

Domestic and International Determinants of Election Boycotts

From 1990-2002, 44 countries experienced a total of 66 election boycotts—accounting for roughly 13 percent of all elections held during this time period. Moreover, the vast majority of these boycotts occurred in the developing world.¹ On one level, then, this paper is an explanation of yet another domestic political phenomenon that distinguishes elections in developing countries. Recent scholarship has drawn attention to several unique aspects of developing elections, including: election administration (Pastor 1999), Fraud (Lehoucq & Molina 2002), Violence (Wilkinson 2004), and international oversight (Hyde 2006). This paper can be read in that vein, as enriching our understanding of another aspect of developing elections that makes them unique from elections in established democracies. At the same time, however, this paper shows how international processes of democratization since the end of the Cold War have affected domestic politics in developing countries.

Election boycotts occur when one or more opposition parties refuse publicly to participate in an upcoming election, as an act of protest. The boycotting party must then make good on this promise with conspicuous non-participation on election day. In some cases election boycotts are launched by something close to the whole of the opposition; in other instances, a single, small party will choose to boycott the election. Opposition parties are motivated to boycott, in part, by the domestic political context that they find themselves in, and in part by their own size and standing. At the same time, international influences on electoral competition are also critically important to the decision-making process of opposition parties.

The end of the Cold War ushered in a new era of Third World development and democratization. The dependence of developing countries on international powers for aid and alliance was not new to the post Cold-War period, but the circumstances under which developing countries hoped to garner support changed. Where the 1970s and 80s saw an insistence on anti-communism and economic conditionality

from the West, as well as the option to attract Soviet support with anti-west/pro-communist politics, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a shift in aid conditionality and an emphasis on democracy in the developing world.² But not all developing countries were equally likely to be affected by these changes in international norms. Some developing countries had already established relationships with the West, such that they had reached agreed-upon levels of democratization by the time the Cold War ended. Granted, the agreed upon level of democracy in such countries could vary widely—Egypt has achieved very low levels of democratization relative to a country such as Costa Rica, for example—but countries who had already secured formal alliance and aid relations with the west were less sensitive to the post-Cold War emphasis on democratization than were those countries lacking previously established formal relations. Since the end of the Cold War, those countries that were more vulnerable to international pressures to democratize have had to compete for international favor by undertaking transitions to democracy, with a particular emphasis on electoral activity.

Among other things, election boycotts, particularly major election boycotts, can be explained as a consequence of this new international emphasis on democratization, and the pressure that certain countries have felt to democratize. The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: First, I will examine existing explanations of election boycotts. Second, I will elaborate on an important, and heretofore ignored, distinction between major and minor boycotts. Third, I will offer an explanation for why election boycotts occur. My explanation will focus on the potential costs and benefits of boycotting for opposition parties and how the post-Cold War international context has influenced the decision calculus of political actors in some developing countries. Hypotheses will be generated from the theory and tested, using original data, in the fourth section.

¹ Two election boycotts occurred in Spain and one in Russia. All of these boycotts are considered minor as they involved only one small party.

² For more on aid conditionality see Beaulieu & Hyde (2005); Boulding & Hyde (2005)

Previous Explanations of Election Boycotts

Election boycotts have not received much systematic treatment in the literature, but some attempts have been made to explain why they occur. One of the earliest discussions of election boycotts attributes their occurrence to a lack of political stability or party system institutionalization. A later and more common theme is that election boycotts are motivated by electoral unfairness. It has also been suggested, however, that election boycotts might occur not because of unfairness, but rather because opposition parties know they are going to lose and wish to save face. The most recent investigation of election boycotts cited in this review incorporates elements of both unfairness and certain loss, but emphasizes the importance of international involvement in the election process .

In their study of party system institutionalization in Latin America, Mainwaring and Scully (1995) provide one of the first explanations of election boycotts. They characterize boycotts as protests to delegitimize the current regime, and as indications that there is not yet consensus on the rules of the political process. In the inchoate party systems that the authors describe, "...rather than directing their efforts toward winning elections, actors question the legitimacy of the electoral process and engage in actions that imply rejecting government legitimacy" (23). Here opposition parties would rather protest the government than participate in elections, but it is unclear whether this is because the government is actually unfair, or simply because the system is unstable and opposing parties believe there is still a chance to redefine democratic rules.

While Mainwaring and Scully remain agnostic on the question of whether actual unfairness is at the heart of election boycotts, Michael Bratton's (1998) piece on second elections in Africa addresses the issue of electoral unfairness more directly. For Bratton, boycotts in Africa seem to correspond to a flawed electoral process (19). He observes that, in Africa at least, opposition election boycotts generally occur when elections are not free and fair (24).

Lindberg (2006) expands the unfairness argument, and presents a more systematic examination of African elections since 1989. Using news sources to code boycotts, and information from election

observers on the freedom and fairness of the election, Lindberg finds opposition participation is highly correlated with judgments of elections as free and fair (65). From this finding he concludes that when elections are unfair, parties will be motivated to boycott. Of course, this finding might also be interpreted to suggest that observers are more likely to declare an election free and fair when the opposition participated.

