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When Do Governments Resort to Election Violence?

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Abstract: When are governments most likely to use election violence, and what factors can mitigate government incentives to resort to violence? How do the dynamics of election violence differ in the pre- and post-election periods? Our central argument is that an incumbent's fear of losing power as the result of an election, as well as institutionalized constraints on the incumbent's decision-making powers, are pivotal in her decision to use election violence. While it may seem obvious to suggest that incumbents use election violence in an effort to fend off threats to their power, it is not obvious how to gauge these threats, and a central purpose of our research is to identify sources of information about the incumbent's popularity that can help predict the likelihood of election violence. The observable implications of our argument are tested using newly available cross-national evidence on elections, government use of pre- and post-election violence, and post-election protests from 1981 to 2004.

When Do Governments Resort to Election Violence?¹

On paper, Azerbaijan is a multiparty democracy, and has held periodic multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections since the country regained independence in 1991. Despite the nominal existence of democratic institutions, tactics of electoral manipulation used by the government include overt election fraud, violence, and intimidation. Opposition supporters, opposition candidates, and journalists risk torture, arbitrary arrest, and political imprisonment—all strategies the government uses to “win” elections.² For example, in the run up to the 2005 parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, facing the possibility that the “colour revolutions” of Georgia and Ukraine would spread, the government arrested journalists and attempted to prevent the opposition from campaigning. The police detained over a thousand activists before the election, and jailed hundreds without cause.³ After the election, amid accusations of fraud, the government announced that the ruling party won an overwhelming majority,

¹ Support for this research was provided by the Laboratory on International Law and Regulation at the University of California, San Diego, the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, and the MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale University. Replication data and Online Appendix are available at http://_____. For helpful comments, we would like to thank participants at workshops at UCSD, George Washington University, Yale University, and panel participants at the 2010 ISA annual meeting, as well as Jason Brownlee, Sarah Bush, Gary Cox, David Cingranelli, Daniela Donno, Christian Davenport, Thad Dunning,, Christopher Fariss, Tom Flores, David Lake, Ellen Lust, Irfan Nooruddin, Philip Roeder, Ken Scheve, and Susan Stokes. We also thank Sarah Knoesen and Michael Plouffe for valuable research assistance. Any errors or omissions are our own.

² U.S. Department of State 2006a.

³ Osborn 2005.

with the next largest opposition coalition winning only eight parliamentary seats. Reputable international observers, who documented fraud in more than 43 per cent of observed precincts, condemned the elections.⁴ Opposition supporters began to protest the results, assembling more than 7,000 people. Riot police and military forces disbursed the protesters using clubs and water cannons, and several opposition politicians were beaten.⁵ In the end, despite international and domestic backlash, the incumbent remained in power.⁶

Government-sponsored election violence—events in which incumbent leaders and ruling party agents employ or threaten violence against the political opposition or potential voters before, during, or after elections—is common. Figure 1 depicts the yearly number of elections in our sample characterized by pre- or post-election violence from 1960 to 2010. The prevalence of election violence raises several questions: When are governments likely to use election violence? And perhaps more importantly, what can mitigate the incentives to use violence?

Although political violence occurs in many forms, this article focuses on the use of election violence by incumbent governments. Governments are the most common—and often the most brutal—perpetrators of election violence.⁷ Using cross-national data on elections and state-sponsored election violence

⁴ OSCE/ODIHR 2006.

⁵ U.S. Department of State 2006a.

⁶ Valiyev 2006.

⁷ Although there are other perpetrators of election violence, they are not the focus of this article.

And, at least in Sub-Saharan Africa, the vast majority of election violence is perpetrated by the incumbent Straus and Taylor 2012.

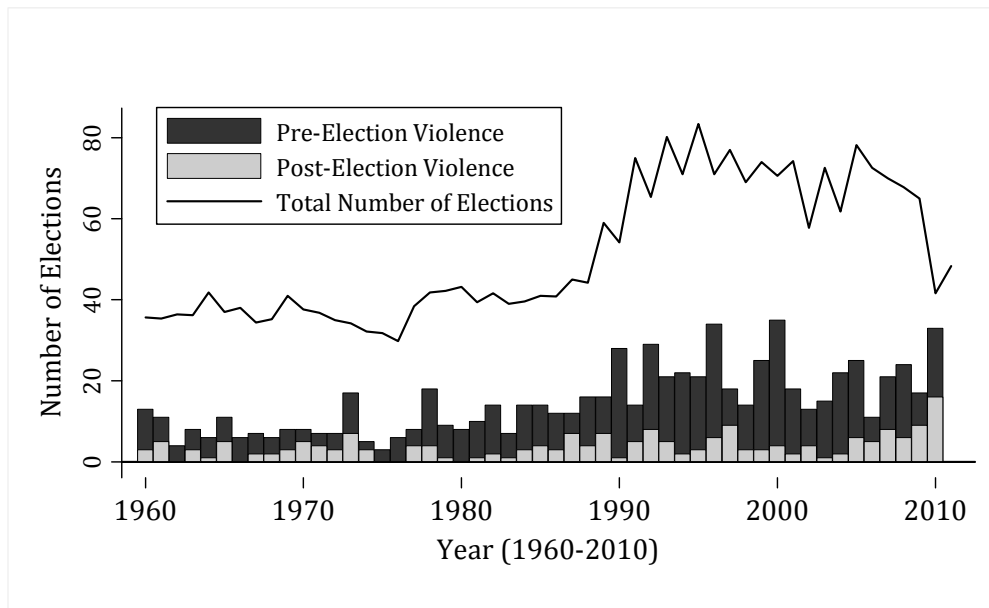
(including threats of violence such as harassment), we present and test a theory of when an incumbent government is likely to use election violence prior to or after an election. Our central argument is that an incumbent's fear of losing power as the result of an election, as well as institutionalized constraints on the incumbent's decision-making powers, are pivotal in her decision to use election violence. While it may seem obvious to suggest that incumbents use election violence in an effort to fend off threats to their power, it is not obvious how to gauge these threats, and a central purpose of our research is to identify sources of information about the incumbent's popularity that can help predict the likelihood of election violence. Our argument applies to government-sponsored violence in both the pre- and post-election periods, although the election-related threats to an incumbent's hold on power are different before and after the election.

In the pre-election period (leading up to and including election day), incumbent governments may use violence in an effort to prevent an electoral outcome that is unfavourable to the ruling political party or incumbent candidate. Pre-election violence can alter the election results in the incumbent's favour by reducing her electoral competition. More specifically, violence can provoke the political opposition to boycott the election and/or influence voter turnout in the incumbent's favour, both of which increase the probability that the incumbent stays in power.⁸ Thus, a government has the incentive to use pre-election violence when the incumbent candidate or party believes the election outcome could be unfavourable. However, fear of losing power is not sufficient to

⁸ These results have been demonstrated in Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2011.

provoke the incumbent to use violence. Even when she has reason to believe that an election threatens her survival in office, institutionalized constraints on the incumbent’s decision-making powers make violent election strategies hard to implement and risky; they increase the odds that she will be constrained by accountability groups such as the legislature, ruling party, military or courts. Thus, when the incumbent is uncertain about her victory, institutionalized constraints on her decision making power mitigate her incentives and opportunities to use pre-election violence.

Figure 1: Election Violence Over Time



Note: Figure is based upon data from the National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy dataset.⁹ Pre-election violence is a count of all elections in which the government harassed the opposition or used violence against civilians. Post-election violence is a count of all elections in which the government used violence against protestors following the election.

In the pre-election period the central threat to the incumbent is losing the

⁹ Hyde and Marinov 2012.

election.¹⁰ In the post-election period, however, a central threat to the incumbent—who has survived the election or refuses to step down—is mass protest against the election process or results.¹¹ Although post-election protests are relatively rare, the incumbent’s decision to use pre-election violence (and other fraudulent strategies) to stay in power amplifies the risk of public demonstrations against the handling or outcome of the election if the incumbent wins. Protests can be a threat to the incumbent even after the election because they indicate that citizens have solved a collective action problem to mobilize against their government.¹² They also increase the probability that the incumbent will be forced to hold new elections or step down.¹³ Protests thus provide incentives and opportunities for incumbents that remain in power after an election to use violence against protesters—in other words, protests can

¹⁰ In addition to outright losing the election vote, there are a number of other electoral outcomes that the incumbent may view as a threat to her power. For example, in electoral authoritarian regimes, election results that do not yield a sufficiently large margin of victory can be a devastating blow to the incumbent’s authority. Additionally, an incumbent president can be made to look weak and thereby threatened by the results of a legislative election that does not match their stated expectations, or by lower-than-expected performance in a subset of the country, even if they do not risk losing an executive election. See, for example, Magaloni 2006a; Simpser 2012.

¹¹ Other threats to the incumbent include *coup d’état* or foreign intervention. We focus on post-election protests, which are much more common threats.

¹² Bunce and Wolchik 2006; Tucker 2007.

¹³ See Figure 2 for trends in post-election protests and how often they lead to the incumbent stepping down or calling for new elections. For examples, see Bunce and Wolchik 2006; Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Tucker 2007.

create a link between the incumbent's use of violence in the pre-election period and violence in the post-election period. However, institutionalized constraints on the incumbent's decision-making power also factor into her decision to use violence against protestors. Facing post-election protests that could force her out of power even after surviving the election, an incumbent without strong institutionalized constraints on her rule is more likely to use violence against post-election protestors.

In the remainder of the article, we briefly summarize how our central argument builds on existing research across several distinct research agendas, outline our theory and its observable implications in greater detail, provide examples, introduce our statistical strategy, and present the findings.

DEMOCRACY, ELECTIONS, AND REPRESSION

Scholars of comparative politics generally agree that holding elections does not mean that a country is democratic.¹⁴ In fact, less than half of the governments that now hold direct elections for national office do so within a context of consolidated democratic political institutions and respect for human rights.¹⁵ Yet there is little debate that elections, like protections for human rights, are necessary for democratic governance.¹⁶

The relationship between democracy and protection for human rights is enshrined in numerous international agreements, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Countries including the United States and most

¹⁴ Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2010; Levitsky and Way 2002; Mainwaring, Brinks, and Perez-Linan 2001; Schedler 2002a; Zakaria 1997.

