Comparing Democracies 4

Elections and Voting in a Changing World

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Authoritarian Elections and Regime Change

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Elections are the hallmark of democracy, but today the vast majority of authoritarian regimes hold elections too. Even among those few states that do not hold elections at the national level, some allow for electoral competition at the local level (e.g., village-level elections in China since the late 1980s, municipal elections in Saudi Arabia in 2005 and 2011).

There are a number of general explanations for why an authoritarian regime would hold elections. A popular argument is that elections are staged to generate legitimacy. But if elections are blatantly manipulated, it is unclear how they are supposed to engender democratic legitimacy. More sophisticated arguments emphasize the way in which elections help dictators manage their elite constituents or the population at large. Participation at the ballot box may serve as a safety valve for popular discontent and, in the extreme, may even stave off the threat of revolution (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Cox 2009). Elections may provide the mechanism through which incumbents can distribute material benefits to the wider population, and by guaranteeing the quiescence of the population through vote-buying and political business cycles, rulers signal their invincibility to potential challengers (Magaloni 2006; Simpser 2013). Dictators also might use elections to fairly distribute rent-seeking opportunities to the elite (Blaydes 2011; Lust-Okar 2006). Finally, incumbents may use elections to collect information. Electoral results may indicate areas of opposition and regime strength, determining which localities will be punished and rewarded, respectively (Brownlee 2009; Magaloni 2006). Subnational

elections also may provide information to central government officials about the performance and popularity of their local agents (Landry 2008).

Given all the reasons why elections may prove beneficial for authoritarian incumbents, perhaps it is not surprising that elections are so ubiquitous. But this assumes that dictators are able to win elections or, at least, control their outcomes. How do non-democratic rulers insure that elections serve their purposes? What types of strategy do they use to control the results of these contests? Do elections always perpetuate incumbent rule, or can opponents sometimes take advantage of these institutions to facilitate change?

The next section examines the different ways in which incumbents can manipulate the electoral arena. Given the wide array of techniques, most elections in authoritarian regimes result in the survival of incumbents. The third section, however, explores the variety of ways in which manipulative and repressive techniques can sometimes fail, enabling opponents of the regime to either win the election outright or mobilize supporters after the election to demand change. In these cases, incumbents either fall from power or are forced to improve the quality of elections. The chapter concludes with some thoughts on what we know about elections and regime change along with some questions that remain.

Strategies for Winning

Incumbents in authoritarian regimes have a variety of ways in which they can bend the rules of the electoral game – before, during, and after polling day itself. Before the election, incumbents may manipulate institutions, such as electoral rules, registration laws, and electoral management bodies. In addition, they may try to prevent the emergence of credible challengers by fomenting divisions among opposition candidates and parties and depriving opponents of media time. Authoritarian leaders may use state resources to buy voter support, and after the election, they may withhold those same resources from constituencies that support the opposition. Incumbents may use fraud throughout the electoral process, but much of it occurs on or just after polling day through stuffed ballot boxes and inflated vote counts. Finally, in possession of the state's repressive apparatus, dictators frequently use violence throughout the electoral period.

Institutional Manipulation

Incumbents may try to manipulate the rules and institutions that are associated with elections. Lust-Okar and Jamal (2002) argue that monarchs in Kuwait, Jordan, and Morocco have favored electoral rules that enable a wide range of political forces to achieve legislative representation so that they can position themselves as arbiters "above the fray" of normal politics. In contrast, leaders with dominant parties in Egypt and Algeria were more interested in laws that shifted seats to the majoritarian

party and the use of high electoral thresholds that would block the entry of small opposition parties. The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) similarly perpetuated its majority in the Mexican Chamber of Deputies by enacting electoral rules that disadvantaged smaller parties and awarded the largest party (i.e., itself) bonus seats.

Authoritarian governments frequently become creative in their attempts to manipulate the rules. Prior to Kenya's first multiparty elections in almost three decades, the incumbent president, Daniel Arap Moi, pushed through constitutional changes requiring presidential candidates to win not only a plurality of the nationwide vote, but also at least 25% of the vote in at least five of the country's eight provinces. As leader of the regime party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), Arap Moi was the only candidate who could count on such broad-based support among regional and ethnic groups.

