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Roundtable Review 16-30

Sarah Sunn Bush and Lauren Prather, *Monitors and Meddlers: How Foreign Actors Influence Local Trust in Elections*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022. ISBN: 9781009204262.

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Introduction by Jessica L.P. Weeks, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Scholars have long believed that democratic institutions are more likely to flourish when citizens trust those institutions. Given the central role of elections in democracies, a particularly important question is whether voters believe that their country's electoral processes are free, fair, and accurate. In other words, do the results reflect the intended will of "the people", or rather, the views of special interests, domestic elites, or even foreigners? Understanding the factors that foster versus erode national electoral trust is of particular importance in an era of global anxiety about the resilience of democracy.

Understanding electoral trust in the present day presents new challenges and questions because changes in global norms have meant that "the people" are increasingly joined on the electoral scene by a potentially suspect set of actors: foreigners. Sometimes, foreign involvement is benign and indeed potentially helpful, for example when foreign countries or international organizations send trained officials to observe electoral processes to try to ensure that undemocratic practices do not distort the will of the people. Other types of foreign involvement are, however, more ominous, such as when foreigners try to sow disinformation or tip the electoral scale in their preferred direction.

In *Monitors and Meddlers*, Sarah Bush and Lauren Prather carefully investigate how both benign and meddlesome foreign involvement influences citizen trust in elections. When do election observers, either by their mere presence, or their positive and negative reports, increase or decrease trust in elections? Similarly, under what conditions does foreign meddling erode such trust? Bush and Prather bring these disparate foreign activities under one conceptual and empirical umbrella, developing hypotheses about the conditions under which different kinds of foreign involvement strengthen versus undermine trust, and then testing those hypotheses using micro-level evidence from five elections in a diverse set of countries: the United States, Georgia, and Tunisia.

In this roundtable, three distinguished scholars provide detailed and thought-provoking reviews of *Monitors and Meddlers*. In general, all three praise both the book's high quality and its vital importance for understanding the effects of the spread of foreign involvement in elections. Ursula Daxecker, for example, calls the book "important, ambitious, and timely," and Inken von Borzyskowski calls it "a thought-provoking read for scholars of political communication, foreign affairs, international intervention, and elections." Daniela Donno characterizes the book as "an ambitious and meticulous study that lays the foundation for an expansive research agenda for future scholars to take up. It is essential reading for those who are interested in how citizens respond to international involvement in electoral processes."

In general, all three reviewers praise both the book's theoretical insights and its empirical contributions. From a theoretical standpoint, the reviewers note that the book improves significantly on the conventional wisdom by explaining how the effects of foreign involvement depend on the micro-level attributes of voters themselves. Rather than expecting reactions to monitoring and meddling to depend only on what the foreign actors are doing, the book theorizes that the effects of foreign activities depend on attributes of the

voters, including partisanship and preexisting attitudes about the foreign groups in question. As Daxecker puts it:

> Bush and Prather argue that what foreign actors say and do *interacts* with how citizens perceive these actors and their prior beliefs about elections. The book's integration of micro-level insights from political psychology with macro-level aspects from international relations is an important innovation.

This theoretical pivot to the micro-level, in turn, paves the way for important new findings. For example, when it comes to election observers (EOs), Donno notes that:

> Bush and Prather find that it is mainly supporters of the losing side in an election who update their beliefs in response to EO judgments; and that, interestingly, they seem to update mainly in a negative direction, whereby EO criticism leads to even lower trust in the election. This directional finding… goes against the idea that the primary role of election monitors is a positive one, that is, to provide reassurance and bolster confidence in the electoral process…overall, the thrust of the directional findings supports the assertions of a different strand in the literature on election monitors—namely, that their criticism serves to mobilize anti-regime sentiment.

The reviewers also praise the book's empirical approach, particularly the diverse evidence on which it draws and its use of carefully designed experiments in three important countries, including panel studies comparing citizen attitudes before and after elections. As Donno writes: "A commendable aspect of this study is that it covers widely varying empirical terrain: two elections in Tunisia, three in the United States, and one in Georgia. This was a bold choice and one that pays off in terms of probing the generalizability of the theory and the findings." Donno further praises how the book places the U.S. in comparative perspective, writing that "more work like this is needed, given that election integrity in the US is becoming increasingly politicized."

Daxecker adds that the book features "exceptionally clear presentation of empirical results." As von Borzyskowski puts it:

> years of work have gone into this book. Fielding five surveys in three country contexts is no small feat. Designing and running original surveys and survey experiments requires heavy lifting and careful thinking, in addition to the expense and time. This is a major accomplishment.

In terms of areas for improvement, the reviewers focus primarily on avenues for future work, but also note a few weaknesses. Perhaps most significantly, von Borzyskowski observes that although the most novel parts of Bush and Prather's theory discuss how treatment effects vary across individuals, those tests are not causally identified because they rely on observed natural variation across voters rather than experimentally-

induced differences. Although she acknowledges the difficulty of overcoming this challenge "as we cannot randomly assign partisanship to individual respondents," future work should assess whether Bush and Prather's findings about individual-level moderators hold up when implementing recent statistical advice for estimating the moderating effects of difficult-to-randomize variables.[1] Von Borzyskowski also writes that the book is somewhat opaque in its' characterization of past work, and that some of the hypotheses could have been clearer and broken down into more specific predictions; she notes that preregistering the studies could help future work in this area.

Ursula Daxecker, meanwhile, argues that the causal chain between foreign involvement and citizen reactions may be more complex than that portrayed in the book, suggesting that domestic actors may play an important role as intermediaries who guide how voters interpret foreign intervention. As she writes:

> Domestic elites—in particular opposition parties—can be crucial intermediate actors. The fact that few citizens are aware of the existence and role of international monitors in the United States would seem consistent with this relationship (108). It is thus likely that whether and how incumbents and opposition parties respond to critical verdicts from international monitors matters, which could trigger a response from citizens.

In their response, Bush and Prather concur that this is an important and feasible avenue for future work. Daxecker also notes that the discussions of meddling were not quite as persuasive or deep as those about monitoring:

> Meddlers remained fairly opaque as actors. This is not surprising given that they want to keep their election interference secret, but it meant that the book's discussion of meddlers does not match the rich descriptive data it presents on monitors. The evidence also remains less supportive; for example, vote choice played no role for the effect of meddlers, and since their aim is always to undermine elections, there is little variation in type.