The notion that election boycotts might not actually be motivated by electoral unfairness has been entertained by politicians and scholars alike. Some are skeptical of the benevolence of opposition parties, and suspect that their motives are more particularistic. It has been suggested that rather than boycotting because the system is unfair, opposition parties boycott elections because they know they are going to lose, and want to appear more powerful than they really are. In citing common explanations for why elections fail, Robert Pastor (1999) offers, "...the opposition parties boycotted or protested because they were weak and knew they would lose a free election" (1). The implication here is that opposition parties would rather save face, by boycotting and casting suspicion on the government, than be shown to be weak at the polls. In an earlier piece, Pastor (1998) reported that this very argument was offered by incumbent politicians in connection to the 1995 Haitian election. Senior government officials explained the major opposition boycott in the following way: "They have no popular support; they boycott because they know they will lose" (160). In his work on elections in Africa, Bratton too notes that the "quality of boycotted elections can be ambiguous," meaning it is not always clear if a boycotted election was actually unfair (21). He further notes that the possibility of a boycott being a "ruse" must not be discounted. As with Pastor's assertions, the term "ruse" here suggests that a boycott may be driven by an opposition party's particularistic interests—in this case to mask their electoral weakness—rather than to protest actual unfairness.

Beaulieu & Hyde (2007) incorporate explanations based on unfairness and certain loss into their examination of the relationship between election boycotts and international election observers. They find that election boycotts are more likely to occur when international election observers are present, and

account for this finding with a concept they call “strategic manipulation”. Strategic manipulation refers to incumbent governments inviting election monitors, to create an appearance of electoral fairness, and then finding ways to manipulate the electoral process that are not likely to result in condemnation by observers. Such strategic manipulation creates conditions of electoral unfairness, like those discussed by Bratton and Lindberg. It also increases the probability that opposition parties will lose the election. When monitors are invited, opposition parties anticipate strategic manipulation and seek to expose it, by boycotting the election. Thus, Beaulieu & Hyde do not dispute that unfairness and/or certain loss may contribute to initiating election boycotts, but show that another factor—increased international attention—also works to encourage election boycotts.

Common to all the explanations discussed here is a focus on the benefits of election boycotts, or factors that might make a boycott attractive to an opposition party. Mainwaring and Scully point to a chance to shape the rules, which could benefit opposition parties. Lindberg suggests that, opposition parties have a chance to improve the fairness of the system by protesting current unfairness. With respect to the “certain loser” argument, weak opposition parties stand to maintain, or even improve, their reputation with a boycott, rather than competing and being shown to be weak. Finally, in the presence of international election observers, opposition parties have a chance to expose cheating incumbents to the international aid community, which has the potential to hurt incumbent regimes.

My explanation will build upon those offered thus far in the following two respects. First, I will continue to build on the work of Beaulieu & Hyde, by expanding further the idea that international context has influenced boycott activity. Second, as previously mentioned, I will draw a distinction between different types of election boycott. Rather than trying to use the same factors to account for all boycotts, I will distinguish between factors that should be important for parties considering a major boycott and factors that might contribute to a minor boycott. Before introducing my explanation, I will elaborate on the differences between major and minor boycotts.

Major and Minor Election Boycotts

In recent history, Bangladesh has had a two-party system with the Awami League, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) enjoying the support of most of the electorate. In 1996 the Awami League, then in opposition, decided to boycott the country's parliamentary elections. The BNP, it argued, had rigged the 1994 elections and had recently suffered losses in municipal elections. Given these recent losses and the history of unfair competition, the Awami league boycotted on the grounds that, without a neutral caretaker to administer the 1996 elections, the BNP was certain to rig the electoral contest in its favor.

An election boycott is considered major if, as in the case of Bangladesh 1996, it involves a majority of the opposition. One main opposition party boycotting an election may be sufficient to constitute a major boycott, if that party controls a majority of opposition support. In other instances, one main opposition party might join with several smaller parties, or several of the largest opposition parties may join together to undertake a major boycott. Unified opposition election boycotts are the clearest examples of major boycotts, but these boycotts are also quite rare. Usually, even if all the main opposition parties agree to boycott an election, some smaller parties will continue to participate (often with clandestine support from the incumbent). Minor election boycotts, on the other hand, are launched by one or more small parties, which do not amount to a majority of the opposition.

In 1994 South Africa experienced its first election with universal suffrage, and it also experienced a minor election boycott. The Inkatha party and Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) both boycotted the polls. Both parties represented white South Africans who constitute less than 10% of the population. The National Bolshevik Party (NBP) in Russia provided another example of a minor boycott. In 2000, the NBP boycotted the Russian elections. This party represents an ideological minority of individuals who wish to see the return of a Russian empire.³

³ In 2005 the party was outlawed by the Russian Government.

The main opposition parties involved in a major boycott tend to be fairly heterogeneous, when compared to the small parties involved in minor boycotts. If they have any particular religious, ethnic, territorial, or ideological orientations, these orientations tend to be reflective of the majority. Compared to major boycotts, the parties involved in minor boycotts are more homogenous, often with stronger religious, ethnic, territorial, or ideological orientations, typically representing minority populations within the country.