Similarly, the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore sought to disadvantage opposition parties by designating more parliamentary districts as group representation constituencies in which all political parties are required to form inter-ethnic slates of as many as six candidates from the country's major communities (Case 2006). Like the measure in Kenya, Singapore's electoral rule provided a dominant party, such as the PAP, with an overwhelming advantage because it was the only one with the organizational strength to pool votes across various communities.

Besides engineering electoral rules, incumbents may also try to manipulate electoral administration. Elections may be administered by a government body, by the government but subject to scrutiny by an independent body, or by an independent electoral management body (EMB) (Birch 2011: 115). EMBs can perform two critical sets of tasks in administering elections: first, setting and applying rules regarding election procedure and electoral competition; and second, resolving disputes (in conjunction with the courts) and certifying results after voters have gone to the polls. As a result, one tactic for authoritarian governments is to pack EMBs with their supporters, hindering their independence. For the 2005 parliamentary elections in Ethiopia, for example, members of the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) were appointed by the parliament in which the ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), held 88% of seats. The EPRDF's dominance of the electoral commission led to questions about its impartiality from opposition parties and to a lack of confidence in its ability to ensure that elections would be administered on a level playing field (Birch 2011: 84).

Division of the Opposition

Authoritarian incumbents frequently win elections because they face a divided opposition. Opposition forces that fail to unite behind a standard-bearer in presidential elections or to coordinate candidates across legislative districts often end up taking votes from each other, allowing the incumbents to win. The result is that in

over 40% of all presidential elections in authoritarian regimes from 1946 to 2008, the incumbent won with less than 60% of the vote (Gandhi 2013).

What creates these divisions within the opposition? Policy differences are frequently cited as a reason for why the two main opposition parties in Mexico, the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), never formed an electoral alliance against the PRI (Magaloni 2006). Relatedly, ethnic divisions often play a role in segmenting the opposition. In Kenya, for example, the main opposition party, Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD), split into two factions in the run-up to the 1992 election because its leaders could not agree on a method of leadership selection. Kenneth Matiba and his supporters pushed for participation of all party members in candidate selection, which would have advantaged him as a Kikuyu, while Oginga Odinga, leader of a smaller ethnic group, preferred selection by delegates (Kasara 2005).

The very act of participation within elections can lead to divisions within the opposition movement. In 2005, the chief opposition party in Zimbabwe, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), split into two factions due to a disagreement over the party's decision to contest Senate elections. After a close internal party vote resulted in the decision to participate rather than boycott the election, party leader Morgan Tsvangirai demanded the vote be ignored, precipitating the departure of Arthur Mutambara and his followers. Mutambara's and Tsvangirai's two factions of the MDC went on to run separately in the 2008 elections, resulting in a close victory for the incumbent Mugabe and ZANU-PF.

As a result, authoritarian incumbents can find a variety of ways to split the opposition. The regime party might adopt policy positions that create wedge issues among opposition parties. More often, incumbents offer the possibility of participating – in elections or in government – to certain opposition figures, giving them access to policy realms or spoils in exchange for breaking with their allies. Allowing some parties to compete in the electoral arena while banning others in Morocco and Jordan, for example, reduced opposition solidarity and created incentives for legalized parties to invest in the survival of the regime (Lust-Okar 2006).

Media Control

While authoritarian leaders usually seek to control the media, they have especially strong reasons to do so around election time. Free media can provide an outlet for opposition parties and candidates to introduce themselves and their platforms to voters and to counter the regime's messages. As a result, state censorship of the press is quite common. In the Philippines, for example, newspapers that opposed Ferdinand Marcos during election campaigns were confiscated (Case 2006: 99). In Zimbabwe, the 2002 Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act allowed the government to revoke journalists' licenses for a broad range of "offenses" and

led to the arrest of more than 70 journalists within the year (Levitsky and Way 2010: 243). This measure enabled the government to control the degree of favorable coverage the opposition may have received in presidential and legislative elections of that year.

