Why Electoral Integrity Matters

This book is the first in a planned trilogy by Pippa Norris on Challenges of Electoral Integrity to be published by Cambridge University Press. Unfortunately, too often elections around the globe are deeply flawed or even fail. Why does this matter? It is widely suspected that such contests will undermine confidence in elected authorities, damage voting turnout, trigger protests, exacerbate conflict, and occasionally lead to regime change. Well-run elections, by themselves, are insufficient for successful transitions to democracy. But flawed, or even failed, contests are thought to wreck fragile progress. Is there good evidence for these claims? Under what circumstances do failed elections undermine legitimacy? With a global perspective, using new sources of data for mass and elite evidence, this book provides fresh insights into these major issues.

Pippa Norris is the McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and Laureate Fellow and Professor of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney. She directs the Electoral Integrity Project (www.electoralintegrityproject.com). Her work compares democracy and democratization, elections and public opinion, gender politics, and political communications. Recent companion volumes by this award-winning author, also published by Cambridge University Press, include Driving Democracy (2008), Cosmopolitan Communications (2009), Democratic Deficit (2011), and Making Democratic Governance Work (2012). In 2011, she was awarded the Skytte Prize and the Kathleen Fitzpatrick Australian Laureate. In 2014, she was awarded the IPSA 2014 Karl Deutsch Award.
Also from Cambridge University Press by the Author


*A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Democracies*, Pippa Norris (2000) (awarded the 2006 Doris Graber award by APSA's political communications section)


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PIPPA NORRIS

Harvard University and University of Sydney
Contents

List of Figures ........................................ page vii
List of Tables ........................................... ix
Preface and Acknowledgments ...................... xi

PART I  INTRODUCTION
1. Theories Why Electoral Integrity Matters ........ 3
2. The Concept of Electoral Integrity ................. 21
3. Evidence ............................................. 40

PART II  THE PROBLEM OF FLAWED ELECTIONS
4. International Concern about Electoral Malpractices .... 75
5. Public Perceptions of Electoral Integrity ........... 91

PART III  THE CONSEQUENCES OF ELECTORAL INTEGRITY
6. For Legitimacy ....................................... 113
7. For Political Behavior ............................... 133
8. For Conflict and Security ............................ 145
9. For Regimes ........................................... 169

PART IV  CONCLUSIONS
10. Conclusions: Strengthening Electoral Integrity .... 191

Technical Appendix A: Description of Variables and Scale Construction ............... 207
Technical Appendix B: Questions in the Expert Survey of Perceptions of Electoral Integrity .... 213
## Contents

| Technical Appendix C: Electoral Context and Background in the Selected Cases | 215 |
| Notes | 225 |
| Select Bibliography | 267 |
| Index | 289 |
Figures

1.1. The core model of electoral integrity
2.1. The three stages of global norm diffusion
2.2. The electoral cycle
3.1. The congruence of expert evaluations of elections in the early 2000s
3.2. The congruence of expert evaluations of elections and democracy
3.3. The WVS survey items measuring components in the cycle of electoral integrity
4.1. Rising news headlines about electoral fraud, major world publications, 1990–2012
4.2. The growing number of elected national legislatures, 1815–2007
4.3. The growing number of elected national executives, 1815–2007
4.4. Incidence of electoral malpractices
5.1. Public and expert evaluations of electoral integrity
5.2. Correlations of public perceptions of electoral integrity with liberal democracy
5.3. Congruence of public and expert perceptions of electoral integrity
5.4. The importance of honest elections
6.1. Electoral integrity strengthens confidence in elected institutions
6.2. Electoral integrity increases satisfaction with the performance of democracy
6.3. Electoral malpractices decrease voluntary legal compliance
6.4. The winners–losers gap in perceptions of electoral malpractice
7.1. Electoral integrity strengthens voting participation
7.2. Electoral malpractices strengthen protest activism

page 11

27

34

58

59

65

77

79

80

83

101

102

107

109

122

123

124

128

138

139
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Trends in electoral violence, 1945–2010</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>World map of electoral violence</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>The regional distribution of electoral violence</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Electoral malpractices and electoral violence</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Election violence by levels of autocracy and democracy</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Comparing electoral integrity in the United States and the Netherlands</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Comparing electoral integrity in Ukraine and Georgia</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>The menu of policy options strengthening electoral integrity</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>The growing role of the international community in electoral observer missions</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables

2.1. Extract from the UN General Assembly Resolution 63/163 on Democratization and Elections
3.1. Expert Indices Monitoring the Quality of Elections in Cross-National Projects
3.2. Assessing the Strengths and Weaknesses of Alternative Expert Indicators of Electoral Integrity
3.3. Congruence Among the Expert Indices of Electoral Integrity, Cross-National Data
3.4. Congruence Among the Expert Indices of Electoral Integrity, Cross-National Time-Series Data
3.5. Public Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Measured in Cross-National Social Surveys
3.6. Dimensions of Survey Items
3.7. Correlations Among Public Perceptions of Electoral Integrity
4.1. Problems of Electoral Integrity
5.1. Congruence Among Public and Expert Perceptions of Electoral Integrity
5.2. Public Perceptions of Electoral Integrity and Malpractice
5.3. Factors Contributing to Accurate Awareness of Electoral Integrity
6.1. Electoral Integrity Strengthens Political Legitimacy
6.2. Components of Electoral Integrity and System Support
7.1. Electoral Integrity Strengthens Voting Participation
7.2. Electoral Malpractices Strengthen Protest Activism
7.3. Components of Electoral Integrity and Political Activism
8.1. Malpractices Associated with Electoral Violence
Preface and Acknowledgments

This book is the first of a planned trilogy on the challenges of electoral integrity around the world, including why it matters, why electoral integrity fails, and what can be done to address these problems. The study is part of the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP), a six-year research project generously funded by the Australian Research Council’s Laureate Award as well as the support of many other agencies and partners. Work on the project started in June 2012, with the official launch workshop held in Madrid, in conjunction with the International Political Science Association World Congress.