Of course, a hallmark of an important book is that it sparks many ideas for future work. All three reviewers note fascinating avenues for future scholarship. First, the reviewers point to several ways in which future research could dive deeper into the dynamics *within* the scope of the book. Donno suggests expanding the dependent variables to explore the important distinction between trust in process versus trust in outcomes. In their response, Bush and Prather instead argue that these two concepts may be capturing the same essential dimension. Von Borzyskowski suggests future studies of how citizens react when exposed to multiple potentially competing sources of information in order to better capture the complexity of the real world. For example, how influential are messages from international election observers when voters are also

[1] On statistical approaches to establishing causal effects of moderators, see Kirk Bansak, "Estimating Causal Moderation Effects with Randomized Treatments and Non-Randomized Moderators," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Series A: Statistics in Society* 184:1 (2021): 65-86.

hearing about the election from domestic elites, the media, political parties, and their own social networks? Donno also supports further investigating temporal dynamics.

Second, all three reviewers argue that the scope of future research should be expanded to include a broader set of countries and/or regime types. Daxecker posits that by focusing heavily on the U.S. and Georgia, two countries with stable levels of democracy, "the evidence…more strongly reflects the effect of foreign actors in cases where most voters' preferences are difficult to move. If correct, this would imply that other contexts would find stronger effects of monitors." Donno and von Borzyskowski also recommend looking not only at democratic countries but also electoral authoritarian regimes where electoral dynamics may differ. As Donno writes:

> Questions about how these findings would travel to autocratic contexts are not explicitly studied and would constitute fascinating ground for future research, as the authors discuss in their concluding chapter. Expanding the scope to electoral authoritarian regimes would allow for other electoral dimensions to be theorized as potential moderating factors, such as variation in how competitive the electoral playing field is, and what this means for the marginal impact of EO judgments (as well as election meddling) for citizen perceptions about the legitimacy of election outcomes.

Finally, Donno highlights the need for future work to dive into questions that could be seen as upstream of the book's findings. One of the book's most fascinating conclusions is that respondents sometimes perceive regional monitoring organizations as highly credible, even when the broader international community is more skeptical of those organizations, and that they sometimes see regional groups as more credible than domestic ones. What explains Tunisian voters' confidence in the conclusions of the Arab League, for example? More broadly, what shapes citizens' perceptions of the neutrality and capability of election monitors, both domestic and international? In their response, Bush and Prather concur that this is an exciting and plausible avenue for future work.

Contributors:

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Ursula Daxecker is Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam where she is a member of the research group Political Economy and Transnational Governance. She is interested in threats to democracy emerging from hostile rhetoric, political violence, and organized crime. Her work aims to understand the processes contributing to the persistence of violence in spite of—or perhaps because of—the adoption of democratic processes. From 2020–2025, she is principal investigator of the project Elections, Violence, and Parties funded by the European Research Council. Her research has previously been funded by the Dutch Science Foundation (NWO), the European Commission's Marie Curie Actions, and the U.S. Department of Defense Minerva Research Initiative. Her work is published in *Oxford University Press*, *Journal of Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Electoral Studies*, among others.

Daniela Donno is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Oklahoma. She researches international norms, electoral integrity, authoritarian politics and women's rights.

Inken von Borzyskowski is Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford in the UK. Her research is on international organizations, international election aid, and election violence. Her first book, *The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence*, was published by Cornell University Press in 2019. Her second book, *Exit from International Organizations*, is under contract with Cambridge University Press. Her articles have been published in the *British Journal of Political Science*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Review of International Organizations*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *and other outlets.*

Review by Ursula Daxecker, University of Amsterdam

Monitors and Meddlers is an important, ambitious, and timely book. Large amounts of money have been spent by international actors involved in elections abroad, and almost all elections in the world today are monitored—or worse, meddled with—in some shape or form. But as Sarah Bush and Lauren Prather ask, does the presence of foreign actors actually influence how citizens in those countries perceive elections? Policymakers and academics often take these effects for granted. But the underlying causal processes are rarely theorized, and even less often empirically assessed. This ambitious book tackles these questions, developing a novel "theory of the citizen" that connects citizens' perceptions with the actions of foreign monitors and meddlers. Moreover, the book arrives at an important time. Democracy and trust in elections seem at an all-time low today. Bush and Prather study the countries and elections that scholars have been especially concerned about, including the 2020 elections in the United States, which is now infamous for President Donald Trump's "big lie."

The book integrates insights from comparative politics, International Relations (IR), and American politics to challenge the conventional wisdom on foreign interference in elections. Policymakers and academics largely assume that foreign actors directly influence voters' assessments of elections, but neither group outlines the underlying processes nor establishes them empirically. Bush and Prather explore the effects of two foreign actors, monitors (i.e., international organizations providing election monitoring or electoral assistance) and meddlers (i.e. foreign actors who deliberately undermine the fairness of another country's elections). Based on a wealth of evidence from the United States, Tunisia, and Georgia, the book shows that the mere presence of foreign actors has little to no impact on citizens' perceptions of elections. For monitors, the book establishes that their presence has no effect on perceptions, nor do positive assessments improve citizens' confidence in elections. And while negative verdicts from capable monitors lower voters' evaluation of credibility somewhat, as do the efforts of election meddlers, these effects are mixed and modest in size.

The lack of support for the conventional wisdom, however, does not mean that monitors and meddlers are irrelevant for citizen evaluations of elections. Rather, Bush and Prather argue that what foreign actors say and do *interacts* with how citizens perceive these actors and their prior beliefs about elections. The book's integration of micro-level insights from political psychology with macro-level aspects from International Relations is an important innovation. The resulting "theory of the citizen" proposes two linkages between citizen perceptions and international actors. First, foreign actors' influence depends on how uncertain citizens are about the conduct of elections (61-63). Those who voted for winning candidates differ from

those who voted for election losers in the malleability of their beliefs. Winners are set in their views and never update, while losers are more open to shifting their perceptions, albeit only in a downward direction.[1]

This is an important corrective to the conventional wisdom and complements other work that has pointed to the complex relationship between voters' objective and subjective assessments of election quality. For example, Elizabeth Wellman, Susan Hyde, and Thad Hall found that voters' direct experience with fraud matters remarkably little for their perceptions of electoral credibility.[2] Focusing on variation in subjective vs. objective fraud, Daxecker, Di Salvatore, and Ruggeri established that citizens' subjective perceptions are much more important for how they react to elections than fraud reported by international monitors.[3] Second, voters' response to foreign actors depends on how those same voters perceive them (56-58). The book argues that having monitors who are perceived as capable and neutral improve voters' perception of election quality, while those who are seen as biased (which per definition includes meddlers) have no or negative effects on citizens' assessments of elections. While seemingly intuitive, prior work has not explored how citizens perceive different foreign actors, making this perspective a welcome addition to research that has explored aggregate variation in monitor characteristics.[4]

Monitors and Meddlers makes important empirical contributions. The book examines voter perceptions across five elections in the United States, Tunisia, and Georgia, three countries that are substantively important, in detail. Case selection follows a "most different systems" design logic (82-94): that is, the book shows that despite important differences between these cases across important variables, such as level of democracy and length of democratic experience, citizens respond to variation in intervener identity and vote choice in broadly similar ways. Moreover, the book relies on original surveys in which the same citizens were queried about their perceptions immediately before and after elections (81), allowing the authors to explore within-respondent changes in response to what happened in elections. In addition, Bush and Prather should be commended on the exceptionally clear presentation of empirical results. The book

