Catch Me if You Can:
Why Leaders Invite International Election Monitors and Cheat in Front of Them

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Until 1962, there were no recorded cases of international election observation in sovereign states.¹ Today, it is rare for a developing country to hold a legitimate election without the presence of international observers. Upwards of 80 percent of elections held in non-consolidated democracies are now monitored, and many leaders orchestrate obvious electoral fraud in the presence of international observers. Alberto Fujimori of Peru, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, Manuel Noriega of Panama, and Eduard Shevardnadze of the Republic of Georgia, among others, invited delegations of international observers to judge their country’s domestic elections and were subsequently condemned by observers for manipulation of the electoral process. Negative reports from election monitors have been linked to domestic uprising and electoral revolutions, reductions in foreign aid, exclusion from international forums, and other forms of internationally imposed sanctions.²

The fact that so many leaders of sovereign states choose to invite foreign observers presents an empirical puzzle for international relations theorists. Why did the practice spread so widely when it is potentially costly for leaders to invite international observers to judge their elections? Why do so many leaders bother to invite observers when they plan to cheat in front of them?

The answers to these questions speak to several ongoing debates within international relations and comparative politics. In brief, I argue that when powerful states expressed a preference for supporting democratizing states, initially in the early 1960s overtly in the 1980s, the premium for identifying as a democratizing regime gave “true-democrats” an incentive to

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¹ Apart from monitored elections in sovereign states, a number of plebiscites and referenda in occupied or disputed territories were internationally supervised prior to 1962 (Beigbeder 1994, Waumbaugh 1920, 1933).
² This topic has not yet been treated rigorously in the international relations literature, but a thorough reading of cases in which fraud is alleged by international observers highlights many well-publicized cases in which the government faced internationally imposed costs because of election manipulation. Crawford (1997) highlights twenty-nine cases of aid withdrawal or suspension following fraudulent elections and other related anti-democratic actions.
signal their democratic credentials to international audiences. Although there were other possible signals, these leaders chose to invite international election observers as a costly signal that distinguished their regime from pseudo-democrats. As the potential rewards for demonstrating a commitment to democracy increased, other benefit-seeking leaders imitated the signal regardless of whether or not they were committed to democratization. This widespread and repeated behavior, coupled with the growing importance of democracy to international actors, changed international expectations such that inviting international election observers became an international norm. Members of the international community now share the expectation that leaders of non-consolidated democracies will invite foreign monitoring of their elections. Where the decision to invite observers was initially a signal that the country was democratizing, by the early 1990s, the lack of observers in the first election following a period of non-democratic rule had become a conspicuous signal that the election was not legitimate.

Figure 1 illustrates the trend of observed elections over time.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

In this article I have two goals. First, I provide a theory of international norm development, which, in different language, explains the creation, spread, and persistence of a new screening technology within international politics. The vast majority of existing work on international norms focuses on two types: those that facilitate international cooperation and those that result from principled ideas and norm entrepreneurship. Relative to international norms examined in the existing literature, election observation is distinct in that it represents a norm

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that is costly for many actors to comply with, it does not necessarily facilitate cooperation, and it
did not result from the work of norm entrepreneurs. It is often analytically difficult to prove that
norm compliance was motivated by the norm rather than material interests, and thus, many
scholars within IR remain skeptical about the added value of norm-based explanations. Here,
leaders of non-consolidated democracies are expected to comply with the norm of election
observation, and the norm is held and enforced by members of the international community. As I
elaborate below, this environment allows an examination of norm compliance that does not
conflate material and norm-based motivations.

Second, I examine how state leaders in the developing world respond to changes in the
international environment—in this case, the changing value of democracy.\(^5\) Democracy is one of
many state-level characteristics of potential value to other members of the international
community, and as such is often overridden by other interests. The fact that security or economic
interests are more important does not mean that democracy is irrelevant. By modeling the
incentives of state leaders as influenced by domestic political constraints and international
pressure, I explore the conditions under which leaders have the incentive to fake democracy in
order to please international audiences. More generally, this article should be of interest to
scholars of democratization and democracy promotion as well as those in the “second-image
reversed”\(^6\) and “two-level games”\(^7\) traditions.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, I discuss election observation relative to existing
explanations of norm development. Second, I model the allocation of international benefits and
formalize the strategic interaction between state leaders and the international community as a

\(^5\) The international emphasis on democracy is a consequential and relatively unexplored variable within international
relations (Frank 1992, McFaul 2004)

\(^6\) Gourevitch 1978.

\(^7\) Putnam 1998.
screening game. Using original data on the global spread of election observation from 1960-2004, I then examine the empirical implications of the model. I conclude with a discussion of the broader implications of the theory.

Election Observation, Signaling, and Norm Development

Today, there exists a shared expectation among members of the international community that leaders of developing countries will invite foreign observers to judge their domestic electoral processes. As summarized by Eric Bjornlund, “election monitoring has become the norm and is now effectively a prerequisite in [democratizing and semiauthoritarian] countries for elections to be viewed as legitimate.” Similarly, Roland Rich describes international expectations in regard to international observers:

International observation of national elections and referendums in countries claiming to be democratic has become the norm. 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.

Leaders comply with this internationally held expectation even when it appears fairly certain that the observers they invite will condemn their election. Explaining why leaders of developing countries contributed to the initiation and spread of election observation is intimately related to the relationship between norms and rationality within international relations. However, there is a common misperception that norms and rationality are at odds with one another, resulting from what has been called an “unfortunate conflation between methodology and substance.” As Fearon and Wendt summarize this misperception, “some see rationalists as arguing that people follow norms only because (and when) it is useful to do so, whereas constructivists allow that

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11 Kahler 1998, 933.
people can be motivated to follow norms simply because they think it the right or legitimate thing to do.”\textsuperscript{12} There is also a common belief that all norms are morally or ethically desirable. As Keohane observes, “norms can consist of standards of behavior which are widely regarded as legitimate; they do not necessarily embody ethnical principles that override self-interest.”\textsuperscript{13} It is widely recognized by both rationalists and constructivists that norms and rationality are interrelated.\textsuperscript{14} Even so, a number of theoretical gaps persist.

In the most widely cited theory of international norm development, offered by the social constructivist literature in international relations, norm development is understood in ideational language: norm entrepreneurs, motivated by principled ideas, seek to change international or domestic behavior through the generation of new international norms.\textsuperscript{15} Although rationality plays a part in many arguments—the work of these activists may, for example, generate costs for actors who fail to comply with the new norm—norm entrepreneurs are central in initiating the new behavior.

For their part, institutionalists have done a poor job of articulating theories of international norm development and change, in part because they tend to see norms as less consequential variables within international relations. Within this approach, norms are embedded within international institutions and are therefore generated along with institutions. Norms are viewed as important to the extent that they help facilitate international cooperation by, for

\textsuperscript{12} Fearon and Wendt 2002, 61.
\textsuperscript{13} Keohane 1986, 21. Also see Goertz and Diehl (1992) for a discussion of variation in the deontological component of norms.
\textsuperscript{14} See Checkel 1997; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; and Kahler 1998. As Finnemore and Sikkink observe, “there is little good theoretical treatment of [the relationship between norms and rationality], partly because scholars have tended to counterpose norms and rationality in IR.” (1998, 908).
\textsuperscript{15} Checkel 1997; Fearon and Wendt 2002; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999.
example, providing focal points, common knowledge, or by constraining or ordering preferences.\textsuperscript{16}

I argue that both approaches neglect an important path to norm development. As recognized in the economics literature, norms and other social conventions can develop “spontaneously”\textsuperscript{17} as a result of repeated interactions, and persist because they are Nash equilibria. However, this literature focuses primarily on norms that are mutually beneficial behaviors such as norms surrounding the enforcement of property rights. I argue that instrumentally motivated repeated behaviors can generate new and self-enforcing international norms, even when the actors bound by the norm would prefer that it did not exist. This argument rests on the separation between the actors who enforce the norm and the actors who comply with the norm. For many social norms, particularly those that are internalized, norms are enforced by the individuals who are expected to comply with them.\textsuperscript{18} Within the international system, state leaders are bound by internationally held expectations. Leaders may not agree with the expectations for their behavior or think they are “right” or “legitimate.” However, the fact that the international community holds such expectations (or that internationally held norms exist) generates costs for non-compliance, thus giving state leaders the incentive to comply with norms even when doing so carries substantial costs or risks.

