



## King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1017/S0007123420000186](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000186)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Bubeck, J., Jager, K., Marinov, N., & Nanni, F. (2020). Why Do States Intervene in the Elections of Others? The Role of Incumbent-Opposition Divisions. *BRITISH JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE*, 0(0), 0.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000186>

### **Citing this paper**

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [librarypure@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:librarypure@kcl.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# Why Do States Intervene in the Elections of Others? The Role of Incumbent-Opposition Divisions\*

Johannes Bubeck<sup>†</sup> Kai Jäger<sup>‡</sup>  
Nikolay Marinov<sup>§</sup> Federico Nanni<sup>¶</sup>

February 24, 2020

## Abstract

Why do states intervene in elections abroad? We argue that outsiders intervene when the main domestic contenders for office adopt policy positions that differ from the point of view of the outside power. We refer to the split between the government's and opposition's positions as policy polarization. Polarization between domestic political forces, rather than the degree of unfriendliness of the government in office, is what attracts interventions of two types: process (for or against democracy) and candidate (for or against the government) interventions. We provide a novel, original data set to track the policy positions of local contenders. We show that the new policy polarization measurement outperforms a number of available alternatives when it comes to explaining process and candidate interventions. We use it to explain the behavior of the United States as an intervener in elections over the period 1945 to 2012. The United States is more likely to support the opposition, and the democratic process abroad, if a pro-US opposition is facing an anti-US government. It is more likely to support the government, and undermine the democratic process abroad, if a pro-US government is facing an anti-US opposition. We also present results for all interveners, confirming the results from the US case.

---

\* Authors' names in alphabetical order. Replication data: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/76WQ73>. Online appendix: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3435138>. Support for this research was provided by the Mannheim Center for European Social Research (MZES), and by grant number MA 7209/1 – 1 of the German Research Foundation (DFG). We thank Dennis Hammerschmidt for help with UNGA voting, participants in the University of Houston's Political Science brownbag seminar, for helpful comments and Patrick Shea for econometric advice. All errors are own.

<sup>†</sup>Economist. Email: [johannes.bubeck@gmail.com](mailto:johannes.bubeck@gmail.com)

<sup>‡</sup>Lecturer, Department of Political Economy, King's College London. Researcher, Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), University of Mannheim. Email: [kai.jager@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:kai.jager@kcl.ac.uk)

<sup>§</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Houston. Email: [niki.marinov@gmail.com](mailto:niki.marinov@gmail.com)

<sup>¶</sup>Researcher, Alan Turing Institute. Email: [federico@informatik.uni-mannheim.de](mailto:federico@informatik.uni-mannheim.de)

# 1 Introduction

The dramatic accusations of foreign interference in the 2016 US Presidential election put the issue of foreign meddling in elections front and central in public and scholarly debates. Yet, at present, we have only an incomplete theoretical grasp of the causes of foreign meddling in elections, and few empirical tools to explain the occurrence of interventions.

Elections are a contest for power: in the simplest rendition, a set of government candidates and a slate of opposition candidates compete for victory. An election intervention may change the odds of victory of one ticket, and thus alter the relative weights of the expected policy outcomes after the election. This gives outside powers a straightforward motivation to intervene: they would intervene if they expect that it would make a difference for post-election policy. How attractive an intervention is, then, depends on the importance of the policy at stake, the difference a victory for one or the other set of candidates will make policy-wise, and on the likelihood of an intervention succeeding in securing a victory of the supported ticket.

While all parts of the calculus of intervention need careful study, here we focus on the first two elements. We study the importance of policy polarization, which we define as the difference between the positions of the leading contenders on the issue of relations with the outside power, as a factor for interventions. We also study the types of issues that give rise to policy contention between states.

Since the scholarship on external election interventions is relatively young, we turn to other bodies of research to find our points of departure. International relations scholarship speaks of the importance of friendly governments in place in other states. A friendly government is less likely to pose military challenges (Goemans et al. 2009), may become an ally (Lake 2007; Kinne 2012), offer support in international fora such as the United Nations (Bailey et al. 2017a), or prove to be a reliable trading partner (Russett et al. 1999). Extending the logic of this insight to interventions, a reasonable conjecture is that election interventions are deployed to secure a friendly leader at the helm of another state's government.

While we agree that countries seek friendly governments abroad, we note a crucial oversight. International relations scholars typically only take into consideration the position of the current government. Yet, most countries in the world hold elections to decide which party will rule. As described by Wagner et al. (2018, 540), "there has been very little attention to parties as ideational and political agents in security policy." The current literature essentially assumes that if a country is acting in an unfriendly manner to the United States, and the government is replaced as a result of an election intervention, the post-intervention government will pursue more friendly policies toward

the intervening power (Levin 2016). For us, what matters is the competition for power between different parties. Knowing the orientation and policies of the government in office supplies only part of the puzzle. One would also need to know whether the opposition favors policy continuity or change to understand the true attractiveness of election interventions.

Comparative politics has investigated the types of policy promises made by parties (whether in government or opposition) to voters in order to get voters to support the party. Once elected, the party is expected to enact the policy mandate it offered, even though exceptions do occur.<sup>1</sup> This concerns policies that may be of interest to outside powers. For example, recent studies show that the deployment decisions and the institutional oversight of military missions are contested between government and opposition parties in Western democracies (Wagner et al. 2017, 2018). The question thus is what would outsiders do to affect the domestic scramble for power which determines, at least in part, future policy.

We start out by linking foreign interest in elections to policy divisions in the state that may be targeted by interventions. We define two types of election interventions: one designed to strengthen or weaken the rules of the game, and one designed to boost the support for a specific candidate. An example of the former is helping to organize clean elections, an example of the latter is conditioning foreign assistance on who wins. We argue that policy polarization between incumbent and opposition should predict both types of interventions, since they are alternative or complementary means of boosting a candidate's chance of victory. When foreigners like the incumbent over the opposition, they will invest in weakening the democratic rules of the game, and in generating more support for the incumbent. When the opposition is preferable, foreign actors will seek to strengthen the rules of the game, and boost the vote-share of the opposition. We demonstrate the theoretical importance of taking both the government's and the opposition's positions into account.

We then select a random sample of elections held around the world. We use a variety of sources to classify the policy positions of the governing and opposition parties on issues of concern to potential external interveners. Based on our novel Process-Party dataset, we obtain a measurement of candidate positions. We define policy polarization as the difference between the incumbent and opposition on relations with the outside power. Our measurement of polarization yields a natural expectation of when we may see election interventions: when the outsider prefers one domestic actor to win based on their policy positions.

We demonstrate the utility of the exercise by comparing our polarization measurement to two well-known potential alternatives available in the literature: a measurement of policy-alignment based on a country's United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voting record (Bailey et al. 2017a),

---

<sup>1</sup>There is an enormous corpus of work: three recent contributions are Stokes (2001); Bawn and Somer-Topcu (2012); Jäger (2017).

and the left-right ranking of party policy positions from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Volkens et al. 2018). When measuring foreign election intervention, our measurement outperforms the other two alternatives as it has less noise and is less likely to be biased as compared to the available alternatives.

Our theoretical approach should be useful for future research. Scholars can study the importance of different types of democratic institutions, different degrees of democratic consolidation, different cultural or geo-strategic contexts for foreign interventions. It can also help a variety of research and policy agendas, including research on the democratic peace (Dafoe et al. 2013; Hobson 2017), on leaders (Debs and Goemans 2010; Saunders and Wolford 2018), on economic sanctions (Grauvogel et al. 2017; McLean and Radtke 2018), diplomacy (Saunders and Lebovic 2016), networks (Kinne 2012). For instance, the democratic peace proposition argues that democracies do not fight each other. According to our research, who is elected in a democracy can be, at least in part, a function of the policies they propose toward powerful outsiders. This may provide another causal mechanism for how the United States secures more pliant leaders among the world’s democracies – and then has no need to fight them.

## 2 Why Intervene?

Scholars have long known that democratic elections matter, such contests have mostly been treated as an independent variable. Research on elections as a dependent variable, i.e., something that attracts international attention and action, has focused primarily on the role of external actors as promoters of democracy. In pioneering work, Hyde (2011) has shown why and how states invite external election observers. In many cases, a trade-off is seen between fighting for freedom and fairness, and getting the right person to win the elections (Donno 2013; Kavakli and Kuhn 2019).<sup>2</sup> A number of works have examined specifically the issue of taking sides: foreigners intervening in a partisan manner in elections. Corstange and Marinov (2012) and Shulman and Bloom (2012) show how voters evaluate partisan foreign interventions in their elections. Levin (2016) argues that superpower support enabled targeted candidates to win during the Cold War. Tomz and Weeks (2019) investigate how Americans would like to push back against hypothetical intervention scenarios in their elections. We extend further the insights from that work by asking what factors provoke interventions. We focus on what we believe is an important factor: incumbent-opposition policy divisions.

---

<sup>2</sup>Bush and Prather (2018) show that election observers may sometimes be seen as biased or agenda-driven. Knutsen et al. (2017) explore the links between democracy and autocratic elections. Walter et al. (2018) demonstrate that domestic referenda may be decided on the basis of expectations of how foreign powers would react.

## Hypotheses

We set up a very simple decision-theoretic model. Take an election in which two candidates propose policy platforms that may be different from the point of view of the outside power. We assume the incumbent ( $A$ ) and opposition ( $B$ ) parties have policy platforms denoted by  $A_{gov}$  and  $B_{opp}$ . An incumbent's vote-share can be represented as:

$$f(\text{voter support, election bias}) = f(\chi, \beta)$$

We assume, in keeping with observed empirical regularities, that a more biased election (rigged vote count, difficult registration, etc.) benefits the incumbent's chances of reelection, whereas a cleaner election benefits the opposition. We also assume that more votes for one party, benefits that party and may lead to their victory. An incumbent wins, opposition loses, by a combination of rigging the rules and garnering votes. Either may work by itself: and the success of one may partly depend on the other (fewer votes may result in greater final tally under more biased rules).

