# Free and fair elections: A new database

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## Abstract

The holding of elections has become universal but only about half of all elections are free and fair. Electoral malpractice not only distorts the quality of representation but has implications for political, social and economic outcomes. Existing datasets either provide information on election quality for a large number of elections but offer little detail, or they provide very detailed information for a small number of elections. Our data collection effort closes this gap by providing ten variables of election quality for all leadership elections for the period 1975–2011. We use these data to provide an assessment of elections that is closely tied to the commonly used term 'free and fair'. We define 'freeness' of the election as the rules of the election and the process leading up to the election, and 'fairness' of the election refers to the events on the election day. Our data show that the quality of elections has declined over time. These electoral problems are mainly due to issues in the run-up to the elections. Using probit regressions we investigate the possible causes of election malpractice. Our analysis suggests that the freeness and the fairness of the elections are related to a number of variables, such as income, aid, executive constraints and the presence of election monitors, but that these variables have differential effects on freeness and fairness.

## Introduction

Almost all countries hold elections to determine their leaders but we argue that electoral malpractice is widespread and many elections are not free and fair according to international standards. Electoral malpractice is an important issue because it reduces the objective quality of representation and has implications for political, social and economic outcomes (Birch, 2011).

In this new database, covering 169 countries over the period 1975–2011, we provide ten variables to assess the quality of elections. Our election variables range from the laws governing the elections, to the de facto application of these rules to events during the campaign process and on the election day. Our main aim is to generate indicators that enable us to judge whether an election is 'free and fair'. Although this is a very popular term, political scientists concentrate on value-free measures, such as the quality of elections (Kelley, 2012), electoral self-determination (Cingranelli, Richards & Clay, 2014) or electoral integrity (Norris, Frank & Martínez i Coma, 2014). One exception is the recent Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Coppedge et al., 2015) which offers a subjective measure of free and fair elections. However, their measure is not based on their other objective measures of the election. In contrast, we focus on providing ten objective measures of the electoral process and suggest how these measures can be used to derive a measure on whether the elections were free and fair.

We consider the rules of the election and the process leading up to the election as assessing the 'freeness' of the election. 'Fairness' of the election refers to the events on the election day. Using our ten variables we find that about half of all elections are marred by malpractice. These elections were either unfree or unfair or both.

Our definition of 'free and fair' elections is of course open to criticism. One might argue that an election cannot be fair if the run-up to the election was not free (Elklit & Svensson, 1997). However, our definition can

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be helpful in the examination of the election process before the election and the election day as separate events (c.f. Kelley, 2012; Schedler, 2013). Researchers critical of our definition can use the disaggregated data to construct different aggregates or to examine particular dimensions of electoral misconduct. In contrast to other databases that either cover many elections in relatively little detail (e.g. Database of Political Institutions, DPI; Beck et al., 2001), or more recent data collection efforts that provide a lot of detailed information but only for a small number of elections (e.g. Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, PEI; Norris, Martínez i Coma & Gromping, 2015), we provide ten variables for most leadership elections from 1975 to 2011, thus offering manageable information for researchers wishing to examine the causes and consequences of electoral misconduct. Our database is available online and allows other researchers to download our data and report additional information on specific elections.

Our article is organized in the following way. In Section 2 we define 'free and fair' elections and discuss our ten measures. Section 3 provides some descriptive statistics and in Section 4 we illustrate the use of our aggregated variable in a model of the determinants of electoral misconduct. Section 5 offers some conclusions and suggestions for future research.

## Definition and measurement

### Definition
Elections are a key element of democracy and good quality elections strengthen the leadership's political legitimacy. This is stressed in the 'Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections' by the Inter-Parliamentary Council (IPC) which starts as follows:

> In any State the authority of the government can only derive from the will of the people as expressed in gen uine, free and fair elections held at regular intervals on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage. (Goodwin Gill, 2006: viii)

The declaration provides a list of rights and responsibilities that constitute a 'free and fair' election and we base our concept on the IPC declaration. 'Freeness' means that all adult citizens must have the right to register and vote as well as having the right to establish and join parties and campaign freely within the country. 'Fairness' refers to the equal treatment of equals. For example the declaration states that every voter is 'entitled to exercise his or her right equally with others'.

Building on the IPC concept of 'free and fair' elections, we used election observer reports to measure ten dimensions of electoral conduct. Our survey of election reports suggests that observers focus on the following issues in their assessments: the right to vote; the registration of voters; the freedom to stand as a candidate in the election; and the freedom to campaign freely and have access to the media. After the polls close the votes must be counted accurately and the results from each polling station have to be reported and added up correctly. Complaints have to be handled by an independent agency.