\textbf{An Endogenous Theory of Norm Development}

I argue that leaders invite international observers and cheat in front of them because election observation has become an internationally held norm, and compliance is now diffusely enforced by international actors interested in promoting democracy. Why did leaders invite

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\textsuperscript{16} Schelling (1963), Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner (1998). See also Sugden (1989) on “spontaneous order” and the social conventions and norms that may result from repeated cooperative games.
\textsuperscript{17} Sugden 1989.
\textsuperscript{18} Ellickson 2001.
observers in the first place? Why did the practice spread so widely when it is potentially costly for leaders to invite international observers to judge their elections? How do international norms develop in the absence of norm entrepreneurs and outside of international institutions?

To address these questions I model the strategic interaction between the international community and state leaders. This situation most closely approximates a screening game, in which the international community is interested in evaluating the democratic credentials of benefit-seeking states. The model is used to explain the initiation and rapid spread of election observation. The “pooling” on the behavior of inviting observers, coupled with the increasing value of democracy to international actors, changed international expectations about appropriate behavior for leaders of developing countries. I call the theory below an “endogenous” theory of norm development. The election observation norm arose from within the strategic situation faced by leaders seeking international benefits, and was not the result of advocacy.19

True and Pseudo Democrats

Throughout this article, national leaders of transitional countries are referred to as “incumbents.” This assumed actor can be one individual or a group of leaders, depending on the regime type. They choose to hold elections, whether to invite international monitors, and to what degree they will participate in a democratic election. I assume that there are two general types of incumbents: “true-democrats” and “pseudo-democrats.”20 The other actor influencing the game is the international community,21 represented in elections by international observers.

19 The theory is similar to that offered by Avner Grief (2006) to explain endogenous institutional change.
20 This is not an inclusive typology of all leaders. There are also those leaders who do not hold elections, and those that are already leading consolidated democracies.
21 This is a somewhat controversial actor because the international community does not exist as a cohesive unit, and its preferences cannot be described. For this chapter, I assume that it does exist and that its relevant preferences favor democracy. I also assume that international election monitors can represent the international community. Assuming the existence of the “international community” as a cohesive actor is primarily a pragmatic modeling decision. In reality, the “international community” is an amalgamation of states and IOs which act independently.
A common assumption in political science research is that the primary goal of incumbent politicians is to maintain power. This is often a useful assumption, but it can be misleading when applied to countries without institutionalized political rules. For some incumbents in democratizing countries, the goal of democratization trumps the incumbent’s goal of staying in power. Throughout democratic history, there have been leaders who have put their desire to lead their country toward democracy ahead of their desire to stay in office. US President George Washington was one of the first prominent politicians to do so, and transferred power to an elected successor despite popular opinion that he should serve indefinitely. Since that time, a number of incumbent politicians have risked their own popularity and political future in order to help their country progress toward democracy. Other prominent examples include Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Clerk in South Africa and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

I define true-democrats as those incumbents who obey the letter and the spirit of electoral laws: they follow rules regulating electoral competition (they do not commit electoral fraud) and comply with expected behavior following an election (if they lose, they peacefully transfer power). Put simply, they act like leaders in established democracies. Within the confines of a democratic election, it remains a valid assumption that true-democrats wish to maintain power.

For other leaders of countries in transition, the assumption of power hungry politicians remains appropriate. Pseudo-democrats hold free and fair elections if they believe that they are popular enough to win outright, and if they are not sure that they will win, they manipulate the election to their benefit. The crucial differences between true-democrats and pseudo-democrats are that first, pseudo-democrats are willing to cheat and, second, if they are defeated, they do not willingly transfer power to another party. History shows that these leaders are sometimes surprised when an election reveals that they are not as popular as they believed. For example, it

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22 At the time, George Washington was considered a “modern Cincinnatus.”
was widely reported that Marcos agreed to hold the 1986 Philippine elections because he believed he would win in a landslide. Similarly, in Uruguay in 1980, and in Nicaragua in 1990, unelected dictators or strongmen failed to anticipate that they were likely to be voted out of office. In each case, the leaders held elections because they felt they would win overwhelmingly, and were resistant to transferring power after losing. Even though, in each of the examples above, the incumbent eventually allowed a transfer of power to the winner of the election, this transfer was caused by enormous popular uprising and international pressure rather than the leaders’ inherent preference for democracy.

These “stunning” elections are one way in which countries transition to democracy without the leadership of a true-democrat.23 Errors of judgment aside, pseudo-democrats are likely to hold elections on a heavily tilted playing field that they have manipulated in their favor. The existence of true-democrats and pseudo-democrats plays a central role in why it has become an internationally expected behavior for leaders to invite international election observers. The implications of the existence of these two types of leaders will be discussed later.

The other major actor in the development of election observation is the international community. I assume that the international community can be reasonably modeled as a coherent actor. During the Cold War, I focus exclusively on the preferences of the Western oriented international community. Since the Cold War, in the context of international democracy promotion, the international community of democratic states has shared similar preferences on this issue and primarily acts in concert through intergovernmental organizations.24 Organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the European Union, the Southern

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23 Huntington 1991, 174. For a more extensive argument along these lines, see Marinov 2006.
24 The use of democracy promotion rhetoric by the US in Iraq is an exception, but has not lessened the focus on democracy outside of the US (McFaul 2004).
African Development Community, and the African Union have made official proclamations confirming their preference for democracy and transparency in other states in the world. They, along with bilateral donors, have backed up this preference for democracy with significant investment in democracy promotion and increases in the amount of aid that is linked to progress toward democratic and transparent institutions.

The international community increased emphasis on democracy during the later years of the Cold War. However, promoting democracy is just one of several other common goals of foreign policy, and their relative importance has changed over time. During the Cold War, the declared preference for democracy was easily trumped by anti-communism, and after the Cold War the West’s preference for democratic regimes could still be overridden by a country with a high level of geo-political importance (the US and Egypt for example). However, to varying degrees, democracy has served as one of the characteristics that developed democracies value and promote in other countries.

International election observers are representatives of the international community. Their presence at an election is primarily to judge whether the election meets international standards or not, and is therefore not modeled as a strategic decision. In practice, international observers maintain the ability to “move the goalposts” depending on a variety of factors specific to the election, including their desire to be invited to future elections in the country, the consequences of a negative report (they do not want to send a country back into civil war), or their wish to support a process that they judge is moving in the right direction. International observation missions, and the international community that they represent, generally benefit from accurate

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25 Among many documents that discuss these official proclamations, see the series of United Nations documents entitled “Enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections, specifically A/RES/44/146; Goodwin-Gill (1994); the OSCE’s 1990 Copenhagen Document; Merloe (1999); as well as the pieces by Diamond (2002), and Carothers (1997, 2002).

reporting. Accurate reporting supports their goal of supporting democracy (by separating the true-democrats from the imitators) and also helps them develop and maintain a good reputation.