Even in the absence of draconian measures, non-democratic incumbents are able to control content so that the media becomes another tool for winning elections. In Fujimori's Peru, for example, in exchange for monthly payments and judicial favors, several tabloid newspapers agreed to publish stories that damaged the opposition in the run-up to elections. In Ukraine, prior to the Orange Revolution, cronies of the incumbent president, Leonid Kuchma, ran at least six of the largest television stations, providing biased coverage during the presidential campaign (Levitsky and Way 2010: 216). In the 2005 presidential election in Egypt, even though television channels attempted to provide equal coverage to candidates, the largest daily newspaper, *Al Ahram*, devoted more space to Mubarak than to all the other candidates combined (Allam 2010).

Economic Rewards and Sanctions

The incumbent's use of resources to manipulate election outcomes manifests itself in a variety of ways. Time-series analyses of macroeconomic indicators provide evidence of fiscal business cycles in Egypt under Mubarak (Blaydes 2011: chapter 5), Malaysia under the Barisan National Front (Pepinsky 2007), and Mexico under the PRI (Magaloni 2006: Chapter 3). Generally, the poor are the targets of inducements, such as direct cash payments and in-kind benefits. Blaydes (2011), for example, finds that illiterates in Egypt were twice as likely to vote as those who could read. The poor were viewed as "cheaper" to buy in order to secure and demonstrate support for the regime. Incumbents may also deploy their resources to discourage opposition supporters from showing up at the polls. In Mozambique, for example, the incumbent party, FRELIMO, was accused of paying supporters of the largest opposition party, RENAMO, to stay at home during the 2004 parliamentary and presidential election (Birch 2011: 105). The electoral dominance of incumbents may be enough to discourage voters, especially those inclined to support the opposition, from participating (Simpser 2013: Chapter 7).

While incumbents may try to persuade voters through material inducements, they may also use their economic power to punish opposition supporters. In the 1980s, the PAP-controlled government in Singapore instituted a system by which votes are counted at the ward level, which equates to an apartment block. Since the majority of citizens live in public housing, such a method of counting votes provided the government with detailed information about the geographic distribution of its support. The result was that apartment blocks that supported the opposition usually were designated as low priority for maintenance and improvements (Hicken 2011: 295). Similarly, Magaloni (2006) finds that PRI governments dispersed funds from an anti-poverty

program (PRONASOL) to municipalities on the basis of political criteria: areas that supported the PAN, a party historically and solidly in the opposition, received fewer funds while those municipalities that supported the PRD – a new party whose supporters the PRI believed could be co-opted – received more funding.

Electoral Fraud

The exact distinction between electoral fraud and other forms of electoral manipulation is the topic of significant debate. One idea – especially pertinent for the election monitoring community – is that motivation matters in determining what should be classified as fraud, since observed behavior may be the result of either the intension to cheat or a lack of capacity (Hyde 2008). For example, missing election materials from polling stations or unsecured ballot boxes may be signs of an incumbent government trying to disenfranchise citizens or one that does not have the know-how or resources to administer an election. Another possible distinction is on the basis of legality. Electoral fraud entails breaking rules, whatever they may be (and however unfair they may be), while manipulation consists of establishing those rules. Since rules are visible, so too is manipulation, while acts of fraud are clandestine (Lehoucq 2003). As a result, gerrymandering the boundaries of electoral districts and setting onerous registration requirements for candidates and voters are examples of manipulation, while stuffing ballot boxes and keeping the names of the dead on voter registration rolls constitute fraud. In their study of Costa Rican elections from 1901 to 1948, Lehoucq and Molina (2002) find at least 47 different ways in which governments perpetuated fraud.