We also considered more explicitly how the freeness and the fairness of elections can be undermined by consulting the survey instruments that election observers use (e.g. the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, OSCE) and the menu of electoral manipulation as presented by Schedler (2002).

Based on this analysis we generated a list of ten dimensions of electoral conduct:

(1) Legal framework
(2) Electoral management bodies
(3) Electoral rights
(4) Voter register
(5) Ballot access
(6) Campaign process
(7) Media access
(8) Voting process
(9) Role of officials
(10) Counting of votes

### Measurement
There is probably no election that is perfect in terms of rules and their application. In our measurement of electoral malpractice we only want to highlight cases in which the irregularities were not minor but intentional, widespread and did or could have influenced the outcome of the election. Judging whether a rule or action was intentional is problematic but a number of studies of election quality focus on establishing intent (e.g. Kelley & Kolev, 2010). While a number of rules and actions are clearly designed to manipulate the outcome (e.g. voter intimidation), some may be the consequence of capacity problems (e.g. voter registration). Below we discuss each of the ten variables and how we decided whether deliberate malpractice occurred. In addition, our codebook provides details for each election.

Our main data sources are: Keesing's Contemporary Archives, the United States Department of State Human Rights Reports, other text sources from respected

organizations such as Freedom House and election observer reports. The full list is provided in the codebook. For coding purposes elections fall broadly into two categories: with and without election observer reports.

For the majority of elections observer reports provide plenty of information. However, election monitoring organizations draw different conclusions after having observed the same election. Some monitors, in particular intergovernmental organizations, tend to be more lenient in their judgements than nongovernmental organizations (Kelley, 2012) and there is evidence that autocratic governments strategically invite certain monitoring organizations (Daxecker & Schneider, 2014). For these reasons we ignored the normative conclusions of the reports and concentrated on the description of the rules and events. The information is not presented in a uniform way and we had to judge how severe the reported irregularities were. We are also aware that the reports are political documents and that some information may have been deliberately left out. For example, Kelley (2012) suggests that violence is under-reported due to fear of generating more conflict. There is little we can do to address this issue other than using a number of reports to detect these omissions.

We are also aware that the presence of observers may have prevented some forms of malpractice, that is, there might be a systematic measurement bias. Monitors are more likely to observe problematic elections. Thus, we have more information on these elections but their quality may have been better due to the presence of observers. We are not able to fix this issue but want to flag it so that users of the data can consider the impact of this bias.

For the elections for which we have no information from observer reports we can distinguish three categories: (1) elections that are perceived as unproblematic (mostly Western democracies); (2) elections that are so obviously marred by malpractice that they are perceived as a sham and no monitoring organization publishes details on these elections; and (3) small island countries where there is little international interest. When there was no evidence on malpractice after analysing our main text sources, we checked existing databases such as DPI and CIRI. If no problems were listed in these either, we coded all ten variables as satisfactory. If the text sources flagged up problems we tried to find out further information from other reputable sources (e.g. Freedom House, various years).

## Ten variables of election quality

Corresponding to our list of ten dimensions of electoral conduct we generated ten variables. These are in turn based on a number of criteria; if these were fulfilled we coded the variable 1 and 0 otherwise. We were unable to code each criterion for every election and chose to summarize our assessment in a dichotomous variable. Such an aggregation is not a first best solution but it was a practical way of coding elections for which we had incomplete information. We discuss each variable in turn.

**Variable 1: *Legal framework.*** The legal framework describes the rule of the game. It guarantees the right to vote and run for office and that elections are run at regular intervals. If none of the following rules were violated, *Legal framework* was coded 1.

(a) Citizens are constitutionally guaranteed the right to vote.
(b) Citizens are constitutionally guaranteed the right to run for office.
(c) Laws governing the electoral process are not changed just before the election.
(d) Elections are held at regular intervals.

Criteria 1(a) and 1(b) required some judgement on common exceptions to a universal franchise. We did code as 0 if clergy could not vote as this was at times an important anti-government political constituency. However, we did code as 1 if clergy could not stand for office, as this was generally a separation of powers de facto. We coded as 0 if past political actions that were not themselves anti-democratic excluded citizens from standing. This generally excluded people only of a particular political leaning.

Note that we only require that citizens can vote. We did not assess the justice of citizenship requirements. As long as all citizens can vote despite the existence of disenfranchised populations, we coded as 1.