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[1] While focused on election losers at a more aggregate level, other work has similarly emphasized the crucial role of election losers for citizen coordination. See Inken von Borzyskowski, "The Risks of Election Observation: International Condemnation and Post-Election Violence," *International Studies Quarterly* 63:3 (2019): 654-667.
[2] Elizabeth Iams Wellman, Susan D. Hyde, and Thad E. Hall, "Does Fraud Trump Partisanship? The Impact of Contentious Elections on Voter Confidence," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 28:3 (2018): 330-348.
[3] Ursula Daxecker, Jessica Di Salvatore, and Andrea Ruggeri, "Fraud is What People Make of It: Election Fraud, Perceived Fraud, and Protesting in Nigeria," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63:9 (2019): 2098-2127.
[4] Prior work has shown that the presence of multiple observers makes it possible for domestic elites to manipulate international monitors' assessments. For work on the causes and consequences of multiple monitors, see: Daxecker, Ursula and Gerald Schneider, "Electoral Observers: The Implications of Multiple Monitors for Electoral Integrity," in Pippa Norris, Richard W. Frank, and Ferran Martinez I Coma, eds., *Advancing Electoral Integrity* (Oxford University Press, 2014): 73-94. Similarly, Kelly Morrison, Daniela Donno, Burcu Savun, and Perisa Davutoglu show that competing verdicts reduce the risk of post-election contention. See Kelly Morrison, Daniela Donno, Burcu Savun, and Perisa Davutoglu, "Competing Judgments: Multiple Election Observers and Post-Election Contention," *The Review of International Organizations* (2024): 1-29.

relies on advanced quantitative methods and survey experiments, but describes these designs in straightforward ways, and presents results in visually appealing and simple ways.

These are important strengths. A few aspects would merit further attention. Some questions arise from the bracketing out of more aggregate domestic actors. While it is correct that arguments on foreign actors tend to assume at least partial effects via citizens, it does not necessarily follow that foreign actors directly affect citizen preferences. Domestic elites, in particular opposition parties, can be crucial intermediate actors. The fact that few citizens are aware of the existence and role of international monitors in the United States would seem consistent with this relationship (108).[5] It is thus likely that whether and how incumbents and opposition parties respond to critical verdicts from international monitors matters, which could trigger a response from citizens.[6]

Especially in transitional or partial democracies, opposition parties have strong incentives to pay attention to the quality of elections, and their reactions may shape voters' perceptions much more strongly than foreign actors can. In particular, opposition parties could seek the international attention and support of international observers in an effort to draw attention to their voters' grievances.[7] These insights imply a more complex causal chain, and omitting domestic elites creates the possibility that the book overestimates the influence of foreign actors. It is also possible that international actors try to anticipate responses from domestic elites and adjust their verdicts if destabilizing forces do well in elections.[8] Aside from partisanship at elite levels, the emphasis on vote choice means that the book could not explore voters' partisanship independently of winner-loser effects. It is plausible, for example, that voters' perceptions might be more uncertain if an incumbent loses, leading to greater shifts in perceptions.

The unified theoretical framework for monitors and meddlers is not entirely persuasive. Meddlers remained fairly opaque as actors. This is not surprising given that they want to keep their election interference secret, but it meant that the book's discussion of meddlers does not match the rich descriptive data it presents on monitors. The evidence also remains less supportive; for example, vote choice played no role for the effect of meddlers, and since their aim is always to undermine elections, there is little variation in type. Moreover, one wonders whether zombie monitors could fit the meddlers' category.

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[5] On the limited awareness of monitoring among citizens see also: Robert Macdonald and Thomas Molony. "Local Perceptions of Election Observation." Working paper. (2024).

[6] Ursula E. Daxecker, "The Cost of Exposing Cheating: International Election Monitoring, Fraud, and Post-Election Violence in Africa," *Journal of Peace Research* 49:4 (2012): 503-516.

[7] Hannah Smidt, "From a Perpetrator's Perspective: International Election Observers and Post-Electoral Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 53:2 (2016): 226-241.

[8] Kerim Kavakli and Patrick Kuhn show that observers tolerate fraud against Islamic challengers more often. Kerim Can Kavakli and Patrick M. Kuhn, "Dangerous Contenders: Election Monitors, Islamic Opposition Parties, and Terrorism," *International Organization* 74:1 (2020): 145-164.

Like any good book, *Monitors and Meddlers* raises lots of avenues for future research. One is the extension to additional cases with unstable voter preferences. The book covers two countries with stable levels of democracy, Georgia and the United States. The evidence thus more strongly reflects the effect of foreign actors in cases where most voters' preferences are difficult to move. If correct, this would imply that other contexts would find stronger effects of monitors. Second, the book finds that voters are sometimes more responsive to culturally similar monitors despite objectively lower capacity. The micro-level mechanisms behind this surprising finding merit further theorization; such as integrating work on motivated reasoning with social identity theory. Third, an alternative explanation proposed by the book—the effect of nationalism—could be integrated with the book's theoretical approach. Rather than a constant, nationalism could interact with foreign actors' roles in interesting ways. Domestic elites may, for example, portray foreign actors as enemies or friends, thereby manipulating the views of citizens. Finally, future work could triangulate the findings from surveys and descriptive data presented in the book. It would be interesting to see how citizens themselves describe their experiences with foreign actors, which would shed further light on the causal mechanisms put forward in this exciting new book.

Review by Daniela Donno, University of Oklahoma

Election observation (EO) is perhaps the most prominent tool of international democracy promotion, and analysts have devoted quite a bit of energy to understanding whether, and how, it works. Underlying many claims about EO effectiveness is the idea that it influences how citizens think about their elections. The notion that election observation bolsters political legitimacy in new or unstable democracies, for example, holds citizen beliefs at the very heart of the matter.[1] Yet, this mechanism has received curiously little systematic attention.[2] In this impressive study, Sarah Bush and Lauren Prather seek to fill this gap. In the process, they dispel any simplistic or overly-optimistic notions about how domestic audiences respond to international election observation.

Adding to its relevance to contemporary global events, the book also tackles the phenomenon of election meddling. This allows the authors to draw intriguing comparisons between monitoring, which is a nonpartisan process-based intervention, with meddling, which entails actions with distinctly partisan goals. The forms of meddling that Bush and Prather study include misinformation campaigns and foreign hacking of voting machines.

The empirical core of the book is a series of survey experiments that were conducted over ten election cycles in Tunisia (the 2014 parliamentary and presidential contests), the United States (the 2016, 2018, and 2020 general elections), and Georgia (the 2018 first- and second-round presidential contests). In sequential chapters, Bush and Prather examine, first, the average effect of monitors' presence (chapter 4) and of election meddling (chapter 5). In both cases, they find modest effects. Subsequent chapters reveal a more complicated picture, whereby the influence of monitors and meddlers depends on their identity (chapter 6), as well as on the respondents' partisan orientation (chapter 7).

