1 *Introduction*

From the earliest days of the republic, American leaders worried about foreign influence in US elections. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson in 1787, John Adams wrote, "You are apprehensive of foreign Interference, Intrigue, Influence. So am I. – But, as often as Elections happen, the danger of foreign Influence recurs."[1]

In *Federalist No. 68*, published in 1788, Alexander Hamilton expressed a similar concern that other countries would interfere in US presidential elections. He warned that foreign powers would seek "to gain an improper ascendant in our councils" by elevating "a creature of their own to the chief magistracy of the Union."[2] When George Washington stepped down after two terms as president in 1797, his Farewell Address famously warned about the threat of foreign entanglements, which he called "one of the most baneful foes of republican government."[3]

Yet, the founding fathers failed to anticipate that foreign powers would routinely intervene in elections around the world by the twentieth century. Indeed, since the end of the Cold War, countries have openly *invited* many types of foreign involvement, such as international election observers (EOs) and various forms of electoral assistance. More nefarious forms of foreign influence, similar to the interventions by France and Great Britain to help support friendly candidates during the early days of the American Republic, also continue. And as recently observed in the United States, foreign efforts to influence election outcomes can sometimes be tolerated – or even encouraged.

This book illuminates a critical, but poorly understood, dimension of foreign electoral interventions: how individual citizens respond to

[1] Adams (1787).
[2] Hamilton (1788).
[3] Washington (1793).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

them. Although foreign actors frequently get involved in an effort to undermine citizens' trust in elections, we know little about how effective such interventions are. For example, intelligence analysts suggest that delegitimizing elections is a central goal of Russia's recent influence operations in the United States.[4] Meanwhile, publicly released evaluations of elections from high-quality international election monitors explicitly aim to "cut through the fog of disinformation" that foreign and domestic actors sometimes attempt to create among the public.[5] But what are the true effects of both types of involvement? Does foreign meddling undermine public perceptions of electoral credibility? And do monitors' reports reach – let alone influence – citizens?

Focusing on the citizen allows us to unravel two sets of puzzles about contemporary foreign influences on elections. First, why do leaders invite (or acquiesce to) foreign involvement? In some cases, democratic candidates welcome illegal help from outside countries, although we might expect it to prompt a public outcry. Governments that do not hold clean elections also behave in surprising ways: Sometimes they invite credible international monitors that are sure to criticize them, yet at other times they welcome sham monitoring groups from nondemocratic countries that are sure to discredit them within the international community. We explore the conditions under which countries involve different types of foreign groups.

The second puzzle is: Why don't the candidates and political parties that win elections do more to respond to credible evidence of foreign meddling or the electoral deficiencies identified by monitors? Many analysts have declared that a nationalist backlash to meddling is almost unavoidable, and that this explains why foreign electoral interventions are usually pursued covertly despite the obstacles associated with executing such operations. But US President Donald Trump was slow to retaliate against Russia despite credible evidence that Moscow interfered in the 2016 presidential election, and preventing foreign interference in the 2020 election remained firmly on the back burner. Indeed, it seems that Republicans and Democrats perceive Russia's involvement very differently. This divergence appears to represent a more general trend, as many types of foreign electoral interventions – including observers' monitoring missions and reports,

[4] Coats (2019, 7).
[5] Merloe (2015, 92).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for example – are viewed positively by some audiences and negatively by others. Why?

We argue that understanding (1) leaders' decisions about whether to invite and respond to foreign influences and (2) foreign actors' decisions about whether to intervene in the first place requires determining how these interventions affect citizens. In terms of the former, government leaders seek to maximize their chance of remaining in power. In most countries that hold elections, government stability and legitimacy are based on citizens' belief that elections are a credible mechanism for choosing leaders. Thus, leaders may invite or accept foreign influence (or fail to respond to it) because they believe it will maximize their chances of winning and will not undermine – or, in some cases, may even increase – the election's credibility. Regarding the latter, foreign actors must base their decisions about whether (and how) to intervene in elections on how their involvement will affect the credibility of the election – and how this helps achieve their ultimate goal of either advancing or undermining democracy. Meddlers may decide to intervene covertly if they think their intervention will undermine the legitimacy of their preferred candidate's victory. Relatedly, monitors may consider how the public will receive their statements when they craft their election reports and take care to avoid sparking instability or violence. We discuss the implications of citizens' beliefs about election credibility for governments' and foreign actors' decisions throughout the book and summarize these causal processes in a simplified model in Figure 1.1.

Although governments' and foreign actors' decisions are likely to be guided by what they expect the public's reaction to be, as suggested in Figure 1.1, few studies have identified what these effects are. This book therefore develops a bottom-up "theory of the citizen" to explain how foreign actors shape public perceptions of the credibility of elections. We define a *credible election* as one in which people trust the results and believe the outcome reflects the will of the people.[6] We draw on insights from political science and other social science disciplines such as psychology to argue that foreign interventions can change individuals' level of trust in their country's electoral institutions, but only under certain conditions. We acknowledge that such interference is not always unwelcome: Some foreign actors, such as international election

[6] Bush and Prather (2017, 922).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

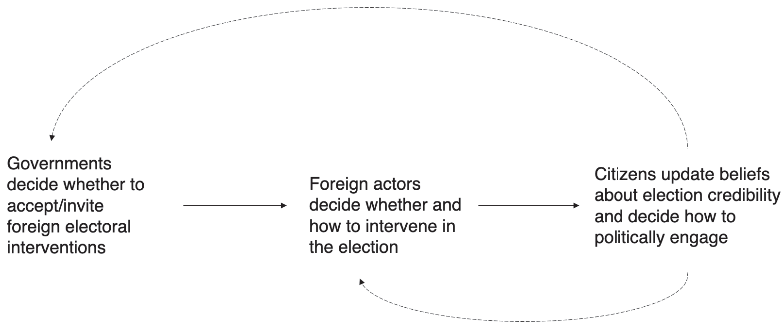

Figure 1.1 Key relationships between government decisions, foreign actors' decisions, and citizens' beliefs around election day
Note: We directly theorize and test the relationships indicated by solid lines. Our findings also have implications for the relationships denoted by dashed lines. As we discuss next, some foreign interventions in elections are not invited by governments. In such cases, foreign actors bypass the first step in this chain.

monitors, can enhance individuals' trust, and other foreign actors, such as states that are trying to swing elections in support of favored candidates, do not always diminish it. Three factors determine whether outside influences enhance or diminish trust: (1) *who* is intervening, (2) *which* political party individuals support, and (3) *where* the election takes place. We briefly introduce each factor before describing the study's case studies.

First, foreign actors have their strongest effects when locals believe they have the capability (and willingness) to influence elections. Sometimes it is surprising which foreign actors are perceived as being capable of doing so. For example in Tunisia, observers from the Arab League were the most likely to enhance trust, even though most analysts and international audiences tend to be skeptical of them since they mainly come from undemocratic countries. That undemocratic observers can legitimize elections in the eyes of the public helps us understand why governments invite them despite the risk of international ridicule.

Second, people respond to foreign interventions in highly partisan ways. Those who support winning candidates and parties (i.e., election winners) *never* significantly update their beliefs about the credibility of elections in response to outside interventions. However, election losers are quite receptive to new information that might cause them to lose faith in the election results, whether from international monitors that

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have criticized the election or from reports about foreign meddling. In other words, foreign interventions tend to polarize citizens' beliefs about election credibility, exacerbating differences in electoral trust between winners and losers.