**Variable 2: *Electoral management bodies* (*EMB*).** Elections have to be managed independently and many countries have EMBs to ensure the quality of the elections. We coded *EMB* as 1 if none of the following was violated:

(a) Election boundaries are set so that no candidate/ party is favoured (no gerrymandering) (de facto).
(b) EMBs are held accountable to election law and abide by it.
(c) EMBs are independent and impartial.
(d) EMBs have sufficient time to organize elections (i.e. no snap election).

(e) Decisions made by and complaints made to the EMBs are subject to review and possible reversal.

Most problems arose from the fact that EMBs were not independent and impartial. Some countries have no EMBs but the elections are managed by government ministries (e.g. elections in Belgium, Denmark and Finland). For these cases we coded 'not applicable'.

**Variable 3: *Electoral rights*.** Having the legal right to vote is not always sufficient to ensure that citizens are able to exercise this franchise in practice. We assessed the following criteria when coding *Electoral rights:*

(a) Equal suffrage is in place for citizens of voting age (e.g. no voter group is systematically disadvantaged) (de facto).
(b) Equal and effective access to polling stations is in place.
(c) Any limitations on voting are based on internationally recognizable and acceptable norms.
(d) Voters have been informed effectively about how and where to vote.

Many observer reports do not explicitly refer to voters having difficulties in exercising their right to vote. We decided to code as 1 if the observer report was comprehensive and the turnout was over 50%, as participation is commonly used in other data projects (e.g. Vanhanen, 2000 and PEI).

**Variable 4: *Voter register*.** The incorrect registration of voters makes it easier to manipulate the voting process. Fictitious and multiple entries can inflate the vote count while leaving voters off the register under-represents parts of the population. We coded *Voter register* as 1 if none of the following were violated:

(a) Voter registers are up to date for the election taking place.
(b) Voter registers are accurate: without false names, lack of correct names of individuals, inclusion of name of non-eligible voters (e.g. the dead or children) and multiple entries.
(c) Voters are able to easily and effectively register to vote and can meet the necessary requirements on time.

Under-registration of voters can be due to different reasons. It may either be due to anti-democratic intentions or to capacity issues. We coded as 0 any cases where registration fell below 80%, and for cases over 80% we only coded as 0 if there was evidence of deliberate malpractice. This threshold was a compromise intended to capture all deliberately anti-democratic regimes, and minimize the number of democratic regimes with a low capacity to be given a zero coding.

**Variable 5: *Ballot access*.** If citizens are not guaranteed to stand de jure, we coded *Ballot access* as 0. However, even when the opposition has legal rights, governments often restrict competition de facto. Some data collection efforts focus on the restriction of the opposition in order to establish whether an election can be lost (e.g. Hyde & Marinov, 2012). We coded *Ballot access* as 1 if none of these criteria were violated:

(a) Citizens eligible to stand are able to compete in the election (de facto).
(b) Parties/candidates get equitable treatment when applying for office.
(c) Any rejections of candidature are based on internationally recognizable and acceptable norms.
(d) No one candidate gets over 75% of the votes.

Criterion 5(d) merits some discussion, as it is an ex-post indicator of the election process. It can be interpreted as an indicator of political competition but this does not allow us per se to distinguish between popularity and fraud. We follow DPI coding and use a share of 75% of the votes as an indicator of malpractice. This rule provided useful additional information for 13 elections. In five cases the opposition boycotted the election due to major concerns regarding the electoral process. For the other eight elections we had very little information to code the other variables and this rule helped us to code *Ballot access*.

**Variable 6: *Campaign process*.** With this variable we want to capture irregularities in the campaign process, such as vote buying, intimidation, violence and the improper use of campaign finance. We coded *Campaign process* as 1 if none of the following criteria were violated:

(a) No violence, bribery, intimidation or any other inequitable treatment of voters occurs during the process.
(b) No violence, bribery, intimidation or any other inequitable treatment of candidates occurs during the process.
(c) Campaigns are free from government interference and the candidates are able to freely express themselves by holding rallies, etc.
(d) Campaign finance:

i. Prohibition on use of government resources other than that provided to all candidates.

ii. Without massive financial advantages for the incumbents.

Two main concerns arose. The first was how to deal with generalized violence, where the relationship to the election was unclear. We consider neither general personal security problems nor isolated clashes between party supporters with complex motivations as violation of our criteria. The second was how to deal with infrequent or unsubstantiated reports of violence or bribery. If reports were infrequent we coded 0, as these issues are likely to be under-reported. For unsubstantiated but widespread reports, for example when all stakeholders assumed bribery occurred, we coded as 0. Where allegations were both unsubstantiated and infrequent, we made no judgement and coded −22 (insufficient evidence).