We further assume that an intervener has two options: support candidates directly, by investing resources in their campaign (e.g, promising aid if they win), or alter the rules under which an election is held – by insisting on a cleaner election, or by tolerating repression of opposition activists. We refer to the former as candidate or  $c$  investments, and to the latter as process or  $p$  investments. The two distinct interventions change candidate support:  $\chi(c)$ , and the bias:  $\beta(p)$ . The post-intervention vote-share therefore becomes:  $f(\chi(c), \beta(p)) = f(c, p)$

We assume that the election result determines the policies according to the vote shares of the platforms  $A_{gov}$  and  $B_{opp}$  and that interventions are costly.<sup>3</sup> Depending on the degree  $\Gamma$  to which the outsider cares about the result of the election, the intervener's utility will be:

$$u(c, p) = \Gamma(f(c, p) \cdot A_{gov} + (1 - f(c, p)) \cdot B_{opp}) - s(c, p)$$

The problem of intervention then becomes how much resources to invest in an election in order to bring policies closer to the more desirable platform, given one's preferences for the policies of one candidate over the other.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>We introduce a generic cost term  $s(c, p)$ .

<sup>4</sup> Here we assume away the presence of other interveners. The basic predictions of the model, which we derive in Appendix A, are not affected.

For a more compact statement, we define *polarization* as:  $\pi = A_{gov} - B_{opp}$ , such that intervener prefers government to win when  $\pi > 0$  and the opposition to win if  $\pi < 0$ . In our take, polarization refers to the difference in the potential intervener’s utility for seeing (re-)elected the incumbent or opposition. Then the outsiders’ choice is to pick  $c$  and  $p$  to maximize:

$$\max_{c,p} \quad \pi \Gamma f(c,p) - s(c,p)$$

We assume that the supported candidate (with  $c$ ) is more likely to win and that more bias means the incumbent wins. If we further denote as  $c > 0$  incumbent-supporting interventions (with  $c < 0$ , opposition support), and with  $p > 0$  pro-democracy or bias-reducing interventions ( $p < 0$ , democracy-eroding, or bias-increasing ones),<sup>5</sup> we can motivate the following predictions:

**Hypothesis 1:** Candidate interventions  $c$  are more likely if polarization  $\pi$  is increasing.

**Hypothesis 2:** Process interventions  $p$  are less likely if polarization  $\pi$  is increasing.

We formally derive these hypotheses for a suitable choice of functional forms in Appendix A.<sup>6</sup> The first hypothesis simply says that if an outsider wants a candidate to win, they will invest in that candidate’s vote share. The second hypothesis says that outsiders can also – in addition or instead – invest in influencing the rules in a manner that favors their candidate. In different cases, the mix of process and candidate interventions would vary depending on local conditions and intervener preferences. What concerns us is the sign of slope of the investment in either strategy over polarization, which we argue will hold.

What we would like to emphasize is that key to interventions is the difference between the government’s and the opposition’s policy positions. When the polarization parameter  $\pi$  is set to 0, interventions of either kind only generate costs and would not be undertaken.

We also note an additional implication of this model. We capture importance with the parameter  $\Gamma$ . Policy divisions on more important issues (higher importance  $\Gamma$ ) will attract interventions. Higher  $\Gamma$  increases the (absolute value) of the predicted slope of interventions. The issue at stake is expected to matter in motivating interveners to take interest in an election.

---

<sup>5</sup>We assume that  $f(c,p)$  is monotonously increasing in  $c$  and monotonously decreasing in  $p$  and that  $s(c,p)$  is increasing in  $c$  and  $p$ .

<sup>6</sup>We think that rather than solving the decision-theoretic model for more general functional forms and with different assumptions regarding the basic building blocks it would be a more promising area for future research to explicitly model voter’s preferences regarding the two parties as well as their interaction with foreign interference.

Our model can easily accommodate differences in the cost of intervention across countries. For example, we would expect the cost of process interventions to be much higher in consolidated democracies (and hence, they would be seldom undertaken). The reason is that working institutions make it more difficult to affect how votes are counted, for instance. Note that candidate interventions remain a possibility - voters in consolidated democracies and elsewhere can be swayed by foreign campaign funds and similar measures.<sup>7</sup>

We assume that foreign help can boost the fortunes of a domestic ticket. As long as that works at least sometimes, our model applies. We know that in many cases domestic actors ask for foreign support and claim it is key for their success – for instance, in the case of Greek post-war elections up until the 1967 military coup.<sup>8</sup> If foreign powers assume that interventions will backfire, they may refrain from undertaking them, or they may be more likely to intervene in a covert manner.

## Notes on Polarization

We assume that polarization is about some pre-existing cleavages in society, such as Sunnis and Shias in Lebanon seeing themselves aligned with America and Iran, respectively. Outside interventions can exacerbate these divisions - by giving groups an additional reason to polarize (Corstange and Marinov 2012). Groups may adopt a more or less extreme position in the expectation of foreign support. While the dynamics can be complicated, we still expect to find greater polarization associated with greater propensity to intervene.

In our model, we assume that all cleavages and policies concerning the foreign power can be mapped into a single one-dimensional policy space. The ideal point of the foreign power lies at either end of this policy space. In a fractionalized political system, the intervener would support the closest policy platform, taking into account its weight in a potential (coalition) government or opposition platform (via  $A_{gov}$  or  $B_{opp}$ ).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>A more sophisticated version of the model, allowing for endogenous policy positions, can be found in (Bubeck and Marinov 2017).

<sup>8</sup>Wittner, Lawrence. 1982. *American Intervention in Greece, 1943–1949*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

<sup>9</sup>We abstract away from institutions and more complex time-lines. Cabinet-formation and coalition bargaining, if introduced formally, will have non-trivial implications. Theoretically, a more fractionalized, parliamentary system means an intervener has more options at the pre-election stage - but they also have that post-election, in terms of affecting cabinet-formation. It is not possible to formulate an unambiguous expectation about how a PR (or Parliamentary system) will make intervention more or less likely.



## The Role of Democratic Outside Power as a Driver of Interventions

So far, we assume that the intervener has no inherent preference for cleaner rules – and would invest whatever maximizes the return on policy in light of the cost.

According to the model, even non-democracies would sometimes promote democratic elections: in order to enhance the effectiveness of pro-candidate interventions. To give one example, in the 1945 Finnish election, the Soviet Union demanded that the Communists should be given more freedom to campaign, and more access to the media. The Soviets based their demands on threats to Finish post-war recovery and territorial integrity.<sup>10</sup>

We add an additional term to the maximization problem, giving the intervener an externality from investing in cleaner rules. Democracy promotion may carry an additional positive externality for a pro-democracy power:

$$\max_{c,p} \quad \pi\Gamma f(c,p) - \lambda\beta(p) - s(c,p)$$

The additional parameter  $\lambda > 0$  captures the extent to which the foreign power cares about democracy - more precisely, about the (non-negative) level of bias in the conduct of an election. Process interventions may be justified either because a power cares about more or less democracy, understood as cleaner elections, or (in addition or solely) because candidate interventions are enhanced by or stymied by changing the rules the game. Another way to state this prediction is: in periods in which democracy matters more for states, we will see more pro-democracy interventions undertaken.

We demonstrate next how a novel data collection helps to demonstrate the utility of this theoretical exercise.

### 3 The Process-Party Dataset

We start by identifying all (potentially) competitive global elections over the period of 1945-2012, using the National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset (Hyde and Marinov 2012). We require that at least the following minimal conditions for political competition are present: more than one candidate or party competes, and the incumbent's office is subject to elec-

---

<sup>10</sup>Zilliacus, Kim O K. 1995. Finländsk kommunism i ljuset av väljarstöd 1945-1991. Bidrag till kännedom av Finlands natur och folk, H. 149. Swedish ed. Helsingfors, Finland: Finska vetenskabs-societen.

toral competition (these are variables available in NELDA).<sup>11</sup> All regimes we study are ‘shades of democracy’ - though some may be more on the authoritarian spectrum. We then take a stratified random sample: for each country, we pick one Cold War and one post-Cold War election (the period may be important for patterns of interventions). We rely on random selection to produce results representative of the general relationship between polarization and interventions.

As a next step, for all elections in our sample, we predefine a list of powers that potentially have a stake in the contest. We rely on the following selection criteria: all global/Great powers (veto-yielding members of the UN) and regional powers, former colonial powers, immediate neighbors, and regional political organizations. The selection of potential interveners is done regardless of actual interventions. The full list is part of the online codebook. Each election has eight potential interveners on average.

Our next objective is to use a variety of sources to generate data for each election on potential and actual interveners, candidate interventions, process interventions, and the stances of the government and the opposition toward the foreign intervener. We record policy stances of the local actors in a manner that precedes and is independent of any actual intervention.

To find appropriate information, we asked research assistants to conduct targeted searches for each election cycle of databases, such as LexisNexis, ProQuest, Google News, historical newspaper archives, policy content generated by the actors themselves, and scholarly work related to a particular election in journals and books. This procedure ensured access to a variety of English-language sources from around the world. In addition, the researchers processed French, German, and Spanish sources. The resulting articles are checked for appropriate information on interveners, policy stances, and relations. Once we locate information, we save it and provide coding notes in order to document the coding choices.<sup>12</sup>

Candidate interventions try to influence the number of votes cast for a particular candidate, often but not necessarily within the legal framework of an electoral system. The following actions, among others, count as candidate interventions: if a state or organization (1) makes benefits, such as foreign aid, conditional on who wins, (2) threatens to pursue negative consequences (economic sanctions, suspending diplomatic relations, military threat) in response to the ‘wrong’ winner, (3) provides monetary or other benefits to a specific candidate or party, or (4) supports the election of a specific candidate or party in statements. This includes public criticism of actual or proposed policies if the criticism can be linked to support for the government or opposition at the ballot box.