¹⁵ Authors' calculation.

¹⁶ Dahl 1971; Huntington 1991; Riker 1965.

European states promote democracy globally in part because of the idea that full protections for human rights require democratic government: democracy increases liberty, freedom and security for citizens. Evidence shows that stable liberal democracies are much more likely than other types of governments to respect human rights,¹⁷ although political transitions often include high levels of coercion and democratizing governments do not always respect human rights.¹⁸

Yet, as elections have spread to nearly every country in the world, so have complaints about the role of violence in democratization and the use of violence as an electoral tool. Scholars have argued that elections increase political polarization and potentially increase human rights abuses in countries without well-developed respect for the rule of law, and that even politicians in democracies can have strong incentives to use violent electoral tactics.¹⁹ By contrast, others have argued that elections in illiberal states eventually bring about broader political participation, civic engagement, and political accountability, all of which will improve respect for human rights over time.²⁰

Cross-national statistical studies of repression and elections are abundant, but existing data has hampered efforts to distinguish between

¹⁷ Henderson 1991; Howard and Donnelly 1986; Poe and Tate 1994; Zanger 2000.

¹⁸ Collier 2009; Davenport 2007; Snyder 2000.

¹⁹ Zakaria 1997.; Collier 2009; Collier and Vicente 2012; Robinson and Torvik 2009.

²⁰ Lewis-Beck 1990; Lindberg 2006a; Lipset 1983; Seligson and Booth 1995; Sisk 1995. A related literature explores the role that elections play in bringing about political liberalization: Howard and Roessler 2006; Lindberg 2006a; Lindberg 2009; Roessler and Howard 2009.; and how parties have used voter-initiated ethnic riots as an electoral manipulation tactic (Wilkinson 2006.)

elections in which incumbents use violence from those that do not—leading to contradictory findings.²¹ In addition, existing work has largely focused on explaining when human rights abuses increase during election years, rather than explaining variation in the use of various forms of election violence between elections and during different phases of the election process.

For example, in his path breaking study of 49 countries from 1948 to 1982, Christian Davenport found that authoritarian governments were statistically more likely to reduce censorship and political restrictions during national election years, perhaps in an effort to legitimize the regime by giving citizens access to political leaders. He found no relationship between elections and political repression in transitional or democratic countries.²² In a follow on study, he found that governments also tend to reduce media restrictions during election years, perhaps as a way to institutionalize dissent.²³ David Richards, however, in a study of elections in 74 countries (including some autocracies) from 1981 to 1987, found that the presence of national elections had no effect on general levels of government respect for human rights in an election year one way or the other.²⁴ Focusing on democracies, David Cingranelli and Mikhail Filippov argued that both incumbents and opposition leaders strategically choose to engage in or ignore poor human rights practices in the absence of proper electoral incentives, and that among democracies, certain electoral rules

²¹ Contradictory findings in this literature may also be due to differences in case selection.

²² Davenport 1997.

²³ Davenport 1998.

²⁴ Richards 1999.

are associated with better protections for human rights.²⁵

What is clear from the research agenda on elections and repression is that there is a strong connection between stable liberal democracy and government protection for certain human rights, but that a growing number of elections are taking place in locations where democracy has yet to be fully consolidated. To date this research does not use measures of election-specific violence perpetrated by incumbent governments, nor does it separate the pre- and post-election periods. Instead, it mostly relies on aggregate annual measures of human rights abuses, which may or may not be related to election-specific violence. And it has produced conflicting results about the relationship between repression and elections.

PROTEST AND REPRESSION

From 1960 to 2010 there were more than 350 unique cases of post-election protest.²⁶ Although there is a rich literature on how various kinds of protests increase the use of repression generally, and a smaller literature on the role of elections in sparking protests, few previous empirical studies have examined both election protests and election-specific violence.

Existing research on (non-electoral) protest has found evidence that government repression provokes various forms of public dissent, including protests, strikes, demonstrations and rebellions.²⁷ Studies also have found that the use of repression has led to protests. Davenport documented that

²⁵ Cingranelli and Filippov 2010.

²⁶ Hyde and Marinov 2012.

²⁷ Carey 2006; Davis and Ward 1990; Gupta, Singh, and Sprague 1993; Machado, Scartascini, and Tommasi 2011; Moore 1998; Moore 2000.

governments tend to respond to domestic threats such as protests with repression and that they are more likely to apply censorship and political restrictions as the frequency and intensity of dissent rises.²⁸ Sabine Carey, however, found that only guerrilla warfare increases the risk of political repression, whereas non-violent or spontaneous forms of dissent do not create threats substantial enough to warrant a violent government response.²⁹ Other studies have shown that the relationship between repression and dissent is non-linear: governments overreact to small demands with violence but as demands increase governments often exercise more restraint.³⁰ In some cases, government repression and accommodation in response to protests have been substitutes.³¹

A separate research agenda focuses on elections that provoke post-election protest. The most relevant finding for this article is that manipulated elections can serve as a focal point for collective action, and post-election protest (or the threat of protest) can be an important part of self-enforcing democracy.³² Election fraud and violence in the pre-election period make post-election protest more likely.

We build upon these different bodies of research to investigate the role that post-election protest plays in a government's decision to use violence

²⁸ Davenport 1995.

²⁹ Carey 2010.

³⁰ Gartner and Regan 1996.

³¹ Moore 2000.

³² Fearon 2011; Przeworski 1991; Przeworski 2006; Schedler 2002a; Tucker 2007; Weingast 1997.

following an election where the incumbent remains in power, and also evaluate the relationship between pre-election violence, post-election protest, and the use of violence against protestors.

ARGUMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

Our central argument is that information about the incumbent's popularity in different phases of the election cycle and institutionalized constraints on her decision-making powers work together to influence her decision to use election violence prior to and after an election. In brief, if an incumbent anticipates an unfavourable electoral outcome—such as an outright win for the opposition or a result that makes the incumbent look weak—she has incentives to use violence in the pre-election period as a strategy to stay in power. Pre-election violence can help the incumbent stay in power by reducing her electoral competition: inducing opposition parties to boycott, making it less likely that a promising opposition candidate will run, or manipulating voter turnout, all of which make a manufactured “victory” more likely. However, not all incumbents act on these incentives. As we will explain below, accountability groups that place institutional constraints on the incumbent can mitigate incentives for violence. One implication is that an incumbent that is uncertain about electoral victory *and* does not face significant institutional constraints is more likely to use election violence.

The incumbent's decision to use violence (or fraud) in an effort to reduce her electoral competition during the election can lead to an unintended consequence: public demonstrations against the handling or outcome of the election. Although it is relatively well documented that pre-election violence and fraud can trigger post-election protest, this relationship has not yet been

evaluated within the broader context of when incumbents choose to use election violence.³³ For our purposes in this article, protests are important because they can topple governments, leading to resignation of the incumbent or new elections. Thus, like the threat of an unfavourable electoral outcome in the pre-election period, post-election protests are a threat that creates incentives for incumbents facing few institutionalized constraints to violently suppress protesters out of fear of losing power in the post-election period.

Because pre-election violence is one factor that can lead to post-election protest, and because post-election protest can provoke post-election violence, another observable implication of our argument is that the decision to use violence in the pre-election period can create incentives to use violence in the post-election period. Finally, and consistent with the implications of our argument in the pre-election period, if post-election protests occur, an incumbent that lacks significant institutional constraints is more likely to use violence against protestors.

Fear of Losing Power

Elections put incumbents in a bind: they can bring a number of advantages, such as validating a leader's hold on power, but elections also introduce uncertainty about the outcome.³⁴ The fear of losing power because of

³³ Bunce and Wolchik 2006; Fearon 2011; Hyde and Marinov 2008; Magaloni 2006b; Tucker 2007.

³⁴ Brownlee 2009; Cox 2008; Levitsky and Way 2002; Levitsky and Way 2010; Magaloni 2006a; Simpser 2012. Note that most governments in the world now hold regular elections, although some scholars model the decision to hold elections as an endogenous decision made by leaders each time elections are held (Cox 2008; Gandhi and Przeworski 2009.)

an election (losing the vote, facing post-election protest, or other unfavourable outcomes) can prompt an incumbent to respond with political repression of various types, including violence.³⁵ Threats motivate election violence, but these threats take different forms in the pre- and post-election periods, which we describe in the next section.

Pre-Election Violence

Prior to an election, the incumbent government must anticipate whether the outcome of the election is likely to be favourable to her or her party. If she believes that she is popular enough to win the election outright (or to win by a large enough margin), election violence—as one potential tactic in the “menu of manipulation”—is unnecessary, risky, and even counterproductive.³⁶ However, if she cannot be certain of a decisive victory, or if she believes that the election outcome is likely to be unfavourable, she may resort to election violence in an effort to reduce her political competition.

In the pre-election period election violence is a strategy to reduce the incumbent’s political competition in at least two ways. Harassment of the opposition—for instance, the incarceration and torture of opposition candidates—increases the likelihood that the opposition boycotts the election and the incumbent wins. When opposition parties withdraw before an election takes place, the incumbent government’s odds of winning improve substantially.³⁷ A second way in which pre-election violence makes a favourable

³⁵ Davenport 1995; Poe et al. 2000.

³⁶ Schedler 2002a. Note that the margin of victory acceptable to many electoral authoritarian leaders is much higher than the majority required to stay in power (Simpser 2012.).

³⁷ Beaulieu 2006; Lindberg 2006b.

electoral outcome more likely is by influencing who turns out to vote. The incumbent government may use violence in an effort to persuade voters to stay home on election day, coerce would-be opposition voters into voting for the incumbent, or threaten voters who would otherwise prefer to abstain into turning out to vote for the incumbent.³⁸ Such methods of intimidation that increase turnout for the incumbent and decrease turnout for the opposition are often combined with other methods of election fraud.³⁹

In the UN-administered 1993 elections in Cambodia—the country’s first potentially democratic, multi-party elections—the incumbent government’s Cambodian People’s Party faced strong challenge from the royalist FUNCINPEC party, and sought to use violence in an effort to intimidate their candidates and supporters as a way to reduce the competition and win the vote. According to one opposition party operative, “the State of Cambodia is creating the terror because they know that Funcinpec will win.”⁴⁰ The Cambodian government was responsible for over 70 documented killings – and more than 100 injuries – of members of the political opposition prior to the election.⁴¹ The perpetrators were affiliated with the government and the political parties that were most threatened by elections: the Cambodia People’s Party (CPP), led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, and the party affiliated with the “Khmer Rouge”, which

³⁸ For examples, see Blaydes 2010; Human Rights Watch 2010.

