

In the Shadow of Democracy Promotion

Strategic Manipulation, International Observers, and Election Boycotts

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International efforts to promote democracy can have unanticipated effects. International election observation is perceived to increase domestic confidence in the electoral process and reduce fraud. Conversely, election boycotts are perceived to be more likely as electoral fairness decreases. The authors document a puzzling relationship between monitored elections and opposition party boycotts: Observers are associated with an increased boycott probability. They argue that international benefits for democratic elections give electoral autocrats the incentive to invite international observers and manipulate elections to minimize international criticism. This increase in “strategic manipulation” has led to changed incentives for opposition political parties, which have the most to lose from a manipulated but internationally certified election. Consequently, international monitors increase boycott probability. The authors support this explanation with an original data set of elections, boycotts, and international observers (1990 to 2002).

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A new game has emerged during elections in developing countries: Under international pressure to democratize, incumbent governments hold elections and invite international election observers but in many cases

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have no intention of transferring power to a competitor. When opposition parties distrust the democratic commitment of the incumbent government, they can participate and hope that international monitors condemn election manipulation, or they can try to influence monitors by boycotting the election. This dynamic has played out in dozens of elections throughout the developing world. For example, prior to the 1995 Algerian presidential elections, the foreign minister touted the expected presence of international observers, arguing that “[the elections have] to be transparent both in the eyes of the Algerian citizen and in the eyes of the international community. With these observers, no one can be suspected of being partial” (Brahimi, 1995). Nevertheless, several opposition political parties argued that international observers would legitimize the government’s hold on power and chose to boycott the election despite their parties’ perceived popularity.

In 1986, Philippe Schmitter wrote that international factors play an “indirect and usually marginal” role in political transitions (p. 5). Since the end of the cold war, as elections have spread to nearly all countries in the world, the role of international actors has grown increasingly prominent, yet little research examines the consequences of this development. This article explores the relationship between international pressure and domestic behavior by examining two prominent features of post-cold war elections: the presence of international election observers and the decision by opposition political parties to boycott elections. Using original data, we find that from 1990 to 2002, contrary to expectations, international monitors increase the probability of an opposition party boycott.

Given the intentions of democracy promoters and the reasons why other scholars argue that election boycotts occur, the concurrence of these trends represents an empirical puzzle. Organizations that send international observers argue that foreign monitors increase confidence in the electoral process by providing independent third-party evaluation and may also improve the quality of elections by reducing election fraud (Bjornlund, 2004; Carothers, 1997). *Ceteris paribus*, opposition parties are understood to be less likely to boycott when elections are free and fair (Lindberg, 2006). Hence, one would expect the presence of observers to decrease election boycotts. As we demonstrate in this article, the empirical record shows exactly the opposite pattern. Why does the presence of international election observers increase the probability of an election boycott?

Our thesis is that tying some international benefits to minimally democratic elections gave electoral autocrats the incentive to invite international observers and manipulate the election in ways that observers were less likely to catch or criticize; in other words, what we call “strategic manipulation.”¹

This trend has changed incentives for opposition political parties because they have more to lose from a manipulated election that is declared internationally legitimate. Successfully concealed electoral manipulation in the presence of international observers makes it less likely that opposition parties will win and *more* likely that an election will be viewed as legitimate, disadvantaging the opposition during the election and reducing the validity of any postelection opposition complaints. Thus, we argue that strategic manipulation by incumbent leaders explains the increased probability of an opposition election boycott when international observers are present.

In this article, we first provide brief background information on international election observation and election boycotts and then define the strategic incentives of the actors involved with each practice. We document the empirical puzzle described above and present statistical evidence that observers increase the probability of a boycott when controlling for the domestic causes of boycotts. Third, we introduce strategic manipulation as the explanation for the initially puzzling finding concerning boycotts and monitors. We provide evidence to support our argument and consider alternative hypotheses before concluding.

The Election Observation Trend

The first internationally observed election in a sovereign state took place in 1962, but the practice spread rapidly beginning in the late 1980s as a way for incumbent leaders to signal their democratizing intentions to international audiences. By the end of the 1990s, international election observers were nearly ubiquitous at elections outside of established Western democracies, and inviting observers had become a necessary condition for an internationally legitimate election. As Roland Rich (2001) writes,

The rejection of foreign electoral observers has come to be taken as a signal that the country concerned is not prepared to open itself to international scrutiny and is not interested in the international legitimacy that a positive report would bestow. (p. 26)

At a minimum, the role of observers is to offer an independent assessment of the electoral process within a broader program of democracy promotion. Professionalized observer groups themselves are interested in providing accurate election reports, as their reputations dictate future invitations to elections as well as their own credibility. However, there are numerous

obstacles to providing accurate election assessments, not the least of which are attempts on the part of incumbents to manipulate elections and limit observer access to information about election quality.