---

<sup>11</sup>We follow Hyde and Marinov (2012) in this.

<sup>12</sup>We offer more information on the search procedure in online Appendix B. Also see

The full set of allowed candidate codings are 1 for support for incumbent/government candidate; 0 if there is no support for any candidate;  $-1$  for support for an opposition candidate. The intermediate categories of 0.5 and  $-0.5$  refer to actions that are less clear, or conflicting information is present, with some evidence indicating support or opposition but other (less significant) evidences contradicting that.

The most frequent type of candidate intervention in the dataset is public endorsements (32 percent). A full 25 percent of candidate intervention qualify as providing support for a party, such as campaign funds or propaganda. Promises of economic rewards or club membership (e.g., in the European Union) that are tied to a candidate make up 16 percent of candidate interventions. Only about one percent of candidate interventions are candidate-specific military threats or acts of violence. Most interventions include more than one action: linking aid to a candidate's election, and joint campaign appearances with the U.S. Ambassador, for example.

Process interventions capture whether a foreign powers sought to enhance (+1), weaken ( $-1$ ), or did not exert an effect (0), on the electoral process. Values of 0.5 and  $-0.5$  are allowed for less clear (mixed) interventions, with one type dominating. Some examples of a positive process intervention include a state or organization: (a) sending or supporting credible election monitors to testify about the fairness of an election, (b) attempting to even the playing field in accordance with national electoral laws and internationally-accepted standards, (c) ensuring orderly and free and fair elections by providing security for voters, or (d) threatening consequences if fraud occurs, such as economic sanctions or freezing aid. By contrast, a negative process intervention obtains if a state or organization: (i) tries to legitimize an election process that is clearly corrupt, (ii) helps governments to change voting rules in a way that distorts the playing field, (iii) endangers orderly and free and fair elections by approving or assisting in violence against voters or a political group, or (iv) provides benefits to governments that orchestrated electoral fraud.

Again, noting that most interventions feature more than one element, the predominant patterns are: praising polls with widely-recognized shortcomings (31 percent) is the most frequent type of negative intervention, followed by playing down evidence of bad play (23 percent), and actively supplanting democratic institutions, which occurred in 11.4 percent of all negative process interventions. As far as positive interventions are concerned, the following predominate: observing elections (35.3 percent), providing positive reports and rewards for clean elections (31.3 percent), providing negative reports and punishments for flawed elections (22.3 percent), and providing aid, security or logistics for the electoral process (12.7 percent).

All actions coded in either the candidate or process support variables concern only the pre-electoral period. We seek to avoid judgement about the effectiveness of different intervention strategies, so we merely record whether an intervention of any kind has occurred.<sup>13</sup>

According to the argument we make, policy polarization accounts for the decisions of outsiders to intervene in an election. Variables  $A_{gov}$  and  $B_{opp}$  capture the orientation of the government and opposition toward the intervening power. More precisely, this is the stance of the relevant actor on the policy issues a foreign power cares about when it comes to that country. Government is defined as the political party or parties and/or leader in office at the time when the election takes place.<sup>14</sup> Opposition is defined as the opposition party or parties in parliament, their front-runners, and/or new parties or candidates attracting a substantial amount of public support.

$A_{gov}$  and  $B_{opp}$  range from friendly (+1) to neither friendly, nor unfriendly (0) to unfriendly (-1). Intermediate values of 0.5 and -0.5 are allowed for where we uncover mixed messages on relations with the foreign power, with one direction predominating. While we consider and document stances on all issues of concern to the outside power in an election, the orientation coding is a single numeric value reflecting the human coder's judgment on the overall stance of the actor toward the intervening power. If there are more than one government or opposition parties, the coding takes the strength of each party in previous elections or in the pre-election polls into account.<sup>15</sup>

Again, we clarify that we focus on the pre-election period: no information from the period after the election enters coding decisions. Information from scholarly books and articles are only considered if they pertain to the pre-election period. The publication date of scholarly books or articles do not need to be before the election date, but the information provided by these sources has to be on the pre-election period. If we were unable to identify whether they apply to the pre-election period, they were not considered for the coding decisions.

The measurement for polarization  $\pi$  is based on the difference between  $A_{gov}$  and  $B_{opp}$ . Consequently,  $\pi$  ranges, in increments of 0.5, from +2 (friendly government, unfriendly opposition) to -2 (unfriendly incumbent, friendly opposition).<sup>16</sup>

Table 1 shows the coding scheme at work in nine elections. The data collection takes as a starting point the NELDA dataset (columns one and two). Columns three to seven come from our new cod-

---

<sup>13</sup>Our scheme and documentation enables researchers to turn plausible conjectures about the seriousness or effectiveness of different kinds of interventions into testable hypotheses.

<sup>14</sup>If the government has been in office very briefly as in the case of a caretaker government, we consider the previous administration as  $A_{gov}$  for the coding.

<sup>15</sup>For instance, a major opposition party with a friendly stance of +1 and a minor opposition party with an unfriendly stance of -1 would result in a coding of  $B_{opp}$  of +0.5.

<sup>16</sup>In the situation of an unknown and irrelevant opposition coded as 77, polarization becomes 0 because the opposition is unable or unwilling to formulate a foreign policy position that is independent from the government's stance.

Table 1: Illustrative Codings

Country	Election ID	Intervener	$A_{gov}$	$B_{opp}$	Process	Candidate
Guatemala	600-2007-0907-L1	United States	-0.5	77	0	0
El Salvador	092-2006-0312-L1	United States	1	0	1	0
Guyana	110-1985-1209-L1	United States	0	-1	0	0
Peru	135-1945-0610-L1	United States	1	1	0	0
Uruguay	165-2004-1031-L1	Brazil	0	1	0	-1
Italy	325-1979-0603-L1	USSR/Russia	0	0.5	0	0
Moldova	359-1996-1117-P2	USSR/Russia	-1	1	0	0

ing. The Brazil-as-intervener case in the Uruguayan 2004 legislative election (165-2004-1031-L1) says that the governing party in Uruguay had neither friendly nor unfriendly attitude toward Brazil (0), the opposition parties had a friendly stance toward Brazil. According to the last two columns, Brazil supported the opposition with candidate-targeting election intervention but refrained from seeking to affect the rules of the game.

We implemented a procedure of documenting the grounds for each decision. There are case studies for each intervener in each election, in which information from the original sources is saved. We annotated the case-studies in a manner allowing us to use text-analysis tools, developed in the field of Natural Language Processing (NLP). We highlight with pre-defined ‘keys’, the pieces of text in original source that justify a specific coding of a variable. We implement the highlights as a custom-created simple mark-up language in  $\text{\LaTeX}$ . The mark-up is rendered as colors in the resulting PDF file. The choice of colors is arbitrary and is for coder- and reader-convenience only.

Consider the example of the 1945 Peruvian legislative election (135-1945-0610-L1), shown in Table 1. In the Presidential election of that year, Jose Bustamante y Rivero of the coalition National Democratic Front (FDN) was elected as new President, receiving 66 per cent of the vote. General Eloy G. Ureta of the Revolutionary Union coalition received 33 per cent. Due to a constitutional provision, incumbent President Manuel Prado Ugarteche did not seek re-election. In the legislative election, the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), which was part of the FDN, won an absolute majority. The following annotated notes support the positive decisions on variables  $A_{gov}$  and  $B_{opp}$  with respect to the main actors’ stances on relations/issues of concern with the United States:

The Second World War also brought APRA closer to the Allies than to the Axis, and Luis Alberto Sanchez, a leading aprista, argued that it was Haya’s anti-Axis, pro-Roosevelt position that led to the establishment of relations between U.S. Ambassador John Campbell White and APRA in late 1944 and early 1945. It should be added that APRA’s strategists looked to the United States to

provide the foreign capital that would be needed to initiate economic growth in the postwar era. On the eve of the 1945 elections, the U.S. embassy believed that ‘little doubt remained that victory for Dr. Bustamante spells government in Peru by APRA. The United States continued, however, to be reassured by APRA’s evident popular power, its avowed commitment to democracy and inter-American cooperation, and its explicit anticommunism. (p. 177 in: Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough (eds.): Latin America Between the Second World War and the Cold War. Cambridge University Press, 1992)

As expected, Prado y Ugarteche maintained the pro-oligarchy policies in a very explicit manner between 1939 and 1945, year marked by World War 2. He also repaired Peru’s relationships with the Allies, immediately breaking relations with the fascist countries. He signed loan-lease treaties with the United States and permitted the construction of an American base at the oil port of Talara. He also deported thousands of Japanese residents after confiscating their properties. He accepted the American wish to establish a policy of price stability of domestic raw materials in exchange for a US tariff reduction. As Julio Cotler noted, ‘Peru suddenly became the guardian and defender of Roosevelt’s four freedoms, hoping to be repaid for its unconditional support of North American policies.’ Thanks to its political leaders, Peru was converted into a good neighbor, the kind that US President Franklin Roosevelt wanted.’ (Henry Tantalean: Peruvian Archaeology: A Critical History. Routledge, 2016)

Both the governing (light red underline) and opposition party (light blue underline) candidates promoted cooperation to the United States and took a friendly stance toward their neighbor to the North. Whether on military, ideological matters, or other matters, the main contenders for power had no disagreement with the United States. Thus, this is a case of no (0) polarization.

In addition to transparency, this type of documentation offers other advantages. We note some of these next.

## **Automatic Identification of Directionality**

We want to know whether a machine learning algorithm would be able to produce numeric values from the saved, annotated notes that are similar to the ones our human coders provide. In particular, we want to know whether ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ directions in government and opposition classifications are so consistently coded that an algorithm would learn to precisely distinguish them. To that end, we retrieve all snippets with their related code. In this setting, each highlighted piece of text is associated with a binary label (– or +), referring to negative stance toward the foreign country or a positive overall stance.