**Variable 7: *Media access.*** Another opportunity to distort equal competition arises where the media can be manipulated. A number of data collection efforts consider media access as important (e.g. Schedler, 2006, 2013; Birch, 2011). We coded media access as 1 if the following criteria were met:

(a) All parties/candidates are provided with access to the media.
(b) All parties/candidates have equitable treatment and time on government owned media and the ruling party does not get disproportionately large media coverage in the name of news/editorial coverage.
(c) Freedom of speech is preserved.

At times it was unclear whether a ruling party was receiving more coverage via ongoing news stories, and whether coverage of different groups was qualitatively different. We coded 1 where it was clear that all serious opposition parties and candidates had been able to broadcast their message effectively and had not been grossly misrepresented, setting aside disagreements about exact parity which we did not have sufficient information to judge. Freedom of speech is a general criterion, that is, anybody commenting on political matters should have the right to do so – citizens, candidates and journalists.

**Variable 8: *Voting process.*** For the voting process to be fair it is important that voters can exercise their right to vote and that they have equal and effective access to a polling station. We coded *Voting process* as 1 if none of the following criteria were violated:

(a) Votes are cast by a secret ballot.
(b) Voters are practically limited to one vote per person (de facto).
(c) Adequate security is in place for both the voters and the ballots.
(d) Balloting is done without ballot box stuffing, multiple voting, destruction of valid ballots, officer voting, or manipulation of votes cast outside the polling place.
(e) Voting occurs without intervention of any agent.

All observer reports covered the voting process. Some reports appear to be politically biased, for example, observers conclude that group voting was not malicious or that poorly designed booths were accidental. To code *Voting process* we ignored these judgements and focused on the extent of the problems.

**Variable 9: *Role of officials.*** It is not necessary to directly manipulate votes to distort an election during the voting process. Illicit intimidation and persuasion, lack of transparency and subtle rule violations are captured by this indicator, which is coded 1 if none of the following are violated:

(a) The officials adhere to the election procedures (e.g. they have been trained adequately; know which procedures to follow; do not interfere in the voting process; file complaints made to them, etc.).
(b) Unauthorized persons are barred from entering the polling station (e.g. army members).
(c) No campaigning is done within the polling station.
(d) Transparency is in place: all parties are able to have observers in the station.
(e) International Election Observers can view all parts of the voting process.

Incompetence of officials was frequently a mild complaint but not deemed to have any impact on the outcome. These procedural issues were ignored.

**Variable 10: *Counting of votes.*** An honest vote count is crucial to the fairness of an election. We coded *Counting of votes* as 1 if none of the following were violated:
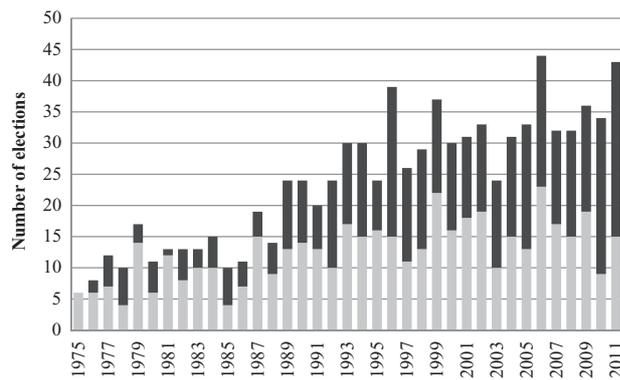
Figure 1. Free and fair elections
Dark parts of the bars show the number of problematic elections.

Table I. Measuring election quality

| | Variable | Obs. | % of elections that fulfilled the criteria |
|---|---|---|---|
| (1) | Legal framework | 1,010 | 75.5 |
| (2) | EMBs | 796 | 69.5 |
| (3) | Electoral rights | 696 | 76.6 |
| (4) | Voter register | 687 | 65.9 |
| (5) | Ballot access | 765 | 74.6 |
| (6) | Campaign process | 806 | 53.3 |
| (7) | Media access | 895 | 63.8 |
| (8) | Voting process | 843 | 75.8 |
| (9) | Role of officials | 684 | 76.6 |
| (10) | Counting of votes | 800 | 84.0 |

(a) Tabulation of votes can be tracked from polling stations up through intermediate centres and to the final processing station.