International election observers do not monitor an election unless invited by the incumbent government. Prior to the mid-1980s, for the most part observers were invited only to elections that were already likely to be clean, and observer organizations had little practice with uncovering and calling attention to election fraud (Hyde, 2006). As the international benefits tied to internationally certified elections increased at the end of the cold war, autocrats had greater incentive to hold elections and to invite observers even while manipulating the election. Some electoral autocrats made little attempt to hide their election rigging and were criticized by international observers. Observers at the 1986 Philippine election, for example, were surprised that Ferdinand Marcos made little attempt to conceal election rigging from international observers and the foreign media (National Democratic Institute, 1991). Similarly, when it became clear in the 1989 Panamanian elections that Manuel Noriega's chosen successor did not win, the incumbent regime "lost" the tabulation sheets, an unambiguous move that also resulted in international condemnation of the election. Still, many electoral autocrats legitimized their rule through internationally observed elections, including Alberto Fujimori in Peru in 1995, Charles Taylor in Liberia in 1997, and Daniel arap Moi in Kenya in 1992.

As more governments began to invite observers to elections of varying quality in the late 1980s and early 1990s, observers were criticized for failing to judge the entire process and focusing on formal election day procedures to the exclusion of other aspects of elections (Abbink & Hesselting, 2000; Carothers, 1997; Geisler, 1993). Given their goals, this criticism led observer organizations to improve their methodology, to observe more of the electoral process, and to generally become more equipped to document and expose election manipulation.

By the end of the 1990s, a number of widely adopted innovations in observation techniques had made it more difficult for incumbent leaders to cheat, including parallel vote tabulations, large delegations of both long- and short-term observers, more extensive training and professionalization of observers, formalized standards across missions, and coordination with vast networks of domestic election observers (Bjornlund, 2004; Carothers, 1997). However, there remain a number of forms of electoral manipulation that observers are unlikely to detect or that they are less likely to identify as fraud. For example, some international observer organizations hesitate to criticize the electoral system, even when it perpetuates a severely biased

playing field. Others are likely to criticize only electoral irregularities that they believe would have influenced the outcome, even though making this judgment is extremely difficult. In general, credible international observer organizations improved dramatically in quality over the course of the 1990s but nevertheless face numerous challenges in judging election quality.

Election Boycotts

As elections spread to nearly all countries in the world, they have become important not only to the international community as indicators of democratization but also to domestic political groups jockeying for increased power in a context of fluctuating institutions (Schedler, 2002). Elections in developing democracies are important for determining who will win and how power is to be allocated, but unlike those in consolidated democracies, elections in these countries are also a battleground between incumbents and opposition parties over the fundamental rules of the game (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995). Since 1990, the developing world has experienced the vast majority of election boycotts.² Election boycotts are relatively rare events: Approximately 14% of all multiparty elections in developing countries were boycotted from 1990 to 2002.

When opposition parties boycott an election, they publicly refuse to participate in protest. Although the specific character and timing of the election boycott may vary, they are always initiated after elections have been announced and culminate with a party's (or parties') conspicuous nonparticipation on election day.³ As a form of protest, election boycotts are distinct from instances when opposition parties threaten to boycott and later participate in an election. They are also distinct from (and usually more costly than) postelection complaints or protest. In nearly all cases, boycotts are called after international election observers have been invited and in some cases are announced even after the observers are on the ground to observe the elections.

Boycotting opposition parties do not simply drop out of the political space as sore losers. Witnesses of election boycotts report that they are accompanied by active campaigns. In Zambia in 1996, for example, the opposition party UNIP bought vote cards to prevent their use by registered voters on election day and mobilized youth wings to intimidate voters and discourage voter turnout.⁴ When Bangladesh's main opposition party, the Awami League, boycotted parliamentary elections in 1996, the members organized violence and a general strike on election day as well as several

nationwide strikes in the lead up to the election to support their election boycott (Neuman, 1996). Small, weak, and poorly organized opposition parties are less likely to be able to marshal the resources necessary for a successful opposition boycott.

Opposition parties do not undertake the decision to boycott lightly. In the most general sense, a party must consider both the costs and the benefits associated with a boycott. A boycotting party forfeits any tangible benefits that it might have won during the election. Such benefits can include legislative seats or positions in the executive as well as the accompanying political and monetary benefits of office. Beyond the immediate election, opposition parties must also consider how an election boycott will affect their reputation and chances at future electoral success. Algerian opposition parties, for example, made swift efforts to reconcile with the government following their boycott of the country's 1992 parliamentary elections, suggesting that the costs of their boycott had proven too great ("Algeria: Opposition Calls," 1995). Given the costs associated with a boycott, opposition parties must perceive significant benefits to undertake a boycott and forgo the most significant benefit for any political party: the chance of winning an election.

Research focusing on the domestic causes of boycotts has found that unfair electoral conditions increase the chances of a boycott (Beaulieu, 2006; Bratton, 1998; Lindberg, 2006).⁵ Opposition parties may see a boycott as beneficial if it improves the fairness of future elections, which would increase their own future chances of electoral success. Opposition parties tend to justify boycotts on the grounds of electoral unfairness. Opposition parties in the Mauritanian elections of 1997, for example, attributed their boycott to the government's refusal to establish an independent electoral commission.