We employ a Support Vector Machine (SVM), a very popular supervised-learning model for classification, adopted both in NLP research (Joachims 1998) and by the text-as-data community (D’Orazio et al. 2014; Merz et al. 2016).

It is crucial for supervised learning approaches to provide training examples; pieces of text that fit a certain description, and others that do not. The SVM classifier, in particular, uses the example to map the text as points in a multi-dimensional space. Subsequently, it finds the vector that separates points belonging to the two classes (in our case, these are highlighted strings that point to negative stances and to positive stances by government or opposition). Then, when the SVM is provided with a new snippet of text that needs to be classified, it maps it again into that same space and predicts the class, based on the position of the point with respect to the separating vector. Based on the distance of the point to the vector, the SVM is also able to provide us with the level of confidence of the prediction.

We test the SVM in a 10-fold cross-validation setting (see Manning et al. 1999) in comparison with a different classification algorithm, a Naive Bayes (NB) classifier. For each, we experiment both with term-frequency (TF-IDF) and semantic (w-emb) vector representations of texts.<sup>17</sup> We are able to achieve good performance with the different classifiers, up to an accuracy of 80% with the SVM employing word embeddings, which means that the property under study is better captured when modelling the underlying semantics and not just the frequency of words.<sup>18</sup>

Using this algorithm in a cross-validation setting, we have produced machine-generated predictions for all highlighted texts in our collection.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the SVM classifier give also the opportunity of moving beyond the binary label provided for each highlighted text. In order to obtain a continuous value, ranging between -1 (highly negative) to 1 (highly positive), we employ the confidence score of each decision and consequently re-scale each prediction.

This provides us with a new version of the dataset, in which human numeric decisions (-1,-0.5,0,0.5,1) are replaced by a machine-generated continuous value. The continuity in the measurement reflects the computer learning from the general direction assigned by the human coder, extrapolating, and assigning some uncertainty to its decision. This gives us an alternative measurement of polarization, which we use to check the robustness of our results.

---

<sup>17</sup>We have experimented with two different ways of providing snippets to the classifier in the form of numerical vectors (the type of input required by the algorithm to map them as points in space): *a*) the first was to represent them as term frequency–inverse document frequency (TF-IDF) vectors, which capture word-frequency information (Manning et al. 2008); *b*) the second as averaged word embeddings (w-emb) (Mikolov et al. 2013), which are vectors that capture semantic properties of texts, such as addressing the same topic even when using different words. While word frequency vectors have been largely adopted in text-based political science research (Hillard et al. 2008; D’Orazio et al. 2014; Merz et al. 2016), word embeddings, due to their novelty, have been only recently employed, in particular for ideological positioning (Rheault and Cochrane 2019; Nanni et al. 2019). Choosing between the two representations largely depends on whether the information that the classifier is aimed to capture is mentioned explicitly or is conveyed in a more implicit way.

<sup>18</sup>In particular, when the confidence of the classifier is above 80% its precision reaches over 90%.

<sup>19</sup>This has been done in 10 different experiments, changing every time the 90% of examples used as training data and the 10% used as test, on which we obtained the predictions and related confidence scores.

## Automatic Identification of Policy Issues at Stake

International relations tends to divide issues of concern in relations between states into broadly economic and military/political ones. Scholars seem to think that military-related issues of security tend to dominate – since they pertain to survival (Gilpin 1987).

We may want to know, for instance, whether the discussion of relations between Bolivia and the United States centers on debt restructuring, armed conflict, or drug production. A Bolivian politician may promise to eradicate drugs (a positive development from a US point of view), or may promise the opposite (a negative development). For convenience, we refer to the stances as positive or negative (directionality discussion in previous section), and to the policy issues as the policy issues at stake in an election. A policy issue may be salient, but it may not generate divisions – if all main political actors may be in agreement on what needs to be done.

Based on the information uncovered, the principal investigators created six categories of policy issues of interest:

- i. Issues of alignment capture spheres of influence (Communist vs Western), inclusion in broad geographical and cultural groupings (Middle-East, Caspian), former colonial empires, membership in alliances, including hosting of bases, and membership in regional blocs (this is a broad category related most centrally to security, but also to a ‘civilizational’ choices or groupings).
- ii. Issues of armed conflict capture strife, use of force, troop deployment, violence, border clashes, rebel activity. Disputes over territory and nuclear weapons enter here.
- iii. Economic issues include investment, trade, aid, energy, health, reconstruction, logistics such as roads and ports.
- iv. Democracy and human rights issues include freedoms, repression, elections, persecution of minorities, migration.
- v. Left-right issues reflect the use of left-right language.
- vi. Global bads capture corruption, transnational crime, terrorism and similar.

We created a dictionary of terms (online Appendix D) around those issues and used text analysis techniques to classify their presence in each intervener-targeted-election pair, essentially checking all the highlighted text on which  $A_{gov}$  and  $B_{opp}$  decisions are made. To do so, we build a semantic



representation of each issue (i.e., a centroid), as the average of the word-embeddings of all its seed words (Manning et al. 2008). Then, given the semantic representation of a snippet, we measured the relevance to it of each issue as the cosine similarity between the two vectors (representing the snippet and the issue).<sup>20</sup> The relevance score reflects how much discussion of stances of government and opposition on policies of interest to an outsider matches each of the policy stakes we created.

One way we can think about the semantic match as the relative weight of the issue in the resulting numeric score. A higher match indicates that more discussion is dominated by a particular issue, leading to the expectation that this issue is relatively more important or influential in setting the overall tone in relations. For each election, and potential intervening power, we rank-ordered the different categories by the degree they match: creating ‘a most important’ issue, and ending with a ‘least important’, or least matching, issue. This is equivalent to saying that one issue has the highest congruence, followed by the issue with the next-highest congruence, and concluding with the issue that is least congruent.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of issues at stake for interveners for each of the different elections in our data. Six histograms show the importance of alignment, armed conflict, economic items, democracy and human rights, left-right issues, and global bads such as terrorism and drug-trafficking. Each panel overlays two histograms in the interest of space. Results confirm that issues of political alignment and security are dominant themes when candidates discuss relations with a specific external power. Economic matters come in third place. Democracy and human rights issues are of intermediate concern. Left-right divisions and terrorism do not make it to the top of the agenda for most cases.<sup>21</sup>

## Improvements Over Other Data Sets

The data on political polarization we provide is an advance over the available alternatives. The CMP is a well-known and highly-respected effort to assemble a large dataset of what each party said it would do, in written form, before an election was conducted (Budge et al. 2001).<sup>22</sup> Human interpretative coders estimate a variety of position placements for all major political parties based on 56 policy categories, which are extracted from the parties’ electoral programs. In addition,

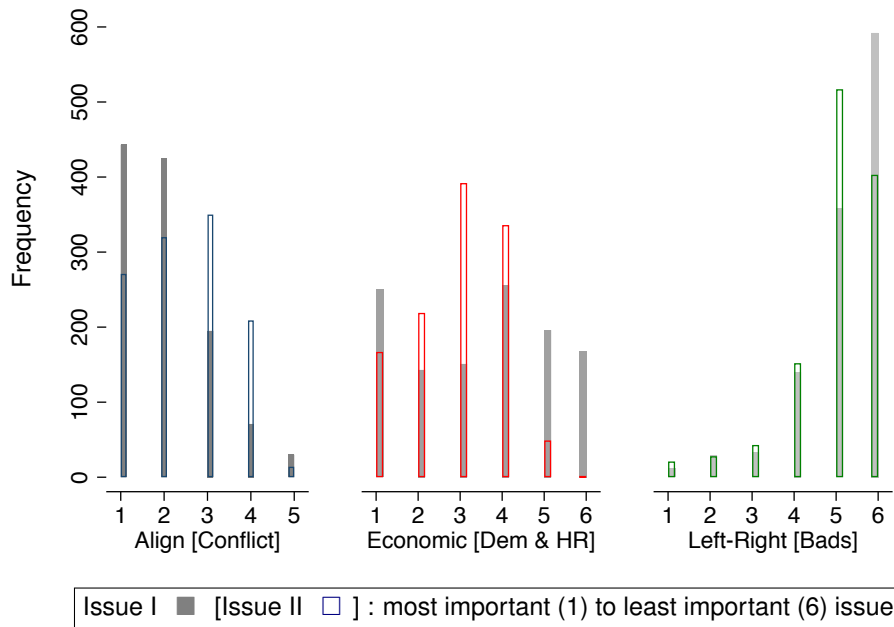
---

<sup>20</sup>Figure D.3 in online Appendix D.1 shows the obtained centroids.

<sup>21</sup>That these are the dominant issues is not to say that these issues explain divisions between the candidates. Indeed, whether domestic candidates are more likely to disagree on matters related to alignment but agree on matters related to economics is a separate, interesting issue we do not pursue here.

<sup>22</sup><https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/>.

Figure 1: Policy issue at stake in relations between intervening power and target country: text-classification based on nearest-neighbor centroid



scholars have used the manifesto corpus to create alternative policy categorizations and to automatically scale positions based on text. While the dataset is impressive and an excellent resource for many research agendas, its utility for studying election interventions is limited. First, CMP historically has focused on about fifty, mostly developed, countries. CMP also does not cover all potential issues that may drive country’s relationships with foreign powers. There are some variables related to internationalism, peacefulness, and left-right divisions. These may be salient for foreign powers. We pick the left-right dimension available from CMP for a comparison to our data as a predictor of interventions. It may be somewhat important in itself, or as a proxy for other dimensions.