(b) Entire counting process is observed by more than one group.

(c) No rules on what constitutes a valid ballot that favour one candidate/party.

(d) No evidence for fraud in any way (e.g. no inflation of election results by polling officials, no tampering with the ballot boxes during the counting or movement, etc.).

In a number of cases a recount was demanded for a limited number of polling stations, and settled by a court of similar body. Where resolution was peaceful and legal, we did not code as 0 for the original miscount. Likewise we did not code as 0 for procedural problems with the count that were judged not to have affected the outcome.

## A first look at the data

In our database we list a total of 1,114 elections in 169 countries for the period 1975–2011. As Figure 1 shows, the number of elections has increased over time. Due to the different election cycles the graph has a lot of 'spikes' but there is a strong positive trend. There was almost one additional election per year.

Is this positive trend driven by an increase in good quality elections? Our data suggest that the number of problematic elections increased disproportionately. During the first ten years, about 70% of all elections were free and fair (shown in light grey) but this decreased to 45% during the last ten years. It appears that more regimes hold elections in order to legitimize their governments but without wanting to face the threat of a

political turnover (Schedler, 2006, 2013). However, it may be the case that we picked up more problematic elections due to increased election observation over time (Kelley, 2012).

We assessed the quality of elections using our ten variables in the following way. For 78% of all elections we were able to code at least five variables and for 402 elections we were able to code all ten election quality variables. For one-party states we did not score elections and for these 63 elections we only list the dates. Table I provides an overview of the ten variables.

For almost all elections we could assess the variable *Legal framework* (1,010 elections) but it proved difficult to score the variables *Electoral rights*, *Voter registration* and the *Role of officials* where we have only about 680 observations for each variable. The variable *Counting of votes* tends to be the least problematic aspect of elections: for 84% of all elections for which we have data, the votes were correctly counted. The most problematic aspect of elections appears to be captured by the variable *Campaign process*. Only about 53% of all elections are free from violence, bribery, intimidation and government interference and the financing of campaigns follows international standards.

These ten variables can be used in different ways to assess whether elections are 'free and fair'. Following Goertz (2005) we could stipulate a necessary and sufficient concept structure where any manipulation tactic would be sufficient for (potentially) altering the results. A consistent measure of this concept would require that all freeness variables score 1 in order for the election to be deemed 'free'. However, the number of missing values would only allow us to score 402 elections from mainly high-income countries. We therefore decided on the following practical aggregation rule: an election is 'free' if at least four variables out of variables 1–7 fulfil the criteria

Table II. Free and fair elections

|  | *Unfair* | *Fair* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unfree | 212 | 169 | 381 |
| Free | 40 | 469 | 509 |
| Total | 252 | 638 | 890 |

and an election is 'fair' if at least two variables out of variables 8–10 score 1.

Which problems are most common in elections? For 890 elections we can provide a cross-tabulation in Table II. As expected, most elections are characterized by problems in both categories (212 elections) or no problems (469 elections). About 19% of all elections are characterized by problems during the run-up to the elections but not during the election day (169 elections). Only 4% of elections have no irregularities in the run-up to the elections but have problems on the election day (40 elections). These elections are free but unfair.

We also examine the time trend of election malpractice and find that over time more elections are characterized by problems in the run-up to the election than on the election day. In other words, over time election malpractice has become more common and the main reason why more elections are not characterized as 'free and fair' is mainly because they are not 'free', that is, there are problems before the election day.

## Data in action

Our data can be used to analyse why some societies are more likely to hold poor quality elections and thus contribute to the emerging literature on the determinants of electoral malpractice (e.g. Birch, 2011; Kelley, 2012). We use our categorization of 'free and fair' elections to examine which characteristics make poor quality elections more likely. Table III presents our results. Using probit regressions we examine whether elections are both free and fair (column 1), free (column 2) and fair (column 3).