**The Allocation of International Benefits**

In the late Cold War, the Western international community valued several specific characteristics in other states. In descending order, the characteristics they valued included a state’s commitment to anti-communism, a state’s geo-political position, and finally a state’s commitment to democracy. Above all else, the West valued anti-communism in other states. Holding other factors constant during the 1980s, the West also professed a preference for democracy. For anti-communist countries that were already aligned with the West, benefit-seeking leaders could increase their value to the West by becoming more democratic.

The benefits that the international community allocates to states based on their value include but are not limited to international legitimacy, foreign aid, preferential trade agreements, membership in international organizations, and increased foreign direct investment. These international benefits can also be withheld or withdrawn as a penalty for various reasons, including actions related to democratic reversals.

As a rule, the international community prefers to support incumbent leaders of countries judged to have high value, although the characteristics valued change over time. This section formalizes this concept. Assume that the West assigns a score of $S$ to every incumbent leader seeking international benefits. This score can be based on any number of criteria. For simplicity, assume that the West assigns this score based on three criteria: support for or against communism, geo-political position, and commitment to democracy, represented by $s_1$, $s_2$, and $s_3$. Each score is also assigned a corresponding weight of $w_1$, $w_2$, and $w_3$. Therefore,

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27 For documentation of this statement, see Burnell 2000; Cox, Ikenberry, and Inoguchi 2002; Chand 1997; Nelson and Eglinton 1992; Smith 1994; and Stokke 1995.
\[ S = s_1 * w_1 + s_2 * w_2 + s_3 * w_3, \text{ where } w_1 + w_2 + w_3 = 1 \]  
(Equation 1)

Let \( s_i \) range from -1 to 1 with -1 representing a very pro-communist country and 1 representing a completely anti-communist country. Let the expected amount of international benefits that a state receives given its score be \( F(S) \). Assume that \( F' > 0 \), or that the higher the value of \( S \), the greater the amount of expected international benefits.

\[
F(S) = F(s_1 * w_1 + s_2 * w_2 + s_3 * w_3)
\]  
(Equation 2)

\[
\frac{\partial F}{\partial S_3} = F'(s_1 * w_1 + s_2 * w_2 + s_3 * w_3)
\]  
(Equation 3)

So,

\[
\frac{\partial(s_1 * w_1 + s_2 * w_2 + s_3 * w_3)}{\partial S_3} = w_3
\]  
(Equation 4)

Thus, \( \frac{\partial F}{\partial S_3} = F'w_3 \), with \( F' \) representing some positive amount of international benefits. Because the values of \( w \) sum to one, a change in \( w_i \) necessarily implies an opposing change in at least one other value of \( w \).

During the Cold War, increasing \( s_3 \) would only lead to a small boost in international benefits because \( w_3 \) was small. After the Cold War, the value of \( w_3 \) increased relative to \( w_1 \) and \( w_2 \). Given the above theory of the allocation of international benefits, this implies an increase in the share of benefits allocated based on a state’s perceived commitment to democracy.

How would the increased value of commitment to democracy change the behavior of benefit-seeking states? Specifically, how does this theory of international benefit allocation help explain the development of international election observation?

During the Cold War, characteristics other than democracy were valued by the West when choosing how to allocate international benefits. However, it is reasonable to assume that \textit{ceteris paribus}, the West preferred supporting democratic states over non-democratic states.
Upon recognizing the growing preference for democracy, leaders of benefit-seeking states that were already clearly aligned with the West could marginally increase their share of benefits by signaling their commitment to democracy. Note that signaling a commitment to democratization does not necessarily imply actual democratization, and could be consistent with existing studies that show little positive relationship between democratization and increases in foreign aid tied to democracy.\textsuperscript{28}

Gradually, other countries in similar positions vis-à-vis the West also invited international observers. There was no explicit advocacy of the practice of election observation. From the perspective of the international community during this period, international observation was a controversial practice, with the UN judging it a violation of sovereignty. Influential international actors did not press for international observation, nor did the organizations sending observers develop high quality observation methods. During the Cold War, the impetus to invite international observers was entirely with incumbent leaders seeking a marginal increase in their international benefits from the West. The Western international community was primarily concerned with anti-communism, beginning to be concerned with democratization, and relatively indifferent to the practice of election observation.

At the end of the Cold War, a state’s commitment to anti-communism or non-communism dramatically lessened in value relative to its preference for democracy. As the preferences of the international community changed toward overt global preference for democracy (with geo-political importance remaining most important), the actions of benefit-receiving countries and the international community changed in response. In the next section I formalize the resulting strategic dynamic as a screening game.

\textsuperscript{28} Crawford 2001; Knack 2004.
Screening Democracy

The following model clarifies the assumptions made about domestic and international actors and the environment surrounding the development of international election observation, and lays out how changing preferences on the part of international actors led to the rapid spread of election observation and a pooling equilibrium in which true and pseudo-democrats choose to invite observers, ultimately leading to the creation of an international norm. I utilize a screening model because the international community sets the price schedule of international benefits prior to the start of the game.

The sequence of decisions is as follows. Prior to the start of the game shown in Figure 2, the international community moves to determine the level of international benefits that are allocated based on commitment to democracy. These benefits were not necessarily linked to election monitoring per se until after the norm had developed. In the first stage, the type of the incumbent is determined by chance. The incumbent can be one of two types, a true-democrat or a pseudo-democrat. Let $T$ represent an incumbent that is a true-democrat, and $P$ represent an incumbent that is a pseudo-democrat. The probability of $T$ is represented by $\gamma$, which is, of course, $0 \leq \gamma \leq 1$, and the corresponding probability of $P$ is $1-\gamma$. Incumbents can make two choices: First, they choose to invite international observers ($I=1$) or not ($I=0$). If the incumbent is a pseudo-democrat who invites observers, she then chooses the level of effort devoted to hiding her cheating ($H \geq 0$). True democrats never cheat, so I assume that $H|T=0$. For simplicity, assume that pseudo-democrats always cheat. The cost of hiding election fraud at level $H$ is $c(H)$.

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29 This distinction is important. Because international benefits were linked to democracy rather than directly tied to election monitoring, the initiation of election observation closely approximates a signaling game in which the signal is initiated by the informed player. After the development of the expectation that observers would be invited, international benefits were linked explicitly to election observation, thus creating a screening game in which the signal is called for by the uninformed player (Rasmussen 2007).
Nature moves and the incumbent can win or lose the election. The probability that an incumbent wins the election is denoted by \( p \). For simplicity I assume that the probability of victory is the same for both types. If the incumbent loses the election, the payoff is zero, even if observers are invited.\(^{30}\)

**Payoffs**

For the incumbent, winning the election brings several benefits. Some of these benefits do not depend on the international community such as salary and domestic prestige. These benefits are denoted by \( B \). Winning office also brings with it international benefits, which for simplicity will be referred to as aid, and denoted by \( A \). \( A = F(S) \) as defined in Equation 2, or the amount of international benefits a state expects to receive based on its score. The reports issued by observers, denoted by \( R \), are used in part to determine a given country’s score. If cheating is detected, observers issue a negative report, \( R = -1 \), and if cheating is not detected, observers issue a positive report, \( R = 1 \). Given that an incumbent is cheating, the probability that observers issue a negative report is a function of the level of effort devoted to concealing the cheating, \( r(H) \). If the incumbent is a true-democrat, then the probability that the report is negative is zero because cheating is never revealed to the international observers. \( A \) is a function of inviting observers and the report they issue, denoted as \( A(I,R) \), where \( A(1,1) > A(1,-1) \geq A(0,\bullet) \). Note that \( A(0,\bullet) \) is the flow of targeted international benefits if monitors are not invited.

**Expected Utilities**

Given the information above, I compute the expected utilities for the incumbent leaders. The payoff for losing the election is normalized to zero. For the true-democrats, the expected utilities are as follows.