Third, foreign actors have their strongest effects when there is uncertainty about an election's integrity. Uncertainty is more likely in countries that are holding transitional elections, but it can exist in stable countries as well.

Our findings are based on large, national surveys in three countries with distinct regime types: Georgia, Tunisia, and the United States. We focus on a small number of cases so we can implement in-depth surveys with three key features. First, we interviewed the same individuals immediately before and after elections, which allows us to examine how interventions and election outcomes shape their beliefs about an election's credibility. Second, the surveys include experiments designed to identify the effects of foreign actors; this approach addresses the challenge that monitors may be prone to observe elections with more integrity, and meddlers may be more likely to interfere in elections that have less integrity to begin with. Third, our surveys shed light on the dual role of the United States as both a site of intervention and a key intervener (it sponsored monitors in Georgia and Tunisia and was rumored to have meddled in both countries' elections). Like other countries, including Russia, the US experience as the target of foreign electoral interventions may shape the public's views about instigating electoral interventions going forward.

Our cases differ in terms of culture and institutions but share recent histories as the sites of substantial outside interventions. They allow us to examine how foreign actors shape perceptions of election credibility in a consolidated democracy (the United States, 2016–2020), a transitional democracy (Tunisia, 2014), and a partial democracy (Georgia, 2018). By studying diverse cases, we can investigate the effects of monitors and meddlers in countries that are at least partially democratic. Although our surveys are the heart of the book's empirical contribution, we also analyze other quantitative datasets[7] and draw on qualitative materials identified through desk research

[7] These datasets include the World Values Survey, National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy dataset, and the Data on International Election Monitoring.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(e.g., election monitoring reports and manuals, news articles, and intelligence reports) and field research (e.g., interviews with international and domestic election monitors, election management officials, civil society organizations, and focus groups).

Since citizens' trust in elections affects whether they turn out to vote or participate in post-election protests, among other outcomes, the book's findings help us understand how foreign interventions influence the shape of politics in the countries where they occur. They also advance our understanding of a much broader topic: whether and how international politics affect domestic politics. A great deal of attention has been devoted to studying the international sources of general cross-country trends related to democracy, stability, resistance, and violence. We show that foreign electoral interventions – and perhaps foreign influences more broadly – contribute to the polarization of domestic audiences. Given the threat that polarization is increasingly thought to pose to democracy, our findings suggest new ways in which foreign interventions affect countries' overall trajectories by influencing ordinary citizens' political attitudes.

Our findings also shed light on why policymakers engage with foreign actors near elections in the ways that they do, including sometimes inviting or tolerating outside influence in puzzling ways. Although meddling can cause election losers to question their faith in democratic institutions, it does not appear to shake the faith of election winners enough to prompt policy action. Thus, partisan interventions by outside powers have the potential to undermine core democratic processes.

1.1 How Foreign Actors Intervene in Elections

As John Adams feared in 1787, foreign influences on elections are pervasive. In today's globalized world, events beyond a country's borders influence its economy, politics, and society – and can indirectly shape its elections, too. Indeed, prior studies have explored how foreign influences on domestic politics have the potential to affect elections *indirectly*, for example, through foreign governments' lobbying of elected officials,[8] foreign aid programs and loans,[9] and the actions of

[8] Pevehouse and Vabulas (2019).
[9] Stone (2004); Jablonski (2014).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) like the European Union (EU) that are engaged in promoting and enforcing democratic norms over the long term.[10] The evolving ways in which countries are interconnected make this strand of the literature an important and interesting area for future inquiry, particularly as foreign interventions relate to citizens. This book focuses on how foreign actors' *direct* interventions in elections affect citizens' perceptions of an election's credibility. Thus, we exclude various indirect forms of foreign influence that have the potential to significantly influence domestic politics but are not focused on elections *per se*.

Past research on direct interventions in elections typically focuses on either *democracy-promoting* or *democracy-undermining* interventions. Scholars of the former have examined why and how states pursue democracy promotion, including election monitoring and its effects on election quality.[11] Prior studies of the latter have assessed the supply and effects of partisan electoral interventions, which seek to undermine democracy by influencing citizens' free and fair choice of elected representatives.[12]

Few scholars have combined both types of interventions under the same theoretical umbrella. The most recent example is Johannes Bubeck and Nikolay Marinov's research on foreign electoral interventions, which investigates foreign actors' decisions to intervene in other countries' elections.[13] They argue that such decisions represent a combination of two choices: (1) whether to intervene in the democratic process and (2) whether to support a specific candidate or party. Both decisions can either enhance or undermine democracy. Their emphasis on foreign actors' decisions to intervene in the process, for a candidate, or both has shed considerable light on questions about interveners' strategies. Our work builds on the foundation of their research with a focus on how foreign actors intervene in the democratic process in diverse ways (which can make the electoral playing field either more or less fair) as we develop a theory of citizens' perceptions of elections.

We argue that understanding the effects on citizens requires considering the domestic government's choice to invite, accept, or reject

[10] Kelley (2004); Pevehouse (2005); Vachudova (2005).
[11] See, for example, Pevehouse (2005), Hyde (2011), Kelley (2012b), Donno (2013), Bush (2015), and von Borzyskowski (2019a).
[12] See, for example, Levin (2020).
[13] Bubeck and Marinov (2019).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1.1 *Types of foreign influences on elections*

	Invited by the Government	Not Invited by the Government
Makes playing field fairer	Example: high-quality international election observers	Example: IGO punishment of countries violating electoral integrity norms
Makes playing field less fair	Example: "zombie" international election observers	Example: foreign disinformation campaigns that occur without invitation

the intervention. As Susan Hyde has argued in the context of election monitoring, inviting monitors can signal to the international community that the incumbent intends not to cheat in an election.[14] We extend this logic, noting that domestic governments play a role in inviting, accepting, or rejecting all types of outside electoral interventions, which serves as a signal to citizens of their commitment to democracy (or lack thereof).

We therefore classify direct foreign electoral interventions along two dimensions (Table 1.1 describes them in more detail). First, such interventions make the electoral playing field either more or less fair. Second, some foreign electoral interventions are invited by the government, whereas others are not. While foreign influences on elections could be classified in other ways, such as according to the type of actor involved or the point in the electoral cycle at which they occur, these two dimensions are the most relevant for our theory of the citizen.

The first dimension along which we classify foreign influences on elections is how fair or unfair that influence makes the electoral playing field. In a fair electoral playing field, the electoral outcome reflects the will of the people.[15] Many domestic institutions and practices can contribute to a fair electoral playing field, from those that ensure citizens have a genuine choice in the election to those that govern vote counting and guarantee that citizens can vote freely and safely. Foreign actors also play a role.

[14] Hyde (2011).
[15] Birch (2011, 14).

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Given how important competitive elections are to democracy, we consider any foreign intervention in an election that seeks to make the playing field fairer to be a form of *democracy promotion* and any foreign intervention to make the playing field less fair to be a form of *meddling*.[16]

The second dimension that is important to understanding foreign influences on elections is whether the government invites or accepts the intervention. As we elucidate in the summary of our argument, this characteristic is central to our theory because such an invitation can provide information to citizens about whether incumbents intend to cheat.

