

Critical Dialogue

The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence. By Inken von Borzyskowski. Ithaca:

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Not too long ago, scholars treated elections as domestic affairs for the countries holding them. Inken von Borzyskowski's book *The Credibility Challenge* shows just how far we have traveled in barely a decade. It fits alongside works such as Susan Hyde's *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm* (2011), Daniela Donno's *International Actors and the Politics of Electoral Misconduct* (2013), Judith Kelley's *Monitoring Democracy* (2012), and Sarah Bush's *Taming Democracy Assistance* (2015). All of these works assess international involvement in democratization processes in countries, usually centering on elections (though Bush considers democracy assistance more broadly to include help for civil society). What is different and novel about Borzyskowski's work is that it considers the impact of international involvement on elections violence. The book shows the evolution of this field from its early optimism at the promise of international engagement for democratization to a more somber assessment of the darker sides of international entanglement in the affairs of others.

Borzyskowski considers 400 elections in Latin America and Africa after the end of the Cold War. She wants to know how international involvement can lessen election violence. This focus is welcome. These regions are hard places for democracy to grow; in the words of the author, all too often, they provide "rocky soil" for the seedlings of democratic elections. Many of these countries are poor, their voters are mostly uneducated, and local leaders are all too enamored with the perks of unchecked power. And Borzyskowski faces some powerful skeptics. Scholars like Paul Collier have argued that democracy in such "dangerous places" often foments, fails to stop, or even directly facilitates violence and mayhem. Her answer—theoretically referenced as "credible election theory" and empirically substantiated with cross-country regressions, maps, and surveys—is that the international community can make elections less violent by making them more credible.

The theoretical machinery of the book follows standard treatments of elections in democratizing countries. There are an existing government and a (challenging) opposition, which are trying to, respectively, conduct credible elections and decide whether to live with the result. The novel twist is that violence can arise at any point: before, during, or after the election (the book focuses on the before and after stages). These distinctions, seldom made elsewhere, are important and productive.

The main explanatory variables are election observation and technical assistance by international organizations, mostly the UN in the latter case and any major, credible observer outfit in the former case. These actors, the argument plausibly affirms, play an outsized role in Latin America and Africa—particularly in Africa, where poverty and low capacity open a large space for intervention to have an effect.

Borzyskowski argues that technical assistance strengthens the central electoral commission, which can then produce and enforce stronger rules of the game. It also accomplishes sundry tasks such as propagating information about how to resolve grievances. This tends to reduce the attractiveness of resorting to violence both before and after elections. Election observers help collect information and help hold perpetrators of violence accountable before the elections. Although this intervention tends to reduce violence, violence may increase post-election in the wake of a credible election observer verdict of fraud.

An important strength of the book is that it specifies the who, how, when, and why of election violence. The author also develops her own measure: the number of people killed. The book is careful to note who commits violence and to what end, and it provides a very detailed cross-country empirical view of the phenomenon. Another strength is its careful attention to econometric modeling, selection effects, and causal inference. Nonrandom selection of democracy aid to recipients is, of course, the norm, not the exception and must be contended with. The book does its best to control for factors that explain both violence and aid allocation. At the end of the day, the author argues compellingly that any remaining biases work against the arguments she makes; for example, assistance goes to the places most likely to experience violence, which makes finding violence-reducing effects there very difficult. The empirical portions of the book rely primarily on

cross-national election-level data. The book also draws on informative surveys in specific countries, with some of the surveys conducted by the author. In addition, Borzyskowski offers a number of short, well-chosen, and well-researched country studies to support her theory.

The evidence indicates that international involvement significantly reduces the number of people killed in election-related events, except for the case of election observers and post-election violence, where negative verdicts cause spikes in violence. Furthermore, the author makes an effort to trace the causal mechanisms behind these claims by showing, for example, that voters tend to trust observed elections and that technical assistance works by increasing central election capacity.

The book is eminently readable, with clear writing, graphs that are clean and effective, and results tables that are just right in number. The book's organization is conventional. There are six chapters, with an introduction laying out the problem, a conclusion with policy recommendations, and four core chapters with the theory, data-collection strategy, and examinations of the pre- versus post-election periods and observation versus technical assistance.