³⁹ Lehoucq 2003; Schedler 2002a.

⁴⁰ Philip Shenon, “Cambodia Factions use Terror Tactics in Crucial Election.” *The New York Times*, May 9, 1993.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of State 1994.

boycotted the elections.⁴² Ultimately, the incumbent party's fears were justified, as they fell far short of a majority and only managed to join the ruling coalition when CPP leader Hun Sen threatened to reignite the country's civil war.

Incumbents are most threatened by elections when they might lose, but judging when they might lose is difficult, particularly in countries in which the flow of information is restricted and expression is limited. Some incumbents are able to gauge their popularity prior to an election through public opinion polls, and the most straightforward electoral threat to the incumbent is revealed by reliable public opinion polls that indicate that the incumbent is unpopular. If reliable polls indicate that the incumbent is likely to lose the election, she will be more likely to use election violence in an effort to reduce her political competition; if reliable polls indicate that she is popular, violent manipulation tactics are unnecessary.

Yet a lack of information about the incumbent's popularity can also signal a threat. If public opinion polls are not available or polls are known to be grossly inaccurate, the incumbent may have difficulty estimating her actual popularity and her chances of a favourable election outcome will be uncertain. We argue that if reliable polls prior to the election are not available, the incumbent will also be more likely to resort to election violence. Put another way, both uncertainty about her popularity and reliable proof of her unpopularity prior to an election can motivate a worried incumbent to use election violence as a strategy to stay in power.

Of course, polls are not the incumbent's only source of information about

⁴² Inter-Parliamentary Union 1993.

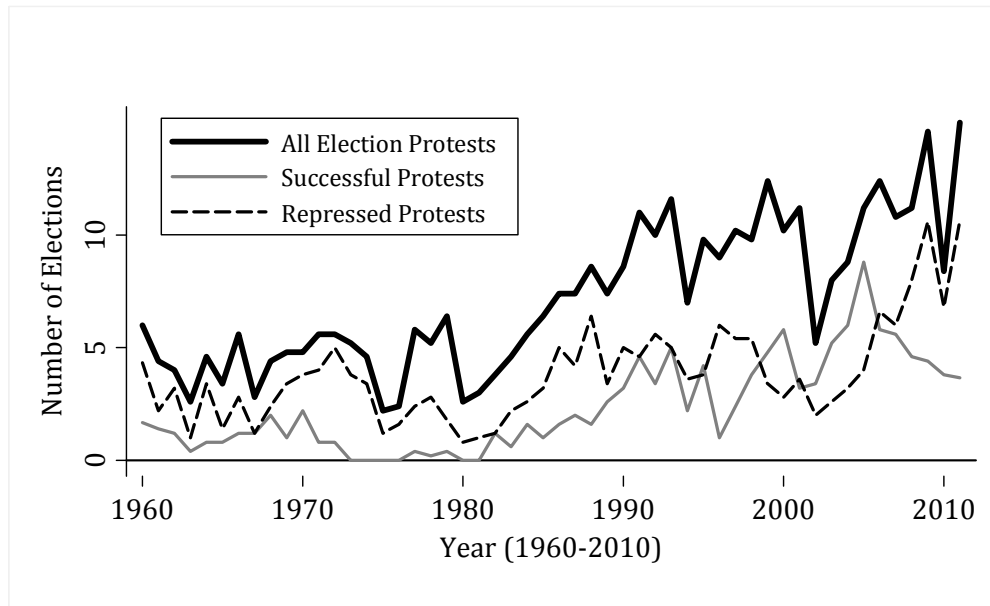
her popularity, and public statements about the election can also signal the incumbent's confidence of victory. The incumbent's and opposition candidates' own statements about their probability of victory provide clues about whether the incumbent appears to be concerned about an unfavourable election outcome. In general, a leader who is confident of victory has little reason to use election violence—gauging the incumbent's level of confidence is thus another way to gauge threat to the incumbent and predict the likelihood that she will use violence.

Post-Election Violence

Even after election day is over, incumbents who remain in power may still be challenged by an election-induced threat. One of the main sources of threats comes from protests. Post-election protests indicate that citizens have solved their collective action problem and are willing to mobilize against the regime.⁴³ Post-election protest can reduce the incumbent's credibility and build momentum to unseat her after the election.

⁴³ Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Tucker 2007.

Figure 2: History of Post-Election Protests and Protest "Success"



Note: Successful protests include any case in which election protests contributed to an election being cancelled or an incumbent being deposed. Repressed protests are cases in which the government used violence against demonstrators.⁴⁴

Figure 2 shows the history of post-election protests and their “success” in contributing to the cancellation of an election or the resignation of the incumbent. An increasingly large share of protests has resulted in the ouster of the incumbent or the cancelling of an election. Like polls or other information about the incumbent’s popularity in the pre-election period, protests can serve as an indicator of the incumbent’s popularity in the post-election period.

Existing scholarship demonstrates that post-election protests are triggered by (among other things) election violence and fraud.⁴⁵ Although an incumbent uses pre-election violence in an effort to reduce her electoral competition, her decision to use violence can have the unintended consequence

⁴⁴As coded by Hyde and Marinov 2012.

⁴⁵ Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Magaloni 2006a; Tucker 2007.

of increasing the likelihood of post-election protest. Because post-election protests are a threat to the incumbent government's power, they can provoke the incumbent to respond with violence in an effort to stay in power in the post-election period.⁴⁶

Institutionalized Constraints

We have thus far focused on how the fear of losing power, either because of the election or because of post-election protest, can provide incumbents with a motivation to use election violence. Yet a number of incumbents who are not confident of a decisive victory prior to the election or who face protests after the election never turn to violence as a strategy to stay in power. A leader's choice to act on motives to use election violence is constrained by her ability to engage in, and the anticipated consequences of engaging in, violence in both stages of the election cycle. Both increase with "institutionalized constraints" on the authority of the incumbent leader, which may be imposed by accountability groups including legislatures, ruling parties, councils of nobles, military, and courts.

Given that the incumbent fears losing power, one way that institutionalized constraints can reduce the likelihood that she will resort to election violence is by preventing her from taking actions such as issuing directives, mobilizing the police for partisan harassment, or making policy decisions that will result in violence. An example of this form of institutionalized constraint is a legal limitation on the incumbent's ability to declare a state of emergency. A government that declares a state of emergency, for instance, can

⁴⁶ Carey 2006; Carey 2010. Note that Carey's focus is not on post-election protest, but rather on protest more generally.

legally restrict certain human rights, often leading to violence.⁴⁷ However, some executives cannot use this policy without oversight from national accountability groups such as legislatures. In Guinea-Bissau and South Africa only the legislature has the power to declare a state of emergency, while in Haiti the legislature must approve a state of emergency and thus acts as a check on the executive's decision-making power.⁴⁸

Another way that institutionalized constraints can mitigate violence when the incumbent is uncertain of victory or faces post-election protests is by threatening to hold her accountable for the decision to use violence. Violence can lead to legal or political prosecution. Human rights abuses—such as torturing the political opposition or opening fire on citizen protestors—are in most cases illegal and unpopular among citizens. When they face powerful accountability groups, perpetrators of these crimes risk getting caught and punished, either while they are in office, or after they are no longer in power. Legislatures and courts may punish leaders for perpetrating violence. For example, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (which involves both national and foreign justices) sentenced former Khmer Rouge leader, Kaing Guek Eav, for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including his role in overseeing the torture and death of more than ten thousand people in the 1970s—a time in which he had no reason to believe he would one day be held accountable.⁴⁹ He was sentenced to life in prison and required to testify in the trials of three other former leaders in the Khmer Rouge. Consistent with this example, we argue that

⁴⁷ Hafner-Burton, Helfer, and Fariss 2011; Neumayer 2011.

⁴⁸ Elkins, Ginsburg, and Melton 2007.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch 2010.

election violence is a more attractive strategy for leaders facing an uncertain election only when serious consequences are not anticipated because constraints on the incumbent's decision making powers are not deeply institutionalized.

Observable Implications

To summarize, our argument generates three observable implications that we examine in the remainder of this article: (1) an incumbent that is uncertain about electoral victory and does not face significant institutional constraints is more likely to use election violence; (2) an incumbent that uses pre-election violence or fraud increases the likelihood of post-election protest against their regime; and (3), facing protests, an incumbent that lacks significant institutional constraints is more likely to use violence against protestors in the post-election period. In the next section we provide examples of these implications in elections in two countries with prominent histories of election violence.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

We have chosen five elections in two electoral autocracies—Zimbabwe and Iran—to illustrate the observable implications of our argument at different stages in the election process. In both countries leaders faced the threat of losing power as a result of an election process and had few institutionalized constraints preventing or discouraging election violence. The cases vary, however, in the factors that provoked—and the timing of—election violence. For each election described, we present detailed monthly data on instances of election violence collected from an analysis of all reports available on Lexis-Nexis, as well as supplemental materials by NGOs and election watchdogs for the pre- and post-

election periods.⁵⁰

Election Violence in Zimbabwe

Robert Mugabe has been president of Zimbabwe—a nominal parliamentary democracy—since the country gained independence in 1980. Since 2000, Mugabe and his political party associates in the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) have faced opposition from the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and their leader, Morgan Tsvangirai. Presidential and legislative elections in 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008 show variation in the degree to which the MDC threatened ZANU-PF's hold on power, culminating in the very close 2008 presidential elections that nearly resulted in an end to Mugabe's rule. In addition to using direct electoral fraud, ZANU-PF has regularly rigged elections in their favour by terrorizing political opposition members and supporters in an effort to reduce the competition.⁵¹

Elections in Zimbabwe show how even an autocratic leader like Mugabe can feel threatened by the electoral process and therefore become motivated to employ tactics of election violence. Reliable public opinion polls were virtually non-existent prior to elections in 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008. Although autocratic leaders like Mugabe tend to project confidence before elections, a

⁵⁰ We searched all available news reports and human rights reports for cases of election-related and government sponsored human rights abuses in the pre-and post-election periods (one year before and after election day). These data include the date of the incident, the alleged perpetrator, the reported victim, and the number of people affected. These data and sources will be available on the corresponding author's website. We thank Sarah Knosen for invaluable research assistance.