UN voting alignment data is also a plausible alternative dataset. UNGA has received much attention in the literature (Márin-Bosch 1987; Voeten 2012) and constitutes the most widely used measurement of countries’ foreign policy preferences (Bailey et al. 2017a). Given the broad range of topics that are voted on every year and the fact that the large majority of countries are part of the UNGA (Chelotti et al. 2019), scholars have been interested in using the expressed preferences from states’ voting behavior — and the resulting voting similarities — as an indicator for state relationships that are comparable across time and space (Kim and Russett 1996; Voeten 2012). While measures for extracting policy preferences and constructing relationship structures are abundant

and range from simple (see Voeten 2012, for an overview) to more complex (Magu and Mateos 2018), recent studies question whether any of these measures can actually capture the underlying preferences of states.<sup>23</sup> For us, the concern is that issues that are up for a vote at the UN may not correlate with the set of issues at stake in relations between two countries. Furthermore, UN voting is available only for the government, thus ignoring the position of the opposition. Nonetheless, in what follows, we use voting similarity on the UNGA votes (in the year before election) to check whether it predicts U.S. election interventions. We focus on all, rather than only important votes because these are shown to be highly correlated for most significant purposes.<sup>24</sup>

Next, we use these datasets to estimate a model of US interventions in the elections of other countries. Online Appendixes H and I provide a detailed look at how the UN and CMP measurements relate to our Process-Party measurement of polarization for the case of the United States as intervener.

## 4 When Does the US Intervene in Elections?

Historically, the US has been the most active power undertaking interventions, possibly because it is a powerful country and a democracy (thus, familiar with how elections operate). We use US interventions to illustrate the importance of our theoretical point and empirical measures.

Figure 2 and Table 2 show the linear fit of an OLS model for candidate and process interventions undertaken by the United States against polarization as measured by the Process-Party data.<sup>25</sup> Polarization is defined as the difference between two  $-1$  to  $1$  measures,  $A_{gov}$  and  $B_{opp}$  and so it ranges from  $-2$  to  $2$ . It also shows the same by CMP (left-right split) and against the target government's voting alignment in the UNGA. The UNGA data is the government's voting alignment, normalized and rescaled so that the minimum in the sample is  $-2$  and maximum is  $2$ , essentially setting the opposition's unobserved alignment to  $0$ . We are forced to do that since no opposition measure is

---

<sup>23</sup>At the heart of this debate is the question whether countries are free in casting their votes, due to findings of external influences on UNGA voting in the form of foreign aid and vote-buying (Wang 1999; Dreher et al. 2008; Carter and Stone 2016; Bailey et al. 2017a), voting blocs (Lijphart 1963; Kim and Russett 1996), or to what extent voting similarity occurs either only through changes in the resolution (Brazys and Panke 2017) or simply by chance (Häge 2011; Häge and Hug 2013). Current debates on UNGA voting reflect these problems and discuss to what extent voting at the UNGA represents a valid indicator of policy preferences or if other sources are more appropriate (Chelotti et al. 2019).

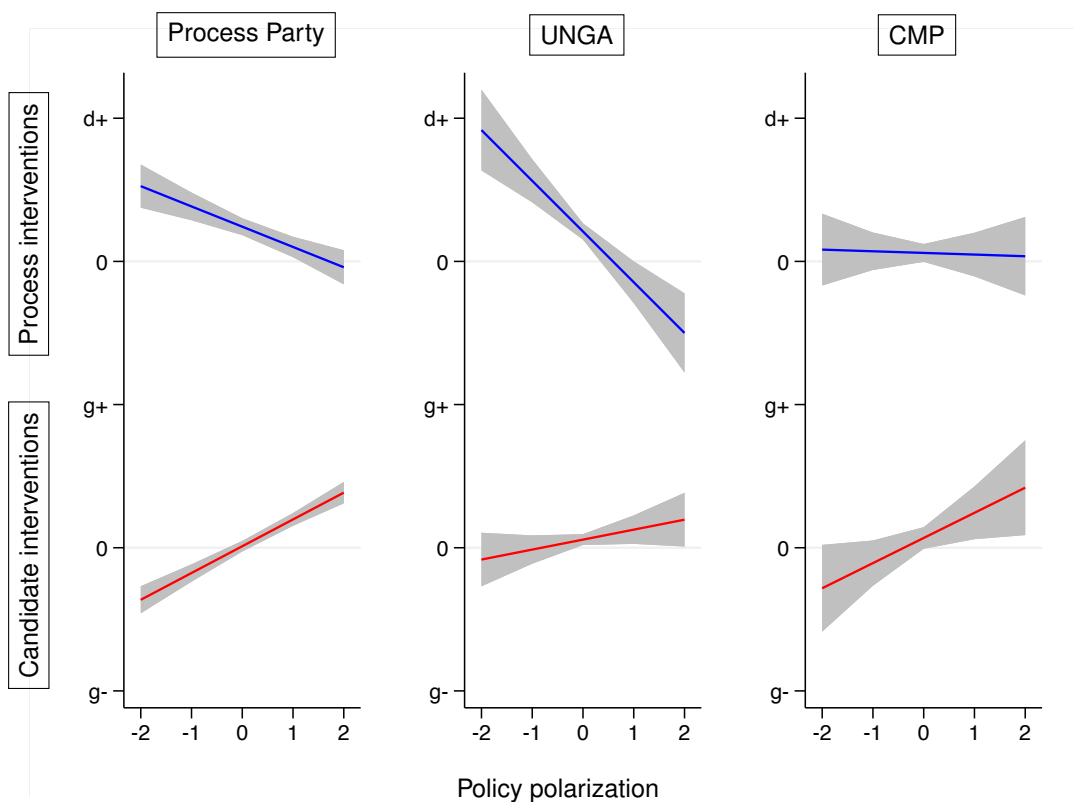
<sup>24</sup>Bailey et al. (2017b, 441) notes, when comparing votes on important vs not-important resolutions: "The broad patterns are the same, but minor differences do exist and these may be the more appropriate measures for some analyses. The bivariate correlation between ideal points estimated based on important votes and all votes is .92."

<sup>25</sup>The linear model fit is based on the values  $\{-1, -0.5, 0, 0.5, 1\}$  for  $p$  and  $c$  from the Process-Party data as outlined in section 3. In Figure 2 the label  $d+$  on the y-axis represents  $p = 1$  and  $g+$  represents  $c = 1$  in order to improve the readability of the combined figure.

available. According to section 2, we expect an upward slope ( $\beta_1 > 0$ ) for candidate interventions and a downward slope ( $\beta_1 < 0$ ) for process interventions.

Figure 2: US Process and Candidate Interventions: OLS on Process-Party data, UNGA voting alignment, L-R polarization from CMP.

*pro-democracy interventions are denoted by d+, negative values denote actions that are undermining democracy, candidate interventions are g+, pro-government, g-, pro-opposition*



The Process-Party dataset bears the predictions of the theoretical model, expecting upward-sloping candidate-interventions and downward-sloping process interventions over policy polarization.<sup>26</sup> When the US wants the government to win (positive and high polarization), it does not promote democracy, and it puts resources behind the governing candidate ticket. When the opposition

<sup>26</sup>We list-wise delete missing opposition/government scores (since polarization is not available). This concerns one tenth of cases. If we set the missing score to 0, results are not significantly altered.

is preferred, democracy-promotion is undertaken to the fullest, and these are backed by or accompanied by attempts to boost the opposition ticket via candidate support. Interestingly, some democracy-support is forthcoming even when the US has no reason to prefer one set of candidates over another (policy polarization of  $\pi = 0$ ), suggesting that part of the attraction of this strategy lies with the inherent appeal of promoting democracy abroad. The confidence intervals are narrow, reflecting both precise measures and the larger sample size. Data is available for all elections in the Process-Party dataset. While sometimes the two distinct types of interventions are undertaken separately, in many cases, the US engages in both simultaneously, suggesting that there are complementarities. We could account for this via a joint estimation of both outcome variables via seemingly unrelated regressions (SUR). We find that standard errors only change by a tiny amount and that this does not affect the overall significance patterns (cf. online app. Table F.8).

Table 2: US Process and Candidate Interventions: OLS on Process-Party data, UNGA voting alignment, L-R polarization from CMP.

$$\text{Process/Candidate Interventions}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{Divisions}_i + \varepsilon_i.$$

	Process Interventions			Candidate Interventions		
Polarization	-0.134*** (0.0341)			0.190*** (0.0286)		
UNGA alignment	-0.336*** (0.0669)			0.0696 (0.0581)		
Left-Right (CMP)	-0.0116 (0.0323)			0.176** (0.0842)		
Constant	0.230*** (0.0300)	0.196*** (0.0265)	0.0593* (0.0301)	0.00302 (0.0172)	0.0568*** (0.0193)	0.0682* (0.0392)
Observations	232	221	58	232	221	58
R-squared	0.082	0.107	0.001	0.304	0.010	0.085

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

By contrast, in the CMP and UNGA linear fits, the confidence intervals are wider. In the UNGA model, the slope of candidate interventions is indistinguishable from 0 (suggesting that government alignment does not predict efforts to boost a particular candidate). In the CMP model, the slope of pro-democracy interventions is not distinct from 0, suggesting that left-right divisions are not predictive of an intervening power's commitment to clean rules of the game.

UNGA voting alignment is likely a noisy proxy for the issues at stake in an election. The process-party data does not measure solely, or most importantly, foreign-policy positions. An outsider may be concerned primarily about domestic issues from the target’s perspective: drug production, investment policy, human rights abuses. These policies may or may not overlap with the UN’s agenda. In addition, voting-alignment similarity is based on observed votes: since many items never come up for a vote, the resulting measure may not reflect states’ true conflicts and similarities. India-Pakistan and Greece-Turkey had nearly perfect voting alignment while fighting wars or being on the brink of a war. In addition, the missing opposition position variable in UNGA data may bias the coefficients away from their true slope.<sup>27</sup>

We believe our measurement to be an independent source of information that is better suited for studying election interventions. UN alignment may be better for other purposes.