A number of economic characteristics are significant in this analysis. Countries with higher per capita incomes are more likely to have free and fair elections while those with a high resource dependency are less likely to experience free and fair elections. This confirms the hypothesis that resource abundance inhibits democratization (e.g. Collier & Hoeffler, 2009; Ross, 2012). A high aid dependency ratio increases the probability of experiencing free and fair elections. A causal interpretation is potentially problematic because aid might be endogenous;

Table III. Free and fair elections

|  | *Free and fair* | *Free* | *Fair* |
|---|---|---|---|
| ln GDP per capita | 0.486 | 0.469 | 0.396 |
|  | (3.48)** | (4.22)** | (2.86)** |
| Natural resource rents | 0.031 | 0.023 | 0.022 |
| (% GDP) | (3.71)** | (2.79)** | (3.13)** |
| Aid | 0.040 | 0.029 | 0.054 |
| (% GDP) | (2.88)** | (2.55)* | (3.16)** |
| Trade | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.002 |
| (% GDP) | (0.32) | (0.63) | (1.15) |
| Observers present | 0.773 | 0.435 | 0.478 |
| (0/1) | (3.99)** | (2.88)** | (2.92)** |
| Executive constraints | 1.013 | 0.931 | 0.619 |
| (0/1) | (3.42)** | (3.93)** | (2.76)** |
| Constitutional term limit | 0.961 | 0.955 | 0.290 |
| (0/1) | (1.84)† | (2.64)** | (0.78) |
| Presidential election | 0.169 | 0.219 | 0.472 |
| (0/1) | (0.61) | (0.90) | (1.84)† |
| 4th wave of democratization | 0.088 | 0.397 | 0.071 |
| (0/1) | (0.36) | (1.74)† | (0.30) |
| Observations | 470 | 478 | 409 |
| Countries | 105 | 105 | 104 |

Probit analysis, dependent variable *Free and fair election*, robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered by country. $^{†}p < 0.1$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$. Regressions include continent dummies.

donors might provide more aid to countries with good elections. However, an analysis of donors' allocation decisions suggests that donors give little consideration to recipient merit as measured by their democratic regime (Hoeffler & Outram, 2011). Economic openness (trade as a percentage of GDP) appears to have no effect. We also test the impact of a number of external and internal constraints. The presence of any election monitors and executive constraints (e.g. if the legislature limits executive authority) increases the probability of a free and fair election.[1] Their effect is considerable: the probability of a free and fair election increases by 31 percentage points if these constraints are in place. However, as discussed in the previous section, election monitoring may be endogenous: more democratic regimes are more likely to invite observers.

The comparison of columns (2) and (3) suggests that some of the explanatory variables have differential effects on the freeness and fairness of the election. Constitutional term limits have a positive impact on the freeness of the election but not on their fairness. The opposite

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[1] Hafner Burton, Hyde & Jablonski (2014) include executive constraints. We use values of xconst≥5 to code a dummy; see Marshall, Gurr & Jaggers (2013).

holds for presidential elections: they are more likely to be marred by malpractice on the election day. Thus, our analysis suggests that policy shapers wanting to improve the quality of elections should carefully analyse the type of problem and choose appropriate policy instruments.

## Discussion

The holding of elections has become almost universal but only about half of all elections have been free and fair during the period 1975–2011. Electoral malpractice not only distorts the quality of representation but has implications for political, social and economic outcomes. Although a number of databases offer an assessment of the quality of elections, they do not correspond to the notion of whether the election was free and fair. Existing data collection efforts either provide overall information on elections for a large number of countries and years but state few details, or offer much more detail but only cover elections in authoritarian regimes or semi-democracies. More recent databases offer a wealth of information on electoral (mal)practices but only cover a small number of elections. We are trying to close this gap by providing ten variables for all leadership elections during the period 1975–2011, measuring the rules of the election, the process before the election and events on and immediately after the election day.

We use our election quality data to assess whether the elections were free and fair. 'Freeness' of the election relates to the rules of the election and the process leading up to the election. 'Fairness' of the election refers to the events on the election day. Thus, our measure of election quality focuses on the timing of the malpractice during the electoral cycle. Our data suggest that there are a number of elections that are unfree but fair (e.g. not all voters were registered but there were no irregularities on the election day). On the other hand there were few elections that were free but unfair; this does not appear to be a popular option when trying to rig an election. Many observer organizations concentrate on the election as an event, that is, whether the election was fair. Our results suggest that international organizations should closely monitor the run-up to the elections, that is, whether the elections were free.

Our data can be used in a number of different ways. Following Chauvet & Collier (2009) and Collier & Hoeffler (2015) the data can be used to explore the economic, political and social consequences of electoral malpractice. Alternatively, one can investigate the causes of election malpractice. We present a simple probit model suggesting that the freeness and fairness of the election is determined by a number of economic and political variables. Another research question would be how electoral systems have developed over the past 35 years. Lindberg (2004) suggests that the quality of elections improved over time in Africa. Is it important which dimension improves first, freeness or fairness? Our data suggest that problems of freeness have become more widespread and one important policy question is how the electoral rules and their application in the run-up to the elections could be improved.

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