⁵¹ Krieger 2000; Kriger 2005.

suppressed informational environment generates uncertainty about their true popularity and creates incentives to use tactics of manipulation pre-emptively in order to avoid any unfavourable electoral outcomes.

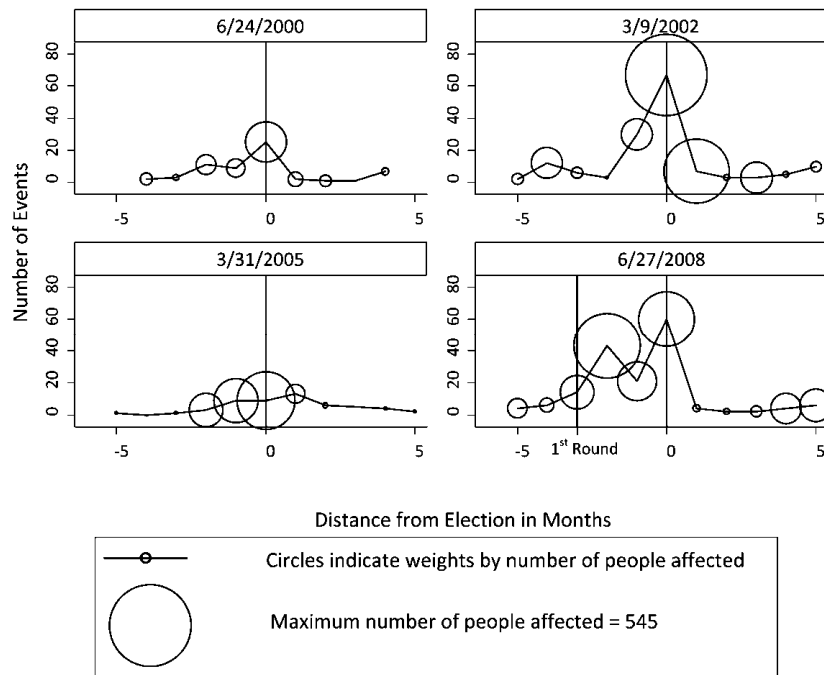
Uncertainty about Mugabe's true popularity created incentives for the ZANU-PF to violently harass MDC candidates and target—even kill—citizens prior to each election. The violence worked to reduce electoral competition, provoked several opposition boycotts, and manipulated voters into supporting ZANU-PF.⁵² Mugabe's authority was virtually unchecked by domestic accountability groups: there were very few regular limitations on the president's actions, constitutional restrictions on his actions were largely ignored, the legislative assembly had limited power or independence, and rule by decree was used often.⁵³ These conditions—uncertainty about the regime's popularity, a potential threat from an opposition movement, and few institutionalized constraints—explain the repeated bouts of pre-election violence in Zimbabwe.

To illustrate the patterns of election violence in detail, Figure 3 maps monthly data on state-sponsored violence before and after elections in Zimbabwe. The figure shows the increase in politically motivated violence, both in terms of the number of events and number of people affected, across four elections: the 2000 parliamentary elections, the 2002 presidential elections, the 2005 parliamentary elections, and concurrent presidential and parliamentary elections in 2008, including a runoff.

⁵² Timberg and Mugari 2008a; Timberg and Mugari 2008b.

⁵³ U.S. Department of State 2001; U.S. Department of State 2003; U.S. Department of State 2006b.

Figure 3: Variation in Political Violence by Election in Zimbabwe



Note: The count of events and deaths are based upon a search of all news reports and human rights reports, including those available on Lexis-Nexis, for cases of election-related and government sponsored human rights abuses in the pre-and post-election periods (one year before and after election day).

Mugabe won the 1996 presidential elections with more than 90 per cent of the vote. The opposition was not particularly strong, and the 2000 elections were the first in which any opposition party posed a real challenge to ZANU-PF dominance. As the *Financial Times* reported, the MDC “managed to defy a state-sponsored campaign of violence and intimidation to attract voters from all regions and ethnic groups...”⁵⁴ Mugabe stepped up his efforts to use election violence prior to the election and “showed signs of nervousness as votes were counted...positioning armed riot police in Harare and the nearby suburb of Budiriro,” conceivably in an effort to prevent post-election protests.⁵⁵

Although the MDC had little chance of winning the 2000 legislative

⁵⁴ Mallet 2000.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

elections (in part because Mugabe could appoint 30 of the 120 legislative seats), the newly formed MDC was widely viewed as a serious challenger to Mugabe's authority. As a result, during the 2000 election, police, intelligence officials, war veterans, and ZANU-PF supporters murdered, tortured and intimidated MDC supporters: the government reportedly killed more than 30 people for political reasons.⁵⁶ Violence began several months prior to, and spiked during, the election (Figure 3).

Since 2000, the MDC's has threatened Mugabe's hold on power, which has been particularly acute during elections. In response, his government has engaged in a campaign of election-related violence against the MDC, especially in presidential elections in which his personal hold on power is most directly threatened. In 2002, prior to and during the presidential election, ZANU-PF ran torture camps across Zimbabwe to "re-educate" opposition supporters.⁵⁷ The *Times of London* reported that the violence campaign led to dozens of deaths and disappearances and hundreds of abductions, assaults and torture victims.⁵⁸ As in 2000, violence began in 2002 several months prior to the election, and hundreds of people were victimized in the months immediately following, including 344 members of the Young Women's Christian Association who were arrested during a peaceful post-election protest against the results of the presidential election.⁵⁹ Not included in these figures are MDC supporters who fled Zimbabwe after the election, fearing persecution.

⁵⁶ Amnesty International 2001; U.S. Department of State 2001.

⁵⁷ Schlink 2002.

⁵⁸ Raath 2002.

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State 2003.

The US State Department accused ZANU-PF of manipulating the electoral process in the 2005 elections through corruption and intimidation, including unlawful killings, politically motivated kidnappings, and state sanctioned actions by security forces to torture members of the opposition, union leaders, and civil society activists.⁶⁰ Mugabe's use of violence was somewhat lower than in the other elections shown in Figure 3, in part because the ZANU-PF also relied on the politicization of food-aid during a period of severe economic crisis, which we did not code as a form of election violence.⁶¹ In this election, the party also employed the support of traditional leaders, who threatened their subjects with eviction if they failed to vote correctly.⁶²

The 2008 elections marked the first concurrent presidential and parliamentary elections and also the most serious threat to Mugabe. Before the 2008 presidential election Mugabe banned all political rallies and arrested Tsvangirai—ostensibly for violating the ban while attending a prayer meeting. Tsvangirai was severely beaten, sustained a massive head injury, and was denied access to medical treatment.⁶³ Nevertheless, the challenge posed by Tsvangirai and the MDC was greater than in any previous election, and the MDC won a parliamentary majority for the first time, clearly indicating that Mugabe's regime, and Mugabe himself, were increasingly threatened by the electoral process and by increasing public support for the MDC. The government delayed the release of the results of the presidential election for more than a month, a move perceived

⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State 2006b.

⁶¹ Nolen 2005; Thornycroft 2005.

⁶² Thornycroft 2005.

⁶³ Herald Sun 2007.

to be an effort to remedy Mugabe's poor performance. When official election results were finally announced, ZANU-PF received 43 per cent of the vote and MDC received 47 per cent, just shy of the 50 per cent majority needed to win the first round outright. Before the runoff Mugabe's agents instigated a deadly wave of violence against MDC supporters. Due to the degree of violence directed toward his supporters, with more than 85 confirmed murdered and thousands injured, Tsvangirai chose to boycott the runoff in an effort to avoid risking the lives of more of his supporters in this "violent, illegitimate, sham of an election process."⁶⁴

In summary, the lack of institutionalized constraints in Zimbabwe between 2000-2008, and Mugabe's use of election violence in response to his waning popularity illustrates part of our argument. Election violence was triggered by the rising popularity of the MDC and was successful at generating short-term reductions in political competition.

Post-election Violence in Iran

The 2009 election in Iran illustrates a situation in which the highest levels of violence occurred in the month after the election, as a response to public protest against fraudulent results. Like Zimbabwe, the chief executives in the Iranian government experience very few institutionalized constraints on their decision-making powers. This combination of unpopularity revealed through mass post-election protest against a government with few institutionalized constraints helps to explain why the government resorted to significant violence against protestors.

⁶⁴ Geoghegan 2008.

Typically, the Iranian process of candidate screening by the Guardian Council guarantees that the majority of candidates are prohibited from running. In 2009, the incumbent president Ahmadinejad was apparently caught by surprise when popular sentiment turned against him just before the election, and (albeit unreliable) polls conducted a few days prior to the election suggested that one of the permitted candidates, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, could gain enough votes to force a runoff election.⁶⁵

Following the election, both candidates declared victory. In an abnormally rapid vote “count,” authorities declared the incumbent president the winner. Protests erupted and millions of people took to the streets to dispute the fraudulent results. The protests were a clear indication of the people’s dissatisfaction with the incumbent and a threat to the legitimacy of the regime, and consistent with our argument, the government responded with violence. On June 14th, plainclothes forces attacked a Tehran University dormitory and reportedly killed five student protesters. On June 16th, the government banned foreign journalists from the streets; and arrested almost 100 people, including former government ministers and senior political figures. Riot police dispersed protests in Tehran and were videotaped killing Neda Agha, a young bystander who became an icon for the anti-government movement. Protests continued and the government responded with more violence. Over the next few months 4,000 protesters would be arrested, and others would be killed as a direct consequence of election-induced violence. Figure 4 maps monthly data on state-sponsored violence before and after the June 12, 2009 election, illustrating the increase in

⁶⁵ The Economist 2009; Ron Synovitz 2009.

election violence in terms of the number of events and number of people affected.