It is also possible that opposition parties would boycott perfectly fair elections if they thought they could improve their own electoral chances in the future by discrediting the regime. Governments frequently level just such a criticism against boycotts and characterize the opposition as sore and certain losers. In the 1995 Haitian election, senior government officials explained the opposition boycott in the following way: "They have no popular support; they boycott because they know they will lose" (Pastor, 1998, p. 160). Contrary to the assertions by some incumbent regimes, systematic studies have not borne out the claim that most opposition parties boycott because they know they are unpopular.⁶ In fact, rather than being undertaken by would-be losers, boycotts are more likely to occur when oppositions are stronger (Beaulieu, 2006). In addition to these domestic causes of

boycotts, we show that international factors, specifically the presence of international election observers, also influence the decision to boycott.⁷

Observers and Boycotts

To better understand the relationship between international pressure and domestic behavior, we have collected an original data set of all elections for national offices (executive and legislative) that took place between 1990 and 2002. We exclude elections in long-term, established democracies, as categorized by Lijphart (1999), and elections in which only one party is legal.⁸ For each election, we coded whether an opposition party election boycott took place and whether international election observers were invited. Only the first round of any multiple-round election is included in this analysis, as decisions to boycott subsequent rounds of an election are substantively different decisions. The data include 453 elections in 107 countries. A description of the variables and associated summary statistics are included in the appendix.

Even though international monitors are thought to encourage free and fair elections, a surprisingly nontrivial number of internationally observed elections in the decade were boycotted. Of all boycotts in this time period, 63% occurred when observers were present.⁹ Results from a logit regression explaining the occurrence of election boycotts further indicate a strong positive relationship between boycotts and the presence of monitors (Model 1, Table 1). Based on the work of Beaulieu (2006) and Lindberg (2006), the following factors are included in the model: electoral fairness, prior opposition strength, length of the country's experience with elections, the country's wealth, and regional fixed effects. After controlling for other factors associated with election boycotts, the presence of international observers is still associated with a significant increase in the probability that a boycott will occur.

Because we employ a logit model, the magnitude of the effect of monitors on boycotting is illustrated with predicted probabilities. Using the same data and model presented in Model 1 (Table 1), the probability of a boycott is 25% (95% confidence interval = 9% to 52%) when no international observers are present and all other independent variables are set at their median value.¹⁰ Adding the presence of international observers increases the probability of a boycott by 19% (95% confidence interval = 3% to 35%). Put differently, when all variables are set at the median and observers are present, the probability of an opposition party election boycott is 44%, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 17% to 74%.

Table 1
Logit Regression Results

Dependent Variable =	Model 1, 1990–2002		Model 2, 1990–2002		Model 3, 1990–2002		Model 4, 1990–2002	
	Coeff.	Robust SE						
Boycott								
Constant	-0.236	(0.624)	-0.087	(0.618)	0.335	(0.704)	-1.590	(0.308)
Internationally observed	0.913*	(0.385)	0.893*	(0.466)	0.994*	(0.419)	0.555	(0.365)
Period (0 = 1990–1997; 1 = 1998–2002)			-0.619	(0.429)				
Interaction of period × observed			0.394	(0.578)				
Democracy score (Polity2)	-0.122*	(0.038)	-0.120*	(0.037)	-0.140*	(0.036)	0.027	(0.044)
Opposition strength	0.000	(0.008)	0.002	(0.008)	-0.0001	(0.009)	2.856*	(0.627)
Years with electoral experience	-0.004	(0.015)	-0.003	(0.015)	-0.011	(0.0145)	-0.156	(0.090)
GDP per capita	-0.0001*	(0.0000)	-0.0001*	(0.000)	-0.0001*	(0.0000)	2.62e-7	(4.14e-7)
Executive election								
Legislative institutional competitiveness								
Americas	-2.080*	(0.918)	-2.206	(0.943)	-2.115*	(0.838)	0.909*	(0.342)
Europe	-2.807*	(0.788)	-2.88	(0.792)	-3.072*	(0.805)	0.564*	(0.228)
Sub-Saharan Africa	-1.499*	(0.642)	-1.58	(0.631)	-2.063*	(0.674)		
Asia–Pacific	-2.185*	(0.709)	-2.25	(0.691)	-2.71*	(0.784)		
N	442		442		417		419	
Wald χ^2	(9) 67.42		(11) 79.22		(12) 112.64		(7) 67.15	
$p > \chi^2$.000		.000		.000		.000	
Log pseudo-likelihood	-141.13		-140.563		-132.150		-255.133	
Pseudo R^2	.204		.208		.231		.172	

Note: Robust standard errors adjusted for clustering by country. For Models 1 to 3, North Africa–Middle East is the reference region.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed z test.

This empirical evidence is intended to document the puzzle. Namely, Model 1 highlights a different relationship between election observation and opposition boycotts from what one might expect. If international observers are a signal that the election will be objectively evaluated according to international standards and are believed to cause cleaner elections, why does the presence of election monitors increase the probability of an election boycott?

Strategic Incumbents and Manipulation

The international community's success in motivating regimes to become more electoral, if not more broadly democratic, has given some leaders the incentive to employ strategic manipulation, defined here as any form of electoral manipulation that is selected to avoid international condemnation of the election. Strategic manipulation is typically covert, but it may also include the selection of manipulation tactics that are visible but unlikely to be labeled by international observers as fraud. Examples of strategic manipulation include

- anonymous intimidation of or violence against opposition candidates
- passing candidate qualification laws intended to disqualify popular candidates
- illegally discrediting opposition candidates by, for example, framing them in a crime
- tampering with voter registration lists
- failing to update voter registers that favor the incumbent
- failing to deliver sufficient voting materials to opposition strongholds
- providing insufficient funding for voter education in opposition strongholds
- intimidating voters in a manner that is not visible to international observers
- accusing nonpartisan observers of bias or placing restrictions on their activities
- stacking the electoral commission with government supporters to administer the elections in a partisan manner
- covertly using government resources for the incumbent's campaign activities

The preceding list of examples is an illustrative, but by no means an exhaustive, account of strategic manipulation practices. An exhaustive list would be difficult to provide given the "menu of manipulation" available to incumbents and the ever-evolving game between incumbent and observers.¹¹

Effective strategic manipulation is dependent on the context of the election, and the choice of manipulation tactics is conditioned by what observers are likely to catch and criticize. As a result, effective forms of strategic manipulation should change with changes in the emphasis of election monitoring.

