Elections, Electoral Systems, and Electoral Integrity*

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Abstract

Concerns with electoral integrity are tied to debates about democracy and democratic backsliding. The potential for democratic backsliding increases with the perceived stakes of the political game. Electoral systems matter because they affect the stakes of the game. They influence how ideological polarization in the party system is produced and processed. They also influence the extent to which group differences become politicized and how peacefully politicized differences are managed. The relationship between electoral rules and electoral integrity depends on many contextual factors. High electoral integrity can be achieved under both majoritarian and proportional rules given the right conditions. Empirically, we find no consistent differences in the level of electoral integrity across majoritarian and proportional electoral systems when we average across different economic, social, and political contexts. We encourage scholars to more closely examine the contextual effects of electoral systems on electoral integrity in future work.

*NOTE: We are grateful to Sona Golder and two anonymous reviewers for providing comments. All data and computer code necessary to replicate the results in this analysis will be made publicly available on our webpages on publication.

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Introduction

Concerns about electoral integrity are inherently tied to debates about democracy. This is because electoral integrity has to do with the 'quality' of elections and how 'good' elections promote democracy. When it comes to electoral integrity and democracy, does it matter what electoral rules we use? In this chapter, we explore how electoral rules influence electoral integrity in democratic elections. We focus on democracies because elections often serve very different purposes in dictatorships than they do in democracies.

In the next section, we outline the connection between elections, electoral integrity, and democracy. Competitive elections help to resolve conflicts peacefully and sustain democracy *under certain conditions*. When these conditions don't hold, political actors have incentives to violate electoral integrity and democracy is threatened. An important condition for sustaining democracy is that the perceived electoral stakes shouldn't be too high. When political actors are polarized and sufficiently fearful of what their opponents might do in power, they're more likely to violate democratic norms and engage in electoral malpractice (Svolik, 2019*b*, 2020; Svolik and Graham, 2020). Electoral rules matter in all this because they affect the stakes of the game and how political polarization is produced and processed. They also influence the extent to which group differences become politicized and how peacefully politicized differences are managed.

In this edited volume, electoral integrity is defined as "a set of principles to be achieved in elections which help to realize the ideals of democracy" (James and Garnett, 2025). Building on this framework, we lay out our argument by examining how electoral rules affect principles related to contestation, participation, and conflict management. Later we highlight the importance of how we think about democracy. Majoritarian electoral systems help to sustain a particular vision of democracy, while proportional systems help to sustain a quite different vision (Powell, 2000). This reminds us that arguments about the value of particular electoral systems reflect normative and ideological claims about the very nature of democracy. We finish by briefly investigating the empirical relationship between electoral systems and electoral integrity.

Elections, Electoral Integrity, and Democracy

Modern democracy is a system in which rulers must seek the consent of the people to govern by regularly holding competitive elections in which incumbents expose themselves to the possibility of losing (Przeworski, 2020; Stasavage, 2020). Competitive elections are important because they provide the means by

which the people authorize rulers to govern and hold them accountable for their actions. They provide citizens with the opportunity to express their preferences and shape the direction of public policy.

Competitive elections are also important, though, because they help to peacefully process conflicts and prevent violence (Przeworski and Sprague, 1986; Przeworski, 2020). Democracy is a foundational political institution in that no third-party enforcer exists to compel political actors to abide by the democratic rules of the game (Svolik, 2019*a*). As such, democracy must be a self-enforcing equilibrium (Przeworski, 2005). Regular competitive elections can help sustain such an equilibrium. While we would all like to rule ourselves, the fact we live together with others means we are almost certainly going to be ruled by someone else. Conflicts naturally arise because we have different preferences. As Przeworski (2020) argues, the possible alternation of governments that occurs in democracy because of elections can help to resolve these conflicts peacefully. In effect, the possibility of some *future* alternation in power may be sufficient to induce competing political actors to comply with the election of a ruler and live within the constraints of a democratic system rather than seek power through force *today*. Understanding the conditions that make this outcome possible sheds light on when we can expect to see electoral integrity violations.

Elections produce winners and losers. If the losers have a sufficiently high chance of winning at the next election, if the costs of fighting are high, and if the loss they'll suffer from being ruled by their opponent isn't too great, the losers may prefer to comply with an election outcome rather than reject it and seek power through force (Przeworski, 2020). The election winner is obviously happy they won. While they'd probably rather stay in power forever and not have to compete again in future elections, they may prefer to do so and run the risk of losing rather than provoke violence by seizing power (Birch, 2007). Much again depends on the costs of fighting, their chances of winning future elections, and the loss they'll suffer if their opponents come to power. If the winners value the democratic status quo sufficiently highly, they have an incentive to moderate their policies so the losers don't suffer too much and decide it's better for them to take up arms. They also have an incentive not to abuse their incumbency power to manipulate the political system and electoral rules in such a way that the losers' prospects of winning future elections fall too low. The winners may try to manipulate the system in their favor but only to the extent that the losers become indifferent between accepting the election outcome and engaging in violence (Przeworski, 2020).[1] Ultimately, it's the

[1]Mistakes can obviously be made. Due to informational asymmetries, it can be difficult for election winners to know exactly how much they can manipulate the system in their favor before the losers prefer to engage in violence. Similarly, it can be difficult for election losers to know for sure whether the incumbent's actions signal institutional reform or a rejection of the democratic rules of the game. It may also be difficult to know whether a reported election outcome accurately reflects citizen preferences or is the result of untoward manipulation. This can result in 'unnecessary' violence. While these types of informational issues and their

threat of costly violence, as well as possible democratic collapse, that leads incumbents to compromise and exercise self-control when it comes to electoral malpractice and rigging the system.

As Przeworski (2020, 118) remarks, "the miracle of democracy is that conflicting political forces obey the results of voting. People who have guns obey those without them. Incumbents risk their control of governmental offices by holding elections. Losers wait for their chance to win office. Conflicts are regulated, processed according to rules, and thus limited." It should be clear, though, that the miracle of democracy won't work under all conditions. One important condition for it to work is that there shouldn't be too much at stake at election time. If the policy or material differences between the winners and losers are too great, the winners might be unwilling to risk losing in a future election and instead try to manipulate the system during their incumbency so they can maintain their hold on power. This might involve them engaging in forms of electoral malpractice such as partisan gerrymandering, intimidating voters, placing restrictions on ballot access, making voter registration difficult, requiring a pro-government media bias, weakening election management bodies, stuffing ballot boxes, and delaying or even canceling elections. Similarly, if the losers perceive too much to be at stake, they might be unwilling to wait for their chance to gain power at the next election and instead engage in violence to prevent the winners from taking office. An implication is that we can expect electoral integrity to be high and elections more successful at peacefully resolving conflict when the stakes of the game are low and elections aren't expected to produce significant change.

Electoral systems matter for electoral integrity and democracy because they affect the stakes of the game. They influence the extent to which power is divided as opposed to concentrated. They also influence the level of polarization in the party system and how this polarization is processed during the election and government formation process (Golder and Ferland, 2018; Ferland and Golder, 2021). In addition, they influence how likely group differences are to become politicized and how peacefully these differences are managed (Lijphart, 2004; Horowitz, 1985; Reilly, 2001). In what follows, we examine exactly how these effects of electoral systems work. We do so by examining how electoral rules affect principles related to contestation, participation, and conflict management. To facilitate this discussion, though, we first summarize some of the key differences between electoral systems.

potential solutions are well discussed by scholars of authoritarian power-sharing (Svolik, 2012), they've arguably not been central to much of the literature on democratic power-sharing and electoral integrity.