A quintessential example of a foreign intervention that helps make the playing field fairer and is invited by the government is high-quality international election observation.[17] Most countries today invite international EOs to monitor their elections.[18] The first international EOs were perhaps a group of European representatives that observed elections in the disputed territories of Moldovia and Wallachia in 1857 as part of the Treaty of Paris.[19] It was a long time before inviting international EOs became a global norm.

The number of national elections monitored by international EOs increased significantly during the second half of the twentieth century and especially after the end of the Cold War. During that time, the proportion of elections being observed by international monitors grew significantly, reaching around 80 percent in 2015, the most recent year for which we have reliable data.[20] The rising demand for international

[16] Both terms represent much broader categories that encompass many other activities that are not directly related to elections. For instance, other democracy promotion activities include most forms of democracy assistance and many actions taken by IGOs (Vachudova 2005; Bush 2015), and other examples of meddling include longer-term efforts to support a favored political party, such as through economic relations and diplomacy (Bush and Prather 2020). Others may also use “meddling” as a pejorative to describe more or even *all* types of foreign influences on elections and domestic politics.

[17] Other examples of activities that fall into this quadrant of Table 1.1 include some forms of international electoral assistance. For example, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan welcomed technical assistance from the UN Development Programme to create a much-needed new voter registry in advance of the 2011 elections (Lührmann 2019, 9).

[18] Hyde (2011); Kelley (2012b).

[19] Kelley (2012a, 205).

[20] See Chapter 4 for more details.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

election observation is related to the "third wave of democratization" as well as the increase in rewards since the end of the Cold War for countries recognized as adhering to democratic norms, such as foreign aid and IGO membership.[21]

Governments invite high-quality EOs to monitor their elections from IGOs such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or the Organization of American States (OAS) and from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Carter Center or the International Republican Institute (IRI), both of which are headquartered in the United States. These organizations send both long- and short-term teams that observe and report on the quality of elections. Multiple international organizations often observe a single election.[22] Although high-quality EOs are not without their biases and flaws,[23] they generally contribute to a fairer electoral playing field by making it more difficult for incumbents to steal an election. They do so by collecting information about election integrity, reporting on any irregularities they find, and increasing the costs of cheating through publicizing electoral malpractice. For example, observers from the OSCE and other organizations are commonly thought to have played an important role in the early 2000s in the post-Soviet Color Revolutions, helping to expose fraud and mobilize citizens in the post-election protests that led to regime change in previously authoritarian countries such as Georgia and Ukraine.[24] Yet, there are no direct analyses of how monitors affected public attitudes in these (and other) influential cases. Our work sheds light on whether foreign organizations were likely to have influenced citizens' perceptions of election credibility in a way that led to the collapse of these regimes.

A good example of a foreign intervention that helps make the playing field fairer but is not specifically invited by the government is IGO enforcement of electoral integrity norms in countries that violate them. Countries sometimes join IGOs such as the EU or OAS that have stated commitments to democracy and are later punished when their elections do not meet international standards for being free and fair. IGOs can attempt to enforce election integrity norms

[21] Huntington (1991); Kelley (2004); Vachudova (2005).
[22] Kelley (2009b).
[23] Kelley (2009a); Kavakli and Kuhn (2020).
[24] Fawn (2006, 1139–1140); Beissinger (2007, 261); Bunce and Wolchik (2007); Tucker (2007).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

via conditionality (i.e., actual or threatened sanctions), diplomacy and mediation missions, and shaming.[25] Under the right conditions, IGO enforcement around elections seems to have the potential to influence citizens' perceptions of election credibility. By loudly criticizing the flawed 1994 general election in the Dominican Republic, for example, the OAS "validated the opposition's claims that tens of thousands of its voters had been disenfranchised," ultimately prompting the incumbent president Joaquín Balaguer to hold early (cleaner) elections and step down.[26]

Other examples of activities that fall into this quadrant of Table 1.1 include some forms of democracy assistance that do not involve cooperation with the government, such as training high-quality domestic EOs. Some people criticize activities in this quadrant as being a form of outside interference since they are not invited by the government, whereas others object to such a characterization on the grounds that such activities are consistent with international norms (Melia 2018; National Democratic Institute 2018a).

Foreign interventions that undermine the fairness of the electoral playing field can also vary according to whether the government invites them. Although some governments opt to invite high-quality international EOs to monitor their elections as described earlier, others ask low-quality international EOs that seek to undermine the democratic process. These "zombie" EOs are sent by groups such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a Russia-led IGO that has monitored elections in authoritarian countries such as Azerbaijan and Belarus. Although zombie observers attempt to mimic higher-quality EOs, they are better understood as a form of foreign election meddling since they seek to tilt the playing field in the government's favor.[27] Zombie international EOs monitor elections in authoritarian countries with the goal of strengthening the position of the incumbent nondemocratic government by being present and issuing and publicizing positive reports about the highly flawed elections they observe. Incumbent governments may invite them to enhance public perceptions of an election's credibility.[28]

25 Donno (2010, 597).
26 Donno (2013, 3).
27 Walker and Cooley (2013).
28 Debre and Morgenbesser (2017).

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Election meddling also occurs in a variety of other forms. States play a larger role in election meddling, while nonstate actors are active in many domains of democracy promotion such as high-quality election observation. It is very difficult to determine how frequently meddling occurs since it is often done secretly, but it is almost certainly less common than monitoring. However, it is not a rare event. Some of the best data on this topic come from Dov Levin. According to his calculations, "Between 1946 and 2000, the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia have intervened in about one of every nine competitive national-level executive elections."[29] His data show that election meddling was common during the Cold War; well-known examples include interventions by both the United States and the Soviet Union during elections in Italy in 1948 and Chile in 1964. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has remained active in some Latin American countries, such as its opposition to Chavismo in Venezuela since 1999, and Russia has meddled in numerous European democracies' elections and in its near abroad.[30] Election meddling goes back at least to the 1796 US presidential election, in which France expressed its disappointment in the victory of (pro-Britain) John Adams over (pro-French) Thomas Jefferson with a decree ordering the French navy to prevent US trade with Europe.[31]

Other forms of election meddling are also invited by the government they are intended to help. For example, the Russian government provided support to incumbent Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych in 2004 in a variety of ways, including by directly funding his campaign. This campaign also featured government-invited zombie monitors; CIS observers (and Russian President Vladimir Putin) prominently endorsed the results of an election that other, more reputable, international observers had criticized.[32] Zombie monitors thus obscured the clear signal that reputable monitors sent to citizens about the poor quality of the election.

[29] See Chapter 5 for more details.
[30] Gill (2018); Way and Casey (2018).
[31] DeConde (1958).
[32] McFaul (2007, 70).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A good example of a foreign intervention that makes the playing field *less* fair and may not be invited is a disinformation campaign.[33] A disinformation campaign during an election entails spreading false information about a candidate or the election as a whole. Disinformation was part of the US intervention in Chile's 1964 presidential election, which has been described as the "peak" of electoral interventions by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The CIA authorized a range of covert and illegal activities from propaganda and disinformation to vote buying in support of the United States' favored candidate, Eduardo Frei Montalva, who was running against the socialist candidate Salvador Allende in an election to replace outgoing President Jorge Alessandri.[34] This effort is estimated to have cost a total of $3 million (or $25 million in 2020 dollars), including covering over half of Frei's campaign expenses.[35] The US Senate's Church Committee later acknowledged that the US government's disinformation campaign in support of Frei included "'black propaganda' – material which purported to originate from another source, such as the Chilean Communist Party."[36] If disinformation campaigns are discovered and become public knowledge, they have the potential to decrease the credibility of elections among citizens.