The CMP measurement of polarization does not track closely enough the issues over which interventions occur. This may help explain the wide confidence interval on candidate interventions.<sup>28</sup> Still, the slope is similar to the one we estimate with the Process-Party data, possibly a reflection of the tendency of the left-right dimension to track anti-Americanism in the West (Chiozza 2009) and other issues of interest to the US. In addition, since process-altering interventions may be impractical or impossible in the mostly consolidated democracies covered by CMP, it is not surprising that left-right divisions are not predictive of the US decision to promote more or less clean elections.

Even though we create  $c$  and  $p$  interventions in a manner independent of the polarization variable, one may want to see whether results hold with some extraneously-generated measurement of interventions. For this purpose, we generate one additional measurement of US democratic interventions abroad. We extract the number of times a country’s election is criticized in the Congressional record, for the 1988 to 2016 period.<sup>29</sup> We replicate the democracy-promotion top part of Table 2 with the new measurement in online Appendix Table G.11. The Process-Party polarization measurement predicts greater criticism of elections when opposition has friendlier stance. Neither UNGA’s alignment nor CMP’s left-right measurements produce similar effects.

Covert interventions are partly captured by our dataset but may be partly missed. We discuss how that influences our empirical predictions in Appendix C. We may be underestimating the true effect of divisions on interventions, making this a hard test for the theory.

---

<sup>27</sup>In online Appendix C we show how omitting the opposition’s position may bias the results when predicting election interventions.

<sup>28</sup>The Process-Party model (on the left) yields a better fit even if restricted only to the observations for which CMP has non-missing data, suggesting that this is not due to sample-selection.

<sup>29</sup>We use a dictionary of terms related to elections, to country’s name, and critical terms. Full documentation can be supplied on request.

## Logit Models of US Interventions with Process Party Measures

While OLS provides for an easy comparison, our variables may not comply with the types of scaling assumptions needed to run an OLS. Policy divisions in Sweden may differ from those in Iran, pro-democracy interventions may require a different threshold than non-democracy ones, and so on. The addition of standard covariates may help us establish the robustness of the relationship.

The main relationship between process and candidate interventions and polarization also holds in an ordered logit model (see columns 1 and 4 of Table 4), and even when we recode process and candidate interventions as dummy variables and use a conventional logit model to check for a relationship (see columns 2,3,5 and 6 of Table 4).

We also add controls: a dummy variable to indicate whether a target country is developed, a dummy variable measuring whether a target country is a democracy based on the V-Dem polyarchy electoral democracy measurement (Coppedge et al. 2016), and a Post-Cold War dummy variable.<sup>30</sup> Table 3 shows summary statistics for our main dataset covering US interventions.

The basic results still hold. As expected there seem to be fewer interventions in more democratic countries, regardless of the level of polarization. This means that democratic consolidation makes democracy-promotion unnecessary, and democracy-erosion costly and impractical. Foreign powers are less likely to engage in pro-democracy interventions if they prefer the government. Higher values of the polarization variable predict a lower probability  $Pr(d+)$ , so democracy enhancing interventions are less frequent. The evidence on democracy-erosion  $Pr(d-)$  as a function of polarization is weaker.

Polarization remains a robust predictor of candidate interventions. The polarization variable takes values between  $-2$  and  $+2$ , and its standard deviation is approximately 0.9. A logit coefficient for polarization of 2.394 in column 2 of Table 4 translates<sup>31</sup> into an almost 10-fold increase in the odds of a candidate intervention benefiting the government if polarization increases by one unit. Similarly, if polarization increases by one unit, the odds of a process intervention that enhances democracy are reduced<sup>32</sup> by around 42%.

We also run specifications that control for various regions of the world via dummy variables (see Table F.9 in the online Appendix). The coefficient of our ordered logit models remain similar.

---

<sup>30</sup>Development set to 1 for above the global median in period in World Bank data, v-Dem electoral democracy above .6 set for democracy, and post-1990 is end of Cold War. Results do not depend on these specific cut-offs.

<sup>31</sup>We need to calculate the increase in the odds ratio as  $e^{2.394} - 1 = 9.96$  and can compare it to the odds of a candidate intervention benefiting the government if all variables (including polarization) are set to 0, i.e.  $e^{-4.245} = 0.014$ , which translates in a probability of around 0.014, i.e. odds ratio =  $p/(1-p)$ .

<sup>32</sup>We need to calculate the decrease in the odds ratio as  $e^{-0.550} - 1 = -0.42$

Table 3: Summary Table for US Interventions

VARIABLES	N	mean	sd	min	max
Process Interventions	261	0.195	0.425	-1	1
Candidate Interventions	261	0.0556	0.307	-1	1
V-Dem Polyarchy	252	0.528	0.251	0.0859	0.958
UNGA Voting Alignment	222	-0.00390	0.413	-0.797	0.992
Developed Country	251	0.602	0.491	0	1
Polarization (Process Party)	232	0.267	0.916	-2	2

*Note: This table shows summary statistics for US interventions. A single observation is an election in a certain country that was selected for our random sample of elections.*

There is no region of the world in which candidate interventions are significantly more likely to happen relative to advanced economies (ADV); the coefficient for process interventions is positive and significant at the 5%-level for Latin America (LA) relative to ADV. Once we look at the dichotomous outcomes  $Pr(g+)$ ,  $Pr(g-)$ ,  $Pr(d+)$  and  $Pr(d-)$  we find similar coefficients for polarization, but some interesting regularities affect the number of observations and the extent to which these estimations are comparable to the previous estimations. There were no candidate interventions benefiting the opposition ticket in African countries (reducing the number of observations to 159 in the respective estimation). At the same time there were no process interventions in advanced economies (reducing the observation count to 166 for both models).<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, we present evidence based on an alternative variable for candidate divisions extracted from the Process-Party dataset. We create one dummy variable to indicate if the foreign power prefers the opposition and one if it prefers the government to win. This approach places the fewest assumptions on how much the foreign intervener prefers the opposition over the government, when it comes to predicting involvement. Table F.10 in the online Appendix shows the result of these logit models, with dummy variables both as regressors and as outcome variables. The basic intuition we have previously presented still holds.

## Issues at Stake

We show in Appendix E results on the importance of issues. We expect higher stakes to result in steeper slope for interventions. We divide the sample into cases where alignment or armed conflict

<sup>33</sup>We choose post-communist countries as the reference category for these estimations and find no regional category that significantly differs from it.



Table 4: Logit Models of Interventions with Process-Party Polarization

	Candidate Interventions			Process Interventions		
	Ordered	$Pr(g+)$	$Pr(g-)$	Ordered	$Pr(d+)$	$Pr(d-)$
Polarization	2.225*** (0.296)	2.394*** (0.363)	-1.940*** (0.555)	-0.669*** (0.230)	-0.550** (0.216)	0.845 (0.703)
Developed Country	0.591 (0.509)	0.401 (0.661)	-0.386 (0.704)	-0.879** (0.384)	-0.884** (0.427)	0.583 (0.692)
V-Dem Polyarchy	-0.408 (0.687)	-0.0737 (1.206)	0.00780 (1.734)	-1.056 (0.743)	-2.795*** (0.847)	-7.805*** (2.261)
Post Cold War	-0.375 (0.474)	-0.166 (0.686)	0.669 (0.786)	1.273*** (0.381)	1.945*** (0.521)	1.043 (0.744)
Constant		-4.245*** (0.840)	-4.060*** (1.451)		-0.358 (0.440)	-1.510 (1.526)
Observations	216	216	216	216	216	216

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

*Note: US process interventions (d+ pro-democracy interventions are indicated by positive values of the outcome variable, d- negative values denote actions that are undermining democracy), and US candidate interventions (positive values indicate pro-government interventions g+). We estimate:*

$$Process/Candidate\ Interventions_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot Polarization_i + \gamma \cdot Controls_i + \varepsilon_i.$$

*Process/Candidate interventions take the values -1, -0.5, 0, 0.5 and 1. For candidate interventions we estimate an ordered logit model and binomial logit models on dummies that take a value of 1 if  $c > 0$  denoted by g+ (and accordingly g- for  $c < 0$ ). For process interventions we repeat this approach and estimate again an ordered logit as well as binomial models using dummies for d+ (pro-democracy interventions with  $p > 0$ ) and d- (for  $p < 0$ ).*

are the first or second-most important issues, and cases where economic issues, left-right divisions, democracy, global bads assume this ranking. We expect the first group to feature higher stakes ( $\Gamma$ ). Figures E.4 and Table E.7 in the online appendix show the results. We do, indeed, find a steeper slope for what we call higher-stakes issues. However, in a fully-interactive model, the interaction term between stakes and polarization (not shown), is not significant. Thus, we have suggestive, but not statistically-significant evidence that higher policy stakes drive US interventions.

## **A Look at All Interveners**

Figure 3 and Table 5 present OLS results for all interveners globally in the elections we study, for both the Cold War and post-Cold War period. Results remain unchanged for the whole sample, with some interesting regularities observed by period (ordered logit yields similar results. Polarization seems to be more strongly driven by policy divisions during the Cold War, possibly a reflection of the higher stakes inherent in Super Power competition. Process interventions are only weakly predicted by polarization during the Cold War, but become much more strongly predicted in the more current period. It is possible that some substitution is at work, with states switching to the more acceptable form of election intervention - affecting democratic processes - after the end of the Cold War. Also, the overall emphasis on democracy-promotion (at 0 polarization) is higher after 1990 - a reflection of the growing international concern with clean elections. The latter is evidence consistent with the additional democracy term we introduced in the model. The upward move is statistically significant, suggesting a greater  $\lambda$  in the post-Cold War period.

It is also the case, though we do not show it here, that the US is more committed to promoting cleaner processes - when compared to any other intervener.

We also use this set-up for two extra robustness checks. Online Appendix F, Figure F.6 shows what happens when we replace the human coding of polarization, with machine-predicted scores. We see more noise, wider confidence-interval, but direction and significance is unaltered.

We evaluate in online Appendix F, Figure F.7 whether elections in which the incumbent's office is contested (a presidential election in a presidential system or any parliamentary election in a parliamentary system) have higher stakes for interveners and elicit more activity. There is some evidence to this effect, but it is not very strong. All national-level elections seem to attract foreign interest, possibly because they all matter.