This book will change the conversation. After its publication, scholars studying election violence will have a much richer set of theoretical and empirical propositions to consider. For example, do threats of sanctions deter governments from cracking down on rioting oppositions after stolen elections? What is the relative importance of sporadic or spontaneous violence versus that led and organized by political elites? Does geographic concentration and duration matter? The contribution this book makes is to enable us to ask even more of the questions that matter, in one of the fastest-growing academic literatures.

A strength of the book is that it aims to go beyond simple cross-country regressions and crude measures by demonstrating elements of the causal chain posited to be at work. For example, chapter 4 on technical assistance presents survey evidence from Kenya and Liberia, showing that more technical assistance increases trust in the election commission and reduces respondents' propensity to riot. One wishes we had more of this analysis to supplement the insights coming from an adequately constructed, original, but also somewhat zoomed-out dataset at the election-country level.

It would also have been interesting to take on, more directly and more fundamentally, the objections against spreading democracy to poor and often violent places. This is an influential argument, alleging many nefarious consequences such as disorder, civil war, and corruption. True, challenging that claim is not the goal of the book. Elections do not *need* to turn out violent, would be the retort to some of the objections made by Collier and others. Still, it is interesting to think about whether election violence is as different from other violence as

the book asserts. Perhaps violence is such an entrenched aspect of some countries' politics that its occurrence around elections is a foregone conclusion and something not driven by international involvement.

Some open questions that this book seems to raise but not necessarily answer include the following. Why focus on these specific forms of election intervention? Is it really the case that technical assistance and election observation are the two principal ways through which the international community affects election violence? Is violence really strategically orchestrated, and what part of it may be simply rioting? The emphasis on the United Nations as an actor and on other international organizations (IOs) leaves another question open: What about state actors? Often, the United States and other powerful actors put pressure on governments to get their act together or else provide succor to local tyrants. How does the framework account for that, and how would the results change if we looked beyond IOs?

We have started to understand that foreigners have agendas that are not limited to providing free and fair elections. Lauren Pranter and Sarah Sunn Bush, in ongoing work, are showing how people perceive foreign promoters of democracy as biased and may push back against attempts to intervene. Does a similar logic not operate when it comes to election violence? Why and how states accept the help they are given and whether aid's effects have institutional staying power would have been illuminating extensions of the argument. Finally, the rise of China has affected Africa. Yet, China and foreign power competition, more generally, do not feature prominently in this book.

The Soviet daily *Pravda* opined notoriously, on the eve of Finland's first post-World War II election that elections are not to be considered sovereign affairs of the countries holding them. This book helps us understand that foreigners may affect election violence. In so doing, it contributes and moves forward an important debate. Pretending that international involvement has only salutary effects is no longer plausible. Borzyskowski shows us that there is a dark side—and offers concrete strategies for how to avoid or minimize it. The book will be of interest to scholars of democracy, area studies, and international relations. It will also interest practitioners, including the leaders of important international organizations such as the United Nations and other important international players.

Response to Nikolay Marinov's Review of *The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence*

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— Inken von Borzyskowski 

I am grateful to Nikolay Marinov for his thoughtful and insightful review, which provides an excellent summary of

my book's contributions and includes several interesting and important questions for future research. In this response, I address two questions Marinov raises about other interventions and state actors, and I offer two promising avenues for future work on aid effectiveness and subnational approaches.

First, why focus on observation and technical assistance? These are the two primary types of international election support (Thomas Carothers, "Elections and Democracy Support," GSDRC 2015, 20–21), with about 60% of elections in Africa and Latin America observed and about 30% percent receiving technical assistance. I agree that many other policy interventions also take place around election times, potentially influencing election credibility and violence. In other work, I have examined seven of these interventions, including police training and youth programs (Jonas Claes and Inken von Borzyskowski, "What Works in Preventing Election Violence: Evidence from Liberia and Kenya," 2018). Additionally, Birch and Muchlinski examine capacity building and attitude-changing programs, while Pokharel provides insights on diplomacy (Sarah Birch and David Muchlinski, "Electoral Violence Prevention: What Works?" *Democratization* 25, 2017; Bhojraj Pokharel, *Preventing Election Violence through Diplomacy*, 2019). As Marinov suggests, examining other types of election intervention, such as whether or how (threats of) sanctions or pro-autocracy aid influence election violence, is an interesting avenue for future research.