Given these myriad types of foreign influences on elections, the same election can often feature competing and complementary foreign interventions. The same country can use multiple tools, and multiple countries can use the same (or competing) tools.

Sometimes, states or IGOs use multiple tools of influence at the same time to influence the electoral playing field in a similar way. For example, a state might support a high-quality international EO mission (an invited intervention) *and* provide funding for domestic nongovernmental efforts designed to promote electoral integrity (an intervention that is not necessarily invited by the government, though it may be legal and thus permitted by the government). During Moldova's 2019 parliamentary election, for example, the US government provided funding to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), an international NGO,

[33] Disinformation campaigns may also be invited. Another activity that fits into this category is attempting to harm a disfavored candidate, such as by physically attacking them.
[34] Shimer (2020, 48, 52).
[35] Ibid., 53.
[36] Church Committee (1975, 15).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for two purposes: to provide high-quality EOs and to maintain a long-term presence in the country. Prior to the election, the NDI office there "supported nonpartisan groups in promoting the integrity of elections through monitoring and advised youth initiatives on solving community problems and increasing the turnout of young voters."[37] NDI also encouraged women's participation in the election as candidates and voters. All of these efforts could be considered as supporting the overall goal of a fair electoral playing field in Moldova, though they varied in their relationship with the government.

The same country occasionally uses multiple tools of foreign influence in *competing* ways to affect the fairness of the electoral playing field. For example, during the 2006 Palestinian legislative election, the US government took steps to both advance the general democratic process (i.e., to make the electoral playing field fairer) and to support the electoral chances of a particular party (i.e., to tilt the playing field and thus make it less fair). The American government initially pressured the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to hold democratic elections, as "US policymakers were convinced that the [earlier] Oslo [peace] process had failed because Palestinians were not democratic enough."[38] US government-funded NGOs, such as NDI, were present alongside the EU and other international observers seeking to encourage a fair electoral process at the invitation of the PNA. Yet, the US government also clearly had a favored side: the ruling party Fatah, not Hamas, the militant faction that ended up winning. To increase Fatah's electoral odds in advance of the election, the US Agency for International Development spent around $2 million on "dozens of quick projects...to bolster the governing Fatah faction's image with voters."[39] The Bush administration recognized Hamas's electoral victory, reflecting international observers' largely positive assessments of the integrity of the electoral process. Yet soon afterwards, the United States coordinated with other members of the international community to impose economic sanctions against Palestine and took further covert steps to try to return Fatah to power.[40]

[37] National Democratic Institute (2019).
[38] Jamal (2012, 192).
[39] Erlanger (2006, A11).
[40] Rose (2008).

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Competing foreign actors may also try to influence the same election in opposite ways, in what has been called an "election war."[41] Whereas election wars between the United States and the Soviet Union were rare during the Cold War,[42] they have since become more frequent between the United States and Russia – for instance over multiple post-Soviet elections in Ukraine.[43] They have also featured as elements of other regional and global power struggles. In elections held since the Arab uprisings of 2011, Qatar has used its economic influence to support Islamist parties in Egypt and Tunisia, while Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have sought to support secular parties and leaders there.[44] In addition to foreign countries taking opposing sides in the same election, there are also cases in which one set of foreign actors seeks to make the electoral playing field fairer, and a different set of foreign actors attempts to have the opposite effect. For example, the 2004 Ukraine election mentioned earlier included high-quality international monitors such as the OSCE that sought to expose fraud and make the election more democratic, while Russian meddling sought to undermine the electoral playing field to benefit Yanukovych.

1.2 Why Interveners Seek to Influence Citizens

This book explores how the foreign electoral interventions described previously affect citizens' perceptions of election credibility. In addition to accepting or inviting foreign electoral interventions, domestic political actors can take various actions to influence citizens' perceptions; Americans need only to think of Donald Trump's efforts to undermine the credibility of the 2020 election that Joe Biden won and the January 2021 insurrection that followed. We concentrate here, however, on domestic political actors' decisions vis-à-vis foreign actors. This shift in focus is needed due to the prevalence of foreign electoral interventions, which governments and foreign actors themselves believe have potentially significant effects on citizens. Although domestic actors' attempts to shape public opinion may sometimes be more powerful than foreign actors' efforts, we do not expect that this is always the case, and

[41] Bubeck and Marinov (2017, 536).
[42] Levin (2019a, 99).
[43] Bubeck and Marinov (2017, 547–548).
[44] Cherif (2014, 2017); Trager (2017); Bush and Prather (2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

our analysis of election monitors supports this assumption. The public may (sometimes accurately) view domestic leaders' efforts to promote or undermine credibility skeptically due to domestic actors' recognized stakes in the election outcome.

As Figure 1.1 models, both domestic governments' and foreign actors' actions related to monitoring and meddling have the potential to influence citizens' beliefs about election credibility. Domestic governments often invite or accept foreign electoral interventions to increase public perceptions of credibility.[45] In uncertain electoral environments, governments that do not intend to cheat may seek the assistance of high-quality EOs that can communicate to citizens (and to the international community) that an election was free and fair. Governments that *intend* to cheat may invite low-quality EOs. If citizens cannot distinguish between high- and low-quality monitors, a cheating incumbent can attempt to use zombie monitors to convince the public that a flawed election was fair. Chapters 2 and 4 provide examples of governments strategically publicizing election monitors' activities.

Both monitors and meddlers seek to influence citizens' beliefs about an election's credibility. According to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, high-quality international EOs believe they influence both the electoral playing field and citizens' perceptions of it:

> International election observation has the potential to enhance the integrity of election processes, by deterring and exposing irregularities and fraud and by providing recommendations for improving electoral processes. It can promote public confidence, as warranted, promote electoral participation and mitigate the potential for election-related conflict.[46]

These are not just empty words. Chapter 4 discusses numerous examples of high-quality EOs from Europe and the United States declining invitations to monitor elections because they do not want to promote public confidence in an election when it is not warranted. Moreover, monitors tend to blunt their criticism of elections that they anticipate

[45] Doing so could have unintended effects, for instance, if the government invites a foreign actor to covertly meddle in the election to maximize the incumbent's chance of winning and the meddling inadvertently becomes public knowledge and undermines the legitimacy of his or her victory.

[46] *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* (2005, 2).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

could involve violence to avoid emboldening citizen groups that seek to challenge the regime by reinforcing perceptions that an election was not fair.[47]

Although meddlers, by definition, generally seek to swing an election in favor of their preferred candidate or party, they often do so as part of a concerted effort to undermine citizens' trust in the electoral process. Or they may be indirectly interested in the credibility of the election because they want an ally to win without jeopardizing the legitimacy of the election. Meddlers may therefore interfere covertly and may be directly interested in influencing the credibility of fair elections. Indeed, diminishing citizens' trust in elections is a welcome outcome for autocratic meddlers even if their desired election result is not achieved. For instance, Way and Casey (2018, 1) demonstrated that the Russian government's electoral interventions in the West since 2015 have sought to undermine democracy, and one mechanism for achieving that aim is to cause ordinary citizens to question the credibility of elections that are generally free and fair. As we discuss in Chapter 5, US intelligence agencies have concluded that these goals characterized Russian meddling in the 2016 US election in particular. More recently, after the 2021 summit between Presidents Biden and Putin, Russian media analysts reported that Russian state media claimed that the January 6, 2021, insurrection was evidence that Russian meddling had successfully sown distrust in elections, and that Moscow should continue to try to influence American public opinion.[48]

Governments and foreign actors thus seek to influence public attitudes. But do they succeed? Given the significance of citizens' perceptions of election credibility, it is important to find out if they do, as we explore in Section 1.3.