While we might suppose—and hope—that monitoring would be perceived more favorably by domestic audiences than meddling, Bush and Prather find little evidence of such a general tendency. Across all three countries that they study, average support for election observation is low, just as evidence of an overall backlash against foreign meddling is weak.

Rather, the most consistent theme of the work is that individual-level responses to international monitoring and meddling are strongly shaped by partisanship. We see this, for example, in Chapter 6, where US respondents' concerns about meddling vary according to whether they supported the winning or losing side in the election; and in chapter 7, which presents evidence of a large winner-loser gap in the effect of monitors in all three countries. Notably, Bush and Prather find that it is mainly supporters of the losing side in an election who update their beliefs in response to EO judgments, and that, interestingly, they seem

[1] Judith Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy: When Election Monitoring Works, and Why it Often Fails* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

[2] In their literature review, Bush and Prather identify four prior studies that examine how international monitoring and meddling shape individual-level attitudes (36-37).

to update mainly in a negative direction, whereby EO criticism leads to even lower trust in the election. This directional finding is important. It goes against the idea that the primary role of election monitors is a positive one, that is, to provide reassurance and bolster confidence in the electoral process. Bush and Prather do find (chapter 6) that the presence of election monitors who are perceived as capable and unbiased serves to moderately bolster trust in elections. But overall, the thrust of the directional findings supports the assertions of a different strand in the literature on election monitors: namely, that their criticism serves to mobilize anti-regime sentiment.[3]

A commendable aspect of this study is that it covers widely varying empirical terrain: two elections in Tunisia, three in the United States, and one in Georgia. This was a bold choice, and one that pays off in terms of probing the generalizability of the theory and the findings. It is also refreshing to see a study that places the US in a comparative perspective; more work like this is needed, given that election integrity in the US is becoming increasingly politicized.[4] Although the surveys are not exactly identical across countries, many of the findings reveal similar tendencies, thus suggesting generalizable conclusions, at least for reasonably democratic contexts like those studied here. Questions about how these findings would travel to autocratic contexts are not explicitly studied and would constitute fascinating ground for future research, as the authors discuss in their concluding chapter. Expanding the scope to electoral authoritarian regimes would allow for other electoral dimensions to be theorized as potential moderating factors, such as variation in how competitive the electoral playing field is, and what this means for the marginal impact of EO judgments (as well as election meddling) for citizen perceptions about the legitimacy of election outcomes.

Monitors and Meddlers provides a solid base for future research to consider additional extensions and unanswered questions. Here, I highlight four issues which stand out. First, the dependent variables in Bush and Prather's analyses are somewhat limited because they both relate to citizen perceptions about the electoral outcome: (i) trust in the election result and (ii) whether the respondent perceives the election winner to be legitimate. Yet, another important dimension of public opinion in this area is trust in the electoral process. In contests marked by large margins of victory (as in many electoral authoritarian regimes), it is possible for individuals to believe that the result was accurate but that the process was nevertheless flawed; in other words, that the playing field was manipulated but that it was not consequential enough to affect the outcome. This potential process-outcome disjuncture points to

[3] Susan D. Hyde, and Nikolay Marinov, "Information and Self-Enforcing Democracy: The Role of International Election Observation," *International Organization* 68:2 (2014): 329-359; Kelly Morrison, Daniela Donno, Burcu Savun and Perisa Davutoglu, "Competing Judgments: Multiple Election Observers and Post-Election Contention," *The Review of International Organizations* (2024): 1-29; https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-023-09528-x; Ursula Daxecker, "The Cost of Exposing Cheating: International Election Monitoring, Fraud, and Post-Election Violence in Africa," *Journal of Peace Research* 49:4 (2012): 503-516; Inken Von Borzyskowski, "The Risks of Election Observation: International Condemnation and Post-Election Violence," *International Studies Quarterly* 63:3 (2019): 654-667.

[4] Pippa Norris, Sarah Cameron, and Thomas Wynter, eds. *Electoral Integrity in America: Securing Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

important questions about whether, and when, EOs may influence one dimension of citizen beliefs more than another.

Second, there seems to be fertile ground for future studies to do more to exploit panel survey designs, by examining changes in citizen attitudes over the pre- versus post-election periods. This is an under-developed aspect of Bush and Prather's analysis. In chapter 7, they present intriguing descriptive evidence of changes in the size of the winner-loser gap pre-election versus post-election (219). But temporal dynamics are not otherwise featured in the analysis of their experimental results.

Third, the results of the Tunisia experiments in particular yield interesting findings about the perceived credibility of different groups, where monitors from the Arab League were found by respondents to be more credible than domestic monitors, US-based monitors, and monitors from the European Union. The lack of confidence in US and European monitors may plausibly be explained by anti-Western sentiment, but the relative lack of public confidence in domestic monitors—which presumably operate in larger numbers and have greater familiarity with the political context— is more puzzling. The question of relative confidence in domestic versus international election monitors is worthy of future study via a research design that is expressly intended for this purpose.

Finally, a key finding in chapter 6 is that citizens' perceptions of the capability and biasedness of election monitors and meddlers matters. This begs the prior question, however, as to what determines these perceptions in the first place? How do people form beliefs about the capability and neutrality of different international actors, whether monitors or meddlers? Bush and Prather take a step in this direction by considering variation in the nationality of different EOs, but many factors remain to be examined. For election observers, for example, it would be valuable to understand more about whether attributes like mission size, a prior track record of critical reports, and the repertoire of activities (e.g., media monitoring, parallel vote tabulations) matter for citizen evaluations.

In sum, *Monitors and Meddlers* is an ambitious and meticulous study that lays the foundation for an expansive research agenda for future scholars to take up. It is essential reading for those who are interested in how citizens respond to international involvement in electoral processes.

Review by Inken von Borzyskowski, University of Oxford

In *Monitors and Meddlers*, Sarah Bush and Lauren Prather ask how international election interventions shape citizens' perceptions of election quality. Specifically, they examine the effect of international election observation and foreign meddling on trust in elections, using innovative survey experiments in Tunisia in 2014, Georgia in 2018, and the US in 2016, 2018, and 2020.