The EIP project is located in the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney. I am deeply indebted to Graeme Gill, Duncan Ivison, Allan McConnell, Michael Spence, and Simon Tormey for facilitating the arrangement and generously hosting the project, as well as to all colleagues in the department. The book would not have been possible without the research team at Sydney, who have played an essential role in stimulating ideas, providing critical feedback and advice, generating related publications, and organizing events, especially developing the Perception of Electoral Integrity (PEI) dataset. I owe an immense debt to Dr. Richard W. Frank, the project manager and research Fellow; Dr. Ferran Martinez I Coma, research Fellow and manager of PEI; and Max Grömping and Sandra Urquiza who helped with research on the project as they pursued their doctoral studies.

My research has also been deeply influenced by discussions with many colleagues at the University of Sydney’s Department of Government and International Relations and at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. As always, this book also owes immense debts to many friends and colleagues. In addition to the award of the Kathleen Fitzpatrick Australian Laureate from the Australian Research Council, the project has been supported by grants from International IDEA, and at Harvard by the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, the Roy and Lila Ash Center for Democratic Governance...
Preface and Acknowledgments

and Innovation, and the Australian Studies Committee. The book also draws heavily on the work of the World Values Survey Association, including the sixth release of the data, and I am particularly grateful to Ronald Inglehart and all members of the Executive Committee who facilitated inclusion of the electoral integrity battery in the sixth wave survey. The book has also been shaped by many students who have taken my Harvard classes over the years, where we discuss challenges of electoral integrity, theories of democratization and measures of the quality of democratic governance, and the most effective policy reforms that address these issues.

The intellectual foundations for this study build on my previous research. Earlier books for Cambridge University Press have compared electoral institutions, voting behavior, political culture, and processes of policy reform, including studies about electoral rules (Electoral Engineering), value change and societal modernization, public support for democratic principles and practices (Critical Citizens, Democratic Deficit), patterns of political engagement and activism (Democratic Phoenix), the distribution of religious and secular values (Sacred and Secular), women’s representation and gender equality (Rising Tide), the impact of political communications and new digital technologies (A Virtuous Circle, Digital Divide, Cosmopolitan Communications), and the design of power-sharing constitutions (Driving Democracy). As the next step, it seems timely and important to turn from analyzing multiple dimensions of elections to addressing some of the potential problems.

This work also arose, as with previous volumes, from experience in directing the work of the democratic governance practice within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which confronted me with the practical challenges of democratic development. I learned a tremendous amount from discussions with UNDP colleagues, and also from collaboration and talks with many other international development agencies on the Electoral Integrity Project, including the Carter Center, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), International IDEA, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organization of American States, the Kofi Annan Commission, Global Integrity, the Sunlight Foundation, the National Democratic Institute, USAID, and the UK Electoral Commission.

Part of the original stimulus for developing the project was my awareness and frustration with a growing disconnect between the standard scholarship on elections and voting behavior, nurtured in the conventional comparative laboratory of Western democracies, and the way the world around us has transformed electoral practices during recent decades. While students of democratization, authoritarian regimes, and comparative politics had picked up on new research themes, which challenges conventional thinking, the subfield of elections and voting behavior was lagging behind developments.

Contemporary headlines around the world have reinforced the importance of understanding the issues considered in this book, not least the unfolding back-and-forth developments of the Arab uprisings. These events, like the
Preface and Acknowledgments

The transformation of postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, were often carried out in the name of promoting democratic elections, although early hopes have been dashed by bloodshed and instability. Elsewhere the outcome of elections that generated street protests in places as diverse as Harare, Moscow, Caracas, Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur reinforced the notion that we need to understand the source of public discontent and what could be done to address these concerns.

I also appreciate all colleagues and friends who provided encouraging comments about this project during its gestation, including Sarah Birch, David Carroll, Ivor Crewe, Larry Diamond, Jorge Dominguez, Jörgen Elklit, David Ellwood, Graeme Gill, Ben Goldsmith, Thad Hall, Carolien Van Ham, Susan Hyde, John Keane, Alex Keyssar, Larry LeDuc, Margaret Levy, Jane Mansbridge, Ian McAllister, Marc Plattner, Lily Rahim, Ben Reilly, Andy Reynolds, Sidney Verba, and Chad Vickery. I received invaluable feedback from presentations of draft chapters and from the comments of discussants at several international workshops and meetings, including the Madrid pre-IPSA Workshop on Electoral Integrity in June 2012, the Harvard Workshop on Challenges of Electoral Integrity at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs in June 2013, the American Political Science Association meeting and workshop in Chicago in 2013, and from faculty seminars every semester at Harvard’s Kennedy School and the University of Sydney’s Department of Government and International Relations annual research retreat. Finally, as always, the support of Cambridge University Press has proved invaluable, particularly the patience, efficient assistance, and continuous enthusiasm of my editor, Lew Bateman, as well as the helpful comments of the reviewers.