\(^{30}\) Note that the decision to hold elections is not included in the model. A more complicated model including this decision does not change the predicted outcomes substantially, primarily because pseudo-democrats who are certain of their unpopularity never choose to hold elections.
$EU_T(1,H) = p[B + A(1,1)] - c(H)$ \hspace{1cm} (Equation 5)

$EU_T(0) = p[B + A(0,\bullet)]$ \hspace{1cm} (Equation 6)

However, since the true-democrat does not cheat or conceal cheating, $c(H)$ is always zero. The true-democrat will invite observers when $EU_T(1,H) > EU_T(0)$, therefore, true-democrats will invite when $A(1,1) > A(0,\bullet)$. So long as the international community provides some benefits based on signaling a commitment to democracy that are greater than those benefits given if no signal is given, the true-democrat always invites international observers.

For the pseudo-democrat, the expected utility is represented by $EU_P(I, H)$. Equation 6 shows that the benefits from inviting observers are a function of the probability of victory and the probability that the report from observers is negative given the effort devoted to concealing manipulation. If the pseudo-democrat wins and successfully conceals manipulation from observers and gains a positive report, she gains $A(I, I)$. If the pseudo-democrat wins but is caught cheating, the report is negative, and she gains $A(I, -I)$. Regardless, the pseudo-democrat who invites observers must pay the cost of concealing manipulation.

The presence of observers can reduce the probability of victory for a cheating pseudo-democrat. Therefore, when observers are invited, pseudo-democrats cheat enough to make the probability of victory equal to the probability of victory if observers were not invited. This extra effort devoted to cheating (and concealing the cheating from observers) is represented in $c(H)$.

$$EU_P(I, H) = p[B + r(H)A(1,-1) + (1-r(H))A(1,1)] - c(H)$$ \hspace{1cm} (Equation 6)

When observers are invited by a pseudo-democrat, there is an optimal level of $H$ to conceal fraud without wasting effort. Let the optimal level of $H$ be denoted by $H_i$, where $H_i > 0$. If the incumbent pseudo-democrat invites observers, the best payoff she can get is,

$$EU_P(I, H_i) = p[B + r(H_i)A(1,-1) + (1-r(H_i))A(1,1)] - c(H_i)$$ \hspace{1cm} (Equation 7)
On the other hand, if the pseudo-democrat does not invite observers, there is no point in concealing the fraud, and the optimal level of $H$ is $H_0 = 0$. Therefore,

$$EU_P(0) = p[B + A(0, \bullet)]$$  \hspace{1cm} (Equation 8)

The expected utility for a pseudo-democrat who does not invite observers, and therefore does not conceal any electoral manipulation, is equal to the probability that she will win multiplied by the domestic benefits of remaining in office and the international benefits allocated to that state based on other factors valued by the international community.

If $[EU_P(1, H_1) - EU_P(0)] > 0$, then the pseudo-democrat will invite observers. In words, if the calculation in Equation 9 is greater than zero, observers will be invited. If it is equal or less than zero, they will not.

$$EU_P(1, H_1) - EU_P(0) = p[(r(H_1)A(1,1) + (1 - r(H_1))A(1,1) − A(0,\bullet))] − c(H_1)$$  \hspace{1cm} (Equation 9)

Notice that the non-international benefits, such as the salary from holding office, are no longer part of the decision to invite observers. The decision by a pseudo-democrat to invite international observers is a function of her probability of victory, the probability that cheating will be revealed, the size of international benefits for holding internationally legitimate elections, and the cost of electoral manipulation.

It is possible to simplify Equation 9 by assuming that the targeted international benefits are only available to those that invite international observers and are not caught cheating, or $A(1, -1) = A(0, \bullet) = 0$. Then Equation (9) above simplifies to

$$EU_P(1, H_1) - EU_P(0) = p[(1 - r(H_1))A(1,1) − c(H_1)]$$  \hspace{1cm} (Equation 10)

As the above expression shows, the pseudo-democrat is more likely to invite monitors in four scenarios: (1) as $p$, the probability that a pseudo-democrat wins the election, increases; (2) as the probability with getting away with cheating increases; (3) as the international reward for holding
internationally approved elections increases; and (4) as the cost of hiding electoral cheating decreases.

In this model, the international community simply sets a schedule indicating the size of international benefits a polity receives for given patterns of observed behavior (invite/not, reported cheating/not). In the simplest case, where \( A(I, -1) = A(0, \bullet) = 0 \), \( A(I, I) \) is the bonus for being (or seeming to be) a democratizing country. The international community maintains the ability to change the value of \( A(I, R) \). In the theory modeled here, the international community simply sets a positive value for \( A(I, I) \). This choice is determined by the model presented in Equation 1, and \( A(I, I) \) can be assumed to be positive and increasing when \( w_3 \), or the relative importance of democracy to the international community, increases.

How does this model explain the trend of more internationally observed elections? Given the above model, one explanation for the increasing trend of monitored elections is that \( A(I, I) \) increased relative to \( A(I, -1) \) and \( A(0, \bullet) \). In other words, the West placed a larger premium on democracy. An alternative explanation for the increasing trend toward monitored elections is that cheating became more effective or cheaper. Formally, either \( 1 - r(H_1) \) increased; or \( c(H_1) \) decreased. A third possible explanation for the increase in observed elections is that electoral autocrats became more secure, or more likely to win a given election, worldwide (\( p \) increased). Although this proposition is theoretically possible given the model, the empirical evidence does not support the idea that autocrats have become more secure. On the contrary, Barbara Geddes shows that although there is variation in leaders’ tenure in office between types of authoritarian regimes, the rate at which all types of authoritarian leaders leave office has increased since the end of WWII, and the failure rate within single-party regimes jumped dramatically beginning in
Thomas Carothers and Larry Diamond provide additional support for the point that authoritarian (and semi-authoritarian) rulers were increasingly likely to be thrown out of office or face competition during the 1990s.32

This leaves two possible, testable, and not yet refuted explanations as to why international election observation increased so rapidly since its inception: international election observation spread because (1) the international benefits for looking like a democracy increased, or (2) it became easier to cheat in front of international observers. These two explanations are not mutually exclusive, and may in fact be related.

**Discussion of Outcomes**

The type of the incumbent may be revealed during the course of play, which itself depends on the quality of observers—taken to be exogenous in the model above. For example, given my assumption that true-democrats never cheat (and the implicit assumption that monitors never render false positives), if any incumbent is caught cheating by monitors, the international community knows that the incumbent is a pseudo-democrat. The international actors setting the benefit schedule and determining the (exogenous) quality of monitoring prefer that monitoring produces accurate screening. Given the preferences and assumptions outlined in the model, and the relationship presented in Equation 10 between investments by international observers in monitoring technology, \( c(H_1) \); the ability of incumbents to conceal their cheating from observers \( H_1 \), and the probability that a report will be negative \((1-r)\), there are two general equilibrium outcomes of the game.

Since the true-democrat always invites when international benefits exist, there is one possible separating equilibrium: the true-democrats invite observers and the pseudo-democrats

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31 Geddes 1999.
32 Carothers 2002; Diamond 2002.
do not. Formally, if \( p[(1 - r(H))A(1,1)] - c(H) \leq 0 \) the pseudo-democrats do not invite observers. If the international community outspends the pseudo-democrats significantly, thus driving up the cost of concealing manipulation; a separating equilibrium results in which true-democrats will be separated from pseudo-democrats because inviting observers (and hiding the electoral manipulation) will have become too costly for the pseudo-democrats. This separating equilibrium also holds if the international benefits allocated based on commitment to democracy are small relative to the cost of hiding electoral manipulation.