Democratic Electoral Systems

An electoral system is a set of laws and regulations governing the competition between candidates and parties (Cox, 1997). These laws and regulations define the electoral formula, the ballot structure, the district magnitude, campaign finance regulations, ballot access, voter registration, and election management bodies. Despite their different dimensions, electoral systems are most commonly categorized into three main families based on the formula they use to translate votes into seats: majoritarian, proportional, and mixed (Bormann and Golder, 2022).

In a majoritarian system, the candidates/parties receiving the most votes win. Although some require the winning candidate/party to obtain a majority of the votes, others require only that they get more votes than anyone else. Most majoritarian systems see voters elect representatives in single-member districts. The most common majoritarian system is the single-member district plurality (SMDP) system in which voters cast a single candidate-centered vote in a single-member district. Over the last 100 years, the SMDP system has been employed in about two-thirds of majoritarian legislative elections.

Proportional representation (PR) systems use quotas or divisors to allocate seats in multi-member districts. The main objective is to produce a proportional translation of votes into seats. Almost all PR systems involve parties presenting a list of candidates in each multi-member district. Parties receive seats in proportion to the share of votes going to their list according to the specific quota or divisor used.[2] Over the last 100 years, the d'Hondt divisor system has been used in almost half of proportional legislative elections. The Hare quota has been used in 30% of these elections. Exactly which candidates on a list obtain the seats won by their party depends on the nature of the party list. With a *closed list*, the winning candidates are determined by the party as voters aren't able to express a preference for a particular candidate. With an *open list*, voters can influence which candidates win seats by indicating not just their preferred party but also their favorite candidate within that party. With a *free list*, voters have even more flexibility because they have multiple votes that they can allocate to candidates either within a single party list or across different party lists. The capacity to vote for candidates from different party lists is known as panachage, while the capacity to give multiple votes to a single highly-favored candidate is known as cumulation.

Most majoritarian and proportional systems simply require voters to indicate which candidates/parties

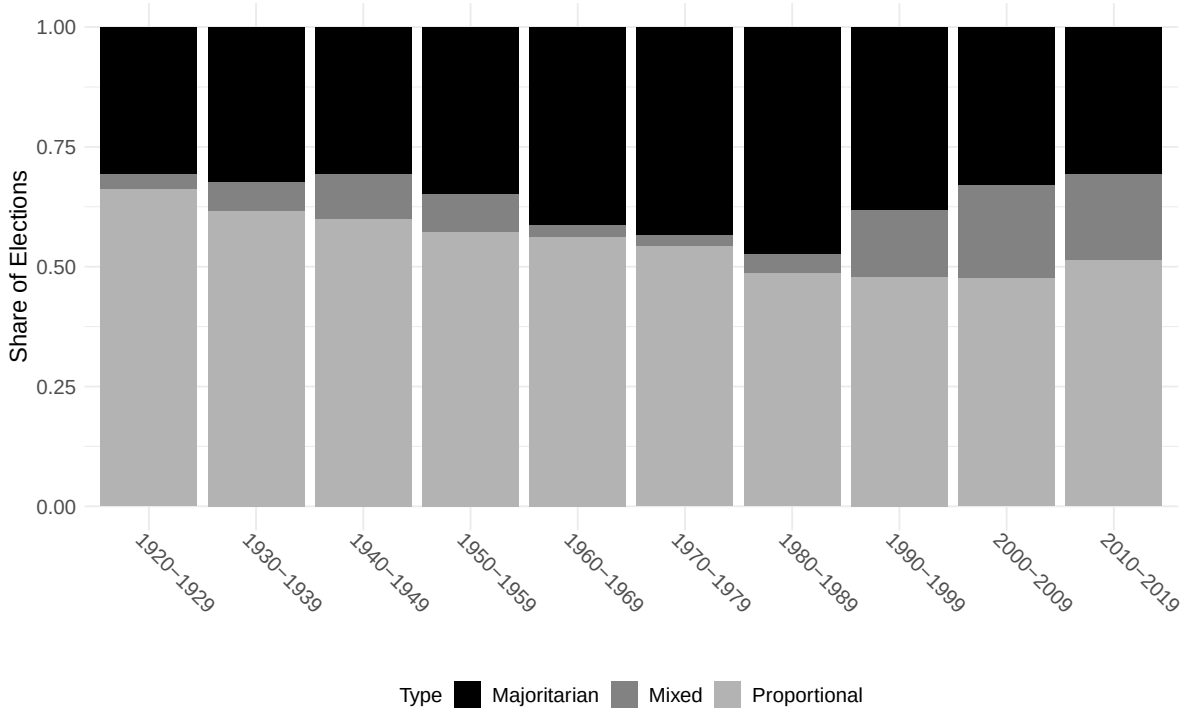
[2] A quota specifies the number of votes needed to guarantee an additional district seat. In a divisor system, party votes are divided by a series of numbers called divisors to produce quotients. District seats are then allocated based on which parties have the highest quotients (Clark, Golder and Golder, 2024).

they favor. However, they sometimes require voters to rank order (some or all of) the candidates. These are known as preference or preferential voting systems. The alternative vote (AV) is a majoritarian preference voting system. With AV, one legislator is elected from each district. A candidate who wins an absolute majority of first-preference votes is elected. If no candidate wins an absolute majority, the candidate with the lowest number of first-preference votes is eliminated, and their ballots are reallocated among the remaining candidates according to the indicated second preferences. This process continues until a candidate receives a majority. The single transferable vote (STV) is an example of a proportional preference voting system. Loosely-speaking, STV is equivalent to AV except that it's applied in multi-member districts and the votes of the winning candidates must satisfy some quota less than an absolute majority.

In a mixed system, voters elect some representatives via majoritarian rules and some via proportional rules. Most employ multiple electoral tiers. An electoral tier is a level at which votes are translated into seats. The lowest tier is the district level, with higher tiers constituted by grouping multiple lower-tier constituencies at the regional or national level. A majoritarian formula is used in the lowest tier and a proportional one in the upper tier. Mixed systems differ in terms of whether their majoritarian and proportional components are independent or dependent. In an independent ('mixed parallel') system, the majoritarian and proportional components are implemented independently of one another. In a dependent ('mixed member proportional') system, the proportional component is specifically designed to correct for the disproportionality produced by the majoritarian component. This is why they're often classified with PR systems. Over the last 100 years, about 40% of elections using a mixed system have employed a dependent version of these systems. In some mixed systems, voters have only one vote, which is used for both parts of the electoral system. In many mixed systems, though, voters have two votes, a 'candidate' vote for the majoritarian component and a 'party' vote for the proportional component.