   Given that fraud is designed to be mostly clandestine, how exactly can researchers study the topic? Whether we examine fraud as an independent or dependent variable, how can we observe it? The operationalization of electoral fraud depends on the types of information available to researchers. In elections in which parallel vote counts (PVCs) are conducted at polling stations, a comparison of the figures from the PVCs with the official results can reveal the extent of fraud. Even in the absence of an independent count against which to compare official statistics, however, researchers still can utilize official figures to estimate fraud. The study of election forensics assesses the extent of fraud from official electoral returns by looking for suspicious patterns in the vote counts or turnout numbers in elections across time or at polling stations across a geographic space. In Russia, for example, while the aggregated national turnout rate remained relatively stable from 1996 to 2007, the number of districts (*rayons*) with Soviet-style turnout rates of over 90% increased exponentially during the Putin era (Myagkov et al. 2009). Another method is to examine the digit patterns in electoral returns, exploiting the fact that individuals may have psychological tendencies to choose certain digits and/or form certain patterns with digits. In ward-level data from the 2003 Nigerian election, for example, Beber and Scacco (2012) find there is an excess number of zeros in the last digit of officially

reported total votes. Many of these methods assume that much electoral fraud occurs at the tabulation stage.

To detect forms of fraud that occur outside the counting of votes, researchers can analyze petitions alleging electoral misconduct to an electoral body or court after the election.[1] Lehoucq and Molina (2002), for example, show that political parties in Costa Rica on average filed six accusations of fraud per national-level election in the first half of the twentieth century. Similarly, Ziblatt (2009) examines the geographic distribution of these legal challenges in Imperial Germany to show that fraud occurred in areas characterized by high socio-economic inequality.
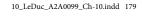
Repression

State-sponsored repression around elections includes restrictions on political and civil liberties as well as physical sanctions such as imprisonment or exile of opposition leaders and supporters. In elections in Uzbekistan, for example, opposition candidates were allowed to meet with supporters only indoors and after receiving permission from district election commissions (Birch 2011: 80). In the run-up to parliamentary elections in March 2012, the Iranian government arrested rights activists, journalists, artists, lawyers, students, and members of ethnic and religious minorities while the main opposition candidates from the previous election – Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi – remained under house arrest (Amnesty International 2012).

Most state-sponsored repression occurs before polling day, and it is designed to influence opposition leaders' campaign strategies, citizens' voting preferences, and their respective intentions to act on them. In addition, incumbent governments who survive in power can use the state's powers to punish opposition leaders and supporters *after* the election. Post-electoral repression is designed to respond to concrete outcomes usually in the form of voting results or post-electoral protests challenging the results or suspected uses of fraud. Mugabe in Zimbabwe employed more blatant forms of repression both before and after the 2005 parliamentary election. Opposition leaders were subject to harassment or imprisonment, while voters suspected of supporting the opposition experienced collective punishment through Operation Murambatsvina: ostensibly a "slum-clearance" program in which the Zimbabwe Police Force brutally bulldozed the dwellings and informal markets of poor urban dwellers, displacing initially almost 600,000 people (Potts 2008). Urban youth, whom the regime feared would become active in protests against electoral fraud, were targeted in the operation (Bratton and Masunungure 2006). By destroying their homes and livelihood and displacing them to rural areas, the regime sought to pre-empt protest by influencing the preferences and ability of young people to collectively act against the government.

On the question of who is targeted by authoritarian incumbents, Bhasin and Gandhi (2013) find that authoritarian incumbents use repressive action to target opposition leaders rather than voters, especially during the month around polling

day. With regard to intimidation and obstruction, Birch (2011) similarly finds that candidates are slightly more likely to be targeted than voters, while Simpser (2013: Chapter 2) finds that these patterns vary across regions: candidate intimidation and obstacles to registration are used more heavily in the Middle East and North Africa while voters are more often targeted in sub-Saharan elections.

Among voters, who gets targeted may depend on the expected closeness of the election. When incumbents expect elections to be closely contested, they may resort to intimidation and violence. The expected margin of victory may be small for two different reasons. The closeness of elections may be due to the presence of many undecided voters, in which case the pre-electoral period contains much uncertainty. Robinson and Torvik (2009) argue that swing voters may, in fact, become targets of electoral violence if parties find them too "expensive" to persuade via ideological or material appeals. Alternatively, elections may be close because society is evenly polarized between pro-regime and pro-opposition supporters. In this case, there are few swing voters and little pre-electoral uncertainty, and so incumbents target core supporters of opposition parties in an attempt to persuade them to stay at home (Bratton 2008; Chaturvedi 2005; Collier and Vicente 2012). These accounts suggest that repression should decrease with the incumbents' expected popularity.

