***	.153	.007	***	005	.008	N/s
Perceived electoral malpractice	155	.008	***	108	.008	***	115	.007	***	047	.009	***
ATTITUDINAL CONTROLS												
Voted for winning parties	.063	.006	***	.022	.006	* * *	.093	.006	***	.009	.007	N/s
National pride	.048	.007	* * *	.068	.007	***	.068	.007	***	.083	.008	***
Importance of democracy	.171	.006	* * *	001	.006	N/s	001	.006	* * *	.092	.007	**:
Confidence in elected institutions	.188	.008	***	.193	.008	***				.047	.009	**:
Interest in politics	006	.007	N/s	030	.006	***	139	.006	***	.010	.007	N/:
Life Satisfaction	.089	.007	* * *	.034	.007	* * *	046	.006	* * *	.009	.008	N/
Post-material values	030	.007	* * *	034	.006	***	005	.006	N/s	014	.007	N/
Media use	009	.008	N/s	.013	.008	N/s	.058	.007	***	058	.009	**:
Social trust	013	.006	*	.034	.007	***	.140	.006	***	.024	.007	**
MACROECONOMIC PERFORMANCE												
Economic growth	012	.068	N/s	.001	.088	N/s	.152	.081	N/s	.079	.099	N/s
Per capita GDP ppp	.061	.098	N/s	034	.127	N/s	320	.117	**	.104	.142	N/:
SOCIAL CONTROLS												
Sex (male)	012	.006	N/s	.007	.006	N/s	016	.006	**	001	.007	N/s
Age (years)	007	.007	N/s	030	.007	***	001	.007	N/s	.094	.008	**:
Income scale	.061	.007	***	.059	.007	***	.024	.006	***	065	.008	**:
Education	019	.008	***	004	.008	N/s	025	.007	***	.056	.009	**:
Urbanization	007	.008	N/s	008	.008	N/s	069	.007	***	.014	.009	N/:
Constant	.055			003			102			076		
N. observations	17,836			17,802			17,839			17725		
N. nations	18			18			18			18		
Schwarz's Bayesian Criteria (BIC)	46266			45771			43583			49790		

Note: The REML multilevel regression models monitor satisfaction with the performance of democracy, respect for human rights, confidence in elected institutions and voluntary compliance with the law as indicators of legitimacy. All independent variables were standardized using means centering (Z-scores). See the technical appendix for the definition and construction of all variables. *=.05 **=.01 ***=.001. **Source**: World Values Survey 6th wave 2010-2014.

Table 6.2: Components of electoral integrity and system support

	Confidence in parliament	Confidence in government	Satisfaction with democracy	Obey law	
INTEGRITY					
Votes are counted fairly	.180**	.186**	.253**	.048**	
Election officials are fair	.172**	.180**	.217**	.048**	
Voters are offered a genuine choice in the elections	.107**	.112**	.156**	.030**	
Journalists provide fair coverage of elections	.113**	.118**	.134**	001	
MALPRACTICES					
Rich people buy elections	182**	172**	184**	103**	
TV news favors the governing party	099**	106**	179**	065**	
Voters are bribed	152**	155**	172**	116**	
Opposition candidates are prevented from running	096**	076**	132**	134**	
Voters are threatened with violence at the polls	060**	080**	092**	146**	

Notes: Q: "*How often in a country's elections...*" ** All correlations are significant at the .000 level.



Figure 6.1: Electoral integrity strengthen confidence in elected institutions

Note: "I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?... The government (in your nation's capital), political parties, parliament, the churches."



Figure 6.2: Electoral integrity increases satisfaction with the performance of democracy

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





Note: "Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified (scored 1), never be justified (scored 10), or something in between, using this card.

- Claiming government benefits to which you are not entitled;
- Avoiding a fare on public transport;
- Stealing property;
- Cheating on taxes if you have a chance;
- Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties.



Figure 6.4: The winners-losers gap in perceptions of electoral malpractice

Notes: Perceptions of electoral malpractice are monitored by the standardized 100-point scale constructed from responses to the following battery of items: *"In your view, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections? Opposition candidates are prevented from running; TV news favors the governing party; Voters are bribed; Rich people buy elections; Voters are threatened with violence at the polls." See Table 3.4 for the analysis of the scale. The 'gap' is measured by the difference between the perceptions of 'winners' and 'losers', classified by voting supporters of the winning and losing parties in the most recent national election prior to the survey. A positive gap indicates that losers perceive more malpractice than winners.*

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³⁰ The results of the multivariate analysis models were checked through tolerance statistics to confirm that there were all free from problems of multicollinearity.

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