In countries competing to appear democratic, major boycotts are of much greater concern to incumbent regimes than minor boycotts. Because of their size, major boycotts will attract more attention than minor ones, and cast more serious doubt on the democratic legitimacy of the incumbent in the eyes of international donors. Minor boycotts, on the other hand, are launched by small groups that may already have a documented history of conflict with the state. There is less chance that such boycotts will raise concern in the international community about the state of democracy, but minor boycotts may signal other problems such as human rights violations, and may receive additional scrutiny in those countries vulnerable to international pressure.

The distinction that I have drawn between major and minor boycotts is important to consider when trying to explain election boycotts for two reasons. First, deciding whether to engage in a major boycott or a minor boycott represents two completely different decisions. In the case of major boycott, a main opposition party is deciding to withdraw from an election in protest, and possibly deciding to coordinate with other opposition parties in the process. With minor boycotts, on the other hand, small, specialized parties are deciding to participate or protest. Second, there are potentially different consequences for each type of boycott. While a major boycott is likely to call into question the democratic nature of elections in a particular country, minor boycotts will not necessarily reflect on the electoral process in the same way. Theoretically, then, even if we can model the decision process in similar ways (and I will), it makes sense to think separately about major and minor boycotts because we

would expect the different opposition parties undertaking these activities to evaluate any particular electoral situation differently.

A Theory of Election Boycotts

Political parties have a finite amount of effort they can devote to political activity. In the electoral arena, we can think of this effort as comprised of all the time, money, and resources a party will spend on a particular election. Opposition parties in developing countries must choose whether to invest this effort in campaign activities or to engage in an election boycott.⁴ If a party chooses to campaign, its effort will be spent persuading and mobilizing voters. If a party chooses to boycott, its effort will be spent publicizing its non-participation, and encouraging voters to follow suit. For example, when UNIP boycotted the 1996 election in Zambia, it mobilized youth brigades to persuade voters to stay away from the polls, and offered voters money to relinquish their voter registration cards.⁵

Although election boycotts and campaigns involve similar activities—public persuasion and (de)mobilization—a given party cannot undertake both simultaneously. It would not make sense for a party to encourage voters to vote for their candidate, and at the same time ask them to stay home on election day. Given the mutual exclusivity of boycotts and campaigns, I expect parties to choose the single option that maximizes their utility—i.e. provides the greatest benefit with the least cost.

The main benefits from a boycott depend on the type of boycott. Major boycotts, by virtue of their size, will aim for more universal benefits, such as increased fairness. An increase in electoral fairness is a public good, which only certain “large enough” groups will have the incentive to pursue, as I explain further below. By contrast, minor election boycotters are more likely to seek discrete benefits

⁴ The assumption here is that parties campaign for their own candidates. There is another option, however, where parties invest in campaign activities in support of another party. This occurs most often when a party has been barred from competition itself (example: Peronists in Argentina). For my purposes, supporting another party will still be considered an investment in campaign activities.

⁵ From a conversation with Michael Bratton (4.02.04) regarding his observation of the 1996 Zambia election.

that target their particular group. Such benefits may be as simple as monetary side payments, or as complex as an end to discrimination against the group they represent.

An additional consideration, which both major and minor boycotters should take into account, is the possibility of jeopardizing the incumbent's international reputation. Following from Beaulieu & Hyde (2005) if either minor or major boycotter could expose incumbents to foreign powers and threaten future arrangements for aid or alliance, their chances of receiving concessions from the incumbent should increase. Major boycotters should have a better chance of extracting increased electoral fairness, and minor boycotters may be able to reap particularistic benefits. It should be easier for the opposition to jeopardize an incumbent's international reputation in those countries who are not insulated from pressures to democratize, and must actively compete for international benefits.

In terms of cost, my explanation differs from those made previously in that none of them consider cost explicitly. The costs associated with a boycott are the same for minor and major boycotters, but will have a markedly different effect on their decisions. The most obvious costs associated with a boycott are the seats sacrificed in the current election (seats that would have been won had the party campaigned) and any penalties the party incurs by not participating in the election. Penalties for non-participation may include re-registration fees or signature requirements to qualify for the following election, as well as the loss of any public finance the party would have received for participating in the election. The public finance at stake with an election boycott is any finance that is conditional upon electoral participation or performance. The term "conditional public finance" refers to money awarded to parties based on some measure of their involvement in the election, be it number of candidates, seat share, vote share, or some combination thereof. Such funds are conditional because they depend on a party's electoral participation.