The frequency with which authoritarian incumbents use these different strategies varies significantly. Simpser (2013) finds that institutional manipulation is a heavily used tactic in elections in the Middle East and North Africa, where incumbents erect legal barriers to entry for challengers. In sub-Saharan Africa, voters are often the target both of vote-buying and intimidation, while elections in the former Soviet Union are most marred by fraud (Birch 2011; Simpser 2013).

What remains unclear is under what conditions authoritarian incumbents choose one tactic over the other. Their choice of strategies may depend on how many "extra" votes they may need to produce. In addition, utilizing these strategies is costly for incumbents, and authoritarian regimes may vary in their capacity to implement them. Clientelist strategies require state resources and a mechanism by which to reach ordinary citizens to distribute them (e.g., well-institutionalized regime party). Strategies to divide opponents of the regime assume that incumbents can offer office and material benefits of sufficient value to opposition leaders. Repressive actions to deal with opposition leaders and voters are costly as well. The increasing ability of election observers to detect fraud may also simply push authoritarian governments to employ other tactics (Hyde 2011). Finally, if incumbents perceive that the short- and long-run benefits of different tactics vary and are not myopic, they may choose some strategies over others. As a result, the tactics that dictators choose to win elections may depend on whether those strategies can backfire and precipitate regime change.

Elections and Regime Change

Of even greater concern than the "logistical" costs of these strategies is that while these strategies usually enable incumbents to perpetuate their rule, they sometimes

backfire. As Schedler (2002) observes, elections are a double-edged sword: in many cases, they successfully consolidate authoritarian rule, but in others, elections actually strengthen the hand of the opposition and may even lead to regime change.

Control over the media may be useful in creating an uneven playing field, but there are costs to censorship or skewing media coverage, especially around election time. Besides incentivizing bureaucratic officials (Egorov et al. 2009), an optimal amount of media freedom can be a conduit of information for the distribution of support within the public for the government and the opposition. The role of elections in revealing this information is important (Brownlee 2009; Svolik 2012) and potentially feasible only when incumbents balance their need for media control to disadvantage the opposition and for relatively reliable information about voter and candidate preferences that might enable them to deploy other tactics to win elections.

Repressive tactics before polling day, for example, may have mixed effects for incumbents. Collier and Vicente (2012) argue that incumbents may use violence to encourage opposition supporters to stay at home on election day, but they must find the optimal level of violence because such tactics can induce their own "soft" supporters to abstain. In the 2007 Nigerian elections, pre-electoral repression strongly deterred turnout, but it also reduced the likelihood that voters would support the incumbent People's Democratic Party (Bratton 2008). Since "more" is not always "better," incumbents may need to calibrate the amount of violence they use in order to maximize their support among the voting population or at least minimize the show of support for opposition challengers.

The mixed effects of pre-electoral repression also may emerge over time. On the one hand, pre-electoral repression may suppress voter turnout and make an electoral boycott by the opposition more likely (Beaulieu 2011; Hafner-Burton et al. 2013). With the withdrawal of opposition parties and supporters from the electoral arena, the incumbent is virtually guaranteed victory. In Ethiopia, for example, the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) managed to register only 30% of its candidates for local elections in 2008 due to widespread government intimidation and violence.[2] As a result, the party boycotted the election and the ruling party won all but a handful of seats in the local councils – a contrast to elections three years earlier when the opposition won all seats but one in Addis Ababa (Aalen and Tronvoll 2008). On the other hand, Hafner-Burton et al. (2013) find that this same pre-electoral violence can contribute to protests after that election which, in turn, can induce incumbents to make costly political concessions, including resigning from power.

Similarly, the use of election-day fraud may have mixed effects for incumbents. Stuffing ballot boxes or manipulating the counting of votes may enable incumbents to claim victory, but opposition forces, civil society groups, and election monitors may detect such fraud, and as a result, incumbent governments may be sanctioned by the international community (Hyde 2011) or may face domestic unrest. Daxecker (2012), indeed, finds that the combination of electoral misconduct, and the presence

of election observers to publicize it, leads to a greater likelihood of post–electoral violence in Africa.