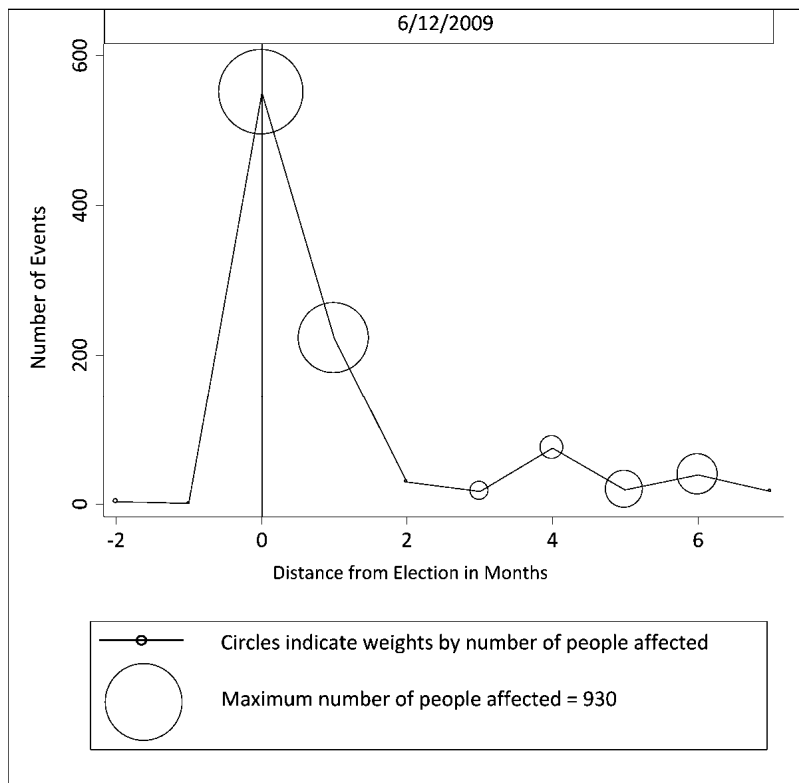
As President Ahmadinejad was sworn into office, government controlled courts began show trials, with many detainees allegedly coerced into confessing that they participated in a foreign-backed attempt to overthrow the government. Security officials shut down the offices of a committee collecting information about torture and other abuses against protestors and detainees. Journalist Ali Reza Eshranghi was sent to prison, followed by academic Kian Tajbakhsh and other prominent intellectuals, political figures and journalists. Many were sentenced to death.⁶⁶ Secrecy surrounding the tallying of the votes means that what actually unfolded is unknown, but observers speculate that the Iranian leadership, having already screened the presidential candidates, was uncomfortable with any results that would have suggested a close election. Facing a worse-than-expected performance by the incumbent, they engaged in a hurried falsification of the results.

In short, the election revealed that an opposition candidate posed a greater threat to Ahmadinejad than anticipated, and perceived election fraud provoked a post-election protest movement that further threatened the regime's grip on power. In response to this threat, the government diffused protests by committing widespread violence against protesters, detaining and killing leaders of the opposition movement, and creating a climate of fear. The leaders of Iran responsible for the political violence, like the leaders of Zimbabwe, had few institutionalized constraints on their decision-making powers and could order

⁶⁶ Amnesty International, "Iran: Election Contested, Repression Compounded." Available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/123/2009/en> (accessed February 19, 2010).

and carry out violence with little reason to fear accountability for their policies.

Figure 4: Variation in Political Violence in Iran, 2009 Presidential Election



The count of events and deaths are based upon a search of all news reports and human rights reports, including those available on Lexis-Nexis, for cases of election-related and government sponsored human rights abuses in the pre-and post-election periods (one year before and after election day).

Elections in Iran and Zimbabwe illustrate how unpopular governments use political violence as a tactic to manipulate elections in the pre-election period—provoking boycotts and manipulating voters—and suppress dissent in the post-election period—harassing, even killing, protestors. In the next section we evaluate our broader argument using new cross-national data on the use of election-related violence.

CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS

In order to systematically assess the observable implications of our argument we employ a cross-national analysis of elections data from 1981-

2004. Many of these data come from the newly available National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset.⁶⁷ These data contain information on elections for national office for all sovereign states with a population greater than 500,000, including detailed information on the existence of several types of election violence, as well as on post-election protest.⁶⁸ Sources for the NELDA data are diverse, and rely primarily on news wire reports, newspaper archives, academic research including the data handbooks on elections edited by Dieter Nohlen,⁶⁹ archives for specific countries and from intergovernmental organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and other sources which are listed in the dataset's codebook.⁷⁰

These data allow us to conduct more fine-grained tests of the correlates of election violence than existing cross-national studies, most of which do not measure election violence directly but instead rely on aggregate annual indicators of various forms of human rights abuses on entire country populations⁷¹ or aggregate counts of demonstrations or protests which may or

⁶⁷ Hyde and Marinov 2012.

⁶⁸ A complete list of the countries in our sample is available in our appendix, which we will make available on line and have provided to the editor with this resubmission.

⁶⁹ Nohlen, Krennerich, and Thibaut 1999; Nohlen, Grotz, and Hartmann 2001; Nohlen 2005.

⁷⁰ Hyde and Marinov 2011.

⁷¹ See the Political Terror Scale, at: <http://www.politicalterrorsscale.org/>, the CIRI Human Rights Data Project, at: <http://ciri.binghamton.edu/>; and Freedom House, at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>.

may not be election related.⁷² In contrast to annual indices of political repression, which measure human rights abuses during a given calendar year, our data focus on election-specific violence perpetrated by the incumbent government and distinguish between pre- and post- election violence against civilians and opposition parties. These data also measure other election or regime-specific characteristics central to our argument, such as whether public opinion polls are available and reliable and whether the incumbent has made public statements alluding to their confidence of victory. Table 1 provides summary information for each of the variables used in the subsequent analysis.

Table 1: Summary Information

| | Mean | SD | Min | Max | Mean Violent Elec's | Mean Non- Violent Elec's |
|------------------------------------|-------|------|--------|-------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Pre-Election Violence</i> | 0.30 | 0.46 | 0.00 | 1.00 | n.a. | n.a. |
| <i>Post-Election Protest</i> | 0.14 | 0.34 | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.36 | 0.11 |
| <i>Post-Election Violence</i> | 0.06 | 0.24 | 0.00 | 1.00 | n.a. | n.a. |
| <i>Victory Uncertain</i> | 0.47 | 0.50 | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.33 | 0.52 |
| <i>Polling Unfavorable</i> | 0.76 | 0.42 | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.82 | 0.74 |
| <i>Executive Constraints</i> | 4.84 | 2.07 | 1.00 | 7.00 | 3.93 | 5.17 |
| <i>Physical Integrity (avg)</i> | 3.19 | 2.31 | 0.00 | 8.00 | 4.64 | 2.58 |
| <i>Polity (avg)</i> | 2.35 | 6.87 | -10.00 | 10.00 | -0.67 | 3.52 |
| <i>Executive Recruitment (avg)</i> | 6.15 | 2.15 | 1 | 8 | 5.33 | 6.21 |
| <i>Political Competition (avg)</i> | 6.36 | 3.37 | 1 | 10 | 4.86 | 6.48 |
| <i>GDP (log)</i> | 2.85 | 2.16 | -1.77 | 9.33 | 2.30 | 3.03 |
| <i>Population (log)</i> | 16.16 | 1.50 | 12.47 | 20.80 | 16.26 | 16.09 |
| <i>Civil War</i> | 0.18 | 0.83 | 0.00 | 7.00 | 0.44 | 0.07 |
| <i>Electoral Fraud</i> | 0.36 | 0.48 | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.68 | 0.27 |
| <i>Demonstrations</i> | 1.33 | 3.22 | 0.00 | 43.00 | 2.09 | 1.14 |

Note: (avg) indicates the three year moving average lagged by one year.

Pre-Election Violence

The first observable implication of our argument is that an incumbent

⁷² Banks 2005.

who anticipates an unfavourable election outcome *and* lacks significant institutional constraints on her decision making power is more likely to use election violence. To test this implication, we estimate the following two models for each election i in country j :

$$Pr(\text{Pre-Election Violence}_{ij}=1) = f(\beta_1 \text{Polling Unfavorable}_{ij} * \text{Executive Constraints}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Polling Unfavorable}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{Executive Constraints}_{ij} + \varphi X_{ij} + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{ij})$$

(Equation 1)

$$Pr(\text{Pre-Election Violence}_{ij}=1) = f(\text{Victory Uncertain}_{ij} * \text{Executive Constraints}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Victory Uncertain}_{ij} + \beta_3 \text{Executive Constraints}_{ij} + \varphi X_{ij} + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{ij})$$

(Equation 2)

where X_{ij} is a vector of control variables and γ_i are country random-effects.

These random-effects account for the likelihood that the effect of electoral uncertainty may differ systematically for each country, resulting in biased estimates. Since our argument is about the threat of losing power, we limit our sample in these estimates to any national election in which the office of the incumbent is at stake in the election.⁷³

We code our dependent variable, *Pre-Election Violence*, as equal to 1 if the government engaged in election-specific violence against civilians (coded from *Nelda33*) or harassment of political opposition members (*Nelda15*) and 0

⁷³ To ensure that we focus on executive elections in both presidential and parliamentary systems, we rely on *Nelda20*, which measures whether the office of the de-facto leader was at stake in the election (usually the president or prime minister).

otherwise.⁷⁴ According to the NELDA codebook, *Nelda33* includes “any significant violence relating to the elections that resulted in civilian deaths.” *Nelda33* includes no specific threshold for deaths, but violence must be “significant” and at least one civilian must have been killed. Violent attacks against civilians, such as bombings, do not count unless they result in civilian casualties. Harassment of political opposition members (*Nelda15*) may include a more diverse set of activities, including murder, torture, beatings, violence against participants in opposition rallies, indefinite detention of candidates or opposition supporters, forced eviction, harassment of media, and a number of other methods.⁷⁵ The NELDA data do not define any specific time period during which election violence is possible, and the coding is specific to each round of an election rather than more aggregated units like country-years. Violence is coded as election-related if reports connect the violence or harassment to the election in any way. Violence unrelated to elections is not coded in any of the NELDA measures of election violence.