In Figure 1, we show the share of democratic legislative elections employing majoritarian, proportional, and mixed electoral systems by decade from 1919 to 2020 (Bormann and Golder, 2022; Bormann and Kaftan, 2024). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the share of democratic elections conducted under proportional rules has declined over time. From a peak of almost 70% in the 1920s, the share of proportional elections has dropped in virtually every decade since. This trend reversed slightly in the last decade when the share of proportional elections increased slightly and exceeded 50% for the first time since the 1970s. The share of elections conducted under majoritarian rules initially increased from about a third in the 1950s to almost

Figure 1: Share of Democratic Legislative Elections by Electoral System Type and Decade, 1919-2020



Note: Data come from the Democratic Electoral Systems dataset (Bormann and Golder, 2022; Bormann and Kaftan, 2024).

a half in the 1980s. To a large extent, this reflected how many newly independent states in Africa and Asia adopted the majoritarian rules of their former British and French colonial rulers after decolonization. This increase in the share of majoritarian elections reversed in the 1990s. Indeed, today there are relatively fewer majoritarian elections than in the 1920s. The declining share of majoritarian elections is partly due to the rising appeal of mixed electoral systems following the third wave of democracy. Many new democracies in Eastern Europe and Asia adopted mixed systems, and several democracies in Latin America have transitioned from using proportional systems to using mixed ones.

Electoral Systems and Their Consequences

The type of electoral system used in elections has important consequences for electoral integrity. This is because it affects the stakes of the game. To illustrate this, we look at how they affect political contestation, participation, and conflict management, three dimensions thought to influence how the ideals of democracy are realized (James and Garnett, 2025). We focus in particular on majoritarian and proportional systems, as

their impact on electoral integrity is most clearly theorized.

Political Contestation

Electoral systems affect the nature of political contestation. They influence the size and ideological composition of a country's party system, thereby affecting the extent to which voters are confronted with meaningful choices at election time. They also influence the ability of voters to accurately convey their preferences. Meaningful voter choice is often considered good for electoral integrity and, indeed, feeds directly into some measures of electoral integrity (Norris, 2014; Garnett et al., 2023). However, we argue that meaningful choice doesn't *necessarily* promote electoral integrity as it also raises the stakes of political competition.

Duverger's (1963) theory provides the dominant explanation for party system size. It argues that party system size is shaped by the interaction of social diversity and electoral rules (Clark and Golder, 2006). Social diversity creates the 'demand' for parties. Demand is high when there are many cross-cutting social cleavages. The extent to which demand is translated into parties depends on the proportionality of the electoral system. Electoral rules matter because of their mechanical and strategic effects. The mechanical effect refers to how votes are translated into seats. Majoritarian systems reward large parties and penalize small ones because only large parties can win seats.[3] This mechanical effect induces a strategic effect on the part of voters and elites. Expecting small parties to have a difficult time winning seats in majoritarian systems, voters may desert small parties and cast a strategic vote for a larger, more 'viable' party. Similarly, political elites may prefer to run as a candidate in a large party rather than a small one, or join an established party rather than create a new one. The incentives to engage in this sort of strategic behavior are weaker in proportional systems because the mechanical translation of votes into seats is less damaging to small parties.

Two observable implications of Duverger's theory are that majoritarian SMDP systems encourage two-party systems (Duverger's law) and that proportional electoral rules favor multiparty systems (Duverger's hypothesis). Consistent with these implications, empirical studies find that majoritarian systems are generally associated with fewer parties than proportional ones (Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 1994; Amorim Neto and Cox, 1997; Clark and Golder, 2006). Important to recognize, though, is that the logic underpinning Duverger's theory works only at the district level. We should expect a national two-party system in SMDP

[3] Some measures of electoral integrity, such as the one provided by the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI) dataset (Norris, 2014; Garnett et al., 2023), code elections as having lower electoral integrity if small parties are penalized. The fact that this is a mechanical feature of all majoritarian systems means they'll always be at a disadvantage when it comes to producing 'electoral integrity' compared to proportional systems. Those who wish to test rather than define the relationship between electoral rules and electoral integrity using the PEI measure should remove this particular component from an election's overall PEI score.

countries only to the extent that the party system is nationalized and the same two parties are advantaged in each district (Chhibber and Kollman, 1998, 2004; Golder, 2006*a*; Hicken, 2009; Stoll, 2015). Party system size, and with it party competition, can look very different at the local level from at the national level in some countries. These nuances are often missed in empirical studies that only investigate the national level or that fail to take account of the conditional effects of electoral rules.

Through their ability to influence the number of parties, electoral systems also affect party location in the policy space. Spatial models predict that majoritarian systems create centripetal pressures to converge on the location of the median voter, whereas proportional systems create centrifugal pressures to disperse throughout the policy space and cultivate niche electorates (Cox, 1990; Downs, 1957; Merrill and Adams, 2002). The fact that majoritarian systems tend to reward large parties and voters often tend to be concentrated in the center of the policy space means that majoritarian systems also create incentives for parties to adopt fairly centrist positions. The incentives to adopt centrist positions are weaker in PR systems where small parties are able to win legislative seats and must distinguish themselves ideologically from their many competitors.[4] Consistent with this, empirical studies generally find that party systems in proportional countries are more polarized and less ideologically compact than those in majoritarian countries (Dalton, 2008; Dow, 2001, 2011; Matakos, Troumpounis and Xefteris, 2016).

In sum, majoritarian electoral rules tend to produce party systems characterized by a small number of large 'umbrella' parties that typically adopt fairly centrist positions, whereas proportional systems tend to produce party systems characterized by many parties that are dispersed throughout the policy space (Ferland and Golder, 2021). What does all this imply for electoral integrity and democratic stability?

A common story is that electoral integrity and democratic stability are higher in PR systems because voters are confronted with a more meaningful array of ideological choices in the party system. As suggested earlier, though, elections help sustain a self-enforcing democratic equilibrium when little is at stake. Too much polarization between government alternatives can be bad. Majoritarian systems create centripetal tendencies for a small number of large parties to adopt similar policy positions close to the median voter. While this limits voter choice, it helps minimize the electoral stakes, thereby promoting democratic stability and electoral integrity. Problems can arise, however, if other pressures counteract the centripetal tendencies

[4]The pressures to disperse in PR systems are tempered by government formation incentives to remain centrist to increase the chances of entering a coalition cabinet (Schofield, 1993; Laver and Shepsle, 1996; Glasgow, Golder and Golder, 2011; Curino and Hino, 2012). Similarly, the pressures to adopt centrist positions in majoritarian systems are moderated by valence incentives that encourage low valence parties to differentiate themselves in terms of policy (Schofield, 2003; Schofield and Sened, 2005).

of majoritarian systems. If polarization happens to arise and voters are confronted with a more consequential choice, then the winner-take-all nature of majoritarian elections where single-party majority governments are common significantly raises the electoral stakes. This may encourage actors to break democratic norms and engage in electoral malpractice to prevent the 'other side' from winning. In sum, majoritarian systems work to prevent the emergence of party system polarization but aren't well suited to peacefully process polarization and meaningful choice if they nonetheless emerge.