This fascinating book builds on studies of international election interventions which started when these interventions became more common and flourished in the 2000s with Susan Hyde's trailblazing research on election observation.[1] Hyde explains why observation has become the norm and what effects observation has on elections and democracy. Many studies followed, initially focusing on election observation[2] but then expanding to meddling,[3] international technical assistance,[4] and diplomacy,[5] and showing what such interventions mean for the domestic politics in recipient countries. Situated at the nexus of international relations and comparative politics, and thanks to being substantively important and highly policy-relevant,

[1] Susan Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm*, (Cornell University Press, 2011); Hyde, "The Observer Effect in International Politics: Evidence from a Natural Experiment," *World Politics* 60:1 (2007): 37-63; Hyde, "Experimenting with Democracy Promotion: International Observers and the 2004 Presidential Elections in Indonesia," *Perspectives on Politics* 8:2 (2010): 511-527.
[2] Judith Kelley, "Election Observers and Their Biases," *Journal of Democracy* 21 (2010): 158-172; Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy: When International Election Observation Works and Why it Often Fails* (Princeton University Press, 2012); Daniela Donno, *Defending Democratic Norms: International Actors and the Politics of Electoral Misconduct* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Inken von Borzyskowski, *The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence* (Cornell University Press, 2019); von Borzyskowski, "The Risks of Election Observation: International Condemnation and Post-Election Violence," *International Studies Quarterly* 63:3 (2019): 654-667.
[3] Stephen Shulman and Stephen Bloom, "The Legitimacy of Foreign Intervention in Elections: The Ukrainian Response," *Review of International Studies* 38:2 (2012): 445-471; Daniel Corstange and Nikolay Marinov, "Taking Sides in Other People's Elections: The Polarizing Effect of Foreign Intervention," *American Journal of Political Science* 56:3 (2012): 655-670; Dov Levin, "When the Great Power Gets a Vote: The Effects of Great Power Electoral Interventions on Election Results," *International Studies Quarterly* 60:2 (2016): 189-202; Johannes Bubeck and Nikolay Marinov, *Rules and Allies: Foreign Election Interventions* (Cambridge University Press, 2019); Dov Levin, *Meddling in the Ballot Box: The Causes and Effects of Partisan Electoral Interventions* (Oxford University Press, 2020); Michael Tomz and Jessica Weeks, "Public Opinion and Foreign Electoral Intervention," *American Political Science Review* 114:3 (2020): 865-873.
[4] Robin Ludwig, "Processes of Democratization: The New Role of the United Nations in Electoral Assistance," *Ecumenical Review* 47:3 (1995): 339-343; Ludwig, "The UN's Electoral Assistance: Challenges, Accomplishments, and Prospects," in *The UN Role in Promoting Democracy: Between Ideals and Reality*, edited by Edward Newman and Roland Rich, 169-187 (United Nations University Press, 2004); Anna Lührmann, "United Nations Electoral Assistance: More than a Fig Leaf?," *International Political Science Review* 40:2 (2019): 181-196; von Borzyskowski, "Resisting Democracy Assistance: Who Seeks and Receives Technical Election Assistance?," *Review of International Organizations* 11:2 (2016): 247-282; von Borzyskowski, *The Credibility Challenge*; Sarah Birch and David Muchlinski, "Electoral Violence Prevention: What Works?" *Democratization* 25:3 (2018): 385-403.
[5] Bhojraj Pokharel, *Preventing Election Violence through Diplomacy* (United States Institute of Peace, 2020); Jonas Claes, *Electing Peace: Violence Prevention and Impact at the Polls* (United States Institute of Peace, 2017).

this research field has benefitted greatly from the expertise of many excellent scholars. Methodologically, this field also underwent expansion, with initial qualitative studies of single cases, followed by pathbreaking field experiments, along with large-N quantitative studies (powered by new datasets[6] on interventions), and a turn to survey experiments in recent years. Within the last two decades, this field has blossomed in substance and methods and contributed a great deal to our knowledge of international influences on elections.

By advancing our understanding of citizen attitudes, *Monitors and Meddlers* nicely complements previous work on international election interventions. Previous studies have theorized how international intervention affects citizen attitudes and behavioral outcomes (such as turnout and post-election protest/violence). In the case of international election observation, many studies have empirically documented the behavioral implications in line with theory, but few studies[7] have directly tested the underlying attitudinal mechanisms. This is where *Monitors and Meddlers* makes its first contribution: the book helps fill an empirical gap in our knowledge of how and when (information about) election observation changes people's perceptions of election credibility. This is important: at their core, elections are about how voters perceive both the candidates/parties and the environment in which they are going to the polls, so students of democracy should care deeply about these issues.

The book's second contribution is testing how foreign election meddling shapes election credibility. Research on foreign election meddling has used observational data[8] and survey experiments[9] about citizen attitudes in individual countries along with cross-national analyses.[10] These studies have examined the effect of foreign meddling on citizen approval of the intervention/intervener and on macro-outcomes (election results, regime type) but only one published study[11] at the time traced the effects on perceived election credibility, showing that meddling reduces trust in election results and democracy. More research here is important: while meddling has received less scholarly attention than election observation,

[6] Hyde and Nikolay Marinov, "Which Elections Can Be Lost?" *Political Analysis* 20:2 (2012): 191-210. Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy*; Donno, *Defending Democratic Norms;* Bubeck and Marinov, *Rules and Allies*; von Borzyskowski, *The Credibility Challenge*; Dov Levin, "Partisan Electoral Interventions by the Great Powers: Introducing the PEIG Dataset," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 36:1 (2019): 88-106; Diego Martin, Jacob Shapiro, and Michelle Nedashkovskaya, "Recent Trends in Online Foreign Influence Efforts," *Journal of Information Warfare* 18:3 (2019): 15-48.
[7] Dawn Brancati, "Building Confidence in Elections: The Case of Electoral Monitors in Kosova," *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 1:1 (2014): 6-15; Lindsay Benstead, Kristen Kao, and Ellen Lust, "Does It Matter What Observers Say? The Impact of International Election Monitoring on Legitimacy," *Mediterranean Politics* 27:1 (2022): 57-78.
[8] Shulman and Bloom, "The Legitimacy of Foreign Intervention in Elections."
[9] Corstange and Marinov, "Taking Sides in Other People's Elections;" Tomz and Weeks, "Public Opinion and Foreign Electoral Intervention."
[10]Levin, "When the Great Power Gets a Vote;" Levin, "A Vote for Freedom? The Effects of Partisan Electoral Interventions on Regime Type," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63:4 (2019): 839-868; Bubeck and Marinov, *Rules and Allies*; Levin, *Meddling in the Ballot Box*.
[11] Tomz and Weeks, "Public Opinion and Foreign Electoral Intervention."

technological advances have made interference attempts increasingly common. For both forms of international election intervention, Bush and Prather contribute novel survey experiments on additional countries, improving and nuancing our understanding of intervention effects on citizen perceptions. The countries chosen vary in their levels of democracy at the time (US-Tunisia-Georgia), which is intended to test the contextual limits of election interventions. As despots continue to manipulate elections and backsliding erodes liberal democracies, research in less democratic contexts is crucial in helping us better understand the limitations of election interventions.