Recall that true-democrats invite if \( A > 0 \). If, on the other hand, \( p[(1 - r(H))A(1,1)] - c(H) > 0 \), a pooling equilibrium results in which both types invite observers. In words, if pseudo-democrats are able to effectively outspend the international observers and stand to gain sufficient international benefits when their strategy succeeds, then true and pseudo-democrats should invite international observers.

What is the relationship between the quality of monitoring and the incumbent’s manipulation strategy? Let \( r \) (the probability that the monitor’s report, \( R \), is negative) be a function of investments by international observer organizations in better monitoring (denoted by \( z \)), and in hiding technology by the incumbent (denoted by \( y \); \( r(H; z, y) \)). Higher \( z \) makes \( H \) less effective in lowering \( r \). An increase in \( y \) makes \( H \) more effective in lowering \( r \). The basic relationship can be represented in the following way:

\[
r(H; z, y) = \frac{z}{Hy+z} \quad \text{(Equation 12)}
\]

This relationship generates a dynamic prediction: if observers get better at catching electoral manipulation (an increase in \( z \)), pseudo-democrats have the incentive to improve their cheating technology (\( y \)), and vice versa. Based on this model, we should observe escalation in both the quality of monitoring and the ability of incumbents to conceal their cheating.
Additionally, as a pooling equilibrium is reached in which both types invite international observers, the actors that benefit from an accurate screen, including true-democrats and international observers, have the incentive to increase the cost of the signal of a leader’s commitment to democracy, making it more costly for pseudo-democrats to fool observers.

**Norm Enforced Equilibrium?**

Election observations spread so widely because benefit-seeking leaders “pooled” on the signal of inviting observers. In combination with the increasing value of democracy to a variety of international actors and a desire by members of the international community to support democratizing states, the widely practice behavior of inviting observers became an expected behavior for leaders of developing countries. The norm of election observation was generated endogenously from the strategic situation faced by state leaders and the international community. It developed in the absence of explicit advocacy, yet the normalization of the practice brought increased investments in monitoring technology and made the decision to invite observers considerably more risky for pseudo-democrats.

The screening model as it is presented above does not fully explore why pseudo-democrats continue to invite international election observers even when the probability of being criticized for cheating has increased substantially. I argue that the existence of the norm of election observation and the pooling equilibrium are mutually reinforcing.

Recall that the international community was initially indifferent to the practice of election observation, and only began sending observers reluctantly after repeated requests from state leaders.\(^{33}\) Many international actors, in particular the United Nations, were concerned that sending observers constituted an illegal violation of state sovereignty.\(^{34}\) The benefits tied

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\(^{33}\) Beigbeder 1994.

\(^{34}\) Santa-Cruz 2005.
generally to democracy rather than explicitly to election observation were sufficient to generate the pooling equilibrium described above. Once the norm developed, rather than simply rewarding governments that invited observers and received favorable reports, international actors became willing to link benefits explicitly to election observation and to punish leaders for not inviting observers.35

This latter change was crucial. Counterfactually, this argument suggests that in the absence of an internationally held norm that observers would be invited, we should rarely observe leaders inviting observers and getting caught and punished for cheating. Without an externally imposed cost for not inviting international observers, the increased quality and professionalization of election observers should have resulted in fewer observed elections. As reflected in Figure 3, election observation has not decreased with the rate of internationally criticized elections. Thus, the existence of an international norm of election observation reinforces the equilibrium outcome.

Of course, the rate of election observation is not 100%. Some countries, like the Czech Republic, Chile and new members of the European Union have “graduated” from the norm and are no longer expected to invite observers because they have democratized. One could argue that the remaining non-inviter s are not interested in holding internationally legitimate elections, or that they have a zero probability of holding an acceptable election. In 2004, for example, the only non-consolidated democracies that held elections but did not invite any foreign observers were Iran, Malaysia, Tunisia, and Turkmenistan. One can speculate as to why these countries do not invite, but it is notable that a number of countries with fraudulent or otherwise unacceptable elections continue to invite observers.

35 Adding a cost for not inviting observers to the formalized screening game increases the set of conditions under which pseudo-democrats invite observers.
The next section turns to an empirical evaluation of the global spread of election observation, and explores in greater detail whether the empirical evidence disconfirms that theory outlined above.

**Explaining the Spread of Election Observation: Empirical Evaluation**

The central dependent variable is whether a given election was observed or not. The propositions outlined above are tested as hypotheses. The driving force in the explanation of the spread of election observation is a relative increase in international benefits for countries acting like democratizing countries. Therefore, the overall probability that a given election will be observed should be preceded by increases in international benefits.

**H1: If the level of international benefits tied to democracy increases, then the probability of an observed election should also increase.**

As more leaders invited observers, the presence of international election observers became more widely understood as a signal of a country’s commitment to democratize. As more countries in a given region invited international observers to their elections, individual leaders were more likely to link positive outcomes to inviting international observers.

Thus, leaders are more likely to recognize the benefits of inviting observers (or more likely to feel pressure to invite) if neighboring countries also invite observers. The hypothesis is not meant to imply that leaders gain more international benefits when their neighbors invite monitors. Rather, when nearby countries began inviting monitors incumbent leaders were more likely to recognize that there were gains to be had or losses to be avoided by inviting international observers.

**H2: The probability that an election will be monitored increases as the percentage of other elections that are monitored in the region in the previous year increases.**
In addition, all else held equal, incumbents who are relatively close to having free and fair elections have less to conceal from observers. Those leaders operating in a very undemocratic political environment will be less likely to invite monitors because the likelihood that they will be criticized is much greater than for those leaders who already operate within somewhat democratic institutions. Therefore, given that consolidated democracies are excluded, the chances that an election will be monitored will be higher if the country is more democratic. In terms of the model presented above, a higher level of democracy would decrease the costs of hiding electoral manipulation. This hypothesis should not be interpreted as an indication of whether a leader is a true-democrat or a pseudo-democrat. In theory, a leader’s type is independent of the domestic political institutions. Even in countries with relatively high levels of democracy, a leader may manipulate the election and choose not to accept the results in the event of a loss. Overall, excluding elections in long-term developed democracies, higher levels of democracy prior to the election should make it less costly for a pseudo-democrat to hold an election that looks clean to international observers, thus increasing the probability that a given election will be monitored.

**H3: The probability that an election in year t will be monitored will increase as the level of democracy of the country in year t-1 increases.**

The dynamic relationship between pseudo-democrats and international observers generates several other predictions. As election observation spread, pseudo-democrats had the incentive to cheat using methods that were less likely to be caught by international observers, and international observers had the incentive to improve their methods of catching electoral manipulation. Therefore, the quality of monitoring as well as the quality of cheating should increase jointly. The quality of election manipulation is very difficult to observe because
effectively concealed cheating is, by definition, impossible to observe directly. However, if international observers are improving the quality of their observation as pseudo-democrats get better at concealing manipulation, the overall rate of negative reports should increase.

**H4: The rate of negative reports should increase over time.**

Anecdotally, the empirical record also shows that pseudo-democrats could invite observers and increase the probability that they will get away with election manipulation by inviting low-quality election observers who are less likely to criticize election fraud.

**H5: As more pseudo-democrats invite observers, the number of elections monitored by “low-quality” observer groups will increase.**

The dynamic relationship between observer quality and election manipulation, as well as the variation in election-holding countries each year implies that the relationships outlined in Hypotheses 4 and 5 are unlikely to be linear.

**The Dataset of Elections and Election Observation**

The explanation of the spread of election observation is tested on a dataset of all national level elections from 1960-2004. Each observation in the dataset is a separate election. Elections in developed countries that are long-term consolidated democracies are excluded. Developed long-term democracies are substantively different from those countries that are expected to invite observers today. Including them in the analysis would unnecessarily complicate the predicted relationships. Developed countries are defined as those countries that do not receive development assistance from the OECD. Long-term consolidated democracies are those defined

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36 A replication dataset will be made available by the author upon acceptance for publication.
by Arend Lijphart, and have been considered democracies for forty years or more. A total of 160 countries are included for some period of time.