For the purposes of a more formal explanation, and for the sake of parsimony, two further assumptions are made regarding political parties that might choose between campaigning and

boycotting. First, they are not currently in power. Second, they are assumed to have set aside the option of using violence.⁶

The Model

Begin by supposing that a party has a defined budget, e . This is the maximum effort the party has decided to devote to political activity during an election. Since there comes a point at which election boycotting and campaigning are mutually incompatible, I simplify my model by assuming the party will devote its entire budget (e) for political activity either to campaigning or to boycotting.⁷

The expected utility of campaigning can be expressed as $S(e)B - c(e) - k_C$, where $S(e)$ denotes the number of seats the party expects to win given campaign effort e , and B is the intrinsic value of a seat. Opportunity costs are captured in $c(e)$. These are the costs of investing e in political activity as opposed to some other activity, e.g., earning money working, time with family, sleeping, etc. Finally k_C indicates the fixed costs associated with campaigning. As the term indicates, these costs do not vary with the overall effort expended on campaigning by any party in particular; rather, they are costs that must be borne by all parties who wish to campaign. Such costs would include any filing fees and signature requirements for ballot access.

The expected utility of boycotting can be expressed as $\pi(e)V - c(e) - k_B$, where $\pi(e)$ is the probability of a desired change given boycott effort e , and V is the value of the change sought. The opportunity costs ($c(e)$) are identical for both campaigning and boycotting. Fixed costs for boycotting (k_B) include seats lost, re-registration requirements, and any public or private finance forfeited as a result of the boycott.

⁶ Some might object to this last assumption. Admittedly, there are examples of parties involved in election-related violence, and the degree to which the party itself is responsible for violent activity is open for debate. Clearly the issue of violence will need to be considered further in the future.

⁷ It is possible for a party to mount an election campaign and then decide to boycott at some point prior to the election. It may appear the party is both campaigning and boycotting, but at the point where a party commits to a boycott, it forfeits a chance to win. In such a case, the party is described as devoting (e) to a boycott, because it will presumably try to channel

Two aspects of expected utility for boycotting should be noted. First, the probability of change is a compound probability. It is a function of (1) whether or not the boycott receives support from a wider audience, and (2) whether there is resultant reform from a supported boycott.⁸ Second, I am simplifying the value of change by assuming that boycotters seek only one reform. If there are a number of separate reforms, then we need a specific probability and value for each desired reform. We can represent such a combination with $\pi(e)V$.⁹ A party chooses to boycott when:

$$\pi(e)V - c(e) - k_b > S(e)B - c(e) - k_c.$$

If the expected utility of a boycott is greater than the expected utility of competing in the current election, the party will choose to boycott.

The logical question that follows the above conclusion is: when is the expected utility of boycotting likely to exceed the expected utility of participating in an election? Using the intuition from the above model, I will specify the following potential costs and benefits for both major and minor boycotts: With respect to the benefits of boycott, I will examine the reduction of current levels of electoral unfairness, and the possibility that foreign aid dependence might generate more support for the boycott. Where costs of boycotting are concerned, legislative strength of the opposition and the loss of public finance that depends on electoral participation will be considered. First, however, I will revisit the international context in which opposition parties are making decisions about boycotting or participating, as I believe it should condition their evaluations of the costs and benefits I have enumerated.

any support it has gained via campaigning toward the boycott effort. Conversely, if a boycotting party decides to enter the race at the last minute, they are considered to have devoted (e) to campaigning.

⁸ Hence $\pi(e) = \text{Pr}[\text{support of boycott} | e] \times \text{Pr}[\text{reform} | \text{supported boycott}]$. I assume the probability of reform given an unsupported boycott is zero, meaning that if a party boycotts and no one seems to care, reform is unlikely to result.

Competition for International Benefits

When the Cold War ended, some countries already had long-standing relationships with the west, which left them relatively insulated from new pressures to democratize. Presumably, those countries with established aid and alliance relationships, had already established acceptable levels of democratization. And while those levels of democratization may have varied dramatically from country to country, depending on what else the country had to offer, they were not likely to be subject to intense scrutiny by the international community, because these countries did not need to actively pursue new aid or alliance agreements.

Countries that had not previously established ties to the West found themselves in a decidedly different position at the end of the Cold War. Former Soviet allies and non-aligned countries found themselves in a new international environment where the only foreign powers offering meaningful aid and alliance options were Western, and increasingly demanding democracy as a condition for engagement. Thus, these more vulnerable developing countries were thrown into competition to secure international benefits from the West. Table 1, which compares major election boycotts and post-Cold War vulnerability, highlights two consequences of this competition among internationally vulnerable developing countries.¹⁰

Table 1. Elections from 1990-2002 by Country’s Boycott Activity and Pressure to Democratize

	No Major Boycott	Major Boycott	Total
Insulated from International pressure to Democratize	185 (38%)	301 (62%)	486 (100%)
Vulnerable to pressure to Democratize	7 (16%)	37 (84%)	44 (100%)
Total	192 (36%)	338 (64%)	530 (100%)

Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 8.5735$ Pr = 0.003

⁹ If there are n separate reforms that a party seeks then $\pi(e)V = \pi_1(e)V_1 + \pi_2(e)V_2 + \dots + \pi_n(e)V_n$

The first clear consequence of vulnerability to international pressure to democratize is electoral activity. Table 1 shows that from 1990-2002, 64% the elections that occurred in developing countries happened in countries who were not insulated from international pressure to democratize. Not surprisingly, countries who felt a greater need to compete for international benefits were holding more elections. The second consequence of vulnerability to democratization pressures appears to be an increase in election boycotts. Over five times as many major election boycotts occurred in countries that were vulnerable to international pressure to democratize. The difference in major boycotts between insulated and vulnerable countries far exceeds the relative increase in electoral activity in vulnerable countries, and suggests that the competition for foreign benefits among some countries has had consequences, not only for electoral activity, but also for domestic electoral behavior. Consequently, any discussion of the costs and benefits associated with the decision to boycott an election must be considered in light of the conditioning effects of a country's competition for international benefits.