The book's theory elegantly synthesizes insights and expectations from previous studies in international relations, comparative politics, and political psychology (including rational updating and motivated reasoning). Bush and Prather summarize the conventional wisdom that observer presence should increase election credibility while negative observer reports and meddling should reduce credibility. The authors also argue that these effects may be mitigated by intervener capability, respondent partisanship, and election uncertainty.

Specifically, previous studies noted that the *presence* of high-quality observers reduces fraud[12] and improves election quality,[13] which should increase election credibility. The work by Susan Hyde and other subsequent studies have made the important distinction between high-quality, credible, or Western groups on the one hand and low-quality or zombie observation groups on the other hand.[14] At times, the book is a little opaque in discussing the fact that many studies of observer effects have focused on high-quality observers.[15] To some, this might make the alleged "conventional wisdom" about *any* observer group seem simplistic. Nonetheless, Bush and Prather further add to our knowledge of observer effects by assessing which observer groups can increase election credibility among citizens in several contexts. They find null results when pooling high- and low-quality observers (124) in three survey experiments. When focusing on high-quality observers, they find that information about observation increases election credibility, an effect that is

[12] Susan Hyde, "The Observer Effect."

[13] Susan Hyde, "Experimenting with Democracy Promotion."

[14] Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma*; Judith Kelley, "The More the Merrier? The Effects of Having Multiple International Election Monitoring Organizations," *Perspectives on Politics* 7:1 (2008): 59-64; Kelley, "D-Minus Elections: The Politics and Norms of International Election Observation," *International Organization* 63:4 (2009): 765–87; Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy*, 75; Ursula Daxecker and Gerald Schneider, "Electoral Observers: The Implications of Multiple Monitors for Electoral Integrity," in *Advancing Electoral Integrity*, edited by Pippa Norris, Frank Richard, and Ferran Martinez I Coma (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 73-94; Lee Morgenbesser, "The Menu of Autocratic Innovation," *Democratization* 27:6 (2020): 1053-72.

[15] Hyde, "The Observer Effect," Hyde, "Experimenting with Democracy Promotion," Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma*; Ursula Daxecker, "The Cost of Exposing Cheating: International Election Monitoring, Fraud, and Post-Election Violence in Africa," *Journal of Peace Research* 49:4 (2012): 503-16; Emily Beaulieu, *Electoral Protest and Democracy in the Developing World* (Cambridge University Press, 2014): 146; Susan Hyde and Nikolay Marinov, "Information and Self-Enforcing Democracy: The Role of International Election Observation," *International Organization* 68:2 (2014): 329-359; von Borzyskowski, *The Credibility Challenge*; von Borzyskowski, "The Risks of Election Observation: International Condemnation and Post-Election Violence." *International Studies Quarterly* 63:3 (2019): 654-667.

weakly significant in the US 2020 (120 fn. 69, p<0.10 per appendix, 27) and strongly significant in the US 2016 and Tunisia 2014 (189). The latter comes with an interesting and surprising twist: Tunisians perceived the Arab League, not the EU or US-based organizations, which researchers would classify as higher quality, as more capable. This is a fascinating finding and supports one of the key points in the book: that the identity of the intervener matters. It would be interesting to know whether the Arab League stood out because of perceived capability (as correlations suggest), because of homophily (given the Muslim country), because it has a local reputation, or because it was the closest regional organization. In the last case (Georgia 2018), high-quality observers did not affect trust, which the authors plausibly attribute to the high certainty surrounding the election process and result.

For observer reports, studies have noted that negative reports should lower election credibility (especially among election losers, which can facilitate post-election protests and violence).[16] Testing this expectation in five survey experiments, Bush and Prather find strong support in two cases and weak support in another two cases (in the predicted direction but short of statistical significance partly "due to the smaller sample size," 132). The fifth case is Georgia which again defies expectations, as effects do not reach significance and suggest a backlash effect among respondents (133).

Moving on to meddling and the most thought-provoking book chapter, the baseline from conventional wisdom is that information about meddling reduces election credibility. Testing this prediction in a wider array of cases and with various experimental treatments, Bush and Prather find mixed support: compared to giving people no information, "no meddling" information increased election credibility in the US in 2018 but not 2020, and "meddling" information reduced election credibility in Georgia in 2018, but priming respondents did not. In Georgia, Bush and Prather also tested for meddler identity in the sense of whether the meddled-for party won the election (i.e. whether the meddler may have been successful/capable). As expected, they document that information about successful meddling reduces election credibility (203).

This chapter (chapter 5) is intricate in the details and stunning in some of the results, as it becomes clear that respondents may interpret treatment texts in opposite ways than intended, forcing us to re-examine information, framing, and the context in which prompts are given. For example, the authors note that one treatment text for meddling (i.e. foreign governments seeking to influence election results) may have been unintentionally understood as "no meddling" (156). And even in a cleaner design, meddling vs no meddling did not seem to affect respondents' perceptions of election quality (161-162). Some of this may be due to timing, as the latter experiments were fielded in post-election surveys (US 2018 and 2020) when people may already have been exposed to information about potential meddling in the media, made up their minds about the result and election quality, and were thus harder to be swayed.

[16] Hyde and Marinov, "Information and Self-Enforcing Democracy;" von Borzyskowski, "The Risks of Election Observation."

Finally, Bush and Prather also argue and show that apart from characteristics of the intervener, the loser/winner status of respondents can condition effects on election credibility. This builds on a strong body of work in electoral studies/comparative politics on the partisan "winner-loser gap"[17] and its application in studies on international interference. Studies on observer reports have noted the role of losers in challenging election results and facilitating post-election protests and violence,[18] and meddling research has noted partisanship[19]—but studies have rarely[20] tested this with data on mass attitudes. Of course, survey experiments come to their limits here as we cannot randomly assign partisanship to individual respondents. But short of that, survey experiments can randomly provide information on which party/candidate won an election and test for heterogeneity in responses.

For partisanship and observation reports, Bush and Prather find that negative reports reduced election credibility among election losers in Tunisia 2014, US 2016 and 2020 (compared to no information, 225-227). Winners could not be swayed. As before, Georgians responded in un-anticipated ways, as positive reports reduced their trust in the election, which the authors attribute to a potential backfire effect (228).

For partisanship and meddling, the authors find no significant differential effects by partisanship in the three contexts. In the US 2018 and 2020, neither winners nor losers were affected by meddling information (231). In the hypothetical vignette in Georgia 2018, both partisan groups were affected (234-235). Digging deeper, Bush and Prather show that some of the effect was more pronounced among partisans who were assigned to the winning party in Georgia. This is intriguing as it is the opposite of observer report effects (where winners are unaffected but losers impacted). It would be interesting to see whether this generalizes to other contexts, and is thus a clear contrast to observation—or whether it is another way in which the particularities of the Georgia context led to weaker and unexpected results.