The increased incentive for incumbent leaders to employ strategic manipulation tactics stems from the international community's emphasis on promoting democracy. Many state leaders in the developing world seek to attract international benefits. The substance of international benefits that each state desires varies, and benefits can include material rewards such as foreign aid as well as less tangible benefits such as international legitimacy. Since the end of the cold war, the Western democracies that allocate many of these benefits have made it clear that they prefer governments elected in free and fair elections, certified as such by teams of international election observers (Bjornlund, 2004; Geisler, 1993; Huntington, 1991; Pastor, 1998). On average, countries that hold internationally certified elections are promised more international benefits (Bjornlund, 2004, pp. 20-30; Bratton, 1998, p. 53; Burnell, 2000; Crawford, 2001, p. 2; Dunning, 2004; Knack, 2004, p. 252; McFaul, 2004, p. 157).¹² As a result, elections and election observation have spread rapidly (Beigbeder, 1994; Bjornlund, 2004).

As Michael Bratton (1998) notes on Africa, "Soldiers who seize power now find it essential to promise citizens and the international community that they will convene competitive elections as soon as possible" (p. 58). Often, however, incumbents are holding such elections more to establish their international credibility than to promote democracy (p. 57). With the Western international community emphasizing internationally certified elections, the best strategy for any benefit-seeking incumbent without a firm normative commitment to democracy is to hold elections, invite international monitors, and rig the outcome in a way that is unlikely to provoke a negative report.

Over the course of the 1990s, election observation methodology was improving, but in general international election observers were best equipped to document and most willing to expose conspicuous forms of election-day electoral fraud, such as blatant intimidation of voters, violent repression of opposition parties, and ballot-box stuffing (Carothers, 1997; Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE], 2005). As Bjornlund (2004) articulates,

Although the international community now agrees on the need to begin monitoring efforts well before election day . . . international observers have yet to determine how to reflect negative preelection findings in traditional postelection assessments. (p. 176)

This disconnect between the types of fraud that observers were likely to sanction and the types of manipulation practiced by some incumbent leaders means that observers do not catch or admonish all forms of electoral manipulation. The gap between actual electoral manipulation and fraud documented by international observers, in turn, influences opposition party behavior.

International observers are invited by the incumbent leadership and cannot effectively observe an election unless granted official credentials by the incumbent regime. Unlike the incumbent party, opposition parties do not have any say in whether or not international election observers are invited, but they do have the ability to influence the information available to international observers. If the opposition believes that significant manipulation is likely to occur but international observers are not likely to condemn it, they can potentially draw attention to this matter by staging a boycott.

To restate, incumbents employing strategic manipulation try to obfuscate the information available to international observers about the quality of the election. The opposition party, by contrast, has the incentive to highlight flaws in the electoral process and expose government manipulation of the process. In most cases, opposition parties possess better (but not perfect) information regarding the incumbent's likely behavior than observers and thus are in a good position to expose cheating that might otherwise go undetected or be viewed as insignificant by observers. This is not to say that opposition parties do not exaggerate or fabricate claims against the government. Rather, when the incumbent is attempting to manipulate the election and receive international certification of the electoral process (via international monitors), opposition parties are particularly motivated to expose any strategic manipulation and can do so by sending the costly signal of an election boycott.

In theory, the presence of strategic manipulation can increase the probability of a boycott in the following two ways: First, the expected benefit from participation for opposition parties is reduced if they are placed at a competitive disadvantage because of the incumbent's manipulation. Not only are they less likely to win representation in a biased election, but if the incumbent secures victory via manipulation and is legitimized by the international observers, opposition participation will have furthered the appearance of democratic legitimacy. Such a "lose-lose" situation increases the incentive to boycott.¹³

Second, the addition of a third-party judge also increases the expected benefit of boycotting. International observers provide an attentive and primed global audience for an opposition party wishing to expose the incumbent regime as undemocratic. Although a party voicing its complaints while also participating in the election might cause monitors to take note,

this is more likely perceived as “cheap talk.” Opposition complaints are more credible if they are accompanied by the costly action of refusal to participate in the election, particularly if the party is popular and is clearly forgoing the opportunity to hold onto political power. So not only does the expectation of concealed manipulation provide the opposition with less to gain from participating in an election, the presence of an attentive third party also provides opposition parties with a greater opportunity to have their objections heard by international actors.