Reducing Electoral Unfairness

Boycotts in Azerbaijan (in 1998 and 2000) and Cambodia (1998) are two examples of major boycotts in response to high levels of electoral unfairness. Cambodian opposition complained that the election had been called too quickly and had not given them adequate time to campaign. In Azerbaijan, both in 1998 and 2000, the same piece of electoral legislation was at issue. This legislation was thought to confer a serious advantage to the incumbent. Moreover, in 2000, the government also attempted to obtain control of the electoral oversight body—a body whose independence is considered very important for electoral fairness in developing democracies (Hartlyn (1994); Lehoucq (1996); Schedler (2004)).

Higher levels of unfairness increase the expected utility of an election boycott because they increase the benefits associated with achieving a desired change—in this case making elections fairer. If

¹⁰ Those developing countries allied with the US at the end of the Cold War (1989) are considered insulated from subsequent pressure to democratize, while Soviet allies and non-aligned countries are considered vulnerable. Coding comes from Walt (1987), Appendix 2.

the opposition is popular and elections are very unfair, that unfairness may be the only obstacle to the opposition gaining real political power. In such a situation, the benefit associated with boycotting to increase electoral fairness would be correspondingly high. In electoral settings that are already very fair, however, there is little to be gained by making elections fairer, and the expected utility associated with a boycott will be lower, because increased electoral fairness does not pose any substantial benefit.

Increased electoral fairness benefits all opposition parties, whether they helped bring it about or not, but not all opposition parties will benefit equally from increased electoral fairness. Large opposition parties will internalize the benefits of increased fairness in a way that small parties can not. The previous statement, that unfairness may be the only thing standing between an opposition party and political power, is certainly only applicable to a large opposition party or coalition of parties. Whereas the benefits of increased fairness for large opposition parties might be substantial, they are likely to be much more modest for small parties, whose size will automatically limit the extent of the benefits they will realize with increased fairness. For this reason, we would expect higher levels of electoral unfairness to influence major boycotts, but we would not expect minor boycotts to be affected by current electoral unfairness.

If a single opposition party is large enough, this party may constitute an privileged group as described by Olson (1965). According to Olson, a privileged group is one that has a large enough incentive to provide the public good that it is willing to bear the full burden of provision, and the good may be obtained without any coordination.¹¹ For example, If the largest opposition party in a country controls a majority of opposition support, it may act as a privileged group and boycott on its own. Such a party stands to benefit the most from an increase in electoral fairness, and will be able to effect a major boycott on its own, by virtue on its size.

Depending on how fragmented the opposition is, no single party may be willing to bear the costs of boycotting for electoral reform. If the opposition is concentrated in a few large parties, these parties

together may form a Schelling (1978) k-group, which will have the incentive to provide the public good. Shelling's k-group is similar to a privileged group, but is more directly applicable to a major boycott in which multiple parties participate. A k-group is a coalition where k represents the minimum size required for group members to benefit from a boycott, even if no one else participates.¹² A single large opposition party, or coalition of opposition parties, could reap the benefits of increased fairness, even if no other opposition parties participated in the boycott to achieve it.

Vulnerability to international pressure to democratize further increases the perceived benefit of a major boycott in situations of unfairness. In countries that are under pressure to demonstrate they are democratic, strong signals of unfairness (such as a major boycott) are likely to leave international actors with a negative assessment of democratization. An incumbent in a vulnerable country, who wants to remain competitive for international benefits, will have little choice but to respond to a major election boycott, and the probability that change will result from the boycott is increased. By contrast, an incumbent in a country that is insulated from international pressures to democratize may be able to dismiss a major boycott without fear of negative consequences.

Aid Dependence

A country's level of dependence on foreign aid may increase the expected utility of boycotting, to the extent that incumbents fear withdrawal of that aid. Given international pressure to democratize, in countries that are more vulnerable to that pressure and also more dependent on foreign aid, we would expect aid dependence to increase the probability of a boycott achieving its desired outcome. Countries that are competing for international favor and are simultaneously more dependent on foreign aid are likely the most susceptible to pressure to enact political reform, which gives opposition parties a better

¹¹ Olson, 50

¹² Schelling, 221

chance of effecting change. Foreign aid dependence should, thus, increase the expected utility of both major and minor boycotts.