Unlike majoritarian systems, PR systems create centrifugal incentives that produce a more ideologically diverse party system. In non-presidential democracies, the government formation process works to keep the electoral stakes low. This is because the vote of no confidence forces governments to obtain legislative majority support. The fact that PR systems produce many parties means that single parties rarely obtain a legislative majority and coalition governments are likely. Due to its pivotal role in the government formation process, the median legislative party, which tends to be ideologically close to the median voter, is often a member of any coalition government (Laver and Schofield, 1998). This constrains the types of coalition governments that form and hence the political stakes at election time.[5]

Empirically, there is little difference in the ideological distance between the government and the median voter across proportional and majoritarian systems (Blais and Bodet, 2006; Ferland, 2016; Golder and Lloyd, 2014; Golder and Stramski, 2010). This suggests that on average there's little difference in the stakes of elections across countries with majoritarian and proportional electoral rules. This finding moreover implies that the extent to which PR systems provide voters with more meaningful electoral choices may be overstated. Ultimately, governments, not parties, implement policy and the ideological congruence of governments with voters doesn't differ much across electoral systems. Moreover, the fact that coalition governments are more likely in PR systems means it's less clear to citizens how their votes influence government choice, as the bargains in forming government coalitions usually occur behind closed doors. In the absence of pre-electoral coalitions (Golder, 2006*b*), voters in PR systems are rarely confronted with identifiable government alternatives (meaningful choices) at election time. The prevalence of coalition governments and the intricacies of the government formation process also mean it's hard for voters to hold governing parties accountable for their actions, which reduces incentives for incumbents to uphold electoral integrity.

[5]The constraining effect of the government formation process is weaker in presidential democracies because the vote of no confidence is absent. This means that any party system polarization produced by PR rules raises the stakes of legislative elections and creates incentives for electoral integrity violations. The winner-take-all nature of presidential elections, combined with the ideological diversity in the party system produced by PR legislative elections, may be particularly problematic. See Mainwaring (1993) for a discussion of this "difficult combination" and the survival chances of presidential democracy.

One final consideration has to do with how electoral rules affect the ability of voters to accurately convey their preferences, something that's often considered an important component of electoral integrity. Most electoral systems require voters to indicate their preferred party or candidate. Some argue that more 'complex' systems that employ preferential voting, panachage, cumulation, and other similar ballot features allow voters to make more nuanced choices and cast ballots that are more aligned with their preferences (Young, 1995; Nurmi, 1999; Farrell and McAllister, 2006; Jankowski, 2016). While some of these ballot features can be applied in majoritarian systems, they're more commonly associated with PR systems due to their use of multi-member districts and their larger party systems. A potential downside of these complex rules, which often result in longer and messier ballots, is that they place higher cognitive demands on voters. This makes it harder for voters with fewer resources and less political sophistication/interest to vote 'correctly' (Lau and Redlawsk, 1997), and can lead them to abstain or cast invalid ballots (Gallego, 2010; André, Wauters and Pilet, 2012; André and Depauw, 2017). Greater complexity thus contributes to increased inequality with respect to political representation. Certain complex rules can have other undesirable effects. For example, the requirement to rank all candidates in some preferential voting systems often leads to donkey voting, where voters end up ranking the candidates they don't care or know much about simply in the order they appear on the ballot. In a recent experimental study, Rinne (2024) finds that more complex rules can improve the degree of 'correct' voting, especially when voters aren't closely aligned with a distinct party, but that the improvement in correct voting is higher for more politically sophisticated voters. While some scholars find that voters use more complicated ballot features when they're available (Laslier et al., 2015), others find that many don't appreciate the added complexity (Müller and Jankowski, 2019).

A limitation of the existing literature is that it almost always assumes voters are engaged in proximity voting over policy. Voters, though, aren't usually voting directly over policy in elections. Instead, they're voting for parties/candidates who influence policy via the government formation process. Government formation can be quite complex and hard to predict, especially in PR systems. That policy ultimately depends on which government forms and other institutional features such as federalism often leads voters to engage in directional or compensatory voting rather than 'correct' proximity voting (Kedar, 2009; Iversen, 1994). It's also common in elections for voters to take account of non-policy valence concerns (Adams, Merrill and Grofman, 2005) as well as non-programmatic forms of party competition such as clientelism (Stokes et al., 2013). This suggests that insights from research on ballot complexity and correct voting may not necessarily generalize to many real-world electoral contexts and are more applicable to pure policy-voting scenarios.

Participation

The most common form of political participation is voting. PR rules are frequently thought to promote voter turnout (Lijphart, 2000).[6] High voter turnout is often considered desirable because it implies voters are actively engaged in choosing their rulers and willing to hold incumbents accountable. This is thought to promote electoral integrity and place limits on the willingness and ability of rulers to engage in democratic backsliding. For many scholars, high turnout signals the legitimacy of the political system, and thus the stability of democracy. However, the theoretical basis and empirical support for this conventional wisdom isn't especially strong (Blais and Aarts, 2006; Smith, 2018).

Several arguments have been proposed for why PR systems promote turnout (Blais, 2006; Smith, 2018). One common argument emphasizes the importance of party system size. PR rules encourage larger party systems in which parties disperse in the policy space. The fact that all voters have parties located relatively close to them means they should feel well represented and be more willing to vote (Powell, 1986; Jackman, 1987).[7] The greater the distance to the closest party, the more likely voters are to feel alienated and the more likely they are to abstain. The small party system size and centripetal tendencies produced by majoritarian rules mean that many voters, especially those on the extremes, are confronted by a set of limited and unpalatable choices, thereby discouraging turnout. The larger party system permitted by PR rules also means there are more parties mobilizing voters. Moreover, party mobilization efforts are arguably more effective in PR systems because the parties in these systems, unlike the 'umbrella' parties in majoritarian systems, tend to represent, and therefore have stronger linkages with, distinct social groups (Powell, 1980; Cox, 2015). This higher and more effective voter mobilization in PR systems should lead to higher turnout.

There are reasons to think, though, that having many parties may also discourage turnout. Coalition governments become more likely as party systems become larger. Negotiations over who the government will be typically occur after an election. This means that voting in PR systems isn't usually as decisive at determining the government's identity as it is in majoritarian systems. This reduces people's incentives to vote (Jackman, 1987). This negative effect of party system size can be mitigated if parties form pre-electoral coalitions (Tillman, 2015). The presence of many parties and the complicated way in which votes affect the choice of government can also increase the cognitive difficulty involved in deciding how to vote,

[6] Compulsory voting requirements guarantee high voter turnout and have implications for electoral integrity. A detailed discussion of compulsory voting can be found in Chapter **.

[7] This line of reasoning also suggests that open list PR systems should encourage voter turnout more than closed list systems, because voters can indicate their support for a particular candidate within a party list.

a 'cost' that deters turnout, especially among those with fewer resources and less political sophistication.[8] Moreover, large party systems may not lead to greater voter mobilization if parties think their mobilization efforts might spill over and help their competitors (Cox, 2015). In sum, the creation of larger and more diverse party systems by PR rules produces competing pressures when it comes to turnout.

A second common argument emphasizes the importance of competitive/close elections. The traditional calculus of voting model indicates that people vote when the expected benefits, which are determined by the probability a vote is pivotal and the benefit from having your side win, outweigh the costs (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). Some argue that people are more likely to vote in PR systems because proportional rules mean votes are more accurately translated into seats, thereby making voters feel more efficacious (Blais and Carty, 1990; Karp, Banducci and Bowler, 2008). This is largely a psychological argument. The likelihood an individual vote will be pivotal is often tiny, though, suggesting that instrumental voting is irrational. Despite this, many people vote. To address the paradox of voting, some scholars emphasize the non-instrumental benefits of voting (Schuessler, 2000). Others focus on elite mobilization (Morton, 1991; Uhlaner, 1989). When elections are close, elites have a strong incentive to mobilize voters as it's easier to affect election outcomes. Once mobilized as *groups* that can swing elections, voters rationally respond by turning out.