We use two distinct measures of whether the election outcome was in doubt. The first measure uses information provided by public opinion polls and the second relies on public statements alluding to the incumbent’s confidence of victory. Even in authoritarian environments, public opinion polls can

⁷⁴ While almost all cases of harassment involve the threat of violence, not all cases involve physical injury. We show later in the paper that our results are robust to only including elections with civilian casualties.

⁷⁵ *Nelda15* excludes cases where the opposition was merely banned, or where the opposition boycotted (Hyde and Marinov 2011.) In addition to the codebook, the notes to *Nelda15* within the dataset were also used to determine what activities were included as opposition harassment.

provide reliable information about whether an incumbent is certain to win the election, and reliable polls are available in over 63 per cent of our sample. We draw data on polling from two NELDA variables. *Nelda25* indicates whether “reliable polls ... indicated the popularity of the ruling political party or of the candidates for office before elections.” *Nelda26* indicates whether those polls were “favourable to the incumbent.”⁷⁶ (Incumbents win approximately 76 per cent of elections in which polling existed and was in their favour.) Using these data we create *Polling Unfavourable*, which equals 1 under two conditions: a) if reliable polls existed that did not favour the incumbent or b) if reliable polls did not exist. *Polling Unfavourable* equals 0 if polls existed and favoured the incumbent.

This variable allows us to test the argument that both a clear signal that the incumbent is unpopular and a noisy signal that creates uncertainty about the incumbent’s popularity create incentives for *Pre-Election Violence*, which is the measure that most closely tracks our theory. However, we also estimate results excluding cases without reliable polls (where *Nelda25* equals “no”) in order to evaluate whether the same logic holds when we examine only whether reliable polls existed and favoured the incumbent.

Our second measure is based on *Nelda12*, which indicates whether the “incumbent or ruling party was confident of victory before the elections.” *Nelda12* equals “yes” in cases in which the incumbent made “public statements expressing confidence” of victory, the opposition indicated that they were “not likely to win,” or there were cases in which the “incumbent or ruling party has

⁷⁶ Ibid.

been dominant for a number of years and is projected to win in a landslide.”⁷⁷ We create *Victory Uncertain*, which equals 1 if *Nelda12* equals “no” and 0 if *Nelda12* equals “yes.”⁷⁸ As face validation of this measure, when *Victory Uncertain* is 1, the incumbent wins approximately 56 per cent of the time, compared to a rate of 92 per cent when *Victory Uncertain* is 1.⁷⁹

An important part of our argument concerns institutionalized constraints on the incumbent. To measure these constraints we use *Executive Constraints* from the Polity IV dataset. This index ranges from 1 to 7 and measures “the extent of institutionalized constraints on the decision-making power of chief executives.”⁸⁰ At the highest level of *Executive Constraints*, accountability groups such as legislatures and courts have authority equal or greater to that of the executive. Examples of *Executive Constraints* include the ability of a legislature or ruling party to initiate much or most important legislation. Even greater *Executive Constraints* include cases in which an accountability group, such as a legislature, chooses the executive and the executive is dependent on its continued support to remain in office. At the lowest level of *Executive Constraints* leaders have virtually unlimited authority with few, if any, constitutional or legislative constraints. Examples include the frequent revision or suspension of the constitution by the executive, cases in which no legislative assembly exists, and the existence of an assembly that can be called

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Cases of “unclear” and “N/A” are treated as missing.

⁷⁹ Because some incumbents will have the incentive to misrepresent their own popularity and falsely project strength, this indicator will include some noise.

⁸⁰ Marshall and Jagers 2002.

and dismissed at the executive's pleasure. Low *Executive Constraints* also include cases of extensive executive control over accountability groups—such as a legislature or courts.

Since election violence is more likely in repressive regimes, we are mindful that we run the risk of estimating which regimes are more likely to be repressive rather than which regimes are more likely to use election-specific violence. Also, since democratic states are more likely to have competitive elections as well as lower levels of repression, a naïve model would likely yield biased estimates of the relationships most relevant to our theory.⁸¹ Therefore, we control for the pre-existing level of government repression (as distinct from pre-election violence) by including a measure of *Physical Integrity* from the CIRI dataset.⁸² This variable is an index (0 to 8) that measures the annual level of government sponsored repressive activity, coded mainly from Amnesty International reports. Since this variable is intended to control for overall trends in repression, we use the three-year moving average and lag it by one year to ensure that it is not picking up election-year violence.

We also want to ensure that our results are not an artefact of the level of democracy in a country. We thus include measures of political competitiveness and executive recruitment from the Polity IV project.⁸³ *Political Competitiveness* is an index (1 to 10) that measures both the level of regulation of political participation and the competitiveness of participation. *Executive Recruitment* is

⁸¹ Poe and Tate 1994. show that democratic states are less likely to engage in physical integrity violations.

⁸² Cingranelli and Richards 2010.

⁸³ Marshall and Jaggers 2002.

an index (1 to 8) that measures the openness and competitiveness of executive selection, as well as the institutionalization of executive power transitions. To ensure that *Political Competitiveness* and *Executive Recruitment* pick up overall trends in democracy, and not election specific components, we use the three-year moving average of these variables lagged by one year.

We also include several additional control variables. Because wealth and population influence the use of violence, we include *GDP (log)* and *Population (log)*, from the World Development Indicators.⁸⁴ Individual leaders may be more likely to use election violence based on their time in office or their experience, and all models therefore include *Leader Tenure* and *Leader Age* from the Archigos dataset.⁸⁵ Because internal conflict is correlated with human rights violations, we include a binary measure of *Civil War* from the Major Episodes of Political Violence dataset.⁸⁶

All models include *Electoral Fraud* to account for another prominent tactic of electoral manipulation. *Electoral Fraud (Nelda11)* is a binary variable that indicates whether there was “significant concerns that the elections will not be free and fair”; this measure relates to “domestic or international concern” about the quality of the election, including whether “elections were widely perceived to lack basic criteria for competitive elections, such as more than one political party.”⁸⁷ We also include *Demonstrations* in all models to account for other types of civic mobilization distinct from post-election protest, and which

⁸⁴ World Bank 2006.

⁸⁵ Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009.

⁸⁶ Marshall 2007; Dunning 2011; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999.

⁸⁷ Hyde and Marinov 2011.

also may predict pre-election violence. *Demonstrations* is a count of the total number of anti-government demonstrations, anti-government strikes and riots during a year (based on Banks CNTS coding).⁸⁸

We report our estimates in Tables 2 and 3, in which the core models use logit and include country random-effects to account for country-specific correlations in the estimates. Figure 5 presents a more meaningful picture of the estimated effect of uncertainty on *Pre-Election Violence*: it plots the interactive estimates from Table 2, column 1 and Table 3, column 1. Each point estimate is the first difference based on when either measure of *Uncertain of Election Victory* (*Polling Unfavourable* or *Victory Uncertain*) changes from 0 to 1, estimated at each value of *Executive Constraints*.

⁸⁸ Banks 1975; Banks 2005.

Table 2: Logit Estimates of the Effect of Polling Unfavorable on Pre-Election Violence

| | (1) Core Model | (2) Only Reliable Polls | (3) Only Civilian Deaths | (4) Fixed Effects |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Unfavorable Polls | 2.37* | 4.97* | 2.40+ | 2.63* |
| | 1.07 | 2.15 | 1.43 | 1.29 |
| Polling * Exec. Const. | -0.49* | -0.87* | -0.58* | -0.62* |
| | 0.20 | 0.37 | 0.27 | 0.27 |
| Executive Constraints | 0.24 | 0.53+ | 0.48+ | 0.44+ |
| | 0.21 | 0.31 | 0.28 | 0.26 |
| Physical Integrity (avg) | -0.44** | -0.61** | -0.40** | -0.34* |
| | 0.12 | 0.20 | 0.13 | 0.17 |
| Political Competitiveness (avg) | -0.18+ | -0.38+ | -0.19 | -0.24+ |
| | 0.10 | 0.21 | 0.13 | 0.14 |
| Executive Recruitment (avg) | 0.31+ | 0.73* | 0.34+ | 0.13 |
| | 0.16 | 0.34 | 0.20 | 0.25 |
| Population (log) | 0.36 | 0.87* | 0.81* | 1.25 |
| | 0.27 | 0.44 | 0.35 | 2.03 |
| GDP (log) | -0.28 | -0.60* | -0.68** | 1.03 |
| | 0.19 | 0.30 | 0.25 | 1.03 |
| Leader Tenure | 0.00 | 0.01 | -0.02* | -0.01 |
| | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Leader Age | 0.12 | 0.02 | 0.16 | 0.28 |
| | 0.17 | 0.27 | 0.19 | 0.23 |
| Civil War | 0.54* | 0.53 | 0.75* | 0.71 |
| | 0.28 | 0.60 | 0.32 | 0.56 |
| Electoral Fraud | 1.60** | 2.02** | 1.10* | 1.53** |
| | 0.42 | 0.76 | 0.48 | 0.50 |
| Demonstrations | 0.12* | 0.09 | 0.12* | 0.08 |
| | 0.05 | 0.08 | 0.06 | 0.06 |
| Observations | 599 | 352 | 597 | 248 |
| Log Likelihood | -227.1 | -99.80 | -188.8 | -75.57 |
| Country Random Effects | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Country Fixed Effects | No | No | No | Yes |
| Explicit Civilian Violence Only | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Reliable Polls Only | No | Yes | No | No |

+significant at 10%; *significant at 5%; **significant at 1%. Standard errors are in parentheses. All models are restricted to election in which the office of the incumbent is contested.