1.3 Why Citizens' Perceptions of Election Credibility Matter

As noted previously, we conceptualize perceptions of election credibility as reflecting both individuals' trust in the results of the election and their belief that the outcome reflects the will of the people. This two-part definition recognizes that an election with integrity requires both a fair process on election day *and* a fair environment and political

[47] Kelley (2009a).
[48] Davis (2021).

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institutions over the longer term. For example, citizens might believe the announced election winner is consistent with the public's preferences but question whether the reported margin of victory is accurate. This dynamic may reflect how the public thinks about elections in popular authoritarian regimes, such as that of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in Mexico or Putin's Russia, as well as in consolidated democracies where the public nevertheless has concerns about vote tabulation.[49] By contrast, if election day occurs without fraud but takes place within a fundamentally closed political environment, citizens might rightfully perceive it to lack credibility given that the free will of the people could not be expressed, even though the votes may have been counted accurately in the strictest sense. For example, international observers positively evaluated Armenia's election day procedures in 2007 and 2008[50] but concluded that the pre-election campaign and media environment were skewed in favor of the ruling party.

Therefore, to measure perceptions of election credibility in practice, we use surveys that ask respondents two separate questions (described further in Chapter 3): One asks about their trust in the election result and the other about their belief that the outcome reflects the will of the people. We could ask these questions in a straightforward manner because our cases do not include authoritarian regimes where respondents might consider them sensitive. Although conceptually distinct, the responses to these questions are highly correlated. We average the answers to both questions to create a single measure of election credibility to use in our main analysis, noting instances where our results are stronger on one dimension of election credibility than the other. Chapter 3 discusses our measurement approach and its strengths and limitations in more detail.

Although individuals' perceptions of election credibility are related to more objective measures of election *quality*,[51] these two concepts are distinct. Sometimes individuals question the integrity of a largely free and fair election, while at other times, people may accept the results of an election characterized by widespread fraud. Illustrating

[49] Robertson (2017, 602).
[50] For example, the OSCE said they were "largely in accordance with OSCE commitments" in 2007. Quoted in Simpser and Donno (2012, 502).
[51] Norris (2013a).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the potential disjuncture between perceptions and reality, we show later in this book (in Chapter 4) that Americans in our surveys tended to express less confidence in their elections than Tunisians did, even though the United States is widely considered to have democratic (though by no means perfect) elections, whereas Tunisia was a transitional democracy at the time of our surveys. Thus, we do not assume that it is necessarily normatively desirable to convince citizens that elections are credible, as it might entail instilling confidence in a flawed contest.

For many political outcomes that matter to governments (and foreign actors), citizens' *perceptions* of election credibility are the most important because they shape citizens' degree of acceptance of the political system and decisions about when (and how) to participate in politics.[52] A substantial body of research finds that individuals' trust in elections affects their likelihood of participating in politics in two ways: through *regular* means such as voting and through *irregular* means such as protesting. Perceived credibility thus has at least three important effects.

The first is that when citizens believe elections are credible, they are more likely to turn out to vote and to engage in the regular political process in other ways as well, such as by volunteering for a campaign or contacting an elected official. Surveys in a variety of global settings have established a positive correlation between perceptions of election quality and voter turnout.[53] The causal logic is intuitive: If people think the outcome of an election has already been determined, there is less reason for them to go to the effort of campaigning for a candidate, voting, and so on.

The second important effect of perceived credibility is that when citizens believe their elections are *not* credible, they are more likely to participate in postelection protests. Although elections perceived to be untrustworthy can lead to political disengagement by decreasing voter turnout, they can also encourage people to look for ways to make their voice heard outside the normal political system. Again, the causal logic is straightforward: When people believe elections are not credible, they are less likely to perceive the government as legitimate and therefore become more willing to protest against it.

[52] Daxecker, Salvatore, and Ruggeri (2019).
[53] Birch (2010); Norris (2013b, Ch. 7).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Analysts often cite the Color Revolutions that erupted in the early 2000s in multiple former Soviet-bloc countries as examples of this phenomenon, although perceptions of election credibility are also linked to protest willingness in the Arab world[54] and sub-Saharan Africa.[55] The Color Revolutions involved the diffusion of a similar model of protests in Serbia (Bulldozer Revolution in 2000), Georgia (Rose Revolution in 2003), Ukraine (Orange Revolution in 2004), and Kyrgyzstan (Tulip Revolution in 2005).[56] Although these and other countries in the region had held flawed elections for some time, newfound opposition tactics enabled antiregime activists to gain more ground than in past election cycles.[57] The revolutions were triggered by large-scale public demonstrations after major election fraud, which focused on public attention and helped dissatisfied citizens overcome the collective action problem.[58] In Serbia, for example, internationally supported domestic observers provided credible evidence that opposition candidate Vojislav Koštunica had secured enough votes to defeat Slobodan Milošević in the September 2000 presidential election; official tallies had declared Milošević the winner. Believing the election had been stolen, Serbians began to demonstrate, culminating in more than a million protesters gathering in Belgrade on October 5. Milošević admitted defeat the next day.[59]

The third and final important effect of perceived credibility that we consider follows from the first two. Because perceptions of election credibility shape individual-level political behaviors such as voting and participation in protests, they also have knock-on effects for democracy. Regular political participation through voting is critical for democratic quality (not to mention election outcomes). That is one reason why growing public concerns about election integrity in several advanced industrial democracies, including the United States, have prompted worries about the future of democracy there.[60]

Meanwhile, election-related protests can have both positive and negative effects on democracy, as they can oust corrupt regimes but

[54] Williamson (2021).
[55] Daxecker, Salvatore, and Ruggeri (2019).
[56] Beissinger (2007).
[57] Bunce and Wolchik (2007).
[58] Tucker (2007).
[59] Donno (2013, 138–139).
[60] Norris (2018); Norris, Cameron, and Wynter (2018); Berlinski et al. (2021).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

also unleash processes that lead to repression and violence. On the one hand, the threat of protest is crucial to the idea of self-enforcing democracy[61] and can lead to democratic revolutions, as the Serbia case illustrates. On the other hand, governments that fear losing power are more likely to violently suppress election-related protests.[62] For example, the government of Azerbaijan cracked down violently on opposition supporters who protested the results of the country's flawed 2005 parliamentary election to prevent a revolution.[63] These dynamics of protest and violence are especially likely in competitive authoritarian regimes, as demonstrated by the crisis that occurred in Kenya after its flawed election in 2007 led to widespread killings and displacement. The popular mobilization that flawed elections can spur is therefore linked to both normatively desirable outcomes (ousting corrupt regimes that rig elections) as well as troubling ones (government repression, large-scale violence, and even civil war).

Thus far, we have considered the effects of perceptions of election credibility through a review of previous research. We can also consider this topic using evidence from our own surveys. Since none of the elections we studied for this book were followed by significant post-election protests, we focus on more regular forms of political participation.

