



Inken von Borzyskowski. 2019. *The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press)

Kerim Can Kavakli¹ 

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How international actors can bolster democracy in other countries is a core question of political science. An important part of the challenge is to ensure that elections are not only free and fair, but peaceful as well. Von Borzyskowski's *The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence* makes a major contribution to the literatures on election violence, and more broadly, international determinants of democratization. Similar to books by Hyde (2011) and Kelley (2012), it provides a broad theoretical framework and a novel cross-national dataset on which to test it. This important and well-written book will appeal to researchers and policy-makers who want to understand how outsiders can help countries democratize peacefully.

The book has a conventional organization. Chapter 1 presents von Borzyskowski's "Credible Election Theory." Its chief strengths are (i) explaining how the causes of violence in the pre- and post-election periods are different, and (ii) highlighting an often-neglected form of international support: technical assistance. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 use statistical analysis and illustrative case studies to provide evidence supporting von Borzyskowski's hypotheses. Remarkably, von Borzyskowski has compiled a novel dataset of election violence ("Global Election Violence Dataset," GEVD) for this analysis. It covers 1400 national elections and referenda from 1990 to 2015 and contains information on the intensity of violence at different stages of the election cycle. The final chapter concludes.

Von Borzyskowski's theory assumes that domestic political actors use violence to improve their chances of winning office. It offers different mechanisms as the drivers of violence in the pre- and post-election periods. In the pre-election period, candidates may use violence in order to raise their vote share. For instance, the incumbent may attack opposition supporters to deter them from voting. In contrast, after the election, violence is a result of the losers' belief that their official vote share significantly understates their real support among the population. These beliefs may be due to

✉ Kerim Can Kavakli
kerim.kavakli@unibocconi.it

¹ Bocconi University, Via Roberto Sarfatti, 25, 20100 Milan, MI, Italy

suspicions of fraud or incompetent management by election officials. Regardless, when official results are not credible the losing camp is more likely to challenge the outcome and tensions may escalate to violence.

Von Borzyskowski then discusses how two forms of international support, election monitoring and technical assistance, can mitigate or strengthen these drivers of violence. International election monitors travel around a country during the campaign period, observe how votes are cast and counted, and afterwards announce whether the election quality was acceptable or not. Technical assistance enhances domestic election commissions' capacity to conduct elections and reduce real and perceived levels of fraud. Although previous research has mostly focused on election monitoring, von Borzyskowski makes a strong case that technical assistance (which she calls "the neglected stepchild of international election aid," page 2) is common and important. In the last three decades the international community has provided technical assistance to 30% of elections in developing countries (page 3). This form of aid usually begins months before an election and includes assistance with a wide range of logistical and technical matters. For instance, the book has a very interesting section on the 1991 elections in Guyana, where international organizations provided computers, software, vehicles and technical personnel for the election commission, and even paid the monthly rent for its building (page 137). Clearly, without this assistance, elections would be much more chaotic and less credible to Guyanese voters.

Von Borzyskowski hypothesizes that technical assistance should reduce violence in both the pre- and post-election periods. Before the election, technical assistance can help defuse tensions by making preparations smoother and better coordinating with security forces. After the election, it can help the election commission count votes and announce the results more quickly and transparently. A more transparent and less chaotic process will lend credibility to the outcome and dissuade the losers from challenging it.

The theoretical effect of election monitoring on violence is more complicated. In the pre-election period, the presence of "reputable" monitors (those expected to report irregularities honestly) can lower violence by raising the probability that perpetrators will be reported and punished. In the post-election period, however, monitors' actions can result in *more* violence. If monitors denounce the election outcome, their verdict can encourage the losing side to protest. In other words, monitors face a trade-off between electoral fraud and violence.

Chapter 2 analyzes violence in the pre-election period and presents evidence that both types of international election aid are associated with lower levels of pre-election violence. Although the new dataset (GEVD) is global, the book uses observations from only Africa and Latin America. As von Borzyskowski explains, these two regions have been the focus of international election aid and also experienced high levels of election violence. Nevertheless, the book would benefit from a discussion of how much the results generalize to other regions. When using observational data the main challenge to inference is endogeneity: international actors may seem effective in quelling violence because they intentionally avoid elections prone to violence. Von Borzyskowski considers this possibility and uses a combination of statistical analysis and case studies that persuade the reader that the conflict-mitigating effects are causal.

Chapters 3 and 4 analyze the relationship between post-election violence and election monitoring and technical assistance, respectively. Analyses in chapter 3

confirm that election monitoring can under certain conditions increase violence: elections condemned by international monitors experience more violence than elections that are endorsed by the monitors. Chapter 4 tests whether elections that receive technical assistance experience less post-election violence. This hypothesis also finds support in the data. To sum, von Borzyskowski presents plenty of qualitative and quantitative evidence for her predictions that whereas technical assistance mitigates violence throughout an election cycle, the effect of monitoring varies by the stage.

Arguably, the book's biggest contribution is highlighting the potential of technical assistance for mitigating election violence. Until now scholars have paid little attention to technical assistance, but this book will be the starting point for future work seeking to correct this omission. In addition, the new dataset on election violence should be a treasure trove for researchers who are looking for highly disaggregated data to test their own theories.

The book opens several avenues for research. One, von Borzyskowski demonstrates empirically that international election support can lower the risk of violence *on average*, but her theory implies that different types of foreign assistance should matter more in different types of countries. For example, technical assistance should be more effective in poorer countries like Guyana where politicians want to run clean elections, but they lack the necessary capacity. In contrast, election monitoring may be more effective in non-democracies where the main obstacle is politicians' willingness to commit fraud. Future work that seeks to understand what kinds of countries benefit from each type of foreign assistance will be valuable. They may reveal that foreign assistance is, under the right conditions, even *more effective* than von Borzyskowski claims.

A second question is whether the effects of technical assistance are limited to a single election. Von Borzyskowski implicitly makes this assumption by coding this variable only for the current election. However, certain facets of election support such as foreign-funded hardware and training for the bureaucrats can be used in subsequent elections as well. Although the benefits of technical assistance may decay over time, they are perhaps more durable than we recognize. Addressing these issues can help policy-makers use their resources more effectively.

A third avenue is to take a closer look at monitor reputation. Von Borzyskowski assumes that monitors from Western democratic states are considered reputable, which is fine for the purposes of this book. However, recent research shows that this is a problematic assumption. Kavakli and Kuhn ([forthcoming](#)) find that highly-regarded Western organizations tend to overlook fraud when the opposition includes groups that are deemed dangerous by Western countries. Likewise, Bush and Prather (2018) show that Tunisians find monitors from the US and the EU as more biased and less credible than other monitors. If voters are well-informed about monitor bias, then we should study how monitors build credibility. One interesting possibility is that monitors' declarations in the pre-election period affect their reputation, and therefore, the credibility of their post-election verdict.

To conclude, *The Credibility Challenge* is an important book that presents a sophisticated picture of how international election support affects the likelihood of violence. It should be read by researchers and practitioners who are interested in democracy promotion and the role outsiders play in it.

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