Strategic Manipulation in the 1990s: Evolution and Effects

Is there evidence of strategic electoral manipulation? Although very few methods of electoral manipulation are new, anecdotal evidence from the 1990s suggests that leaders and political parties have proven creative in their election rigging as they have come under more pressure to hold elections. Thomas Carothers (1997) highlights this form of manipulation in response to international pressures:

Although blatant electoral fraud still occurs, efforts by entrenched leaders to manipulate electoral processes . . . have become more subtle as such leaders have been socialized into the new world of global democracy and internationally observed elections. (p. 22)

In general, we argue that leaders have moved away from fraud in the strictest sense of activity that is both covert and illegal toward manipulation that violates the spirit, if not the letter, of democratic institutions.¹⁴ For example, in Haiti in 1995, candidates could be excluded if they were members of the ruling party during the Duvalier era, but the determination of which candidates fit this description was subjective, and some argue that this criterion was applied unfairly. Eligible opposition parties boycotted the Indonesian election of 1997 because, they claimed, one popular opposition candidate had been barred from competing in the election (ostensibly because of his health), even though the government argued these exclusions were within the scope of the law. Similarly, Bratton (1998) finds that within Africa in the 1990s, a number of incumbents used executive power not simply to break electoral rules but also to use the rules in their favor whenever they could, including, for example, “the disqualification of leading candidates, the spotty coverage of voter registration, the lack of internal democracy in ruling parties, [and] the abuse of government resources during the campaign” (pp. 60-65).

Violence is another strategic means by which opposition candidates can be intimidated or excluded from the electoral process. This method of

manipulation is clearly not part of a democratic political process and is likely to be condemned by observers if it is blatantly or systematically undertaken by the government. It is not often immediately clear, however, who is behind the nefarious behavior, and it is not considered the role of international observers to thoroughly investigate violent crimes that may or may not be election related. In addition, threats of violence have a chilling effect on competition that may be impossible to prove (Kuran, 1995).

Incumbents can use their control of state monies and media, as was the case in Cambodia in 1993, where the government played the movie *The Killing Fields* on state television just days before the election, which was arguably intended to discredit Communist Party candidates (Roberts, 1994). Incumbents can also use their influence in the administrative processes of government to enact bureaucratic discrimination, without giving the appearance of impropriety. For example, in Azerbaijan in 1998, President Aliiev's control of the central election commission was cited as the reason for an opposition boycott of that year's presidential election. Following the election, OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights recommended several changes to Azerbaijan's electoral processes, including the institution of a more neutral body to oversee elections. Some of these recommendations were heeded by the government, but Aliiev retained control of the election commission, which saw fit to disqualify several opposition parties (including the most popular party) from participating in the 2000 election.

Even though control of the body charged with administering the election may be gained through legal measures, governmental or partisan control of the central election commission (as opposed to an independent and nonpartisan election commission) is believed to confer an unfair advantage because it is often used to manipulate electoral outcomes. This can be accomplished by falsifying vote counts (as in the Dominican Republic in the early 1990s) or adjudicating electoral disputes in favor of the incumbent (as in Haiti in 2000).

As a further example, if outdated voter registers favor the incumbent, then it could be an effective form of strategic manipulation simply to underemphasize the importance of voter registration or divert bureaucratic energies elsewhere and blame the out-of-date rolls on a lack of time and money. In such cases, international observers have a difficult time distinguishing between intentional manipulation and administrative incompetence, but the consequences for opposition parties are the same (Pastor, 1999). Boycotts have occurred in Comoros (1996), Kuwait (1990), and Gabon (2001), where the opposition accused the government of operating with a voter register that put the opposition at a disadvantage.

Although it is often difficult to detect or prove, the fact that incumbents are using strategic manipulation has not escaped the attention of international

observers and opposition parties. By the end of the 1990s, many observation organizations were actively cautioning their observers and donors to be on alert for leaders trying to fool observers and gain international approval for rigged elections (e.g., Commission of the European Communities, 2000, p. 5). Furthermore, we maintain that the increase of opposition boycotts in the presence of election observers is a sign that opposition parties were also concerned about the use of strategic manipulation.

In practice, is there evidence that opposition parties benefit from boycotting in front of international observers? An examination of election observer statements following boycotted elections shows that credible boycotting parties in the late 1990s could, at the minimum, expect to show up in international print.¹⁵ In some cases, boycotting opposition parties gained explicit support from international observers, such as in the 2000 election in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In this case, opposition political parties and international election observers worked together to ensure that the election was delegitimized.

Similarly, following a major opposition boycott during the 2000 presidential election in Belarus, the OSCE report condemned the election and the treatment of opposition groups. The report states that because the Belarusian government had not made enough progress in the areas identified by the European Union, the OSCE, and the OSCE member states, the seven boycotting parties were justified in their nonparticipation. In addition, they took pains to document the treatment of the participants during the boycott:

While the Freedom Marches of 1 and 8 October organized by those advocating the boycott passed off without serious incident, a number of activists were charged with various offenses, often several days after the marches in question. . . . This could only have a chilling effect on the campaign environment as a whole. (OSCE, 2000)

The OSCE report shows that the government was actively discriminating against opposition members throughout the pre-election period, and the observers' attention was drawn to these incumbent-sponsored acts in part because the opposition engaged in an active boycott.

Even though some attempts at manipulation are so egregious that opposition complaints are taken at face value, a boycotting opposition party is by no means guaranteed to influence international observers. If the observers do not find evidence justifying the boycott or suspect that the boycotting parties are simply sore losers at the fringe of the political arena, they are liable to ignore the boycott in the report or work to discredit it. For

boycotting in the presence of observers to be a successful strategy, opposition parties must be confident that the conditions are bad enough to justify nonparticipation.