Elites care about the extent to which voter mobilization provides office and policy benefits. The decision to mobilize depends on how efficiently mobilization translates into votes, votes translate into seats, and seats translate into office and policy benefits (Cox, 1999). Electoral rules directly influence the translation of votes into seats. Increasing proportionality at this stage should lead to greater mobilization efforts and higher turnout. However, electoral rules also influence the other stages through their effect on party system size. Assuming spillover effects aren't too high, we might expect greater voter mobilization in PR systems as there are more parties. As coalition governments are more likely under PR, though, individual parties are unlikely to gain full control over any office and policy benefits, reducing the incentive to mobilize voters. In effect, the value of 'winning' is often lower in PR systems.

It's frequently argued that mobilization efforts will be higher in PR systems because elections are closer (Jackman, 1987). PR rules mean that each additional vote is valuable, suggesting that most districts will be competitive. In majoritarian SMDP systems, though, parties have incentives to mobilize only in 'swing' districts where the winning party's identity is uncertain. This suggests there'll be more district-level vari-

[8] As previously noted, the cognitive difficulty facing voters is increased further if the PR system employs a complex ballot that allows for more nuanced voter choice through things like panachage, cumulation, and preferential voting.

ation in mobilization and turnout in majoritarian countries than in proportional ones (Selb, 2009; Eggers, 2015; Cox, Fiva and Smith, 2016). Arguably, the winner-take-all nature of majoritarian elections means mobilization efforts in majoritarian swing districts will be higher than the typical mobilization effort in PR systems. This will be especially true if the parties in the majoritarian system are ideologically polarized, as the stakes of the game will be particularly high. Therefore, mobilization and turnout in PR districts will be lower than in majoritarian swing districts but higher than in majoritarian safe districts. Whether PR or majoritarian rules lead to more mobilization and higher turnout at the national level will thus depend on the share of electorally-close districts in majoritarian countries, as well as the presence of institutions promoting party system nationalization and cross-district coordination (Cox, 1999; Herrera, Morelli and Palfrey, 2014).

Theoretically, it's difficult to make an unconditional claim that PR systems produce higher turnout. The empirical evidence is also mixed. While there's fairly consistent evidence that PR systems are associated with higher turnout in advanced industrialized countries (Powell, 1980; Blais and Carty, 1990; Jackman and Miller, 1995; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998), this isn't the case in the less developed countries of Latin America and Eastern Europe (Pérez-Liñán, 2001; Kostadinova, 2003; Fornos, Power and Garand, 2004; Blais and Aarts, 2006). Nor is there compelling evidence that turnout increases with party system size (Brockington, 2004; Blais and Aarts, 2006) or that proportional systems lead to higher levels of voter mobilization by political parties (Karp, Banducci and Bowler, 2008; Rainey, 2015).

It's also questionable to what extent high turnout signals democratic stability and electoral integrity. Many believe that mass support for a political system provides it with the legitimacy to operate effectively (Booth and Seligson, 2009; Norris, 2011). Voter turnout is often taken as a measure of mass support. When we observe low turnout, it's frequently seen as a harbinger of democratic instability. Recent declines in public support for democracy in developed countries have alarmed many about the possibility of democratic backsliding (Foa and Mounk, 2016; Armingeon and Guthman, 2014). Despite these fears, though, there's little evidence strong public support is necessary for democracy. In a recent study, Claassen (2020) finds that public support helps democratic survival but not democratic emergence. However, Treisman (2023) shows that the result with respect to democratic survival only applies to some types of democracy, and not the 'liberal' democracies such as Poland, Hungary, and the US that animate much of the debate about democratic backsliding and electoral integrity. Moreover, Tai, Hu and Solt (2024) find that Claasen's results disappear entirely once we take account of uncertainty in how public support is measured. We simply don't have compelling evidence that declining public support for democracy leads to democratic backsliding.

Others have also noted that a growing desire to be governed by 'strong leaders' or non-partisan 'experts' may simply be a desire for more competent government and doesn't necessarily imply that people don't wish to choose these actors or be able to replace them if they fail (Przeworski, 2019).

In fact, high turnout may actually signal potential democratic instability, especially in majoritarian democracies. The traditional calculus of voting model indicates that people are more likely to vote when the benefit from having your side win as opposed to the other is high. The winner-take-all nature of majoritarian elections raises the electoral stakes. This won't be too problematic when the centripetal tendencies of majoritarian rules push parties to hold similar policy positions. If ideological polarization emerges, though, then it really matters who wins. Polarization produces high turnout, particularly if the election is close. These conditions are then conducive to electoral malpractice. Not only will elites be more likely to engage in electoral malpractice, but the masses will also be more likely to accept violations of democratic norms to guarantee their side winning. Thus, high turnout in majoritarian elections may not signal democratic stability. This is less the case for PR elections because the need to form coalition governments reduces the value of holding office and pulls governments towards the center.

Conflict Management

As we live together with others who have different preferences means that conflicts will naturally arise. If not managed carefully, these conflicting preferences can turn violent, undermining electoral integrity and democratic stability (Birch, Daxecker and Höglund, 2020). Elections, as we noted earlier, can help to resolve these conflicts peacefully. But the precise rules used in these elections likely matter. Scholars differ on exactly what rules are best for peacefully managing conflict. In line with our discussion of political contestation, scholars generally agree that electoral rules play an important role in determining whether many parties representing distinct social groups or a smaller number of broad-based parties, each drawing support from multiple social groups, will form. Where they differ is in terms of whether democratic stability is best ensured by taking social groups as given and ensuring that minority groups are guaranteed adequate representation, or by assuming that group identities are malleable and can be successfully channeled into promoting behavior that supports, rather than challenges, democracy.

Consociationalists take social groups as given (Lijphart, 2004). They argue that minorities pose a danger to democracy when they're excluded from participation in formal political institutions. But if these minorities are given access to formal institutions and those institutions are designed to reflect the interests of

as broad a set of the population as possible, they'll have a stake in democracy's continued survival. Consociationalists desire multiple checks and balances to prevent the state from abusing minority rights. By making it difficult to change the status quo, checks and balances lower the value of 'winning' and hence the stakes of the game. PR systems are favored as they encourage large party systems and executive power-sharing via coalition governments. Majoritarian systems are considered problematic because their winner-take-all nature raises the stakes of the game and can lead to the indefinite exclusion of some societal groups. Majoritarian systems can mitigate this problem with reserved seats and portfolios for specified minorities. But guaranteeing minority representation in this way requires governments to address the difficult and politically incendiary question of which minorities require special representation guarantees.

Critics of consociationalism argue that PR systems help facilitate the election of small anti-system parties that become locked in cycles of legislative conflict, which can spill over into violent social conflict. PR rules can also give small parties a disproportionate influence in the government formation process. If their support is necessary to build a legislative majority, small parties may obtain concessions that lack majority support. Some scholars are concerned that PR rules replicate societal divisions in the legislature, and thereby intensify political conflict in parliament. Rather than encourage moderation, PR can lead to ever more extremist parties trying to outbid each other in order to win group votes (Bogaards, 2003).