A comprehensive dataset of all elections was not available during the data collection of election observation for this project. Therefore, in addition to collecting data on observed elections, it was first necessary to collect data on all election dates. Election dates since 1960 were compiled from a variety of sources, but were drawn most heavily from the data handbooks edited by Dieter Nohlen (with coeditors varying by region); and Tatu Vanhanen’s Polyarchy manuscript. From 1998 to 2004, the IFES Election Guide was the principal resource for election dates. The dataset compiled from these resources was supplemented with Lexis-Nexis newswire reports, the SUNY-Binghamton Center on Democratic Performance’s Election Results Archive, the Lijphart Elections Archive, and web-accessible information from governmental election management bodies in individual countries.

Unlike existing comparative data on elections, elections are included even when they lack genuine competition or are for offices that have little political power. Truncating the dataset on the dependent variable, in this case eliminating highly uncompetitive elections, would bias the results. If multiple offices are elected on the same day (or during one consecutive multi-day election period), the election is treated as one observation. Elections on separate days, even when held in the same country in the same year, are treated as separate observations (for example, a legislative election in June and a presidential election in December are counted as separate observations). Although data were collected on multi-round elections, the statistical analysis examines only first round elections. National referenda on constitutional or other substantive

37 Lijphart 1999, but Venezuela and Colombia are included in the analysis.
38 This figure includes 26 micro-states or newly independent states that drop out of the dataset for most of the analysis due to missing data.
39 Such as Polity IV or the Database of Political Institutions.
issues were excluded. In some isolated cases incumbents held referenda on their own continued rule. These plebiscites are equivalent to elections with only one candidate, and both are included in the dataset.

**Observed Elections**

The dataset on observed elections is unique in its scope, covering all election-holding countries outside of the developed democratic world. To the extent that it is possible, I also collected data from election observation missions of varying quality.\(^{40}\) Data were first collected from organizations that sponsor election observation missions. The more professionalized organizations make most of their reports available to the public, therefore making it more likely that missing reports would be from the less institutionalized observer organizations. This does not correlate perfectly with the quality of observers, but it may create some bias away from including all observer missions from lower quality and/or lower prestige observer organizations. Because some reports have been lost or were never made public, for each election after 1978, newswire reports on dates surrounding elections were also searched for mention of international observers.\(^{41}\) In this manner, the record of whether an election was monitored was checked by organization and by election.

Therefore, for each election (each observation in the dataset), there is an indication of whether or not it was observed and, when possible, by whom. Many elections are observed by multiple groups. Table 1 lists the organizations that are recorded in the dataset as having sent official delegations of international election observers.

\(^{40}\) I make the point that I included missions of varying quality only to highlight that no groups were excluded based on the perception that their missions are of low quality. It is difficult to draw a bright line between observer groups of high and low quality, and asking a group of experts for their opinion would likely produce some variation in which groups are viewed as high and low quality.

\(^{41}\) Combinations of the terms international, foreign, monitors, and observers were used in Lexis-Nexis searches.
Measuring International Benefits

A quantitative test of Hypothesis 1 requires a measure of international benefits. It is difficult to measure international benefits directly. Some international benefits, like international legitimacy, cannot be measured quantitatively, and even benefits that are quantifiable are fungible and difficult to separate from other benefits. As modeled above, international benefits linked to democracy represent a portion of all international benefits, making precise measurement extremely difficult.

The ideal measure of international benefits would be a survey of state leaders prior to their decision to invite international observers regarding what they expected to receive as a result of inviting observers. This ideal measure is impractical for a variety of reasons. An alternative that may be feasible in the future but that is not yet available is an examination of project-level foreign aid commitments. Because aid is used by donors to promote strategic interests, a greater proportion of aid that is explicitly tied to democracy should reflect an increase in the proportion of international benefits available to leaders who signal their commitment to democracy. This measure would distinguish between rewards for inviting observers and punishment for not inviting observers or for holding fraudulent elections.

What existing indicators can be used as a proxy for the available international benefits allocated based on democracy? Recent scholarship provides evidence of a large shift in the allocation of international benefits based on democracy in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. In general, countries allocate foreign aid to sectors that they value. OECD countries report the amount of aid given to each of several dozen sectors, one of which is “government and civil society.” Donor commitments to support this sector should be a signal of broader donor

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42 See the Project Level Aid Commitments (PLAID) described at http://mjtier.people.wm.edu/intlpolitics/aid/.
interests to all state leaders seeking to maximize international benefits. I used these commitments of aid to government and civil society in each region as a proxy for the proportion of international benefits tied to democracy. The regional total is used to attempt to account for the variation in timing of the international emphasis on democracy between regions (i.e. external pressure to democratize in the Middle East came much later than in Latin America). The data were reported by donors to the OECD DAC from 1973-2004. Reported aid commitments are distinct from disbursements, and better represent a signal of donor priorities. Prior to 1973 these data were not reported by donors. The lack of reporting may be a relatively accurate reflection of the relative importance of government and civil society to OECD countries in the 1960s and early 1970s, with the exception of President Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress in 1961-62. Because of this, the models are run for two time periods. For 1973-2004 all data are complete, but for the 1960-2004 period, one model is run without the aid variable, and in a third model, zeros are substituted for the amount of aid to government and civil society prior to 1973.

**Other Variables Explaining Observed Elections**

To test Hypothesis 2, I include a measure of the percentage of elections in the region that were internationally observed in the previous year. Hypothesis 3 is tested using the country’s lagged Polity2 score from the Polity IV dataset. I also include an interaction between the Polity score of the previous year and the percentage of observed elections in the region in the previous year. Although I excluded developed long-term democracies from the dataset, those countries

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44 This proxy implicitly assumes that international benefits are allocated on a regional basis. It is possible that this is not the case, and countries in all regions of the world take their cues about international benefits from events outside of their region. However, some empirical work supports the plausibility of the regional assumption. See, for example, Simmons and Elkins (2004).

45 The donors included are France, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, Japan, the European Union, Italy, Denmark, Portugal, Finland, Germany, and Spain.


47 For each country, the percentage does not include elections that took place in that country in the previous year.

that have become full democracies during the observed time period, or that are regionally hegemonic, may not be expected to invite international observers.49

The Model

The dependent variable in this analysis is whether a given election was monitored by international election observers invited by the incumbent government. I use a binary logit model. The dataset consists of 1403 individual elections held between 1960 and 2004. This total includes only first round elections held in independent states, and excludes microstates. Missing Polity scores reduce the number of observations to 1258. The average number of elections held by a given country in this time period is ten, but ranges from one election to 27 elections. Although the data are pooled by country, the variation in the number of temporal observations for each country means that statistical tools for binary time series cross-section analyses are not appropriate.50 The data are neither traditional time-series nor panel data. In order to control for panel heteroskedasticity the data are clustered by country. Because the decision to invite observers in the current time period is not likely to be independent from the decision to invite observers in previous time periods, I also include an indicator of whether any previous election in the country was internationally monitored.51

The specification of the model is represented below:

\[ P(\text{observed election}|x_i) = \frac{1}{1+e^{-x_i\beta}} \]

Where \( x_i\beta = \text{Constant} + \beta_1 \text{democracy} + \beta_2 \text{regional percent observed} + \beta_3 \text{regional percent observed} \times \text{democracy} + \beta_4 \text{government and civil society aid} + \beta_5 \text{previous invitation} + e \)

49 The interpretation of interaction terms in non-linear models is more complicated and is discussed in detail later in the analysis.
50 Statement made based on information in Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998). Because the number of time points (T) is not “reasonably large” for all units, their recommended method for binary TSCS data is not appropriate. Some countries in the dataset have as few as one election. There is a very high likelihood of temporal dependence between elections in the same country. Without enough time points, the solution used here is to control for temporal dependence by including a dummy variable if any previous election in the country had been internationally observed.
51 Summary statistics are included in Table 4.
Table 2 shows that the null of hypotheses 1-3 outlined in this paper can be rejected based on the direction and the significance level of the coefficients. The magnitude of the results is best interpreted by examining predicted probabilities while assuming values of interest.52

When all independent variables in Model 3 are set at their mean, the probability that a given election is observed is 25%. Table 3 shows that the variables with the largest effects are the percentage of other elections observed in the region and the presence of observers at a previous election. All else held equal at mean values, a country in a region with zero observed elections in the previous year has a 12.2% chance of inviting international observers. If the rate of observed elections in the previous year is increased to 60% (the 75\textsuperscript{th} percentile of the variable), the probability that the election will be observed is 47%.