Although aid dependence should increase the expected utility of any boycott, we must also consider how aid dependence will affect incumbent behavior, particularly in countries that are vulnerable to international pressure to democratize, before making any predictions about how foreign aid dependence should affect the decision to engage in a major or minor boycott. One possibility is that increased dependence on foreign aid might make incumbents behave better. Incumbents who are under more pressure to appear democratic and also depend more heavily on aid might choose to reduce electoral unfairness on their own, which would decrease the expected utility of major boycotts.

Table 2. Elections from 1990-2002, by Country’s Level of Aid Dependence and Unfairness

	Low aid dependence	Mid- aid dependence	High aid dependence
Most Fair	11 (12%)	1 (<1%)	2 (2%)
Mid-Fairness	46 (51%)	74 (50%)	51 (56%)
Least Fair	33 (37%)	73 (49%)	39 (42%)
Total	90 (100%)	148 (100%)	92 (100%)

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 21.3202$ Pr = 0.000

Table 2 does not lend empirical support to the possibility that incumbents who are more dependent on foreign aid are likely to improve electoral fairness of their own accord. The bulk of elections occur in the mid range of unfairness, irrespective of level of aid dependence. Furthermore, markedly fewer fair elections are conducted as aid dependence increases. While aid dependence does not seem to encourage incumbents to improve electoral fairness, a second possibility is that increased dependence on foreign aid will motivate incumbents to bargain with the opposition to avoid election boycotts.

If foreign aid dependence encouraged boycotts, we would expect to see more major and minor boycotts as aid dependence increased. If, on the other hand, the increase in foreign aid dependence also increased the incentive of the incumbent to offer concessions to avoid a boycott, and incumbents were able to strike a successful bargain, then we would expect to see instances of major and minor boycott decrease as aid dependence increased. Here again, given the differences between major and minor boycott, we are not likely to see a systematic relationship between major boycotts and foreign aid dependence, but we may expect to find a systematic relationship between aid dependence and minor boycotts.

Incumbents will not succeed in bargaining out of major boycotts all of the time. This limited success in bargaining is due in part to the size of the opposition involved in a major boycott, and in part to the heterogeneity of preferences that such a large portion of the opposition is likely to exhibit. In the interest of averting a boycott, an incumbent is only going to concede an amount of equal value to the aid he stands to lose from a successful boycott. Depending on the size of the opposition, the amount the incumbent is willing to concede may not satisfy enough of the opposition to prevent a boycott. Also, it may be difficult to arrive at a satisfactory bargain since the only interest that would-be boycotters are likely to share is a desire for increased electoral fairness. Increased fairness may be too costly a bargain for the incumbent to strike if it poses a direct threat to his or her own power. Furthermore, even if the incumbent is willing to promise increased fairness, previous unfair action might hurt the credibility of the incumbent. Given these factors, it is unlikely that incumbents will always be able to succeed in bargaining to avoid a boycott, and so we are not likely to observe a systematic relationship between major boycotts and aid dependence.

Unlike major boycotts, minor boycotts may, in fact, show a systematic relationship to foreign aid dependence. Incumbents should be more successful at avoiding minor boycotts for the same reasons that bargaining attempts with large portions of the opposition will sometimes fail. Because the opposition considering a minor boycott is small, it will be easier to satisfy their demands at a cost that

does not exceed the aid the incumbent stands to lose. Additionally, because the preferences of these smaller opposition parties tend to be more homogenous, and typically focused on the narrow interests that the party represents, it may be easier for the incumbent to satisfy a party's demands without threatening his or her own power.

Opposition strength

Opposition strength indicates the opposition's overall electoral competitiveness, relative to the incumbent government. Types of boycotts are defined based on the size of the opposition involved, as a portion of the opposition as a whole, but do not depend on the strength of the opposition relative to the incumbent. If a boycott involves a majority of the opposition, it is a major boycott, whether the opposition enjoys widespread support among voters or not. There are reasons to suspect, however, that legislative strength will affect the expected utility of boycotting and that the effects will be different for major and minor boycotts.

The strength of the opposition relative to the incumbent is not relevant for minor boycotts, because the small parties that undertake them never constitute a sizeable portion of the opposition. The size and particularistic orientations of would-be minor boycotters suggests that they should always expect to have limited legislative influence. Whether an opposition as a whole possesses a great deal of strength, as did the opposition in Pakistan in 1993 with control 50% of the legislature, or next-to-none, as was the case in Zimbabwe in 2000 when the opposition held 2% of legislative seats, the political power of minor parties is likely to remain small.¹³ At most, they might hope to obtain some measure of political power if the opposition is particularly strong, but this is not going to be enough, in and of itself, to give small parties greater political influence, relative to major political parties.

For major boycotts, on the other hand, opposition strength should have a strong influence on the decision to boycott. On the one hand, a stronger opposition suggests a cost of boycotting. The more the

opposition stands to win in an electoral contest, the more they forfeit with non-participation. This notion that legislative strength presents a cost of major boycotts is consistent with arguments that boycotts occur when the opposition is particularly weak. If legislative strength decreases the expected utility associated with a boycott by increasing its costs, then we would expect boycotts at lower levels of opposition strength. I wish to offer an alternative interpretation of opposition strength: that it will actually help to mitigate many other costs associated with boycotting and increase the expected utility of a boycott.