In contrast to consociationalists, *integrationists* argue that group identities are malleable. They claim that the salience of group identities can be lowered and inter-group cooperation achieved with the right incentive structure. This involves choosing institutions requiring people to form 'coalitions' that are larger than individual social groups to win power. When it comes to electoral rules, most integrationists call for the adoption of the alternative vote (AV), a majoritarian preference voting system. Voters motivated by group identity are likely to indicate an in-group member as their first preference and the least unlikable candidate from an alternative group as their second. In highly diverse districts, candidates realize their success will likely depend on the transfer of second (and possibly lower) preferences from other groups. Consequently, successful candidates will be those who are effective at making broad-based centrist appeals that cross group lines. This lowers the salience of group differences and encourages moderation and accommodation across social groups (Horowitz, 1985, 1991; Reilly, 1997, 2001).[9]

One factor often overlooked in this debate is the geographic distribution of voters. The AV and PR

[9]Critics of AV argue that it's unrealistic in divided societies because political elites often obtain their privileges as leaders of distinct social groups and parties, and will therefore be unwilling to adopt an electoral system that undermines their position by forcing them to pool their group votes with others. Only Australia, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea have held AV elections.

approaches to managing conflict only matter when members from different social groups live in close proximity. When social groups are geographically concentrated in distinct parts of a country and one group dominates an electoral district, AV won't encourage cross-group appeals.[10] Similarly, the geographic concentration of groups undermines the advantage of PR in representing minorities relative to majoritarian systems. In most of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, ethnic groups live in separate, mostly homogenous areas (Müller-Crepon, 2023), and elect legislators from their own group in SMDP elections. Despite this, election outcomes are often as proportional as if they were held in a single country-wide district under PR, as districts from different regions send members of their own ethnic groups to parliament (Barkan, 1995). In fact, in an effort to enable minority representation, some Latin American countries have moved from PR systems to mixed systems with plurality districts reserved for racial minorities (Van Cott, 2005).

The evidence regarding the effect of electoral rules on conflict management is inconclusive. Some find that PR is negatively associated with violence (Cohen, 1997; Reynal-Querol, 2002; Saideman et al., 2002). There are, however, reasons to be cautious about these results. First, none of these studies examine how PR modifies the way that social diversity influences conflict. In other words, they don't test the claim that social diversity leads to conflict in majoritarian countries but less so in PR ones. The one study that does test this claim finds that, if anything, PR systems exacerbate violence in socially diverse societies (Selway and Templeman, 2012). Second, whether PR reduces conflict or not, it doesn't appear to do so through the mechanisms proposed by consociationalists. Ethnic power-sharing coalitions, for example, are less frequent in countries that run PR elections than in those that run majoritarian ones (Bormann, 2019). Third, existing research doesn't typically distinguish between different types of majoritarian systems. As a result, they don't test the claim that AV moderates the effect of social diversity on conflict. Nor do they examine the extent to which the moderating effect of AV depends on the geographic concentration of social groups. Part of the problem is that statistical analyses are hard to do because so few countries use AV.

Electoral Rules, Visions of Democracy, and Electoral Integrity

Electoral rules are closely associated with different visions of democracy (Powell, 2000). Modern democracy is a system in which rulers must seek the people's consent to govern by regularly holding competitive

[10] Bogaards (2003) argues that 'constituency pooling' strategies can create similar moderating incentives as AV when social groups are geographically concentrated. Constituency pooling requires pooling votes across districts rather than within districts. It might involve requiring parties to win a sufficiently high level of support in different constituencies or regions of a country before being eligible for legislative representation.

elections. Beyond this minimalist definition, though, there are different visions about how democracy should work. To a large extent, we can distinguish between majoritarian and consensus visions. Loosely-speaking, the majoritarian vision, which is associated with majoritarian electoral rules, seeks to concentrate power in the hands of the majority, while the consensus vision, which is associated with PR rules, seeks to disperse power among many groups.

A concern with some of the scholarship on electoral integrity is that it incorporates a hidden ideological agenda (Birch, 2011). Scholars of electoral integrity and democratic backsliding often seem to be especially worried about the decline of 'liberal' democracy (Diamond, 2015, 2020; Müller, 2014). Liberal democracy takes a particularly negative view of political power. It emphasizes pluralism and the importance of placing constraints on legislative majorities and the exercise of executive power. In many ways, liberal democracy promotes a consensus vision of democracy. Proponents of liberal democracy almost always see any reduction in executive constraints and the removal of anti-majoritarian institutions as evidence of electoral malpractice and democratic backsliding. While it's certainly possible that 'democracy' is at risk when these things happen, this needn't be the case. Instead, these reforms might simply signal the adoption of a more majoritarian vision of democracy (Slater, 2013).[11] As Przeworski (2022, 7) reminds us, the preference for a liberal or consensus democracy over a majoritarian, or what he calls an electoral democracy is, in large part, an ideological one. Democracy doesn't require external constraints to be placed on the majority.

Majoritarian and PR electoral systems are important for implementing the two competing visions of democracy due to their effects on party systems, the government formation process, and conflict management that we've already discussed. In what follows, we briefly discuss the key differences between the two visions of democracy. According to the majoritarian vision, citizens choose between two alternative teams of politicians at election time. While the members in each team may hold diverse preferences, they choose to compete together in elections, a process that involves compromise and moderation, in order to win majority support. Whichever team wins a majority forms the government and implements the policies it ran on. Citizens evaluate the policy record to hold the government accountable at the following election.

A central idea of the majoritarian vision is that policy should be determined by the majority. In any complex society, individuals will hold different preferences. A normative appeal of majority rule is that it

[11] The difficulty of distinguishing whether these reforms are designed to promote a different type of democratic vision or to usher in authoritarian rule highlights the difficulties scholars face trying to empirically identify electoral malpractice and democratic backsliding. Our point is simply that these types of reforms shouldn't automatically be considered evidence of a decline in electoral integrity and democracy.

minimizes aggregate dissatisfaction with group decisions (Rae, 1969). According to the majoritarian vision, citizens who hold minority preferences should have no influence in the policymaking process. Power is not to be dispersed across different actors and institutions. The ability of citizens to control their elected representatives and, hence, policy decisions through the electoral process is thought to be possible only if there's a clear concentration of power in the hands of a single-party majority government.

The team that wins an electoral majority holds all the political power and can consume the whole 'pie' until the next election. This doesn't mean, though, that power isn't shared. While power isn't shared during a given electoral cycle, it is shared *over time* so long as different majorities can compete and alternate in office. Moreover, the fact that the winning team can consume the whole 'pie' doesn't mean it will. As discussed earlier, the winning team has incentives to make compromises and exercise self-control so the losing team doesn't stop participating in democratic institutions and engage in violence.

That majoritarian democracies don't disperse power across different institutions means there are few veto players. This means it's relatively easy to change the status quo. Minorities that comprise the losing team in one election can change the status quo more to their liking simply by building majority support at the next election. They can do this by trying to win over defecting members of the incumbent winning team and by trying to better mobilize their own supporters. This creates political competition which also incentivizes moderation and electoral integrity on the part of the incumbent majority.

According to the consensus vision, elections are events in which citizens choose representatives from as wide a range of social groups as possible. This is facilitated by PR rules. Elections aren't designed to serve as an accountability referendum regarding the set of policies implemented by the government. Instead, they're there to provide citizens with the opportunity to choose representatives who'll be effective advocates for their interests when bargaining over policy next takes place in the legislature. Policy should be determined by as many citizens (and their representatives) as possible. Citizens with majority preferences aren't to be given privileged status in the policymaking process. Instead, all groups of citizens, including minorities, should have power to influence policy in proportion to their electoral size. In this way, power is to be shared not only over time but also at each moment in time.