Cross-National Evidence of Strategic Manipulation

Because many forms of strategic manipulation, by definition, cannot be systematically observed, it is difficult to conduct a true test of our theory. Support for our explanation, then, is limited to empirical evidence supporting premises that should be true if our explanation is true and to the examination of alternative explanations. The following section examines cross-national empirical evidence to investigate the hypothesis that increased use of strategic manipulation explains the increased probability of a boycott when international observers are present. This evidence is followed by an examination of three competing explanations.

If strategic manipulation as we have described it does, in fact, exist and has increased over time as we have hypothesized, the following four premises should hold:

Premise 1: The rate of monitored elections should increase from 1990 to 2002.

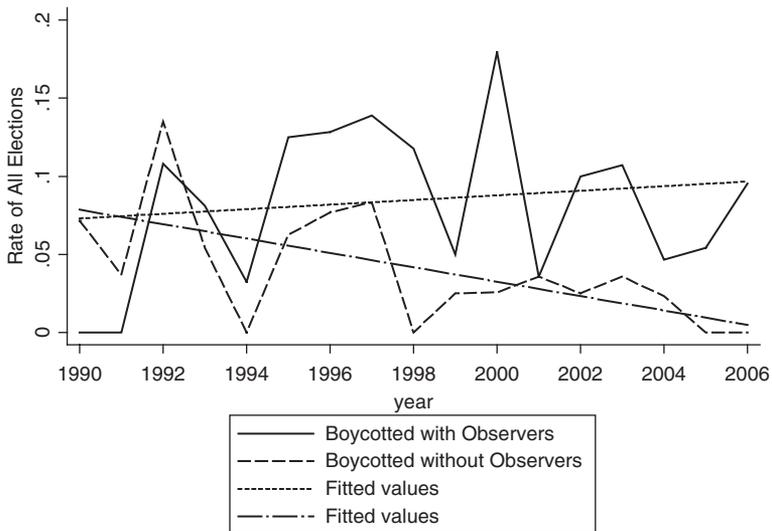
Premise 2: The rate of boycotts in monitored elections should increase from 1990 to 2002.

Premise 3: The rate of boycotts in unmonitored elections should not increase across the time period.

Premise 4: The presence of monitors should have a greater effect on the probability of an election boycott later in the time period.

Regarding Premise 1, the rate of monitored elections increased from 34% in 1990 to nearly 83% by 2002. From 1990 to 2002, as incumbents improved means of securing electoral victory without attracting the attention of monitors, their willingness to invite monitors increased. Figure 1 compares the rate of boycotts in monitored and unmonitored elections. Although boycott activity is volatile from year to year, the pattern displayed supports Premises 2 and 3. Consistent with Premise 2, the rate of boycotts in monitored elections increases across the time period and is generally higher than the rate of boycotts in unmonitored elections. By contrast, the rate of boycotts in unmonitored elections decreases, consistent with Premise 3. The decreasing rate of boycotts in unmonitored elections indicates that, over time, the unmonitored elections are ones in which less fraud is at work, or opposition parties see less benefit in boycotting because of reduced international attention, or both.

Figure 1
Rate of Boycotted Elections Observed and Not
Observed, 1990 to 2006



The fourth premise pertains to the relationship between monitors and boycotts over time. If the availability of strategic manipulation has led to an over-time increase in the number of incumbents willing to invite observers and therefore an increase in the incentives for opposition parties to boycott, we would expect the presence of monitors to have a greater effect on the probability of boycott later in the time period, when strategic manipulation should be more prevalent.

Model 2 (Table 1) replicates Model 1 but includes a dichotomous variable that divides the data into two time periods and an interaction of time period and observer presence.¹⁶ Because the marginal effect and the significance of observer presence, time period, and their interaction cannot be directly inferred from the coefficients in the model, we have calculated them by hand.¹⁷ Predicted probabilities are calculated by setting all other variables at their mean values.¹⁸

The marginal effect of election observation on the probability of a boycott is 0.075 ($SE = 0.089$) from 1990 to 1997 and increases to a marginal effect of 0.088 ($SE = 0.083$) from 1998 to 2002.¹⁹ The standard errors associated with

the marginal effect of observers on boycotts in the two time periods are too large to draw any definitive conclusion. Even so, because the large standard error is likely due to the relative rarity of election boycotts and the fact that Model 2 divides the data into four subsets, we interpret the larger marginal effect of observers after 1997 as tentative support for Premise 4.

In summary, the cross-national evidence supports our theory that when faced with strategic manipulation by some incumbents as well as the presence of an international audience, opposition parties were more likely to boycott elections.

Alternative Explanations

We consider three alternative hypotheses. One possible alternative explanation for the increase in boycotts of observed elections is that the relationship is the result of a selection effect: Perhaps international observers were invited to elections of poorer quality, where boycotts were more likely to occur anyway. This argument is not inconsistent with the argument that we have offered, that strategic manipulation clearly reduces the democratic quality of an election by corrupting the democratic process, but a lack of electoral competition or general electoral unfairness (rather than any strategic manipulation on the part of the incumbent) could instead be responsible for the positive relationship between election observers and boycotts.