Large opposition parties have the advantage of size, which allow them to enjoy longer time horizons as a consequence. Parties recognized as main opposition parties should have larger support bases to sustain them in the future, and will make private fund raising easier than it is likely to be for small parties, with their correspondingly smaller bases of support. The stronger the opposition is, relative to the incumbent party, the more competitive large opposition parties will seem. This will increase the opposition's perceived ability to challenge the incumbent for government, which should further increase the private funds they are able to raise.¹⁴ Although an increase in strength probably means a larger immediate sacrifice in terms of seats lost, it also means a greater ability to mitigate the other costs that will arise from non-participation, such as the loss of public funds, re-registration fees, or signature requirements.

In countries that are democratizing to compete for foreign aid, this perceived benefit of opposition strength (its ability to mitigate the costs of a boycott) should be amplified. Opposition parties may be more willing to withstand an immediate sacrifice because they know their country is under pressure to improve its democracy—which should improve the opposition's own electoral performance in the future. More importantly, a stronger opposition will feel more *able* to withstand immediate costs, because they will be able to offset these costs with their size and corresponding fundraising abilities. In

¹³ Figures from Keefer's Database of Political Institutions.

¹⁴ Cox, 192-93.

developing countries that are more insulated from pressures to democratize, by contrast, the opposition may feel that the time in which they could reasonably expect democratic improvements to be made exceeds even their extended time horizons, causing them to discount the extent to which their current strength might mitigate the costs of a boycott.

Conditional Public Finance for Political Parties

Conditional public finance refers to public funds available to political parties on the basis of their electoral participation. When such funding is available, the specific conditions for finance can vary greatly from one country to the next, as can the ease or difficulty associated with its attainment. In general, we would expect the availability of easily attainable conditional public finance to decrease the expected utility of a boycott, by increasing the costs associated with non-participation. If very minimal participation requirements are enough to secure public party finance, then not participating means the forfeiture of near-certain funds. As with the other factors considered thus far, we would expect the effects of conditional party finance on the expected utility of a boycott to vary depending on the type of boycott in question.

The provision of public finance for political parties is relatively common in modern democracies. Similarly, many newer democracies make public funds available to parties because these parties generally lack a well-developed organizational structure, which can limit their ability to raise private funds.¹⁵ This provision of public funds in developing democracies has generated little controversy, in large part because it builds on the example set by most established democracies. The particularities of provision vary for each country, but Albania, Argentina, Benin, Burkina Faso, Bolivia, Brazil, Cote d'Ivoire, Estonia, Gabon, Guinea, Macedonia, Morocco, Namibia, Paraguay, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, to name a few, all make public funds available to political parties. In most cases public funds are awarded to help parties with general administration and campaign activities.

There are a number of ways in which a government can allocate party finance. Money can be allotted equally and unconditionally, as in Azerbaijan, or on some conditional basis. The most common conditional bases for party finance depend on electoral participation. Some countries, such as Mozambique and Morocco, base their public finance on the number of candidates a party puts forth in the elections. Most other conditions for funding depend on electoral performance, rather than on participation.

In Costa Rica, for example, parties must obtain at least 4 percent of the total votes cast in the election to be eligible for public finance (Tjernstrom, 2003). By contrast, in Bolivia parties receive public funds in proportion to their total vote share in the previous election.¹⁶ In Lithuania, parties must hold a seat in the legislature in order to receive public funding, and Israel emphasizes legislative seat share in its provision of public finance to political parties.¹⁷ Many countries employ some combination of these conditions in allocating public finance to parties.

Public finance that is conditional on electoral performance will necessarily affect the decision calculus of large parties, in the same way as smaller parties. As discussed in the previous section on legislative strength, Large opposition parties tend to have longer time horizons as a consequence of their size, so they may not be as concerned with short-term cost. By virtue of their size, large parties will not have problems raising private funds (relative to smaller parties), and the longer time horizon should make it easier for the major boycotters to forgo immediate benefit. True, the public finance forfeited with a boycott is likely to be larger in dollar amount than the finance a small party stands to forfeit, but given a large party's ability to offset such costs, it is not clear that conditional public finance will affect major boycotts.

Minor boycotters, on the other hand, do not have the advantage of size, and have shorter time horizons as a result. Due to the demographic limitations of the population it represents, a smaller party

¹⁵ van Biezen, 329.

¹⁶ Tjernstrom, 2003.

¹⁷ http://www.idea.int/parties/finance/db/comparison_view.cfm

is going to have a more difficult time raising private funds and remaining competitive in the future, which makes the value of immediate public funds much greater. If would-be minor boycotters give up public funds with a boycott, their party may not be able to survive. Therefore, while we do not expect to see a systematic relationship between conditional party finance and major boycotts, we do expect the presence of conditional party finance to discourage minor boycotts. As a correlary, we expect to find a lack of conditional party finance where we observe minor boycotts. India, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe all lack conditional party finance and all experienced minor election boycotts between 1990 and 2002.