Representatives need to win majority legislative support to pass their policies. Rather than coordinate with each other to form two competing teams, multiple different groups of representatives (parties) run separately at election time, thereby offering voters a wider range of ideological choice. The competing parties then bargain with each other after the election to build majority support for their policies. Legislative

majorities frequently shift as parties build different coalitions depending on the policy under consideration.

An important objective of the consensus vision is to prevent a 'tyranny of the majority' where legislative majorities can ride roughshod over minority preferences. This is to be achieved by dispersing power across different actors and institutions in such a way that the minority has some valuable policymaking influence with which to defend its interests. In effect, the consensus vision imposes institutional limits on any legislative majority that might arise via elections. Rather than simply assume that majorities will exhibit self-control to prevent the minority from withdrawing its participation in democratic institutions and engaging in violence, the consensus vision assumes that constrained government must be compelled through an external system of checks and balances and the use of anti-majoritarian institutions.

That power is dispersed across different institutions means there are many veto players. A consequence is that it's difficult to change the status quo. This means that the power and privileges of groups that benefit from the status quo are locked in (Buchanon and Tullock, 1962; Przeworski, 2022). Historically, systems of checks and balances have protected the interests of particular groups such as White, male, property holders. Because the consensus vision disperses power and employs anti-majoritarian institutions, groups that wish to change the status quo must often win far more than majority legislative support to do so. Given this, minorities may be better protected in majoritarian democracies where it's easier for them to build the necessary support to win power and change the status quo (Dixit, Grossman and Gul, 2000). Arguments in favor of the anti-majoritarian components of the consensus vision "have tended to be built on the assumption that the threat to minorities from government action ... is greater than the threat from government inaction" (McGann, 2006, 111). This isn't always the case. As Przeworski (2020, 127) notes, "while limitations on majority rule may prevent governments from doing harm, they also prevent them from doing much good."

It should be clear how majoritarian and PR electoral rules are causally connected with how political actors try to realize these different visions of democracy. We hope it's also clear from our discussion how one's preferred vision of democracy might influence whether we see particular changes and institutional reforms as violations of electoral integrity. For example, the removal of checks and balances, which aren't a defining feature of democracy per se, are almost always coded as evidence of democratic backsliding. As the majoritarian vision indicates, constrained government is still possible even without external constraints on executive power. This goes back to our very first point that democracy must ultimately be self-enforcing.

Evaluating the Effect of Electoral Systems on Electoral Integrity

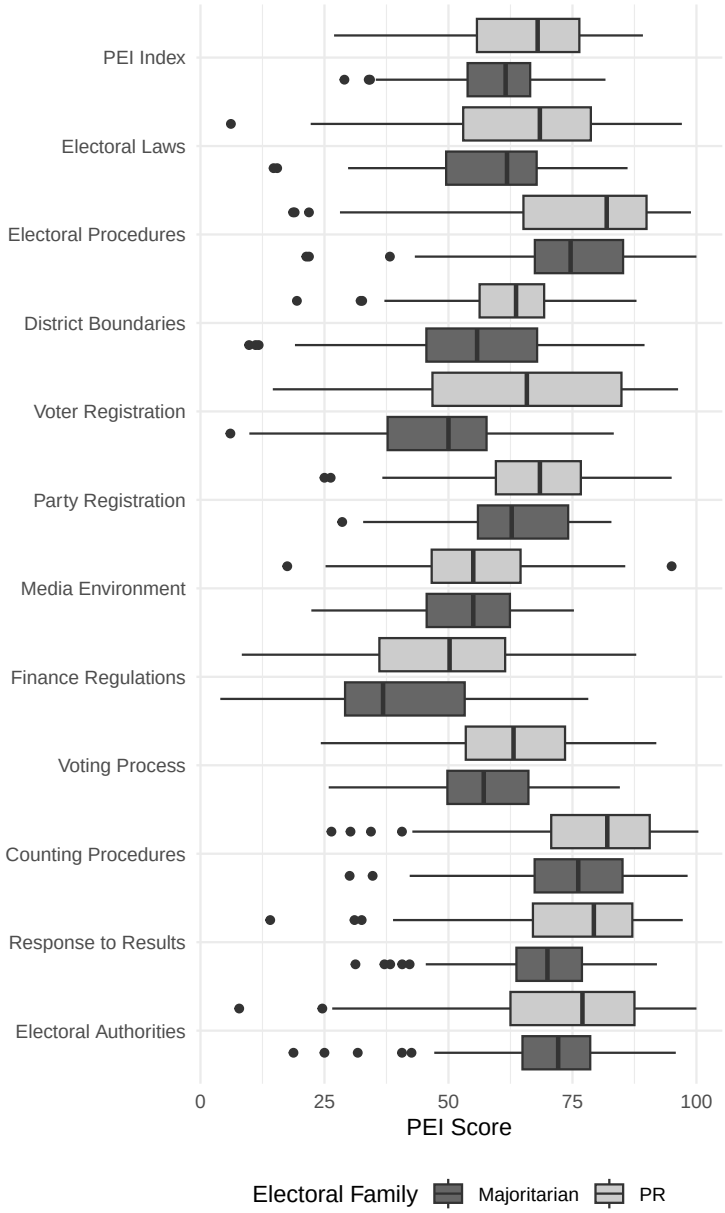
We finish by offering some simple descriptive information about the observed relationship between electoral rules and electoral integrity in democratic legislative elections. We focus on elections that employed either majoritarian or proportional rules. Elections that were considered democratic by at least one of Boix, Miller and Rosato (2012), Democracy and Dictatorship (Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland, 2010), Freedom House, Polity$_5$ (Marshall and Gurr, 2020), and V-Dem Polyarchy (Teorell et al., 2019) are included. The data on electoral systems come from the Democratic Electoral Systems dataset (Bormann and Golder, 2022). We employ two alternative sets of electoral integrity measures.

Our first set of electoral integrity measures comes from the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP) and covers elections from 2012 to 2021. The EIP surveys country experts to ask about their perceptions of 49 electoral integrity issues, grouped into eleven (0-100) categories that relate to the electoral cycle. In terms of the preelection period, country experts are asked to evaluate electoral integrity as it relates to (1) the electoral laws, (2) the electoral procedures, (3) district boundaries, (4) voter registration, and (5) party registration. In terms of the election campaign, they're asked to consider (6) the campaign media environment and (7) campaign finance regulations. With respect to the election day itself, they focus on (8) the voting process. And with respect to the postelection period, they consider (9) the vote counting process, (10) the response to the election results, and (11) the role played by the electoral authorities. Based on expert responses to these indicators, each election is given an overall Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI) score that runs from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating higher integrity (Garnett, James and MacGregor, 2022).

Figure 2 is a 'box and whiskers plot' showing how the overall and individual PEI scores vary across 199 proportional (light gray) and majoritarian (dark gray) legislative elections. The boxes represent the interquartile range (IQR), a measure of dispersion capturing the middle 50% of elections. The vertical line within each box shows the median score. The fact the median lines in the light gray boxes tend to be slightly to the right of those in the dark gray boxes on the overall PEI score as well as all eleven individual dimensions indicates that PR elections exhibit higher integrity scores than majoritarian elections. Importantly, though, the differences in integrity scores across PR and majoritarian elections tend to be substantively small. There's not a single dimension on which the median integrity score of at least one electoral system family lies outside the interquartile range of the other.