In all three countries, we asked people after the elections about their perceptions of election credibility and their plans to engage in various political activities in the future, including voting. Despite significant differences in intentions to participate across the cases, when people perceived the recent election to be more credible, they were always significantly more likely to report planning to engage in future political activities, even when controlling for other factors that could confound this relationship.[64] In Tunisia, for example, we conducted our first survey after the 2014 parliamentary election and the second using the

[61] Weingast (1997); Przeworski (2006); Fearon (2011). For a discussion of how international actors can contribute to this process, see Hyde and Marinov (2014).

[62] Daxecker (2012); von Borzyskowski (2019b).

[63] Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski (2014, 149–150).

[64] These factors include age, gender, education, political knowledge, income, party identification, and satisfaction with democracy. The online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather) includes a table containing this analysis as well as a description of the political participation measure. For a fuller explanation of how we measure perceived election credibility, see Chapter 3.

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same sample a few months after the presidential election held later the same year. A one-standard-deviation increase in the perceived credibility of the parliamentary election was associated with a 28 percent increase in the odds of having reported voting a few months later in the presidential election.[65]

The relationship between perceived credibility and voting is not unique to the transitional environment of Tunisia in 2014. We also conducted a survey before the 2018 US Congressional election in which we asked all respondents how credible they thought it would be, and if they would be willing to sign an online pledge to vote in the election. US political campaigns and NGOs often use voting pledges as mobilization tools because they are thought to commit individuals to vote. For respondents who expressed an interest in making such a pledge, we provided links to three nonpartisan American organizations with online voting pledges at the end of the survey.[66] Our survey platform tracked whether respondents clicked on these links. We found that a one-standard-deviation increase in perceived election credibility increased the odds of clicking on at least one of the voting pledge campaign links by 25 percent.[67] This positive effect is precisely what we expected: People are more likely to want to participate in a political process if they believe their participation will matter.

When we examine a broader set of cases, similar patterns emerge. Figure 1.2 uses data from the seventh wave of the World Values Survey, which polled representative samples of the public in forty-nine diverse countries between 2017 and 2020 on a variety of political and social topics. It shows that people who reported that they trusted their

[65] $p < 0.01$. This analysis controls for the same variables referenced in the previous footnote. Respondents could have overreported voting in the presidential election because voting is socially desirable. However, the 65 percent turnout rate in our nationally representative survey was identical to that reported by the Independent High Authority for Elections in Tunisia for Tunisians in the country at the time, and the reported vote share for the winning candidate in our survey closely matched the official result. See Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Élections (Tunisia) (2014c). A table containing this analysis is in the online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather).

[66] These organizations included two youth-oriented campaigns (Inspire US and Rock the Vote) and one senior-oriented campaign (AARP, formerly an abbreviation for the American Association of Retired Persons).

[67] $p = 0.05$. This analysis controls for the same variables referenced earlier. A table containing this analysis is in the online appendix (www.cambridge.org/bushprather).

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country's elections (on a scale of 1–4 that captures part of our concept of election credibility) were more likely to report that they were satisfied with its political system (on a 1–10 scale). They were also more likely to report that they tended to vote in their country's national elections (coded from 1 to 3).[68] There are important limits to these data and analysis. For instance, the surveys were not generally conducted close to election day, and it is difficult to establish causal relationships between variables measured in the same survey. Nevertheless, Figure 1.2 supports the logic that perceptions of election credibility affect how legitimate citizens perceive their political system to be, and therefore how willing they are to turn out to vote – and likely how willing they are to engage in protests as well.

In summary, the book's theory and findings about foreign actors' effects on perceptions of election credibility have important implications for our understanding of countries' long-term trends related to democratization and democratic backsliding. Foreign interventions can contribute to democratic progress in at least two ways. First, incumbents who are sincerely committed to democracy can invite high-quality foreign election monitors to elections. Their presence may improve the quality of the election, engage the international community in the country's democratic trajectory in supportive ways, and increase citizens' perceptions of election credibility, leading to more engagement of the type that is likely to consolidate democracy. Second, high-quality foreign election monitors can provide information about flawed elections that triggers irregular forms of political engagement, such as protests demanding pro-democracy institutional changes. In this way, some foreign interventions can move public perceptions of election credibility closer to the actual level of election quality and spur democratization and democratic consolidation.

[68] The specific questions were Q222 ("When elections take place, do you vote always, usually or never? Please tell me separately for each of the following levels: National level"), Q224 ("In your view, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections? Votes are counted fairly"), and Q252 ("On a scale from 1 to 10 where '1' is 'not satisfied at all' and '10' is 'completely satisfied', how satisfied are you with how the political system is functioning in your country these days?"). In the figure on trust in elections and voting, we exclude countries with enforced compulsory voting between 2017 and 2020 (the years of the World Values Survey). Information on compulsory voting comes from International IDEA (2021).

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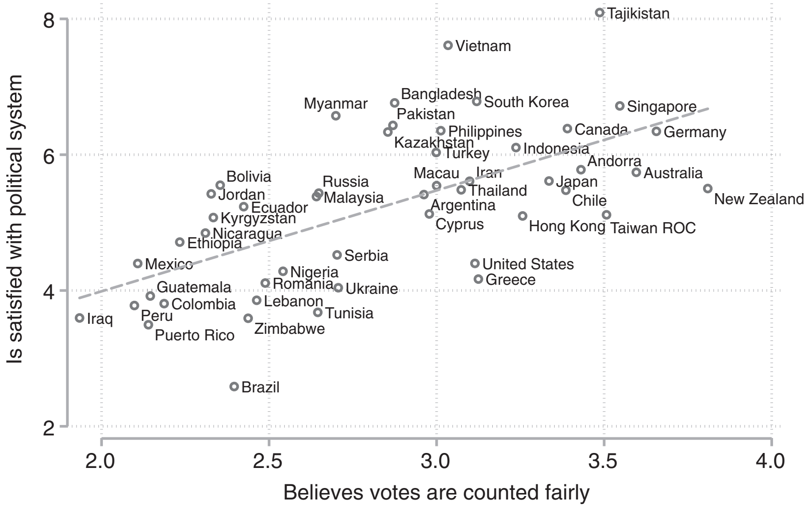
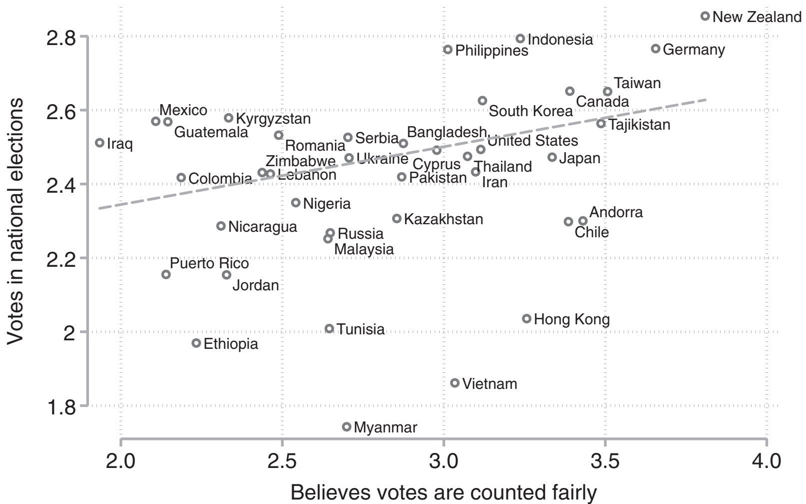


(a) Trust in elections and political satisfaction



(b) Trust in elections and voting

Figure 1.2 The correlations between (a) trust in elections, political satisfaction, and (b) voting, 2017–2020
Note: Data are from Inglehart et al. (2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

However, foreign interventions can also undermine democracy. Meddling is an anti-democratic intervention by definition, but all types of interventions have the potential to jeopardize democracy through their effects on perceptions of election credibility. We find that interventions increase the gap between winners' and losers' perceptions of election credibility, which contributes to polarization and thus poses challenges for democracy.[69] Polarization is not an exclusively negative force, as it can "strengthen party brands and clarify voters' choices"[70] and "produce stronger party organizations," especially in developing democracies.[71] At the same time, polarization makes it more difficult for elites to cooperate – an essential task, especially in transitional democracies – and may insulate them from getting voted out for violating democratic norms.[72] Although accurately informing at least some individuals about election credibility (as credible election monitors do) may be considered valuable in and of itself, this dynamic is not an unalloyed good insofar as it contributes to polarization.