Figure 3: Process and Candidate Interventions by All Potential (Sample) Interveners

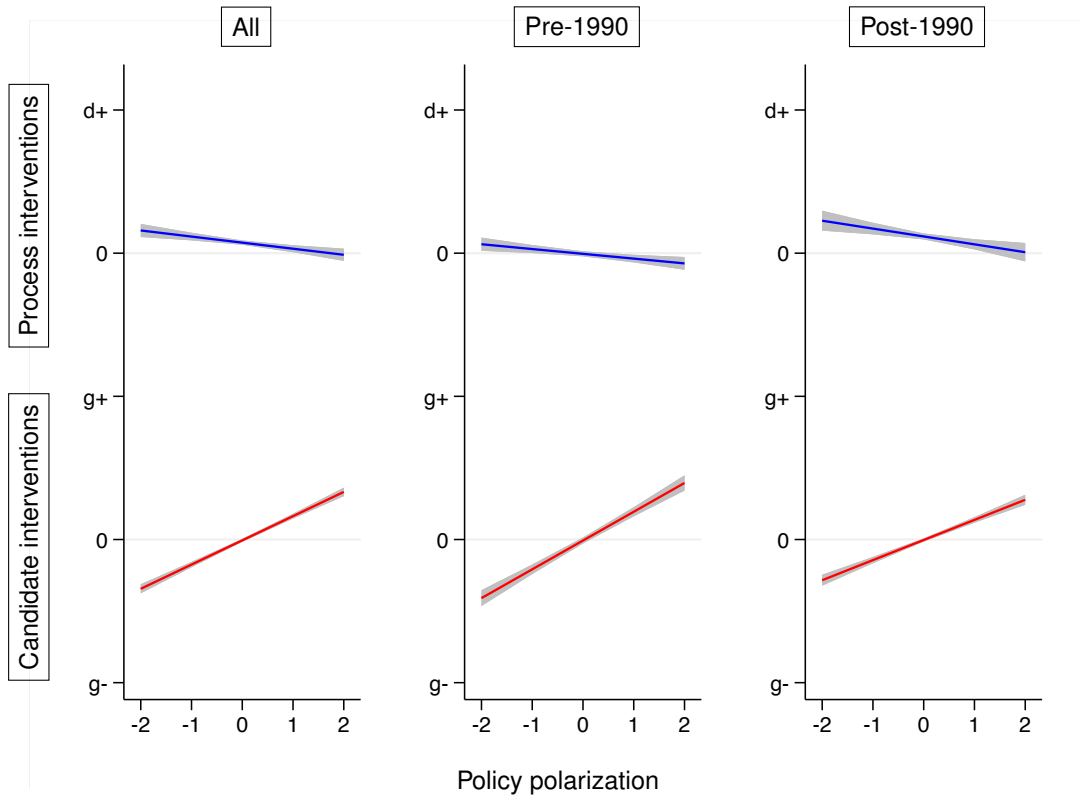


Table 5: Interventions by All Powers

	Process Interventions			Candidate Interventions		
	All	Cold War	Post CW	All	Cold War	Post CW
Polarization	-0.0424** (0.0194)	-0.0335 (0.0249)	-0.0550** (0.0266)	0.169*** (0.0240)	0.201*** (0.0395)	0.140*** (0.0253)
Constant	0.0736*** (0.0105)	-0.00450 (0.0129)	0.117*** (0.0129)	-0.00598 (0.00672)	-0.00721 (0.0125)	-0.00348 (0.00752)
Observations	1,667	585	1,082	1,668	586	1,082
R-squared	0.010	0.017	0.011	0.240	0.299	0.188

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

$$\text{Process/Candidate Interventions}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{Polarization}_i + \varepsilon_i.$$

## Does it Matter? Pre-election Positions, Post-election Policies

Does polarization matter? It could be that our measurement is a poor representation of policy positions, or that, whoever is elected adapts their position, rendering their pre-election positions irrelevant. The latter may be especially the case for more democratic states, in which incumbents have an incentive to preempt opposition challenges through moderation.

We take advantage of two NELDA-provided variables to evaluate this possibility. We combine questions *nelda51* (“Is there a negative change in relations with the US after the election?”) and *nelda52* (“Is there a positive change in relations with the US after the election?”) in a new binary variable which is 1 for cases in which there was any change in relations with US after the election.<sup>34</sup> We also take the absolute value of polarization as an independent variable. We, again, divide the sample into democracies based on the V-Dem polyarchy electoral democracy measurement. A score of greater than .6 is defined as a democracy (choice of threshold does not matter).

We run a logit model of a post-election policy change in relations with the US as a function of pre-election polarization in Table 6. We find that growing polarization is associated with change in relations, regardless of regime type. It is also the case that absolute polarization is somewhat lower (0.57) in democracies than non-democracies (0.72). Thus, there is some moderation in democracies – but, conditional on polarization, there is policy change in relations with US across regime types. While this discovery calls for separate explanation, we take these findings as additional validation of the polarization variable we construct, and for our general approach.

Table 6: Ex-ante Polarization (Process Party) and Ex-post Change in Relations with US (Nelda) by whether State is Democracy or not (V-Dem).

Abs. Change in Relations with US		
	in Dem=0	in Dem=1
Abs. Polarization	0.82**	1.25*
	(.29)	(.63)
Constant	-2.08***	-3.52***
	(0.37)	(0.72)
Observations	125	99
Pseudo R-squared	0.060	0.075
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1		

<sup>34</sup>NELDA does not distinguish this variable further, but the variable appears to track at least in part the removal or imposition of economic sanctions).

## 5 Conclusion

Election interventions are here to stay. In this piece, we advance our current understanding of interventions by distinguishing between two types: a process intervention, designed to strengthen or weaken the rules of the game, and a candidate intervention - with the goal to increase the support for a specific candidate. We argue that policy divisions in target countries are important determinants of intervention. If foreign powers prefer the government, they are more likely to weaken the democratic process and/or providing direct support for the government. By contrast, if foreign powers want to see an opposition victory, they would strengthen the democratic process and/or try to directly intervene to increase the opposition's electoral performance. This should be particularly the case if an election is of great importance for a foreign power, while pro-democratic interventions become more likely in periods in which foreign powers have a stronger commitment to democracy.

In order to test the propositions we derive from the argument, we select a random sample of elections held globally between 1945 and 2012. We design a coding scheme and rely on high-quality human coding to create a measurement of political polarization between government and opposition candidates in elections. We also develop a measurement of how foreign powers sought to affect the process of holding free and fair elections and the election odds of the incumbent and the opposition. We show that our Party-Process dataset has advantages over alternative datasets, such as the UNGA or the CMP.

Based on our original dataset, we show in OLS regression analyses that the United States is more likely to promote democracy if the opposition is pro-American while the government is not. The US is also more likely to directly support a pro-American incumbent or opposition candidate if the other domestic side does not share these positions. The evidence on elections of higher importance resulting in steeper slopes of interventions is weaker. Globally, pro-democratic interventions become generally more prevalent in the post-Cold War period.

Using different sets of robustness tests, we show that our findings hold when conducting logistic regressions and include control variables, such as dummies for different regions, economic development, and high-quality democracies. We also show that the proposed relationship holds for all interveners of the dataset, and that our findings are robust to using alternative coding rules, different sample definitions, and using polarization measures based on machine-learning algorithms. In addition, we also find that our pre-election polarization measurements have broader implications: they align with greater criticism of election when the opposition is pro-American based on an analysis of the Congressional record. Our polarization measurement also predicts post-election changes in relations with the US as measured by the NELDA dataset.

Elections, and foreign interest in them, sit at the intersection of numerous fields of inquiry. Other scholars may build on our contribution to explain why outsiders provide aid to some regimes (to prop up a friendly incumbent), to account for why corruption is tolerated in some countries (to prevent an unfriendly opposition from coming to power) and to explore when leadership changes produce changes in foreign policy orientation. Our general approach and empirical contribution should prove a germane departure point for these, and other questions of interest.

## Bibliography

- Bailey, M. A., A. Strezhnev, and E. Voeten (2017a). Estimating dynamic state preferences from united nations voting data. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61(2), 430–456.
- Bailey, M. A., A. Strezhnev, and E. Voeten (2017b). Estimating dynamic state preferences from united nations voting data. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61(2), 430–456.
- Bawn, K. and Z. Somer-Topcu (2012). Government versus opposition at the polls: How governing status affects the impact of policy positions. *American Journal of Political Science* 56(2), 433–446.
- Brazys, S. and D. Panke (2017). Why do states change positions in the United Nations General Assembly? *International Political Science Review* 38(1), 70–84.
- Bubeck, J. and N. Marinov (2017). Process or candidate: The international community and the demand for electoral integrity. *American Political Science Review* 111(3), 535–554.
- Bush, S. and L. Prather (2018). Who’s there? election observer identity and the local credibility of elections. *International Organization* 72(3), 659–692.
- Carter, D. B. and R. W. Stone (2016). Democracy and Multilateralism: The Case of Vote Buying in the UN General Assembly. *International Organization* 69, 1–33.
- Chelotti, N., N. Dasandi, and S. J. Mikhaylov (2019). Do Intergovernmental Organizations have a Socialization Effect on Member State Preferences? Evidence from the UN General Debate. *Unpublished Working Paper*, 1–62.
- Chiozza, G. (2009). *Anti-Americanism and the American World Order*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins.
- Coppedge, M., J. Gerring, S. Lindberg, S.-E. Skaaning, J. Teorell, D. Altman, M. Bernhard, S. Fish, A. Glynn, A. Hicken, C. Knutsen, K. McMann, P. Paxton, D. Pemstein, J. Staton, B. Zimmerman, F. Andersson, V. Mechkova, and F. Miri (2016). V-dem codebook v6. University of Gothenburg, Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project.
- Corstange, D. and N. Marinov (2012). Taking sides in other people’s elections: The polarizing effect of foreign intervention. *American Journal of Political Science* 53, 655–670.
- Dafoe, A., J. R. Oneal, and B. Russett (2013). The democratic peace: Weighing the evidence and cautious inference. *International Studies Quarterly* 57(1), 201–214.