For this alternative hypothesis to be supported, the data should show a positive correlation between monitoring and elections of poorer quality. We examine this alternative hypothesis in two ways: first by considering election quality in terms of fairness and then in terms of competitiveness.

First, we plotted the average Polity score in the country's pre-election year across all observed elections. If the increasing probability of boycotts with monitors is because of monitor presence in less democratic countries, then the average Polity score should be decreasing. If anything, the average pre-election Polity score is increasing over the time period in question, indicating that observers were slightly more likely to go to elections in countries with more democratic political institutions.²⁰ Over the entire period, the mean Polity score in the year prior to an election is about 2, with a standard deviation of 6. For observed and boycotted elections the mean is similar, contrasted with the mean for unobserved and boycotted elections of -4.15 , with a standard deviation of 3.6. Observers clearly are not seeking out the *least* democratic elections. Note also that Models 1 to 4 include measures of democratic institutions (Polity2), the results of which suggest that democracy scores are not significantly related to whether an election is observed (Model 4) and that levels of democracy are accounted for in the empirical evaluations of boycotts.

We also consider the possibility that poor election quality is an issue of competitiveness rather than fairness. We examine electoral competitiveness as an alternative using two measures. Model 1 of Table 1 includes a proxy for opposition strength and shows that weaker oppositions are not more likely to boycott.²¹ Model 3 confirms this result using an alternative measure of legislative institutional competitiveness (LEIC from Beck et al., 2001).

The second alternative explanation we consider is that boycotts actually increase the probability that monitors will be invited. One might argue that if a boycott is threatened, there could be increased pressure on the government to invite monitors. We argue that this is not likely because boycotts always occur after monitors are on the ground in the country (because they are carried out on election day), and boycotts are usually threatened after monitors have already been invited. It could be the case, however, that international actors and incumbents have indications that boycotts are going to occur, and for this reason monitors are more likely to be invited when the probability of a boycott is higher. If this argument were true, using boycott as a proxy for anticipation of a boycott, we would expect boycotts to have a positive effect on the probability that a given election is monitored. Model 4 (Table 1) employs a model that has been used explain the presence of international election observers at elections, with the addition of a variable indicating whether or not a boycott occurred (Hyde, 2006). When the presence of international observers is the dependent variable, using the same set of data described earlier in the article, boycotts have no statistically significant relationship to the probability of an observed election. Thus, the second alternative hypothesis is not supported theoretically or empirically.

The final alternative hypothesis relates to the type of election. As Model 4 shows, international observers are more likely to observe elections for executive office than for legislative bodies. A potential alternative explanation for the concurrent increase in monitors and boycotts is that boycotts are also more likely in executive elections. Model 3 provides a test of this alternative hypothesis by adding a dummy variable to a model explaining boycotts indicating whether the election was for the executive office or not. As shown in Table 1, executive elections are not positively correlated with election boycotts, thus failing to support this alternative explanation.

Conclusion

The relationship between international election monitors and election boycotts shows one way in which international-level variables may influence

electoral politics at the domestic level: International pressure for democratic elections and the existence of strategic manipulation increase the probability of election boycotts in the presence of international observers. Since Peter Gourevitch's 1978 assertion that "second image reversed" causal arguments are neglected and that academics should better understand how domestic politics may be a result of international politics (p. 882), only a handful of scholars have investigated this causal mechanism in relation to the global spread of democratization.

This article highlights two consequences of the international community's emphasis on internationally certified elections within nonconsolidated democracies. First, for power- and benefit-hungry politicians, we argue that it has triggered the use of strategic manipulation, giving incumbents the incentive to select forms of electoral manipulation that observers are less likely to catch. Second, *ceteris paribus*, opposition parties are more likely to boycott when international observers are present. Because of the increase in strategic electoral manipulation, opposition parties are more likely to devote their resources to attempting to discredit the incumbent by boycotting instead of participating in the election.

This article is not meant as a condemnation of election observation, which has been shown to deter fraud (Hyde, 2006) and proven to be an important component of many transitional elections. Nor is the argument presented here meant to imply that electoral manipulation and election boycotts hinder the democratization process. Certainly, the histories of established democracies indicate that the effects of electoral manipulation on democracy are debatable, and preliminary research on election boycotts suggests that opposition protest can stimulate political reform (Beaulieu, 2006).²² Instead, we think the relationship among observers, incumbents, and opposition parties is a natural result of the strategic interaction caused by any attempt to regulate human behavior.

The argument presented here has highlighted one way that international pressures may work to shape electoral politics in developing countries. Greater awareness of the domestic effects of international democracy promotion is an important step in understanding how this type of foreign assistance can progress most effectively. As international election observation continues to improve, the gap between actual manipulation and the manipulation that observers will catch and sanction should shrink. If observers are able to accurately judge most elections and opposition parties believe that this is the case, then theoretically this should reduce the incentive to boycott that we have argued has been caused by international observers. It is possible that this has already begun to happen, but if it is to continue, it will require continued improvement in international observation if observers are

to keep up as incumbent politicians try to stay one step ahead in the game of strategic electoral manipulation.