Interventions can also widen the gap between election quality and perceptions of election credibility in ways that are problematic for democracy. For example, if nondemocratic incumbents are worried about citizens' negative reactions to flawed elections, they may invite low-quality zombie election monitors to boost the credibility of the election. In this way, low-quality foreign monitors allow autocrats to undermine the competitiveness of elections without eschewing them altogether. Alternatively, election winners may tolerate election meddling. Foreign meddling therefore degrades the quality of an election without necessarily undermining its credibility in the eyes of citizens who voted for the winner. Because winners have less incentive to enact policies to punish past meddling and prevent future meddling once they take office, foreign meddlers have license to continue interfering. In both cases, governments can exploit the effects of foreign interventions on citizens' perceptions of election credibility to undermine democratic progress.

For all these reasons, it is essential to understand how citizens form beliefs about election credibility. We now present our argument about how foreign actors influence those beliefs.

[69] Carothers and O'Donohue (2019).
[70] Lupu (2015, 332).
[71] LeBas (2018, 60).
[72] Svolik (2019); Nugent (2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1.4 The Argument in Brief

People form their beliefs about election credibility through two processes that map onto two general models of public opinion formation. To build our "theory of the citizen," we start by describing these general processes and then consider how foreign actors might exploit them to cause individuals to update their beliefs. First, people want to hold *accurate* beliefs about an election's credibility. They rely on their personal experiences of voting and what they have learned about the election from politicians and the media.[73] A country's electoral institutions, such as its electoral management body and campaign finance laws, can offer especially important clues about whether an election was free and fair.[74] In a second process, people desire to hold beliefs about election credibility that are *consistent* with their partisan attachments. For that reason, the people who support the winning party or candidate typically perceive an election as more credible than those who support the losing party or candidate.[75] This winner–loser gap reflects individuals' emotional responses to election outcomes, as well as their search for information about election integrity that will confirm their partisan biases.

Although these processes can lead people to have strong opinions about election credibility, in many cases, some uncertainty remains. It is difficult for citizens to observe and assess election credibility themselves, since many forms of malpractice are committed behind closed doors (both literally and figuratively). Moreover, the political elites to whom citizens might look for information about election credibility have incentives to misrepresent the true level of malpractice: Election winners have reason to portray themselves as having won fairly, and election losers are motivated to declare the election was stolen. The extent of uncertainty depends on both the political environment (transitional countries tend to have more uncertainty than more stable regime types, whether democratic or autocratic) and individual characteristics.

[73] Claassen et al. (2013); Kerr (2013, 2018); Berman et al. (2019).

[74] Birch (2008); Hall, Monson, and Patterson (2009); Rosas (2010); Kerr (2013); Erlich and Kerr (2016); Jochem, Murtazashvili, and Murtazashvili (2020).

[75] Anderson et al. (2005); Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn (2008); Ansolabehere and Persily (2008); Moehler (2009); Rose and Mishler (2009); Beaulieu (2014a); Cantú and García-Ponce (2015); Sances and Stewart (2015); Robertson (2017); Wellman, Hyde, and Hall (2017).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In this context, foreign actors can provide valuable information to citizens about an election's credibility. Their actions – if people learn about them – can help citizens assess whether political candidates are committed to the rules of the game and whether fraud was likely to have been committed on election day. Citizens are unlikely to have extensive information about foreign interventions around elections, although they may encounter EOs at polling stations. Even if they have limited firsthand knowledge about foreign interventions, they can obtain at least basic information via the media and use it as a heuristic with which to assess the electoral playing field. Our theory considers several ways in which foreign actors affect citizens' perceptions of election credibility on average. More importantly, it proposes several new ways that foreign actors' effects depend on the characteristics of foreign actors, individual citizens, and the countries where elections occur.

We call the expected average effects of foreign actors the *conventional wisdom* because they are the effects that the monitors and meddlers believe themselves to have (as described earlier), and that previous scholarly studies assume they have. For example, research on how international monitors affect patterns of post-election protest typically hypothesizes that they do so via their effects on citizens' perceptions of election credibility but does not test this effect directly.[76] To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to provide a theoretical logic at the citizen level to explain how individuals change their beliefs about election credibility. By developing this logic, we can specify: (1) the mechanisms linking foreign election interventions to election credibility, (2) the variables most likely to condition the relationship between foreign interventions and election credibility, and (3) the most plausible alternative explanation.

According to the conventional wisdom about the effects of foreign interventions, the expected direction of the effect depends on the type of intervention and can be understood primarily through the accuracy mechanism discussed earlier. Whereas international monitoring is expected to increase trust, meddling is expected to have the opposite effect. Foreign actors could affect individual perceptions of elections in this way because of the uncertainty individuals often have about election integrity. Information about international monitors' presence or

[76] Daxecker (2012); Little (2012); Donno (2013); Hyde and Marinov (2014); von Borzyskowski (2019a).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their positive reports may reassure individuals that the electoral playing field is fair and that elites are truly committed to democracy. By contrast, information about foreign meddling may imply that fraud has occurred and, especially if meddling is welcomed, that local politicians are merely pretending to respect the rules of the game. Therefore, it may cause citizens to lose trust.

Yet, we can also construct a richer theory that accounts for individual psychology, which can drastically change how citizens interpret information about foreign interventions in two ways. First, in order for foreign actors' interventions to provide new information to the public about the electoral playing field, citizens must believe these actors are able and willing to influence it. For example, if individuals believe international monitors are biased toward a particular candidate, then their presence does not suggest the playing field is fair and is unlikely to enhance individuals' perceptions of election credibility. Thus, foreign actors' effects are conditional on characteristics associated with their identity. When individuals want to hold accurate beliefs about election integrity, they will only revise their opinion about elections in response to credible foreign interventions. We argue and find that the foreign actors that citizens perceive as capable are not always those that experts regard as such.

Second, individuals' vote choice and uncertainty about the election moderate the effect of foreign actors. Accuracy and directional motivations both point to vote choice as an essential moderating factor. Based on accuracy motivations, foreign actors' interventions are more likely to affect citizens' trust in elections when they reveal information that is different from individuals' existing beliefs and when individuals are uncertain. Uncertainty is especially likely in certain electoral contexts, such as countries that are transitioning from autocracy to democracy, and where politicians' true intentions are unknown. Based on directional motivations, however, foreign actors' interventions are more likely to affect citizens' trust in elections when they reaffirm their partisan biases. For example, election losers may be receptive to information about foreign meddling because they are more open to the possibility that they lost an election unfairly.