- Debs, A. and H. Goemans (2010). Regime type, the fate of leaders, and war. *American Political Science Review* 104, 430–445.
- Donno, D. (2013). *Defending Democratic Norms: International Actors and the Politics of Electoral Misconduct*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- D’Orazio, V., S. T. Landis, G. Palmer, and P. Schrodtt (2014). Separating the wheat from the chaff: Applications of automated document classification using support vector machines. *Political analysis* 22(2), 224–242.
- Dreher, A., P. Nunnenkamp, and R. Thiele (2008). Does US aid buy UN general assembly votes? A disaggregated analysis. *Public Choice* 136, 139–164.
- Gilpin, R. (1987). *The Political Economy of International Relations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton.
- Goemans, H. E., K. S. Gleditsch, and G. Chiozza (2009). Introducing archigos: A dataset of political leaders. *Journal of Peace Research* 46(2), 269–283.
- Grauvogel, J., A. Licht, and C. von Soest (2017). Sanctions and signals: How international sanction threats trigger domestic protest in targeted regimes. *International Studies Quarterly* 61(1), 86–97.
- Häge, F. M. (2011, 7). Choice or Circumstance? Adjusting Measures of Foreign Policy Similarity for Chance Agreement. *Political Analysis* 19(3), 287–305.
- Häge, F. M. and S. Hug (2013). Consensus Voting and Similarity Measures in IOs. *EPSA 2013 Annual General Conference Paper 207*, 1–32.
- Hillard, D., S. Purpura, and J. Wilkerson (2008). Computer-assisted topic classification for mixed-methods social science research. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 4(4), 31–46.
- Hobson, C. (2017). Democratic peace: Progress and crisis. *Perspectives on Politics* 15(3), 697–710.
- Hyde, S. (2011). *The Pseudo-Democrats Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm*. Ithaca NY: Cornell.
- Hyde, S. D. and N. Marinov (2012). Which elections can be lost? *Political Analysis* 20(2), 191–210.
- Jäger, K. (2017). Economic freedom in the early 21st century: government ideology still matters. *Kyklos* 70(2), 256–277.
- Joachims, T. (1998). Text categorization with support vector machines: Learning with many relevant features. In *European conference on machine learning*, pp. 137–142. Springer.
- Kavakli, K. C. and P. M. Kuhn (2019). Dangerous contenders: Election monitors, islamic opposition parties and islamist terrorism. *International Organization*.
- Kim, S. Y. and B. Russett (1996). The New Politics of Voting Alignments in the United Nations General Assembly. *International Organization* 50(4), 629–652.
- Kinne, B. J. (2012). Multilateral trade and militarized conflict: Centrality, openness, and asymmetry in the global trade network. *The Journal of Politics* 74(1), 308–322.

- Knutsen, C. H., H. M. Nygård, and T. Wig (2017). Autocratic Elections: Stabilizing Tool or Force for Change? *World Politics* 69(1), 98–143.
- Lake, D. (2007). Escape from the state of nature: Authority and hierarchy in world politics. *International Security* 32, 47–79.
- Levin, D. H. (2016). When the great power gets a vote: The effects of great power electoral interventions on election results. *International Studies Quarterly* 60(2), 189–202.
- Lijphart, A. (1963). The analysis of bloc voting in the General Assembly: A critique and a proposal. *American Political Science Review* 57(4), 902–917.
- Magu, R. and G. Mateos (2018). United Nations General Assembly Vote Similarity Networks. In C. Cherifi, H. Cherifi, M. Karsai, and M. Musolesi (Eds.), *Complex Networks & Their Applications VI*, pp. 1174–1183. Springer.
- Manning, C., P. Raghavan, and H. Schütze (2008). *Introduction to Information Retrieval*. 2008. Cambridge University Press.
- Manning, C. D., C. D. Manning, and H. Schütze (1999). *Foundations of statistical natural language processing*. MIT press.
- Márin-Bosch, M. (1987). How nations vote in the General Assembly of the United Nations. *International Organization* 41(4), 705–724.
- McLean, E. V. and M. T. Radtke (2018, 06). Political relations, leader stability, and economic coercion. *International Studies Quarterly* 62(2), 357–370.
- Merz, N., S. Regel, and J. Lewandowski (2016). The manifesto corpus: A new resource for research on political parties and quantitative text analysis. *Research & Politics* 3(2), 2053168016643346.
- Mikolov, T., I. Sutskever, K. Chen, G. S. Corrado, and J. Dean (2013). Distributed representations of words and phrases and their compositionality. In *Advances in neural information processing systems*, pp. 3111–3119.
- Nanni, F., G. Glavas, S. P. Ponzetto, and H. Stuckenschmidt (2019). Political text scaling meets computational semantics. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1904.06217*.
- Norris, P., F. Martinez i Coma, A. Nai, and M. Groemping (2015). The expert survey of perceptions of electoral integrity, pei. University of Sydney.
- Rheault, L. and C. Cochrane (2019). Word embeddings for the analysis of ideological placement in parliamentary corpora. *Political Analysis*, 1–22.
- Russett, B., J. Oneal, and D. Davis (1999). The third leg of the kantian tripod for peace: International organizations and militarized disputes, 1950–1985. *International Organization* 52, 441–67.
- Saunders, E. and J. Lebovic (2016, 02). The diplomatic core: The determinants of high-level us diplomatic visits, 1946–2010. *International Studies Quarterly* 60(1), 107–123.
- Saunders, E. and S. Wolford (2018). Elites, voters, and democracies at war. Working Paper. Georgetown University and UT Austin.



- Shulman, S. and S. Bloom (2012). The legitimacy of foreign intervention in elections: the ukrainian response. *Review of International Studies* 61(6), 445–471.
- Stokes, S. (2001). *Mandates and Democracy: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge.
- Tomz, M. and J. Weeks (2019). Public opinion and foreign electoral intervention. Working Paper. Stanford University and University of Wisconsin Madison.
- Voeten, E. (2012). Data and Analyses of Voting in the UN General Assembly. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 1–23.
- Volgens, A., W. Krause, P. Lehmann, T. Matthieß, N. Merz, S. Regel, and B. Weßels (2018). The manifesto data collection. manifesto project (mrg/cmp/marpor). version 2018b.
- Wagner, W., A. Herranz-Surrallés, J. Kaarbo, and F. Ostermann (2017). The party politics of legislative–executive relations in security and defence policy. *West European Politics* 40(1), 20–41.
- Wagner, W., A. Herranz-Surrallés, J. Kaarbo, and F. Ostermann (2018). Party politics at the water’s edge: contestation of military operations in europe. *European Political Science Review* 10(4), 537–563.
- Walter, S., E. Dinas, I. Jurado, and N. Konstantinidis (2018). Noncooperation by popular vote: Expectations, foreign intervention, and the vote in the 2015 greek bailout referendum. *International Organization* 72(4), 969–994.
- Wang, T. Y. (1999). U.S. Foreign Aid and UN Voting: An Analysis of Important Issues. *International Studies Quarterly* 43(1), 199–210.

## A Appendix: Short Theoretical Model

This section illustrates our theoretical considerations by formally deriving our main hypotheses in simple formal model and solve it. We assume that the true level of support the incumbent is  $x$ . Additionally, there is an initial level of bias  $b$  in favor of the incumbent. The foreign power can change the result of the election by supporting the incumbent via candidate support  $c > 0$  or it can reduce/increase the bias of an election via process interventions  $p$ , resulting in a bias  $\beta(p) = b - \sqrt{bp}$ . We assume that the effectiveness of process interventions depends on the initial level of bias.<sup>35</sup> The result of the election will be:<sup>36</sup>

$$f(c, p) = x + c + (b - \sqrt{bp})$$

We assume that the election result determines the policies according to the vote shares of the platforms  $A_{gov}$  and  $B_{opp}$  and that interventions are costly (quadratic loss terms). The importance of the election result in a particular country will be determined by the parameter  $\Gamma$ .<sup>37</sup> The maximization problem of a foreign power is thus:

$$\max_{c,p} \Gamma(f(c, p) \cdot A_{gov} + (1 - f(c, p)) \cdot B_{opp}) - c^2 - p^2$$

For a more compact statement, we define *polarization* as:  $\pi = A_{gov} - B_{opp}$ , such that intervener prefers government to win when  $\pi > 0$  and the opposition to win if  $\pi < 0$ . Hence, we need to solve the following maximization problem:

$$\max_{c,p} \Gamma(x + c + b - \sqrt{bp}) - c^2 - p^2$$

We can then solve the maximization problem of the foreign power by taking first order conditions. The optimal intervention is characterized by  $c^* = \frac{\pi\Gamma}{2}$  with  $\frac{\partial c^*}{\partial \pi} > 0$  (cf. Hypothesis 1) and  $p^* = -\frac{\pi\Gamma\sqrt{b}}{2}$  with  $\frac{\partial p^*}{\partial \pi} < 0$  (cf. Hypothesis 2).

---

<sup>35</sup>In consolidated democracies with a very low level of  $b$  this would make process support rather ineffective.

<sup>36</sup>We need to restrict  $c, p$  such that  $f(c, p) \in [0, 1]$  or use an appropriate transformation (e.g. via a logistic function).

<sup>37</sup>It is possible to introduce an additional term that captures the degree to which the foreign power cares about clean elections (low levels of the resulting bias  $\beta$ ). In further extensions one could also introduce interactions between process interventions ( $p$ ) and candidate interventions ( $c$ ). The most promising direction for further research would however be a model that explicitly models voter preferences.