Our second set of electoral integrity measures comes from the National Elections Across Democracy

Figure 2: Overall and Individual Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Scores by Electoral System Family in Democratic Legislative Elections, 2012-2022



Note: Data on electoral integrity come from the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity expert survey (PEI 8.0).

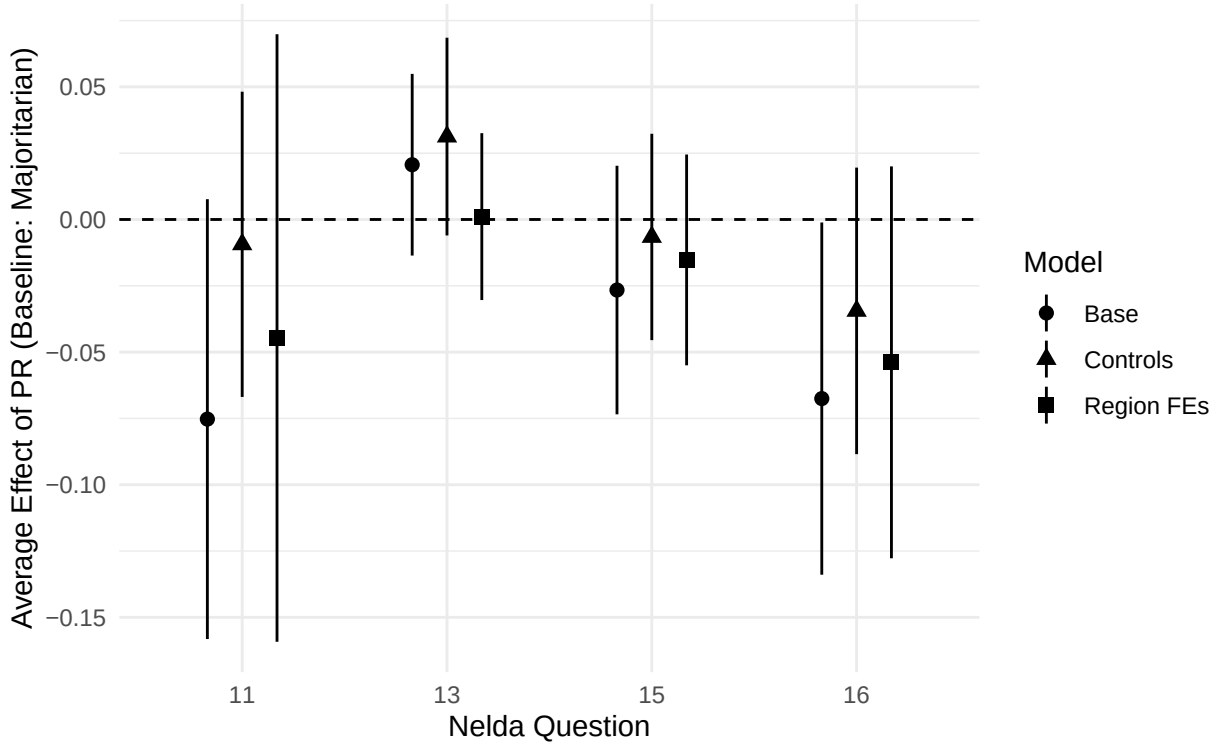
and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset (Hyde and Marinov, 2012) and covers elections from 1945 to 2015. The NELDA dataset relies on country experts to provide simple 'yes' (1) or 'no' (0) answers to several questions that address electoral integrity concerns. We focus here on the same four questions that Norris (2015) used in her analysis of electoral rules and electoral integrity:

- NELDA 11: Before elections, are there significant concerns that elections will not be free and fair?

- NELDA 13: Were opposition leaders prevented from running?
- NELDA 15: Is there evidence that the government harassed the opposition?
- NELDA 16: In the run-up to the election, were there allegations of media bias in favor of the incumbent?

In Figure 3, we show the estimated regression coefficients along with 95% confidence intervals from a series of linear probability models that regress the four measures of electoral integrity on a dichotomous variable indicating proportional (1) or majoritarian (0) elections. Positive coefficients indicate that PR elections are more associated with electoral malpractice, whereas negative coefficients indicate they're more associated with electoral integrity. We show results from three types of models: first, base models that only include the PR dummy and cluster standard errors by country (circles); second, models that add the log of GDP per capita and year fixed effects as controls (triangles); and third, models that include fixed effects for years and eleven world regions (Przeworski et al., 2000) but no controls (squares).

Figure 3: Coefficients from Linear Probability Models Regressing NELDA Integrity Violation Questions on PR Elections (Baseline: Majoritarian Elections), 1945-2022.



Across the four questions and three different model specifications, we find mixed results. The coefficients are negative across all models for three of the NELDA questions (11, 15, 16), suggesting that PR elections have fewer electoral integrity violations than majoritarian elections. However, only one of these nine coefficients is statistically significant. In all cases, the inclusion of controls or year and regional fixed effects moves the estimated coefficients towards zero and none are statistically significant. The coefficients on the other NELDA question (13) are positive, suggesting that majoritarian elections have greater electoral integrity when it comes to whether opposition leaders are prevented from running. None of these coefficients, though, are statistically significant.

In sum, and across two different sets of electoral integrity measures, we find no consistent differences across proportional and majoritarian elections. Even though PR elections tend to be associated with higher electoral integrity on average, differences across electoral systems either don't reach standard levels of statistical significance or they disappear once we control for GDP per capita or compare elections within world regions. These results suggest that some of the descriptive differences we observe across electoral systems with respect to electoral integrity derive from different contextual factors. For example, countries holding PR elections tend to be wealthier than countries holding majoritarian elections. Similarly, the majority of countries using PR are situated in Europe and Latin America, where democracies are older than in Africa, where many countries use some form of majoritarian electoral rules. Our earlier theoretical discussion suggests that other contextual factors, such as the level of party system polarization, will also affect the relationship between electoral rules and electoral integrity. It should perhaps come as no surprise that we found no evidence of a clear unconditional relationship linking electoral rules to electoral integrity.

Conclusion

Concerns with electoral integrity are tied to debates about democracy and democratic backsliding. The potential for democratic backsliding will be especially prevalent when the stakes of the political game are high. Electoral systems matter because they affect the stakes of the game. They do this by influencing the level of ideological polarization in the party system and how this polarization is processed at election time and during the government formation process. Electoral rules also matter because they influence how likely group differences are to become politicized and how peacefully they can be managed. As our theoretical discussion illustrates, the relationship between electoral rules and electoral integrity is a complicated one

that depends on many contextual factors. High electoral integrity can be achieved under both majoritarian and proportional electoral rules given the right conditions. Empirically, we find no consistent differences in the level of electoral integrity across majoritarian and proportional electoral systems when we average across different economic, social, and political contexts. Of course, this doesn't imply that there won't be clear and substantial differences in particular contexts. We encourage scholars to more closely examine the conditional or contextual effects of electoral systems on electoral integrity in future work.

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