Second, what about state actors? How does the provision of foreign aid by states influence election violence, and when do states accept the help they are given? Marinov rightly points out that states also provide election aid directly; exploring the extent, forms, and effects of such direct state aid on election violence would be a great complement to my book and a valuable addition to this research field. We should note, however, that many states channel election support through IOs. For example, the United States channels much of it through NGOs such as the National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, and International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Similarly, US embassies in host countries support programming implemented through international and local NGOs. Although states fund some democracy- and elections-supporting programs directly, they also usually make budget contributions to IOs such as the UN, EU, OSCE, OAS, and AU, which then facilitate such programs on the ground. On the receiving end, I have examined the demand and supply of election assistance in a previous article (Inken von Borzyskowski, "Resisting Democracy Assistance: Who Seeks and Receives Technical Election Assistance?" *Review of International Organizations* 11, 2016). The book builds on these earlier insights to better account for selection dynamics underlying aid provision (pp. 67–68, 79–87).

Additionally, Marinov raises an important question for future work with regard to whether aid effects have institutional staying power. Ideally, technical assistance will render itself obsolete, but only if this support builds institutional capacity, rather than simply filling short-term gaps. Assessing the cumulative or long-term effectiveness of election aid over several electoral cycles is a promising avenue for future work.

Finally, I support Marinov's call for more subnational research. My fieldwork in Liberia and Kenya has shaped my thinking about external election support and local efforts in election management to mitigate violence. Subnational work can advance our understanding of election management, the geography of election violence, how it sometimes intersects with other forms of political violence, how often it may be spontaneous rather than strategic, and the many other open questions in this growing research field (Sarah Birch, Ursula Daxecker, and Kristine Höglund, "Electoral Violence: An Introduction," *Journal of Peace Research* 57, 2020).

Rules and Allies: Foreign Election Interventions. By Johannes Bubeck and Nikolay Marinov. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. 290p. \$99.99 cloth.
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Rules and Allies: Foreign Election Interventions could not be timelier. Policy debates on foreign actions in national elections continue, from current congressional investigations about the US president's request for foreign interference in the 2020 election to Russian meddling in elections in the United States in 2016 and in Madagascar in 2019. Such examples raise pertinent questions about how, when, and which governments choose to influence other countries' elections and what effects that interference has. In their new book, Johannes Bubeck and Nikolay Marinov shed light on these important questions. Using formal models, case studies, and quantitative analyses of an impressive new dataset, they provide valuable insights for scholars and practitioners alike. The book is organized into seven chapters—literature review and theory (chaps. 2–3), data coding and patterns (chaps. 4–5), interventions by the United States (chap. 6), and extensions of the formal model to consider budgets, coups, and buying allies (chaps. 7–8)—plus an introduction and conclusion.

Bubeck and Marinov define foreign election interventions as preelection "deliberate attempt[s] by a foreign government to change the electoral rules or the election outcome" (p. 45). Conceptually, they distinguish between two types of election interventions: process and candidate. Process interventions are intended to influence *how* the election is run. Such international election support

includes election observation (Susan Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm*, 2011), technical capacity assistance (Inken von Borzyskowski, "Resisting Democracy Assistance: Who Seeks and Receives Technical Election Assistance?" *Review of International Organizations* 11 [2], 2016), and other efforts to level the playing field and support a fair vote—or anti-process actions such as international support for gerrymandering, election violence, and (post-vote) international endorsements of clearly fraudulent processes (p. 80). In contrast to process interventions, candidate interventions are intended to influence *who* runs or is supported. Such partisan interventions are in favor of a particular candidate/party and can take the form of mobilization (support for a campaign or aid promises conditional on a certain candidate's victory) or intimidation (threats of sanction or military invasion; pp. 89–90).

Partisan interventions have been documented for great powers (Dov Levin, "When the Great Power Gets a Vote: The Effects of Great Power Electoral Interventions on Election Results," *International Studies Quarterly* 60 [2], 2016). *Rules and Allies* broadens the range of potential interveners and provides explanations for when one type of intervention is used over the other, when they are used in combination, and what effects we should expect them to have. In doing so, the book connects to a wealth of research on democracy assistance (Jon Pevehouse, *Democracy from Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization*, 2005; Daniela Donno, *Defending Democratic Norms: International Actors and the Politics of Electoral Misconduct*, 2013), buying allies (James Vreeland and Axel Dreher, *The Political Economy of the United Nations Security Council: Money and Influence*, 2014), and foreign-imposed regime change (Alexander Downes and Jonathan Monten, "Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization," *International Security* 37 [4], 2013).