Table 3: Logit Estimates of the Effect of Victory Uncertain on Pre-Election Violence

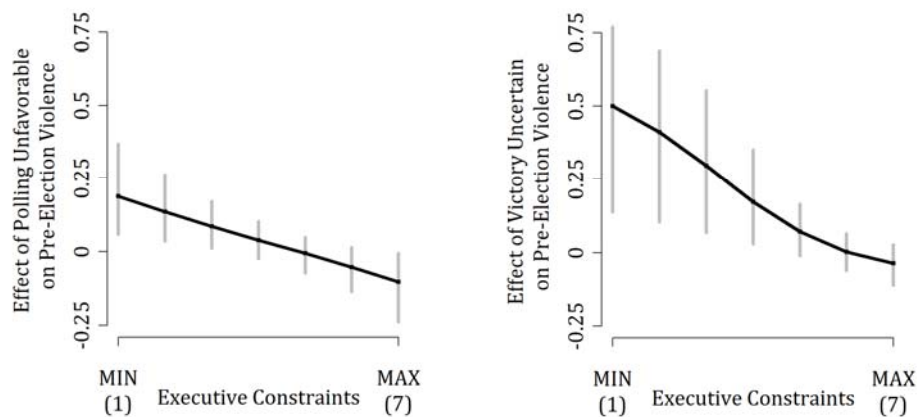
| | (1) Core Model | (2) Only Civilian Deaths | (3) Fixed Effects |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Victory Uncertain | 3.17* | 1.46 | 1.50 |
| | 1.32 | 1.36 | 1.56 |
| Uncertain * Exec. Const. | -0.52* | -0.30 | -0.23 |
| | 0.23 | 0.24 | 0.27 |
| Executive Constraints | -0.11 | 0.07 | -0.06 |
| | 0.15 | 0.18 | 0.18 |
| Physical Integrity (avg) | -0.38** | -0.32* | -0.33+ |
| | 0.11 | 0.13 | 0.19 |
| Political Competitiveness (avg) | -0.16 | -0.17 | -0.21 |
| | 0.11 | 0.13 | 0.17 |
| Executive Recruitment (avg) | 0.27+ | 0.32+ | 0.12 |
| | 0.16 | 0.19 | 0.29 |
| Population (log) | 0.30 | 0.80* | 1.00 |
| | 0.26 | 0.32 | 2.06 |
| GDP (log) | -0.16 | -0.51* | 0.86 |
| | 0.18 | 0.23 | 1.05 |
| Leader Tenure | 0.01 | -0.02 | -0.01 |
| | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Leader Age | 0.06 | 0.02 | 0.16 |
| | 0.17 | 0.20 | 0.24 |
| Civil War | 0.46+ | 0.72* | 0.73 |
| | 0.27 | 0.31 | 0.59 |
| Electoral Fraud | 1.55** | 1.07* | 1.42** |
| | 0.42 | 0.47 | 0.53 |
| Demonstrations | 0.11* | 0.11* | 0.08 |
| | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.06 |
| Observations | 550 | 548 | 216 |
| Log Likelihood | -207.5 | -173.9 | -68.96 |
| Country Random Effects | Yes | Yes | No |
| Country Fixed Effects | No | No | Yes |
| Explicit Civilian Violence Only | No | Yes | No |

+significant at 10%; *significant at 5%; **significant at 1%. Standard errors are in parentheses. All models are restricted to cases in which the office of the incumbent is contested.

Figure 5 provides support for the first observable implication of our

argument. The left panel illustrates that when *Executive Constraints* are at their minimum, a change in *Polling Unfavourable* from 0 to 1 increases the probability of *Pre-Election Violence* by nearly 0.25, on average. The right panel illustrates that when *Executive Constraints* are at their minimum, *Victory Uncertain* is associated with an increase in the probability of *Pre-Election Violence* of nearly 0.50 on average. When *Executive Constraints* are at their maximum, there are no significant effects of either *Polling Unfavourable* or *Victory Uncertain*. Incumbents are more likely to resort to election violence when they cannot be certain of a decisive victory, however, the presence of institutionalized constraints mitigate these incentives to use violence.

Figure 5: Effect of Polling Unfavorable and Victory Uncertain on Pre-Election Violence:



Note: Point estimates represent simulated effects (first differences, 0 to 1) of changing *Polling Unfavorable* and *Victory Uncertain* on the probability of *Pre-Election Violence* for each value of *Executive Constraints*. Estimates are based upon Table 2 column 1. Vertical lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

Tables 2 and 3 also provide several alternative specifications of the core models. The figures showing the predicted probabilities of election violence for these robustness checks are provided in the appendix.

Beginning with the polling estimates shown in Table 2, Model 2 drops all cases where reliable polls are not available or it is unclear whether they are available. This limited sample includes only cases where reliable polls existed and provided a clear signal that polls were not favourable to the incumbent. The coefficients remain consistent in sign and significance with those reported in column 1. When *Executive Constraints* are at their minimum in this model, a change from 0 to 1 (favourable to unfavourable polls) is associated with an increase in the average probability of *Pre-Election Violence* of 0.25.

In Table 2, Model 3, we recode *Pre-Election Violence* to exclude harassment of political opposition members (*Nelda15*). This focuses the analysis on whether the government engaged in election-specific violence against civilians (*Nelda33*), which is a much narrower conception of election violence than our definition. The coefficients are consistent in sign and significance with the coefficients in Model 1, although the estimated substantive effect is smaller. When *Executive Constraints* are at their minimum in this model, a change from 0 to 1 in *Polling Unfavourable* is associated with an increase of 0.04 in the average probability of significant violence relating to the elections that resulted in civilian deaths.

Finally, in Table 2, Model 4, we re-estimate the model using country fixed-effects. This specification validates that our results are not just driven by time-invariant characteristics of countries, such as unobserved institutional or geographical characteristics. Yet because many countries have no cases of *Pre-Election Violence*, country fixed effects yield results that must be interpreted with care. All observations from countries without variation in election violence drop out of the model. The coefficients on our variables of interest remain very similar

to those from the random-effects models. We do not provide predicted probabilities for the fixed-effects models because doing so in a country fixed-effect logit model is problematic.⁸⁹

Next we turn to the alternative specifications shown for *Victory Uncertain*. In Table 3, model 2, we restrict the analysis to cases of election-specific violence involving civilian deaths. Although the signs on the coefficient estimates are consistent with the estimates reported in model 1, the estimated effect of *Victory Uncertain* on *Pre-Election Violence* is insignificant for all levels of *Executive Constraints*. In our view, including harassment and violence involving civilian deaths in the operationalization of pre-election violence is much closer to our theoretical conception of election violence. Limiting the measure to only those cases of election violence involving civilian deaths is a much narrower, conception of election violence and the smaller coefficient is thus unsurprising.

In Table 3, Model 3, we provide estimates of our core model using country-fixed effects, although like in Model 2, the coefficient on *Victory Uncertain* is smaller. Given that the fixed effects model drops more than half of our observations, these results are not surprising. As above, estimating accurate predicted probabilities in the fixed-effects logit context is problematic.⁹⁰

Post-Election Protest and Violence

We analyse post-election protests in this article because, when they occur,

⁸⁹ When using logistic regression, “first differences, and indeed every quantity of interest but one, are impossible to compute correctly from estimates of the fixed-effects model.” King 2001, 499.

⁹⁰ King 2001.

protests are a central source of threat to an incumbent's hold on power in the immediate post-election period. We continue to focus on violence by the incumbent regime, and in estimating post-election protests, the relevant universe of elections therefore includes those in which the incumbent has not lost and conceded defeat in the immediate pre-election period.⁹¹ The existing literature suggesting that fraud and pre-election violence increase the probability of post-election protest motivates our models of protest.⁹² Our estimation approach for predicting post-election protests is represented below for each election i in country j :

$$Pr(\text{Post-Election Protest}_{ij}=1) = f(\beta_1 \text{Pre-Election Violence}_{ij} + \varphi X_{ij} + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{ij},)$$

(Equation 3)

$$Pr(\text{Post-Election Protest}_{ij}=1) = f(\beta_1 \text{Electoral Fraud}_{ij} + \varphi X_{ij} + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{ij},)$$

(Equation 4)

where X_{ij} is a vector of control variables and γ_i are country random-effects. We measure *Post-Election Protest* using *Nelda29*, which indicates whether there were “riots or protests after the election” that were “at least somewhat related to the outcome or handling of the election.”⁹³ *Electoral Fraud (Nelda11)* measures whether there were concerns before the election that it would not be free and

⁹¹ This sample still includes cases, such as Côte d’Ivoire 2011, in which the incumbent lost the election but refused to exit power.

⁹² Bunce and Wolchik 2006; Fearon 2011; Hyde and Marinov 2008; Schedler 2002b; Tucker 2007.

⁹³ Hyde and Marinov 2011.

fair.⁹⁴ As in the pre-election models, we control for the three-year lagged moving average of *Physical Integrity*, as well as for *GDP (log)*, *Population (log)*, *Leader Tenure*, *Leader Age* and *Civil War*. We also control for the three-year moving average of *Polity*, coded from the Polity IV dataset.⁹⁵

Table 4: Logit Estimates of the Effect of Fraud and Violence on Post-Election Protests

| | (1) Core Model | (2) Fixed Effects | (3) Core Model | (4) Fixed Effects |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Electoral Fraud | 1.63** 0.31 | 1.30** 0.34 | | |
| Pre-Election Violence | | | 2.46** 0.30 | 2.21** 0.33 |
| Physical Integrity (avg) | -0.12 0.08 | -0.14 0.10 | -0.11 0.09 | -0.13 0.11 |
| Polity (avg) | 0.00 0.03 | 0.01 0.03 | -0.02 0.03 | -0.02 0.04 |
| Population (log) | 0.26 0.20 | -1.51 1.33 | 0.24 0.22 | -1.70 1.41 |
| GDP (log) | -0.26+ 0.15 | 1.01 0.72 | -0.24 0.15 | 1.10 0.81 |
| Leader Tenure | -0.01* 0.01 | -0.01 0.01 | -0.02** 0.01 | -0.02* 0.01 |
| Leader Age | -0.10 0.13 | -0.03 0.16 | -0.13 0.14 | -0.07 0.17 |
| Civil War | 0.04 0.14 | 0.04 0.19 | -0.11 0.14 | -0.12 0.21 |
| Observations | 966 | 482 | 932 | 458 |
| Log Likelihood | -347.1 | -179.2 | -314.4 | -152.6 |
| Country Random-Effects | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Country Fixed-Effects | No | Yes | No | Yes |

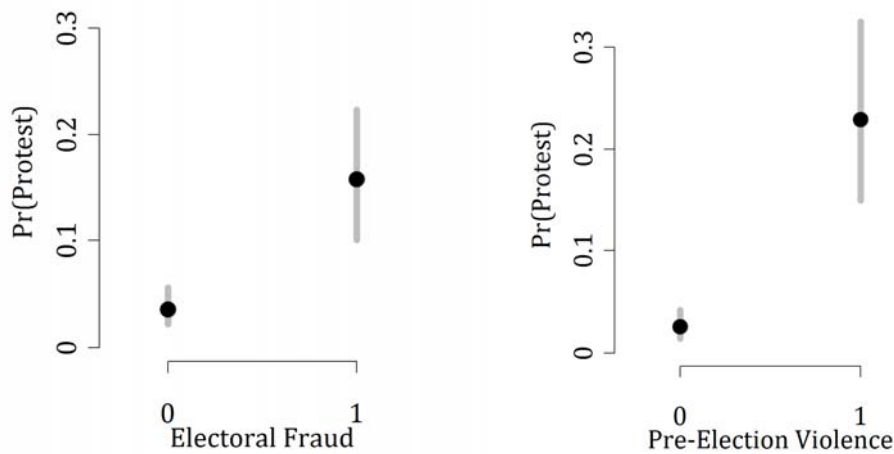
+significant at 10%; *significant at 5%; **significant at 1%. Standard errors are in parentheses. All models are restricted to elections in which the incumbent did not lose the election and leave office.