Our predictions contrast sharply with an alternative perspective on foreign interventions around elections that expects citizens to respond with hostility to any outside intervention. Nationalism "maintains that peoples with a powerful sense of collective identity should be allowed to govern themselves" and is currently thought to be "on the march"

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in the United States and beyond.[77] And what could be a more essential element of self-government than elections? Yet, we argue that nationalism does not offer the best lens through which to understand citizens' views about foreign electoral interventions.

This argument contrasts with recent research, which finds that nationalism's emotional power makes it ripe for deflecting external pressure related to issues of democracy and human rights.[78] In fact, there is mounting (but not uniform) evidence that individuals respond negatively to foreign interventions in these domains that are perceived to violate their country's sovereignty.[79] More broadly, researchers argue that nationalism is a key source of blowback from foreign interventions and the legitimacy problems that plague politicians installed by outside powers in their wake.[80] The nationalism perspective we consider is closely related to the narrative – common among both academics and political commentators – that "foreign threats facilitate partisan unity."[81]

Based on these arguments, one might expect norms of national self-determination to encourage a backlash against all forms of foreign influence on elections – monitoring, meddling, and everything in between.[82] Certainly, according to this perspective, one would at least expect meddling to always diminish citizens' trust. Many studies of the topic have taken this point for granted; in a recent book on election meddling, for example, historian David Shimer writes, "Overt interference *inevitably* provokes a backlash."[83] Likewise, Levin considers the potential for backlash to be a key reason why interveners opt for covert instead of overt interventions and provides evidence that policymakers worry about it when planning operations.[84] Our theory instead proposes that even if meddling has negative effects on trust, many citizens are quite tolerant of – if not receptive to – foreign influence in their elections as long as it helps their preferred party win.

[77] Mearsheimer (2021, 1).
[78] Snyder (2020).
[79] Gruffydd-Jones (2019); Grossman, Manekin, and Margalit (2018); Terman (2019); Chapman and Chaudoin (2020). For exceptions or partial exceptions, see Corstange and Marinov (2012), Bush and Jamal (2015), Lupu and Wallace (2019), and Anjum, Chilton, and Usman (2021).
[80] Edelstein (2011); Lake (2016).
[81] Myrick (2021, 5).
[82] Shulman and Bloom (2012).
[83] Emphasis added. Shimer (2020, 27).
[84] Levin (2020, 40–41).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009204262.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1.5 Plan of the Book

Chapter 2 develops our theory. Chapter 3 then describes the research strategy we use to test its observable implications. Since talking to citizens directly is the best way to determine how foreign actors influence perceptions of election credibility, we rely heavily on evidence gathered in nationally representative surveys that we conducted for this project, which we supplement with other forms of evidence. We administered a total of ten large-scale surveys across elections in three countries at different levels of democracy. We studied citizens' perceptions of the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections in Tunisia (a transitional democracy); the 2016, 2018, and 2020 general elections in the United States (a consolidated democracy); and the 2018 first- and second-round presidential elections in Georgia (a partial democracy). Chapter 3 describes our survey methodology, including our approach to embedding experimental vignettes designed to identify the effects of foreign actors, discusses our case selection rationale, and provides background information on each case.

Chapters 4–7 present our main empirical analyses and findings. We organize the book thematically around our theory's explanatory variables – monitoring, meddling, intervener identity, and individual vote choice – rather than around the three country cases. This decision reflects our core interest in explaining the effects of foreign electoral interventions and showcasing commonalities (as well as variation) in the interventions' effects across three diverse cases.

In Chapter 4, we begin testing the theory with respect to election monitoring. After discussing the ecology of international election monitors and demonstrating general public acceptance of them, we find limited support for the hypotheses related to their average effects. In none of our cases did information about the *presence* of international monitors increase trust in elections. We find more support for the conventional wisdom about the effects of monitors' reports: Positive reports increased trust relative to negative reports in Tunisia (somewhat tentatively) and the United States (more clearly). The substantive effects in both cases were fairly modest, however, and we find no evidence that they had the same effect in Georgia.

We turn to election meddling in Chapter 5. Like Chapter 4, it begins with descriptive information about this phenomenon and its prevalence and shows there is substantial public concern about it. We further

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demonstrate that across all three countries, individuals who believed foreign actors had a negative influence on elections had lower levels of trust in their elections. But our experiments again offer only limited support for the conventional wisdom. Our treatments priming individuals about election meddling either had no effect on perceptions of election credibility or only had an effect when we were able to reassure them that meddling had *not* occurred.

In summary, Chapters 4 and 5 do not offer a great deal of support for the conventional wisdom. As we discuss in more detail in the conclusion (Chapter 8), the null effects in these chapters not only challenge prior assumptions about foreign actors' effects, they also contribute to the broader movement within the social sciences to recognize how null effects contribute to scientific understanding and progress.

We show in Chapters 6 and 7 that these analyses of the *overall* effects of foreign interventions mask considerable variation. Chapter 6 focuses on how the effects of foreign interventions depend on the identity of the intervener. We show that in Tunisia and the United States, the presence of *capable and unbiased* monitors (not any monitors) increased election credibility. In Georgia, an unusually certain electoral environment, the same was true when we focused only on individuals with significant uncertainty in their beliefs about election credibility. Intriguingly, in Tunisia, the monitors perceived as capable and unbiased were those from the Arab League, while in the United States, international observers were not perceived very warmly unless their positive traits were mentioned.

Most survey respondents did not believe election meddling was likely to affect the results of their country's election. If they did believe meddlers were capable of having such an effect, however, then we observe the predicted negative relationship with election credibility. Moreover, using a hypothetical experiment in which we told people that a foreign actor *successfully* meddled in a future election, we find the expected decrease in election credibility. Overall, Chapter 6 illustrates how dependent the effects of foreign meddling on election credibility are on beliefs about the meddler's capabilities.

Chapter 7 explores how monitors' effects are conditional on individuals' vote choice. We show across our three case studies that winners were much more likely than losers to view an election as credible. The question then in terms of theory is whether winners and losers responded differently to the information we provided about foreign

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electoral interventions. We find that positive information about monitors' presence and complimentary reports did not reassure losers, who were much more receptive to negative information from monitors' critical reports. The evidence can be interpreted as consistent with individuals forming beliefs in both accuracy-driven and directionally-driven ways. Similarly, our meddling experiments never caused election winners to lose trust, although they did have such an effect on election losers. Election losers were also much more likely to believe in the existence of foreign meddling and its success to begin with. Overall, these results are somewhat sobering since democracy depends on the consent of election losers and a commitment among election winners to the rules of the game.

Chapter 8 concludes by considering the implications of the theory and findings for both political behaviors that are important to democracy, including voter turnout, and for scholarship on international relations and democratic backsliding. We discuss how the evidence presented in the book complicates the narratives that scholars and others have developed about how foreign actors shape local trust in elections. Without assessing citizens' psychology, we cannot understand which members of society are the most vulnerable to the influence of foreign actors. This chapter also explores how our theory could be expanded to incorporate the role played by elites and political parties in amplifying or diminishing foreign actors' effects on domestic politics writ large. Finally, we close the book with thoughts on how foreign electoral interventions contribute to polarization – and thus to current threats to democracy – around the world.

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