The magnitude of the effect of a previous invitation is also large. When all other variables are set at their mean, the presence of observers at a previous election in the country increases the probability that an election will be observed by about 38.4%. This shows that within countries, the decision to invite is not independent across time and, consistent with the development of a norm, suggests strong path dependence.

The proxy for available international benefits is statistically significant in the predicted direction, but the magnitude of the effect is small relative to the other independent variables. An increase in the committed regional benefits from $2.4 million to $446 million (25\textsuperscript{th} to 75\textsuperscript{th} percentile) is associated with an increase in the probability that an election will be observed by about 4.3%. The null hypothesis that international benefits may be having no effect on the probability of an observed election can be rejected. However, the small magnitude of the effect is

52 Predicted probabilities and first differences are computed using Clarify, (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000).
somewhat puzzling. This could be due to the difficulty in measuring international benefits and the rough nature of the proxy. The percentage of observed elections in the previous year could be absorbing much of the effect that an increase in available international benefits should have on the probability of an observed election. In fact, when the percentage of observed elections is excluded from the regression, the magnitude of the effect of international benefits more than doubles (the same predicted probability described above in this paragraph increases the probability that an election will be observed by 11.4%). In theory, when many elections are internationally observed in the region, leaders are more likely to feel international pressure to invite international observers. Both available international benefits and regional diffusion contributed to the spread of election observation, and the regional diffusion likely increased the chances that incumbent leaders perceived a link between inviting international observers and increased international benefits.

All else held at the mean, an increase in a country’s prior Polity score from -7 to 7 (25th to 75th percentile) increases the probability that an election would be observed by around 13.9%. Countries with higher levels of democracy are more likely to benefit by inviting international observers, either because they have nothing to hide, or because electoral manipulation can be hidden behind procedurally acceptable elections. This effect should fade as observers become better at catching the more indirect forms of electoral manipulation, as they did in the late 1990s. Interestingly, if the same model is estimated using only elections after 1997, the level of democracy is no longer statistically significant (Model 4). In this truncated time period, the level of international benefits also loses statistical significance. This result is likely due to the smaller sample and the rough nature of the international benefits proxy, but the results also fit within the larger context of a change in international expectations about incumbent behavior. By the end of
the 1990s, in the developing world, international actors expected that legitimate leaders would invite international observers. Incumbents complied with this expectation even when it was likely to be costly (for countries with low levels of democracy), and when there were not necessarily increases in material international benefits.

Interaction terms in logit models are often misinterpreted. In order to interpret the effect of the interaction between the level of democracy and the percentage of observed elections in the region more accurately, the method developed by Ai and Norton is used. When included in the model as separate variables, having a higher level of democracy and being located in a region with many observed elections both increase the probability of an observed election, primarily countries that successfully democratized during the period under study. The overall interaction term, as presented in Models 1-4 in Table 2, is negative and significant. However, the effect of the interaction term cannot be summarized as uniformly negative. For many observations, the interaction effect increases the probability of an observed election. Figures available from the author plot the interaction effects on the predicted probabilities and show that although the interaction term is negative in the regression results, for some observations the effect of the interaction term has a positive effect on the probability of an observed election. For many observations the interaction effect is not statistically significant.

Tests of Hypotheses 4 and 5 require further disaggregation of the data. Hypothesis 4 predicts an increase in the rate of negative reports. The first negative reports were in the Philippines in 1986, South Korea in 1987 and Panama in 1989. Observers may or may not have been willing to criticize elections prior to this time, but the quality of elections is endogenous. In the first period of election observation, only true-democrats invited observers. After pseudo-democrats began mimicking the signal of true-democrats, it was not necessarily automatic that

observers would be willing or able to catch and criticize fraudulent elections. Figure 3 shows the
number of negative reports over time relative to the total number of observed elections.
“Negative reports” were recorded as those that seriously question the legitimacy of the election
or the accuracy of the result.\(^\text{54}\) Judgments were made from the original reports of international
observers. Because the majority of observation missions report some irregularities, only the
summary statements from observers were used: either as reported at the press conferences
following the election or in the official final report. Elections for which irregularities were noted,
but observers did not overtly question the winner or the process, were not counted as having
received a negative report.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The rate of negative reports increased generally over time, lending some support for
Hypothesis 4. However, the increase is not steady. The fluctuation in the rate of negative reports
could be due to the character of the election holding countries each year. In each year, there are
varying proportions of countries holding clean elections. The fluctuation could also be due to the
nature of the “game of strategy” in which incremental changes in strategies for manipulating
elections are followed by incremental improvements in monitoring methods. Assuming a
relatively constant base pattern in the rate of clean elections, the advance by pseudo-democrats in
manipulating elections in ways that are less likely to be caught by observers would result in
short-term reduction in the rate of negative reports, whereas an advance in monitoring
technology would increase the rate of negative reports in the short term. This description of the
interaction between monitoring methods and incumbent strategy could also be consistent with
the pattern observed in Figure 3.

\(^\text{54}\) The summary statements from observation reports were collected and separated from identifying information
about the election. I coded the report as negative if the summary statement challenged the winner of the election or
significantly questioned the legitimacy of the process.
As observers recognized the need for higher quality election observation, some incumbent leaders got better at manipulation. Consistent with Hypothesis 5, the evidence suggests that some incumbents tried to mimic the signal of true-democrats by inviting observers who were unlikely to criticize. I define missions as “high quality” if the organization sending observers had previously issued a negative report about an election. “Friendly” missions are those sent by organizations that have never issued a negative report and are therefore assumed to be unlikely to criticize. This measure is imperfect, but should give a general sense of the risk that incumbents were taking when inviting different organizations, and provides evidence of the use of “friendly” observer missions as an attempt to lower the risk of inviting observers. Figure 3 also reflects that over time more organizations issued critical reports and that these organizations continued to observe many elections. After the 1986 election in the Philippines, the rate of low-quality missions peaked when the rate of observed elections was increasing most rapidly.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

In addition, the availability of friendly election observers in the early 1990s helps explain the rapid spread of election observation and invitations to observers by “pseudo-democrats.” By the late 1990s, high quality missions were present at more elections than “friendly” missions, and organizations were generally more willing to issue negative reports. The pattern depicted in Figure 4 is not linear. After observers began to criticize elections in the late 1980s, the percentage of elections observed by friendly observer missions was well over 50% for most of the 1990s, but fluctuates considerably.