Appendix

Variable	Description	# of Obs.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Boycott	= 1 if any opposition party boycotted, from Keesing's Record of World Events and World News Sources in Lexis Nexis	453	0.1369	0.3340	0	1
Internationally observed	= 1 if any official delegation of foreign observers was invited and observed the election, from observer organizations and secondary news sources	453	0.6225	0.4853	0	1
Democracy score	The Polity2 variable from the Polity IV data set (Marshall & Jaggers, 2000a, 2000b), ranging from -10 to 10	452	2.987	5.702	-9	10
Opposition strength	% legislative seats held by the opposition at the time of the election; calculated from Beck, Clarke, Groff, Keefer, and Walsh (2001)	449	26.60	22.96	0	93
Years with electoral experience	# of years, since 1945, country has held elections without democratic interruption, coded from the Polity IV database	447	14.38	13.79	0	57
GDP per capita (2000 constant dollars)	From World Development Indicators, supplemented with Gleditsch (2002)	452	4,554	4,275	145.15	28,708
Percentage observed regionally	Author's calculations	453	0.5330	0.3024	0	1
Total regional aid	Compiled from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee (US\$1,000s)	453	454,969	353,154	156	1,553,757
Executive election	= 1 if direct election for executive office	453	0.4570	0.4987	0	1

Notes

1. The phrase *electoral autocrat* borrows from Diamond (2002) and Schedler (2002).
2. Exceptions include two elections boycotted by Basque separatist party Herri Batasuna in Spain and two elections boycotted by extremist Arab parties in Israel.
3. Opposition leaders in Azerbaijan, for example, called for an election boycott of the October 1998 election in August. During the Jordan elections of 1997, a total of 10 opposition parties decided to boycott the election just days before polling took place.

4. Firsthand account from M. Bratton (April 2, 2004).
5. Lindberg (2006) finds that opposition parties in Africa are less likely to boycott elections when they are free and fair.
6. Lindberg (2006, p. 58) finds that only 10 of 69 instances of opposition election boycotts in Africa were cases where the election was fair but the opposition had no chance of winning.
7. A number of other scholars have begun to focus on how international-level variables influence politics in democratizing countries. These include Gleditsch (2004), Marinov (2004), Levitsky and Way (2005), and Pevehouse (2005). This line of reasoning has roots with Gourevitch (1978).
8. Venezuela and Colombia, although included in Lijphart (1999), were included in our analysis because they are widely perceived to have experienced significant democratic backsliding (Mainwaring, 1999).
9. Cross-tabs for this comparison are available from the authors.
10. The median value is used in this model instead of the mean because it represents values associated with actual cases. The median case has a Polity2 score of 5, opposition seat share prior to the election of 28%, GDP per capita of \$3,213, and 10 years of electoral experience.
11. The term *menu of manipulation* is borrowed from Schedler (2002).
12. The literature on the effects of international benefits remains underdeveloped. Examining the European Union, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Sweden from 1990 to 1995, Crawford (2001) cites 29 cases in which aid was reduced or cut off for antidemocratic actions. Dunning (2004) shows a positive correlation between aid levels and democracy in post-cold war African countries. Other scholars cite specific cases in which leaders appeared to modify their behavior because of the international benefits tied to clean elections. Although it appears that the rhetoric of donors about democracy is not applied consistently, because of the fact that aid is sometimes given or withdrawn based on election quality, coupled with the well-publicized commitments by donors to enforce these standards, we think it is unlikely that leaders of developing countries are unconcerned with the potential international consequences of antidemocratic actions.
13. We are not arguing that the incumbent would certainly lose a fair election. We assert only that an opposition candidate who participates in an election that the incumbent has rigged will not perform as well as he or she would in a free and fair electoral competition.
14. The definition of fraud cited here comes from Lehoucq (2003). See Magaloni (2006) for a description of how the Institutional Revolutionary Party augmented (to the point of nearly supplanting) its use of blatant electoral fraud with more subtle tactics to maintain its electoral dominance in Mexico.
15. In the early days of election observation, the reports focused on election day. The primary objective of the observers was to determine whether the election result was consistent with the "will of the people," and their reports tended to gloss over dissent if they believed that the election was a step in the right direction (Abbinck & Hesselning, 2000).
16. The division of time periods was chosen to balance the number of elections in the two time periods.
17. Following Kam and Franzese (2007), to calculate the marginal effects and standard errors, we begin with the linear portion of the logit regression: $\Pr(Y = 1) = b_0 + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + b_3x_1x_2 + \dots + b_nx_n$, where x_1 = observed, x_2 = period, and x_1x_2 = the interaction of the two. For example, the marginal effect when observed and period both equal 1 is calculated by: $\frac{\delta \hat{p}}{\delta x_1} = (\hat{p})(1 - \hat{p})(b_1 + b_3x_2)$. The standard error for this marginal effect is $\sqrt{V(b_1) + V(b_3) + 2Cov(b_1, b_3)}$.

18. Modal values are used for all dichotomous variables.
19. The standard errors are in parenthesis. In elections that are not observed, the marginal effect of observers presence on the probability of a boycott is 0.036 (0.041) from 1990 to 1997 and 0.027 (0.023) from 1998 to 2002.
20. The Polity2 variable is used in this comparison. Figure 2 is provided in an appendix to this article, available at <http://hyde.research.yale.edu/>.
21. In a slightly different sample of elections, Beaulieu (2006) actually finds that opposition strength increases the probability of a boycott.
22. For a discussion of the history of electoral fraud in the United States, see, for example, Campbell (2005).

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