In the "Colored Revolutions" in Central and Eastern Europe, electoral fraud served as a focal point that enabled dissatisfied citizens to overcome their collective action problem in protesting against the regime (Tucker 2007). While events in Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan are the most recent examples of popular mobilization bringing down autocratic leaders (Beissinger 2007; Bunce and Wolchik 2011), such revolutions through post–electoral protest have occurred before. In the 1986 presidential election in the Philippines, the incumbent president Ferdinand Marcos was so confident that his pre–electoral vote–buying and campaign of assassinations would guarantee victory that he agreed to allow the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) – a watchdog organization composed of veteran, civic, and business groups – to conduct parallel vote counts at polling stations. In areas in which NAMFREL was allowed to observe the polling, its count did not differ significantly from the official one. But in precincts where coercion and intimidation deterred NAMFREL's volunteers from operating, the difference between its figures and the official count in some cases reached almost 20% (Thompson 1995: 150). In fact, the padding of Marcos's vote totals was so great that two days after the election, 35 computer operators working for the Commission of Elections (COMELEC) walked out, refusing to continue to issue voting results that they knew to be blatantly (and embarrassingly) false. Armed with the evidence from NAMFREL and COMELEC's boycott, the main opposition candidate, Corazon Aquino, was able to launch a civil disobedience campaign aimed at protesting the fraud and removing Marcos from office. Aquino's speech launching the campaign in mid–February of that year brought an estimated two million people onto the streets (Thompson 1995: 154).

Authoritarian leaders may use not only violence, but also inducements to divide the opposition. Yet successfully splintering the opposition in one election does not guarantee that it will remain divided in the future. In 1992, Kenya held multi–candidate elections for the presidency and the legislature. In order to disadvantage his regionally and ethnically–based rivals, the incumbent president, Daniel Arap Moi, pushed through constitutional changes requiring presidential candidates to win not only a plurality of the nationwide vote, but also at least 25% of the vote in at least five of the country's eight provinces. Opposition parties, legalized that same year, scrambled for support and failed to form a united front, resulting in seven candidates campaigning against Moi. With the help of the well–institutionalized regime party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), Moi was able to engi–neer nationwide support and win the election handily. The same story was repeated in 1997 when opposition parties failed to unify behind a standard bearer and Moi was again able to win with a plurality. Having learned from their mistakes and determined to prevent the election of Moi's handpicked successor, Uhuru Kenyatta, leaders from 15 opposition parties formed the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). In exchange for promises of constitutional reform and government

portfolios, these parties agreed to present a united front in their support of the Democratic Party's candidate, Mwai Kibaki (Kasara 2005; Ndegwa 2003). With the support of NARC, Kibaki defeated Kenyatta by 30 percentage points. In addition, NARC's legislative candidates won a majority within the legislature. Neither Moi nor Kenyatta attempted to overturn the results, and as a consequence the 2002 elections marked the end of nearly 40 years of KANU rule.

The Kenyan experience, while not common, is also not singular. In a cross-national analysis of 50 competitive authoritarian elections from 1990 to 2002, Howard and Roessler (2006) find that the formation of a pre-electoral coalition, such as NARC in Kenya, increases the likelihood of political liberalization. They argue that electoral coalitions increase the likelihood of liberalization through various mechanisms. First is a mechanical effect in which a standard bearer for the opposition can take away votes from the government candidate, making an opposition victory, or at least government concessions, more likely. Second, a unified opposition may affect the calculus of the army, police, and other coercive institutions that may be less inclined to employ violence if they fear an opposition victory and subsequent recriminations for supporting the incumbent. Finally, a coalition may embolden voters to support the opposition candidate because they perceive that regime change is possible. If incumbents are not able to perpetually divide the opposition, they may find that electoral competition results in unintended consequences.