⁹⁴ As discussed above, this variable indicates whether there was “domestic or international concern” about the quality of the election or if “the elections were widely perceived to lack basic criteria for competitive elections, such as more than one political party.”Ibid.

⁹⁵ Marshall and Jagers 2002.

We present logit estimates of these equations in Table 4 and illustrate the results of our core models in Figure 6, which shows the simulated effect of *Pre-Election Violence* and *Electoral Fraud* on the predicted probability of *Post-Election Violence Protest* when all other variables are held at mean values. Our core models (in columns 1 and 3) include country random-effects and we show the same models (in columns 2 and 4) with country fixed-effects.

Figure 6: Effect of Fraud and Election Violence on Post-Election Protest



Shows the simulated effect (predicted probabilities) of *Electoral Fraud* and *Pre-Election Violence* on *Post-Election Protest* from the estimates in Table 4 column 1 and 3. All other variables are set at the mean. Vertical lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

Consistent with the literature, we find that both electoral fraud and pre-election violence are strong predictors of post-election protest: both variables are associated with sizable increases in the probability of protest across both specifications.⁹⁶ As shown in Figure 6, *Electoral Fraud* increases the probability of protests by nearly 0.13. *Pre-Election Violence* increases the probability of

⁹⁶ Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Magaloni 2006a; Tucker 2007.

protests by over 0.20. The fact that pre-election violence increases the likelihood of post-election protest suggests that the use of pre-election violence can also have unintended consequences for the incumbent after the election.

The existence of post-election protests allows us to evaluate a final implication of our argument: given that the incumbent faces post-election protests, she is more likely to use violence against protestors in the post-election period if she lacks significant institutional constraints. Our approach for estimating post-election violence against protestors is represented below for each election i in country j :

$$Pr(\text{Post-Election Violence}_{ij}=1) = f(\beta_2 \text{Executive Constraints}_{ij} + \varphi X_{ij} + \gamma_i + \varepsilon_{ij})$$

(Equation 5)

We measure *Post-Election Violence* using *Nelda31*, which indicates, in cases of post-election protest, whether the government used violence against demonstrators. This variable equals 1 if the incumbent used violence against demonstrators and 0 otherwise. As in the above models, control variables include the three-year (lagged) moving average of *Physical Integrity*, *Political Competitiveness*, and *Executive Recruitment*, as well as *GDP (log)*, *Population (log)*, *Leader Tenure* and *Leader Age* and *Civil War*. We also include *Pre-Election Violence* as an additional control to ensure that we are not picking up the overall likelihood of incumbents to use election violence.⁹⁷ Since violence against protestors is only possible when protests occur, we include in this sample only elections in which post-election protests occurred, regardless of whether or not

⁹⁷ Only 20 per cent of elections with pre-election violence also involve the use of post-election violence, however 85 per cent of the elections with post-election violence also had pre-election violence.

the incumbent decided to exit power after the election.

Table 5: Logit Estimates of the Effect of Executive Constraints on Post-Election Violence

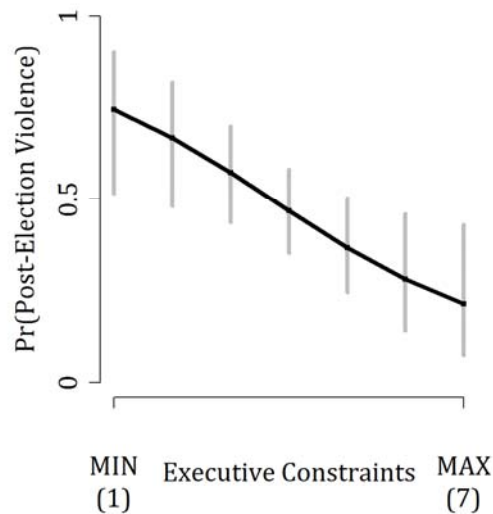
| | (1) Core Model | (2) Fixed Effects |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Executive Constraints | -0.45* | -0.58+ |
| | 0.22 | 0.34 |
| Pre-Election Violence | 1.44* | -0.14 |
| | 0.60 | 0.89 |
| Physical Integrity (avg) | -0.21 | 0.19 |
| | 0.17 | 0.42 |
| Political Competitiveness (avg) | -0.19 | -0.95* |
| | 0.15 | 0.43 |
| Executive Recruitment (avg) | 0.32 | 0.77 |
| | 0.22 | 0.47 |
| Population (log) | -0.52 | 6.63 |
| | 0.36 | 5.16 |
| GDP (log) | 0.47 | 1.41 |
| | 0.30 | 2.31 |
| Leader Tenure | -0.01 | -0.03 |
| | 0.01 | 0.03 |
| Leader Age | 0.58* | 1.13+ |
| | 0.29 | 0.64 |
| Civil War | -0.08 | 0.22 |
| | 0.29 | 0.44 |
| Observations | 160 | 92 |
| Log Likelihood | -88.37 | -25.42 |
| Country Random Effects | Yes | Yes |
| Country Fixed Effects | No | No |

+significant at 10%; *significant at 5%; **significant at 1%. Standard errors are in parentheses. All models are restricted to election in which post-election protests occurred.

We report logit estimates of this equation in Table 5. Column 1 reports estimates that include random effects, and column 2 reports estimates including country fixed-effects. Our results are consistent across both random-effect and fixed-effect specifications: the coefficients on *Executive Constraints* are negative and statistically significant. Figure 7 shows the predicted effects from column 1

of Table 5. A decrease in *Executive Constraints* from 7 to 1 increases the average probability of violence from 0.22 to 0.73, suggesting again that the incentives to repress protesters are mitigated by the presence of institutionalized constraints.

Figure 7: The Effect of Executive Constraints on Post-Election Violence



Shows the simulated effect (predicted probabilities) of *Executive Constraints* on *Post-Election Violence* from the estimates in Table 5 column 1. All other variables are set at the mean. Vertical lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

CONCLUSION

Using newly available data for all elections held in the world, 1981-2004, this article evaluated the conditions under which governments are most likely to use violence as an election strategy. These new data have several advantages. They measure specific forms of electoral violence directly rather than assuming election violence is measured by annual measures of political repression. They separate pre- and post-election violence. And they measure important variation in the popularity of incumbents and the information available to them about the potential threats induced by the election. In contrast to previous research, we

have shown that incumbent leaders are more likely to resort to repression—specifically violence—against political opposition candidates, voters, or citizens when they fear losing power but have few institutionalized constraints on their decision making power. We have also shown that pre-election violence can have the unintended consequence of increasing the probability of post-election protest, and that once post-election protests are initiated against the incumbent regime, institutionalized constraints on the executive can reduce incentives for the government to respond with violence. Using new monthly data and examples from Zimbabwe and Iran, we provided illustrations for our core argument that incumbent governments are likely to use election violence when they fear losing power—because they possess some information that they are unpopular—and face few institutionalized constraints.

It is clear is that as elections have spread to nearly all countries, some incumbents—including those in countries like Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Iran, or Zimbabwe—have used a strategy of violence in an effort to stay in power. In effect, elections exacerbate human rights violations in these places in the short term; without elections, the violations would probably be fewer. However, our results do not speak to whether or not leaders who use election violence actually succeed in staying in power, or whether periods of electorally induced political violence are inevitable parts of political liberalization.⁹⁸ Many of the world’s longest-standing consolidated democracies, including France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, experienced periods of election violence.⁹⁹ This

⁹⁸ Analysis of this question is presented in Hafner-Burton, Hyde, and Jablonski 2011.

⁹⁹ See, for example, Hoppen 1984; Keyssar 2009; Zeldin 1958.

history raises fundamental questions about the long-term relationship between political violence, elections, and democratization. Some scholars and pundits may be tempted to interpret the fact that leaders sometimes use political violence to manipulate elections as confirmation that elections are necessarily “bad” for countries without a history of elections and democracy. Yet our analysis does not support this conclusion.

Rather, several important implications follow from the evidence we provide in this article. First, the countries that are most likely to experience election violence are precisely those places in which the incumbent government feels threatened by an organized and potentially powerful opposition. Although all repression is clearly detrimental to democracy in the short term, competition is necessary for democracy in both the short and the long term. If our analysis is correct, then more often than not, election violence may be a symptom of a threatened and potentially weakening incumbent government rather than a sign that democratization—and future protection for human rights—is doomed.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, our analysis draws attention to the fact that there are a variety of sources for information about the incumbent’s popularity (that to our knowledge have never been studied systematically) that can help predict the likelihood of election violence. Though it may seem self-evident to suggest that incumbents turn to violence when they feel threatened, it is not obvious how to gauge these threats. That is why anticipating actual election violence in the real world has been extremely difficult to do; even the most dedicated organizations that support democratic elections are rarely able to predict when violence will break out. Predicting violence is not just an academic exercise; understanding the conditions under which election violence is most

likely to occur and how it can be mitigated is important because such information can inform the strategies of NGOs, international organizations, and other interested actors, allowing them to better anticipate where measures aimed at preventing election violence are most likely to be useful.

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