As should be clear by now, years of work have gone into this book. Fielding five surveys in three country contexts is no small feat. Designing and running original surveys and survey experiments requires heavy lifting and careful thinking, in addition to the expense and time. This is a major accomplishment. As with many multi-year, multi-stage projects, learning happens along the way. I appreciated the moments of reflection on survey results and what they mean for adapting and improving subsequent survey designs. The book provides a narrative of the research process that takes readers along and explains the tradeoffs of the next design. Of course, this comes at the cost of comparability (such as in Metaketa initiatives[21]), as we do

[17] This is a large literature. See, e.g., Christopher Anderson, Andre Blais, Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan, and Ola Listhaug, *Losers' Consent: Elections and Democratic Legitimacy* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
[18] See footnote 16.
[19] Corstange and Marinov, "Taking Sides in Other People's Elections;" Bubeck and Marinov, *Rules and Allies*. Tomz and Weeks, "Public Opinion and Foreign Electoral Intervention."
[20] Tomz and Weeks, "Public Opinion and Foreign Electoral Intervention."
[21] "Our Work," Metaketa Initiative, https://egap.org/our-work/the-metaketa-initiative/.

not know whether the identical treatments may have also worked (or not) across all contexts. But it provides a treasure trove of potential design ideas for future studies to further explore and adapt.

Moreover, several of the surveys are panel studies—interviewing identical respondents before and after the election—which is an excellent feature that provides an interesting data source for future studies and an aspect that may have deserved more exploration in the book itself. The authors deserve praise for assembling these pieces of evidence and presenting them in a user-friendly fashion.

While the book is well structured and easy to follow, some aspects could have been more coherent. The hypotheses are summarized in a handy table (67) but it is not always clear what exactly the expectation is. For example, more specific statements than vote choice "shapes perceptions" or "accentuates or diminishes effects of foreign actors" could have added clarity here; the latter proposition seems to encapsulate at least four distinct predictions (based on the careful discussion on 62) but they are not each discussed later in each of the empirical testing sections. For the observer reports too, it is not always clear whether we should compare the effects of information about negative reports to positive reports or the control of no information, and where exactly differences are expected (which comparisons of reports, and across which partisan groups). Here, pre-registrations would have increased clarity. There are also a couple of gaps that readers may have liked to be filled. In line with the book's focus on conditioning effects, it may have been useful to examine (1) how the impact of negative *reports* differs among observer groups (intervener identity);[22] and (2) how the impact of observer *presence* differs by respondent partisanship: does the respondents' partisanship condition whether observer presence is seen as beneficial, detrimental, or harmless for election quality?

The book opens up many avenues for future work. Methodologically, it is useful to reflect on the advantages and limitations of survey experiments. While they allow us to cleanly estimate a causal effect of information on attitudes, we all know that reality is often more complex as citizens are exposed to various information sources: multiple international observer groups, domestic observation groups, the media, political parties, friends, and neighbors. How do citizens weigh these different inputs? Do the effects of international intervention remain once we account for competing inputs and local context, perhaps in a conjoint design or other setting? More broadly, how can we best design survey questions that allow causal effect estimates (internal validity) while closely resembling real-world experiences (external validity)?

Substantively, future studies could invest in understanding meddling and other forms of international election interventions that have received less scholarly attention. For meddling, there are now different typologies and some of these are seemingly at odds with each other. For example, Nikolay Marinov and co-authors distinguish anti/pro-process and anti/pro-candidate interventions, whereas Bush and Prather seem to conceptualize meddling as primarily candidate interventions (17) and usually negative (making the

[22] Daniela Donno, Kelly Morrison, Burcu Savun, and Perisa Davutoglu, "Competing Judgments: Multiple Election Observers and Post-Election Contention," *Review of International Organizations* (2024); Daxecker and Schneider, "Electoral Observers."

playing field less fair; lower right box of Table 1.1, 8). However, pro-incumbent meddling may be invited by the government (thus also populating the left column of Table 1.1). And pro-opposition intervention in an electoral authoritarian context may make the playing field fairer (thus populating the upper row of Table 1.1). The variety of ways in which meddling manifests and how it impacts people's attitudes—depending on the salience, effectiveness, and partisanship of meddlers—continues to be a fruitful avenue for future work and is unfortunately topical in an age of mis- and disinformation. Overall, the book is a thought-provoking read for scholars of political communication, foreign affairs, international intervention, and elections.

Response by Sarah Sunn Bush, University of Pennsylvania, and Lauren Prather, University of California, San Diego

We are grateful to Ursula Daxecker, Daniela Donno, and Inken von Borzyskowski for engaging so carefully with *Monitors and Meddlers*. Their excellent work on the international dimensions of elections has influenced our research[1], and we appreciate the chance to respond to their reviews. We also thank Jessica Weeks for writing the introduction to this roundtable and Jeff Colgan and the H-Diplo|RJISSF team for organizing it.

Monitors and Meddlers seeks to understand how foreign actors shape local trust in elections. Foreign influences on elections are common. They range from the seemingly good (as when teams of high-quality election observers report on whether elections meet international standards) to the certainly bad (as when foreign countries disseminate disinformation in order to swing an election in their preferred direction). In many cases, including the examples just described, foreign actors *intend* to influence how ordinary citizens think about the credibility of their elections. That foreign actors *do* affect citizens' thinking is an important assumption in much of the recent literature on external influences on democracy.[2] Yet foreign actors' effects may not be as straightforward as researchers have assumed.

In explaining why, as Daxecker puts it, we integrate "micro-level insights from political psychology with macro-level aspects from international relations" to build a "theory of the citizen" that details how foreign actors' effects depend on individuals' partisanship and their beliefs about foreign actors. We test our theory across three cases—Georgia, Tunisia, and the United States—that vary in their levels of democracy. The findings that emerge from the cases are sometimes surprising, as when Tunisians viewed observers from the Arab League relatively positively or when meddling only diminished the trust of people who perceived it as harming their party. We were heartened that the reviewers appreciated our analysis of a diverse set of cases, with Donno noting that the research design promotes the study's generalizability and further calling it "refreshing to see a study that places the US in comparative perspective." Additional types of cases might be studied in the future, especially countries where uncertainty about election integrity is high (as Daxecker

[1] Ursula E. Daxecker, "The Cost of Exposing Cheating: International Election Monitoring, Fraud, and Post-Election Violence in Africa," *Journal of Peace Research* 49:4 (2012): 503–516, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343312445649; Daniela Donno. *Defending Democratic Norms: International Actors and the Politics of Electoral Misconduct* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Inken von Borzyskowski, *The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence* (Cornell University Press, 2019).