The findings of Howard and Roessler are suggestive and offer a ray of hope for activists seeking to form a unified movement. Yet the effects of coalitions on regime change may be endogenous or conditional on other factors. Van de Walle (2006) argues that opposition to the regime is more likely to coalesce if the leader is unable to maintain his own coalition. As more members of the incumbent's ruling coalition defect, the more incentives they and members of the traditional opposition have to rally around an electoral challenger. Whatever the direction of causality, however, forming an electoral bloc is not the only strategy of importance for the opposition. The success of such electoral coalitions in unseating authoritarian incumbents may be conditional on other tactics available to the opposition: collaboration with civil society groups, vigorous campaigns to register voters and win their support, and preparations for dealing with attempts at fraud, such as parallel vote counts and mobilization of citizens for protest (Bunce and Wolchik 2010).

Regime change, in fact, may be possible only over a sequence of electoral contests. Elections, especially when scheduled and held regularly, offer opposition forces iterated opportunities to "get it right" – whether in terms of electoral or protest strategies. Failure to organize a successful electoral coalition or stage an effective protest can help opposition leaders and activists learn from their mistakes and try again at the next election. In Kenya, for example, past failures in forming an electoral bloc culminated in the successful opposition coalition of 2002.

Repeated elections also may contribute to the likelihood of regime change by affecting the values of citizens and the calculus of incumbents. Lindberg (2006a,

2006b) argues that elections can play a role in democratization – more specifically, improving civil liberties – by creating a robust civil society and instilling awareness among citizens of their role and rights as voters. This awareness, in turn, leads citizens to identify with democratic processes and creates expectations that their leaders will do the same. Incumbents, then, have incentives to satisfy these expectations. They must maintain their electoral base in order to continue to win elections. In order to do so, rulers will continue to allow the liberties associated with the conduct of at least semi-competitive elections. And as elections become part of the normal "rules of the game," state officials have less incentive to suppress civil liberties. In fact, "When it becomes obvious that competitive elections will remain part of the political game, some state officials begin to look for a career defending civil rights rather than beating them down" because they fear the consequences of behaving illiberally (Lindberg 2006a: 147). Lindberg argues that these are the mechanisms behind the improvements in civil liberties during election years in sub-Saharan Africa.

The liberalizing effect of elections has been examined in other parts of the world, but neither the same mechanisms nor the same effects are evident. The introduction of village-level elections in China initially induced high hopes for the possibility of "creeping democratization" (e.g., Pei 1995), and indeed, some surveys found that the elections increased participatory attitudes and feelings of efficacy (e.g., Li 2003; Shi 1999). Yet after two decades of local elections in China, there does not appear to be improvements in civil and political liberties. Similarly, in Latin America, McCoy and Hartlyn (2009) find little support for the premise that elections breed democracy. In fact, elections were held regularly in precisely those countries that stayed solidly authoritarian for decades, as in Paraguay under General Stroessner and Nicaragua under the Somozas.

The entrance of election monitors also may help induce long-term processes of change that improve the quality of elections. Based on a field experiment in which monitors were randomly assigned to polling stations during the 2003 Armenian presidential election, Hyde (2007) finds that the presence of observers reduces the amount of incumbent-sponsored fraud that occurs at the ballot box. Why government officials would refrain from cheating in the presence of monitors is an open question. Even though observer missions do not have the power to punish cheaters, it may be that officials are sufficiently fearful of being named and shamed. Alternatively, state officials may fear punishment from the international community at large: observer groups provide the information about fraud that enables regional international organizations, for example, to agree to coordinate on some type of sanction for cheating (Donno 2010). Finally, the information that monitors provide may help stakeholders, such as opposition parties, develop better strategies to combat fraud and promote more democratic elections in the future.

The large-N cross-national evidence on the effect of elections on regime change is mixed. Hadenius and Teorell (2007) finds that multiparty electoral competition increases the likelihood of democratization, but Brownlee (2009) claims that authoritarian regimes with semi-competitive elections are not more likely to lose

power than their more restrictive, hegemonic counterparts. These varying results may simply reflect what much of this discussion shows: elections often help incumbents survive in power due to the number of tools they have to win, but they sometimes also lead to regime change because either the use of incumbent tools backfires or opposition forces find effectives ways to take advantage of the electoral moment. A large-N sample contains both types of cases, and as a result, the effect of elections on regime change may appear inconclusive (or depend on the sample). The mixed results may also reflect that fact that regime change often occurs outside the electoral context. The Colored Revolutions were an important impetus for the study of elections and regime change, but the fall of Communism in East Central Europe and the Arab Spring should serve as a reminder that the fall of authoritarianism need not wait for electoral competition.