Bubeck and Marinov argue—and show empirically—that foreign powers are more likely to pick sides in an election as the policy positions of competing parties in the target country diverge ("polarization") on a dimension of interest to the foreign power. Given divergence, a foreign power has incentives to support the candidate/party more aligned with it. For example, an outside power favoring the government candidate has incentives for partisan intervention on behalf of the government candidate. An outside power favoring the opposition has incentives to support the opposition candidate (allies) or the election process (rules), because improved election quality means less bias (incumbency advantage) and a more level playing field, which also help the opposition's chances of winning. Outside powers often combine candidate and process interventions for higher impact. In addition to party polarization, other factors driving a potential intervener's decision to meddle in foreign elections include the

outsider's preference for liberalism/democracy promotion, the target country's geopolitical importance, historical ties between target and sender, and whether other interveners are likely to act (hegemony or war context). Finally, the authors argue that election interventions are consequential: they can change both election outcomes (who wins) and processes (election quality).

The empirical tests of these predictions are powered by a rich new dataset that provides information on potential interveners, the type and nature of election interference (pro/anti-process, pro/anti-candidate), and a measure of party polarization in the target country. Bubeck and Marinov manage the data-gathering effort with a clever research strategy: from all elections worldwide from 1945 to 2012 that were minimally competitive (based on Nelda data), they take a stratified random sample so that each country can be included once during and after the Cold War. This results in a sample of 262 national elections in 157 countries (about 10% of all elections). This strategy makes data collection feasible and the results generalizable. For each election, the authors identify potential interveners: global and regional powers, neighbors, former colonizers, those with oil interests, military bases, and ethnic diasporas, as well as international organizations. The coding decisions are meticulously documented in an expansive online appendix that links the relevant quotes from news sources to variable coding to maximize transparency and replicability. The authors set a new standard for documenting datasets of this kind.

Rules and Allies also provides many novel empirical insights. For example, foreign election intervention is widespread: of the 262 sampled elections, two-thirds had some form of election intervention: 52% had process interventions, 33% had candidate interventions, and 20% had both. Moreover, the United States is the most frequent intervener in both process and candidate interventions: "American presence is larger than the footprint of others by a large factor" (p. 119–20). Other common interveners regarding candidates are China, France, and the EU (p. 119); regarding process they are international organizations (the African Union and the EU), the United Kingdom, and France. Although the United States' role in *process* interventions especially after 1990 may reflect increased commitment to liberalism and democracy promotion, its leading role in *candidate* interventions is noteworthy, because Western media usually note meddling by Russia.

The book makes several groundbreaking contributions and provides promising avenues for future research. One aspect that is worth noting is the measurement of process intervention, which seems to include a judgment on its effectiveness (p. 79). This implies that the coding is (at least partially) focused on outcomes, rather than presence or intent. In contrast, candidate interventions

are coded based on intent (p. 89), and they capture whether the intervention happened or was designed to influence the outcome, regardless of its ultimate effectiveness. However, the outcome-focused coding of process intervention could impair our ability to examine whether such interventions matter, because effectiveness appears on both sides of the equation. It could also mean that a coding of 0 conflates two situations: that no process intervention happened or that the process intervention had no effect. That said, most example cases of process intervention mentioned in the book seem to be coded based on intent, so perhaps this is simply a discrepancy in the coding description that the authors may wish to clarify for future users.

A promising avenue for future work is assessing the effectiveness of election interventions. The book's empirical tests are focused on establishing bivariate correlations between the key variables of interest. This is a necessary and important first cut; perhaps it is all that can be achieved in an already very ambitious book that presents a formal model to generate new theory, introduces a new dataset, and conducts empirical tests on drivers, effects, and extensions. Future work should expand on these tests by adding control variables to account for context and alternative explanations to deepen our knowledge of the drivers and consequences of interventions. For example, whereas the argument that polarization drives intervention is intuitive and persuasive, candidate popularity probably also plays a role. Even if polarization is high, actual intervention likely also depends on whether that ally is likely to win anyway, faces a tight election, or is unlikely to emerge victorious regardless of foreign intervention. Outsiders may also support the winning horse to secure economic profits in the target country, regardless of polarization (Michael Schwartz and Gaelle Borgia, "How Russia Meddles Abroad for Profit: Cash, Trolls and a Cult Leader," *New York Times*, November 11, 2019). For intervention consequences, future research could further examine effectiveness. Accounting for context and selection, does intervention "work" in achieving its intended goals, and under which conditions is that more likely? Which types and subtypes of intervention are more effective? When do election wars lead to intra- or interstate violence?