[2] This assumption includes the literature on external influences on protests, election-related violence, and democratization. See for example: Ursula E. Daxecker, "The Cost of Exposing Cheating: International Election Monitoring, Fraud, and Post-Election Violence in Africa," *Journal of Peace Research* 49:4 (2012): 503-516, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343312445649; Susan D. Hyde and Nikolay Marinov, "Information and Self-Enforcing Democracy: The Role of International Election Observation," *International Organization* 68:2 (2014): 329-359, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818313000465; and Inken von Borzyskowski, *The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence* (Cornell University Press, 2019).

suggests) and consolidated autocracies, which we excluded from our study (though Donno sees merit in including these cases in future work).

The reviewers note that, prior to the publication of *Monitors and Meddlers*, multiple forms of external influence on countries' elections—monitors and meddlers—had not been studied using the same theoretical framework. One of our contributions is to show that there is a common logic to how foreign actors influence individual attitudes through our "theory of the citizen" (3). Perhaps with a nod to the pathbreaking work by Judith Kelley on this topic,[3] Daxecker also points out that monitors and meddlers are not so different after all if we consider the rise of so-called "zombie" election observers that seek to validate flawed elections in authoritarian settings.[4] *Monitors and Meddlers* helps explain why zombie observers might be useful to autocrats since their presence at and evaluations of elections have the potential to enhance domestic trust so long as the public views them as being both capable and unbiased.

The core of our research involved ten original surveys conducted between 2014 and 2020 in the three countries (76). We define credible elections as when "people trust the results and believe the outcome reflects the will of the people" (3), and in all of our surveys we asked questions about each of these two dimensions.[5] Donno suggests that this definition emphasizes outcomes over process and may not capture how some autocrats win elections in which "the playing field was manipulated but…not…enough to affect the outcome." Our intention was to capture the dynamic Donno highlights (i.e., when votes are tallied correctly but the electoral playing field is so skewed that an election cannot reflect the will of the people), as well as other ones (i.e., when some votes are miscounted in a way that is not meaningful in terms of the will of the people being realized). In practice, individuals' responses to our two questions are highly correlated (77-78), a finding which is consistent with other research on survey measures of perceptions of election integrity.[6]

Our surveys had at least 1,000 respondents in each country (80). The surveys in Georgia and Tunisia were conducted face-to-face in order to ensure representativeness. In the future, it may be more feasible there and elsewhere to conduct high-quality surveys entirely online, as has been the case in the United States for some time. Online surveys enable researchers to recruit respondents at a lower cost, which facilitates larger

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[3] Judith G. Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy: When International Election Observation Works and Why it Often Fails* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

[4] Sarah Sunn Bush, Christina Cottiero, and Lauren Prather, "Zombies Ahead: Explaining the Rise of Low-Quality Election Monitoring," *The Review of International Organizations* (2024), DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-024-09554-3; Kelley Morrison, Daniela Donno, Burcu Savun and Perisa Davutoglu, "Competing Judgments: Multiple Election Observers and Post-Election Contention," *The Review of International Organizations* (2024), DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-023-09528-x.

[5] This definition draws on Sarah Sunn Bush and Lauren Prather, "The Promise and Limits of Election Observers in Building Election Credibility," *The Journal of Politics* 79:3 (2017): 922, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/691055.

[6] Pippa Norris, "Does the World Agree about Standards of Electoral Integrity? Evidence for the Diffusion of Global Norms," *Electoral Studies* 32:4 (2013): 576–588.

sample sizes. That would make it feasible to test some of the dynamics highlighted by von Borzyskowski, such as additional conditional hypotheses about election monitors and hypotheses that vary the meddlers' traits.

Our surveys were also panel studies (i.e., we interviewed the same respondents multiple times). We used the panel data to explore how election results "triggered dramatic partisan changes in beliefs about election credibility" in Georgia and the US (219-221). We agree with Donno and von Borzyskowski that further consideration of temporal dynamics using panel data is a worthwhile future direction. In particular, future research could extend the panel further in time past the election (our second-wave surveys were conducted immediately after the elections we studied) to examine the durability of the influence of foreign actors on trust in elections.

More generally, we see two primary avenues for future research that would fill in some of the gaps identified by the reviewers. The first extension that the reviewers' essays inspire is work that incorporates domestic elites into the causal chain. *Monitors and Meddlers* discusses the role of domestic elites, including politicians and the media, in several places; however, these actors do not feature prominently in the book. The most extensive discussion comes in Chapter 2 (46-47). There, we highlight the potential role of domestic elites in strategically publicizing election monitoring and meddling. For example, election winners may wish to publicize the monitors' positive reports and downplay any criticisms, while election losers may have the opposite incentives. The same dynamics likely hold for election meddling, with the winners concealing meddling that may have helped them win, while election losers would have incentives to expose it.

Nevertheless, the book does not test how these dynamics work in practice. In Chapter 4, for example, we give information to respondents from election monitors' reports. An extension could test whether hearing this information from a co-partisan or out-partisan elite will increase or decrease the effects we identify and among whom. Practically speaking, it is particularly important to know whether candidates who lose elections could instill confidence in their followers by highlighting monitors' positive reports. The reviewers also note that domestic political actors are often a competing source of information about election integrity. Our model suggests that incumbents send a signal about their commitment to democracy by inviting election monitors or cooperating with election meddlers. Yet, there are other signals that incumbents can send about their commitments to democracy and the quality of elections. Our empirics do not compare the relative effects of politicians' statements about election credibility and international sources of information about elections nor the various signals that domestic actors can send about their commitment to democracy. Future work could adapt our research design to examine whether foreign actors have stronger or weaker effects on electoral trust compared to domestic political elites and under what conditions.

The second gap the reviewers point to concerns the origins of attitudes about foreign actors. We agree with the reviewers that this is a fruitful path in this line of research going forward. We theorize that the effects of international actors will be stronger if individuals perceive them to be capable of affecting election integrity. We suggest that individuals' beliefs about foreign actors might derive from their knowledge about

and personal experiences with foreign countries, as well as their partisan predispositions (59). Yet, we do not test these intuitions in *Monitors and Meddlers*. One intriguing approach would be to examine not just the traits of the organization or country in question, but the traits of the individual people who are monitors or meddlers.[7] For example, international monitoring teams sometimes include individuals who have similar cultural or linguistic backgrounds to the people in the country that is being monitored. Do these shared characteristics matter for the perceived capabilities and biases of election monitors, or do the traits of the organization matter more? As Daxecker points out, drawing on social identity theory to understand the traits that make organizations and individual monitors more influential may also be a fruitful path for future work.

Overall, we are excited by the prospect of continuing work in this space. We are grateful for the opportunity to engage with the thoughtful reviews and to discuss directions for future research inspired by the reviewers. This conversation illustrates the promising research agenda around international influences on elections that we hope to see blossom in the coming years.

[7] For research on the organizational traits that make monitors more legitimate, see Daniel L. Nielson, Susan D. Hyde, and Judith Kelley, "The Elusive Sources of Legitimacy Beliefs: Civil Society Views of International Election Observers." *The Review of International Organizations* 14:4 (2019): 685-715.