Finally, in order to assess the importance of elections under authoritarianism, it is important to be clear on the meaning of regime change. The label "regime change" is usually assumed to connote democratization which, in turn, signifies a change in leaders and an improvement in the political and civil liberties enjoyed by citizens. If anything, however, what elections under authoritarianism increasingly demonstrate is that these things are not always bundled together. To the extent that the quality of civil liberties improved in sub-Saharan Africa with successive elections, it often happened under the auspices of the same leader (Lindberg 2006a). Changes in the executive, in turn, do not always insure the advent of democracy. Wahman (2013), for example, finds that while an electoral coalition among opposition parties makes an opposition victory and alternation in power more likely, it does not necessarily lead to a regime that is democratic. New incumbents often are just as authoritarian as their predecessors.

Conclusion

What have we learned from the recent study of elections in authoritarian regimes? We have learned a great deal about why incumbents in these regimes bother to hold elections in the first place – an important consideration given the ubiquity of elections in dictatorships today. Moreover, we know in more detail how authoritarian incumbents may use elections to consolidate their rule. They have a number of tools by which they can ensure favorable results. But opposition forces sometimes can take advantage of these electoral moments to advance the cause of change, if not achieve outright victory.

Several large open questions remain, however. First, what makes authoritarian elections different from democratic ones? Authoritarian politics may be distinguished by the shadow of violence (Svolik 2012), the lack of a level playing field (Levitsky and Way 2010), or the absence of ex ante uncertainty (Gandhi 2013). But many of the tactics that authoritarian incumbents use to win elections – whether manipulation, fraud, vote-buying, or repression – can also be observed in many democracies. Opposition parties in democracies, in turn, face the same strategic

choices – whether to participate, to form electoral coalitions, to organize mass mobilization – as their counterparts in non-democratic settings. Consequently, it might be worthwhile to think about whether we should segment our study of elections by regime type (e.g., elections in only competitive authoritarian regimes). Not only might a conceptual distinction be unfounded, but such truncation of our samples may lead to biased results (Hyde and Marinov 2012).

Second, when do elections under authoritarian incumbents lead to change, and when do they facilitate stability? Like other nominally democratic institutions, elections often help dictators perpetuate their rule. But as elections in Kenya, the Philippines, and Nicaragua (among others) illustrate, opposition forces sometimes are able to transform the electoral playing field to their advantage, leading to turnover in leadership or an increase in the quality of subsequent elections or both. In their study of elections in post-Communist states in Europe and Eurasia, Bunce, and Wolchik (2010: 73) find that what explains divergent trajectories is "whether the opposition in collaboration with civil society groups and regional and Western-based democracy activists used an ensemble of sophisticated, intricately planned, and historically unprecedented electoral strategies to maximize their votes and, if necessary, to support public protests demanding a change in leadership…." The opposition's strategy, therefore, is critical, but it would be worthwhile to examine more cases and to develop a theoretical foundation for understanding whether there are particular conditions under which these strategies may work or even emerge in the first place. In addition, an understanding of the conditions and strat-egies leading to divergent electoral trajectories requires greater study of cross-temporal electoral processes. Even if it turns out that, as Bunce and Wolchik (2010, 2011) claim, effective strategies for removing dictators through the ballot box are usually "historically unprecedented," we will need to examine the behavior of actors from one election to the next (as they do) to determine whether and when this is usually the case.

Finally, even if elections under authoritarianism result in leadership or regime change, what kind of legacy do they leave? After the fall of authoritarian incum-bents, incoming governments often utilize the same electoral rules and institutions of their predecessors. In addition, the same elites often dominate the scene, recy-cling parties and platforms under new labels. Under these circumstances, is there much change politically for candidates and voters? Or is substantive change possible only after a radical break in electoral institutions and actors? Answers to these ques-tions will contribute to the debate over the impact of elections on regime change.

Notes

1 For a summary of these studies, see Lehoucq (2003).
2 The Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) faced similar problems, leading to its boycott of the elections.