By providing the necessary data and a theory of intervention, Bubeck and Marinov have put researchers in an excellent position to pursue these and many other interesting questions of great policy relevance. The central theoretical contributions of this impressive book—drawing attention to partisan meddling, the trade-offs between partisan and process interventions, and election wars—may well become more important in the years to come, with disinformation campaigns being waged by both existing and rising powers. *Rules and Allies* is thus also highly

recommended for scholars and practitioners interested in foreign affairs, diplomacy, security studies, and political communication.

Response to Inken von Borzyskowski's Review of *Rules and Allies: Foreign Election Interventions*

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— Nikolay Marinov

We thank Inken von Borzyskowski for positioning our book in the literature in an incisive and meticulous way: this is a great service to its potential audience. We also appreciate the broadening of the conversation to regime change and vote buying at the UN, among other topics. This helps us see potential synergies and cross-pollinations. One interesting idea, arising from the present exchange, for example, would be to combine the study of post-election violence, the forte of Borzyskowski's book, with information drawn from our book on the partisan activities of foreign powers, to see whether and how partisan activities influence violence on the ground and whether international organizations play a moderating role.

We would like to add some context to Borzyskowski's review of prior scholarship on partisan interventions. This scholarship started with two works using public opinion data, derived from two country cases riven by partisan divisions and beset by all-too-interested outsiders: Ukraine and Lebanon (Stephen Shulman and Stephen Bloom, "The Legitimacy of Foreign Intervention in Elections: The Ukrainian Response," *Review of International Studies* 38, 2012; Daniel Corstange and Nikolay Marinov, "Taking Sides in Other People's Elections: The Polarizing Effect of Foreign Intervention," *American Journal of Political Science* 53, 2012). These works probed voter responses in each of the two states experiencing interventions. Dov Levin's work on partisan interventions (cited by Borzyskowski) added for the first time the element of large-N data analysis, offering regression results on the effects of great power support on the electoral fortunes of candidates. With the infamous Russian intervention in the US elections, the question of voter responses to interventions is back in the limelight: Michael Tomz and Jessica Weeks show that Americans, like the Lebanese and Ukrainians, are divided along party lines on what to think about foreign meddling ("Public Opinion and Foreign Electoral Intervention," forthcoming in the *American Political Science Review*). Thus, the future conversation is likely to oscillate between its inception in public opinion case-study data (often featuring survey experiments) and observational analyses of large-N cross-country outcomes such as margin of victory.

We thank Inken von Borzyskowski for a very careful reading and accurate restatement of our argument. We are

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also grateful for the painstaking consideration of our coding rules. The review alerted us to an important miscommunication. On p. 79, we write that the process variable “identifies whether the intervention of foreign powers enhanced, weakened, or had no observable effect on the electoral process.” We now see that this does not read as we meant it to. It should state that the process variable “identifies whether the intervention of foreign powers sought to enhance or weaken the democratic rules of the game.” The reviewer is correct that conflating outcomes with intentions is problematic. We trust that other readers (like the reviewer) will glean from our case studies that we sought to capture the foreign intent to change the rules, rather than its effects. Indeed, our goal was to provide a novel dataset of intent to make a difference (via some identifiable action), which would then help us and others further study whether interventions, in fact, had the intended effects.

Borzyskowski also points out that our large-N analysis is somewhat skeletal and does not have potentially relevant information on how candidates are polling and other covariates. We agree that such information would be highly desirable. Part of the difficulty is obtaining and adding good data on such background variables in our representative—but relatively limited in size—sample. Perhaps the time has come for the community of scholars studying elections to team up and collect systematic information on international activities surrounding elections. This would broaden our sample and add exciting new variables. It might also help us begin the study of novel forms of interventions such as spreading propaganda, including via social media, as suggested by the reviewer. We dare to hope that such collaborations by a number of the scholars cited in or part of this exchange will come about to push forward the exciting field that books like the one by von Borzyskowski are helping create.