Another method used by incumbents to minimize the negative consequences of rigging an election in front of international observers is to invite observer organizations that are likely to reach different conclusions. Multiple observer groups at an election are also a sign of
international interest in the election. However, if multiple observation missions give conflicting reports on the same election, the government can characterize the observers’ reports as unreliable. Figure 5 shows the number of observed elections at which there was more than one observer organization. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the OSCE/ODIHR regularly monitor the same election and issue conflicting reports. The CIS has been accused of judging elections on the basis of Russian foreign policy priorities rather than the conditions of the election. The CIS, in turn, accuses the OSCE of bias and of inappropriately applying Western standards for elections. Even reputable organizations have been pitted against each other by incumbent leaders attempting to discredit criticism of their elections. Perhaps as a result, observers have made increased efforts to coordinate their information and in many cases, their post-election press conferences.

[FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE]

As cheating incumbents have improved their methods of manipulating the election and still receiving a favorable report, reputable international observers invested in higher quality election observation. Parallel vote tabulation, coordination with and training of domestic election observers, increased numbers of short-term observers, long-term election observation, media monitoring, evaluations of the legal framework surrounding elections and a general increased willingness to criticize problematic elections are all changes in international observer organizations that make it more difficult for cheating incumbents to escape without international criticism. For cheating parties, these changes have made it more difficult, although far from impossible, to successfully manipulate an election in front of high quality observers.
Conclusions

I began this article with an empirical puzzle. Many leaders invite international election observers, cheat in front of them, and face negative consequences as a result. For pseudo-democrats, being caught cheating by international observers can lead to international condemnation, domestic uprising, and an overall reduction in the probability that they will maintain their hold on power. I have argued that the norm of election observation explains this puzzle. Without the existence of the norm, held and enforced by the international community, the rate of observed elections should have begun decreasing by the end of the 1990s as observers grew better at catching election fraud and more likely to sanction fraudulent elections. Instead, as Figure 1 shows, the rate of observed elections continued to increase during this time period.

Election observation began as a signal to international actors of a government’s commitment to democratization. As more leaders invited international observers and the value of being recognized as a democratizing country increased, leaders who were not necessarily committed democrats also had the incentive to invite observers. This repeated behavior resulted in the normalization of election observation, and the adoption of the screening mechanism of election monitoring by members of the international community. Empirically, using an original dataset of elections and election observation, I have shown that the initiation and spread of internationally observed elections is positively associated with increases in the reward for holding internationally certified elections and with decreases in the ease of getting away with election manipulation. The allocation of international benefits based on democracy gave leaders, including true and pseudo-democrats, the incentive to invite international observers. Once the behavior of inviting observers became accepted by international organizations and democratic

55 See Fearon 2006 for a discussion of election observation and its effect on the probability of popular coordination to enforce democracy.
states as compatible with respect for state sovereignty, the norm of election observation
developed, and rather than simply rewarding democratizing countries, international actors began
to punish leaders who did not invite observers. The international community, most visibly the
European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, have become
willing to ostracize state leaders who do not invite international election observers, something
that would have been unheard of as recently as the early 1990s.

The development of the norm of election observation represents just one case, but it
speaks to several bodies of literature. First, it provides concrete evidence of international
influences on domestic politics, thus continuing in the tradition of “second-image reversed”
research. Second, by providing a theory of international benefit allocation that includes the
importance of democracy without assuming that it is the most important policy goal of
democratic states and international organizations, this piece has also made a contribution to
literature on the effects of democracy promotion. Although not explored in this article, the
incentive to “fake” democracy, generated by internationally allocated benefits, may in part
explain why many countries remain stuck in the institutionally ambiguous space between
democracy and autocracy.

Finally, I have engaged in the debate over international norm formation. Within
international relations theory, this piece is not intended to prove or disprove existing theories.
Rather, I show an alternative path to norm development by arguing that diffuse, instrumentally
motivated action, generated an international norm. The change in international expectations
associated with the international norm now means that international actors are willing to sanction
leaders who do not invite observers and rely explicitly on the screening game. Although counter-
factual examples are difficult to prove, I suspect that the norm of election observation would not

56 Gourevitch 1978.
have developed if it had begun with ideationally motivated norm entrepreneurs. Norm entrepreneurs, in contrast to reluctant international organizations, would have been motivated to develop high quality election monitoring from the beginning. In this counterfactual world, pseudo-democrats would have simply refused to invite observers on grounds of sovereignty and election observers would never have been invited to bad elections. It was only the fact that election observation was initiated by leaders of developing countries that international actors accepted monitoring as an action consistent with respect for sovereignty.\(^{57}\)

Further research, some of which is underway, should explore the domestic effects of election observation, including whether international observers deter fraud, how often conflicting reports are issued, and how domestic audiences respond to internationally observed elections.

\(^{57}\) Not incidentally, leaders who were initially inviting observers did not advocate election observation in other states.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Organizations Sending Election Observation Missions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>International Nongovernmental Organizations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Helsinki Human Rights Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Carter Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERDDES-Africa (Research Group on the Democratic, Economic and Social Development of Africa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFES (formerly International Foundation for Electoral Systems)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Human Rights Law Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Republican Institute for International Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American Studies Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Democratic Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Office on Latin America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intergovernmental Organizations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Union (formerly Organization of African Unity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth (organization of former British colonies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Community of East African States (ECOWAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of American States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation Internationale de La Francophonie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe-- Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South African Association for Regional Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern African Development Community (SADC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polity Score (t-1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Percent Observed (t-1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (Democracy and Regionally Observed Elections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Regional Aid Committed to Government and Civil Society</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previously Observed Election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald chi2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob &gt;chi2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses

* significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%
Table 3: Effects of Country Characteristics on the Probability of Inviting Observers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When this Variable…</th>
<th>Shifts from …to …</th>
<th>Change in Prob. Of Observed Election (upper and lower bounds)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Polity Score</td>
<td>25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; to 75&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; percentile</td>
<td>13.9% (3.1% 29.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Observed Elections (regionally in previous year)</td>
<td>25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; to 75&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; percentile</td>
<td>35.0% (26.0% 43.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Aid Committed to Government and Civil Society, by Region</td>
<td>25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; to 75&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; percentile</td>
<td>4.3% (1.2% 8.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Invitation</td>
<td>Zero to One</td>
<td>38.4% (28.8% 47.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact Democracy and Observed</td>
<td>25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; to 75&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; percentile</td>
<td>-5.7% (-8.7% -2.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Boldface indicates that the 95% confidence interval around a simulated first difference did not contain zero, signifying statistical significance. Based on a logit model estimated in Stata 9.0, with first differences drawn from 1000 simulations performed by CLARIFY (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King).
**Table 4. Summary Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observed</td>
<td>1403</td>
<td>0.312188</td>
<td>0.463551</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polity2 ( (t-1) )</td>
<td>1258</td>
<td>-0.301272</td>
<td>6.800418</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Percent Observed ( (t-1) )</td>
<td>1403</td>
<td>0.280352</td>
<td>0.332714</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polity2*Percent Observed</td>
<td>1258</td>
<td>0.774983</td>
<td>2.817506</td>
<td>-8.4375</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Aid to Government and Civil Society ( \text{US$000} )</td>
<td>1403</td>
<td>296400</td>
<td>443668.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2618499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Observed Election</td>
<td>1403</td>
<td>0.325018</td>
<td>0.468549</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Percent of Elections Observed, 1960-2004
Note: Excludes Long-Term Consolidated Democracies and States with Population < 200,000
Figure 2: The Democratic Signal
Figure 3: Number of Elections Negatively Evaluated by International Observers, 1985-2004
Figure 4: Percentage of High and Low Quality Observation Mission
Figure 5: Number of Observed Elections with Multiple Observer Groups
Bibliography


Geddes, Barbara. 1999. "What do We Know about Democratization After Twenty Years?" Annual Review of Political Science. 2:115-44.