Testing the Theory

The specific costs and benefits enumerated in the model above, can be used to generate a series of testable hypotheses. In order to test the hypotheses that will follow, I have constructed a dataset which contains observations for every country holding multi-party elections since 1990, with one observation for each year an election was held. Since my decision model applies only to opposition parties, single-party elections were excluded. My sample of elections is further restricted in two important ways.

First, because boycotts happen almost exclusively in developing democracies and because patterns of fairness, aid-dependence, legislative strength and availability of conditional public finance are distinctly different in established democracies, I have restricted my sample to developing countries (those countries receiving foreign aid according to OECD data). Second, because my theory is about the ways that international competition for foreign benefits condition the decisions opposition parties make, I have further restricted my sample to those countries that should be particularly vulnerable to international pressure to democratize.¹⁸

¹⁸ Again, Waldt's (1987) coding of US allies is used to differentiate those countries that are insulated from pressure to democratize (US allies) from those countries who are more vulnerable to the pressure (former Soviet allies and non-aligned countries). Because there are so few instances of boycott in countries insulated from pressure to democratize, the regression analyses that follow cannot be duplicated (with meaningful results) on that sub-set of the data.

The dependent variables are dichotomous. The dependent variable for major boycott is equal to one if a major boycott occurred in a particular election, and zero otherwise. This dependent variable will be used to test all hypotheses pertaining to major boycotts. Similarly, the dependent variable used to test all minor boycott hypotheses is equal to one if a boycott occurred that was not major, and equal to zero otherwise. Both of these variables were constructed from exhaustive searches of *Keesing's Record of World Events*; world news sources in *Lexis Nexis*; and *Google*.

I use three control variables in my statistical models. One variable is a measure of economic development (*per capita GDP*), and another variable is a measure of length of democracy (*years democratic*).¹⁹ These two control variables are included to account both for unmodeled heterogeneity among cases given the empirical regularities of election boycotts. The two features that distinguish countries where boycotts never occur from those where they do occur are a higher level of economic development and longer experience with democracy. The final control variable is a measure of whether or not international election observers were present, based on the findings of Beaulieu & Hyde (2005).

Electoral Unfairness

The first independent variable of interest is a measure of electoral unfairness (*unfairness*). This variable was constructed using Freedom House measures of a country's political freedoms and civil liberties for the year prior to each election in the dataset. The two measures were multiplied to create an index of overall electoral fairness, since political freedom and civil liberties serve to reinforce each other, and both contribute to the overall freedom and fairness of elections. The measure ranges from 1-49, with 1 representing greatest electoral fairness and 49 indicating extreme electoral unfairness. Based on the preceding theory, the following two hypotheses can be generated:

H_{1a}: *Greater electoral unfairness should increase the probability of major election boycotts*

H_{1b}: *Electoral unfairness should have no systematic effect on minor election boycotts.*

Foreign Aid Dependence

My measure of a country's dependence on foreign aid (*aid dependence*) was constructed using OECD data on total aid disbursements in a given year, adjusted for inflation. This figure was then divided by the country's GDP, to provide an indication of the size of aid receipts, relative to the country's overall economy. Considering how foreign aid dependence should affect the calculus of both opposition parties and incumbents leads to the following hypotheses:

H_{2a}: *Dependence on foreign aid should have no systematic effect on major election boycotts.*

H_{2b}: *Greater dependence on foreign aid should reduce the probability of a minor boycott.*

Opposition Strength

Opposition strength is measured by the proportion of legislative seats held by the opposition at the time of the election (*seat share*).²⁰ While overall strength of the opposition should not affect the decision of small parties to engage in a minor boycott, it may very well influence larger parties deciding whether or not to engage in a major boycott. Conventional wisdom about the weakness of boycotting parties would suggest that greater opposition strength will increase the costs associated with boycotts, but I have argued that opposition strength will actually help to mitigate many of the costs associated with a boycott and the subsequent electoral cycle out of office. Accordingly, I offer the following two hypotheses:

H_{3a}: *A larger legislative seat share for the opposition should increase the probability a major election boycott.*

H_{3b}: *Opposition seat share should have no systematic effect on minor boycotts.*

¹⁹ The years democratic measure records number of years since the country's last democratic interruption.

²⁰ Opposition seat share figures come from Keefer's database of political institutions.

Conditional Public Finance for Parties

The final independent variable to be considered is the availability of conditional public finance for political parties (*easy CPF*). Data on public finance, and the extent to which it is conditional, were collected from information supplied by the International IDEA project. Additional information was collected with primary research at the library of electoral laws of IFES in Washington D.C. All available countries were coded based on whether or not they offered public finance, whether or not that finance was conditional on electoral participation, and what specific conditions were placed on its receipt. Countries are coded as offering easily attainable conditional public finance if parties can secure public funds based either on the number of candidates they present in an election, or based on the votes received. Countries are coded as *not* offering easily attainable CPF if no finance is available, or if it is based on some threshold of votes, or seats won.

H_{4a}: *Easily attainable conditional public finance should have no systematic effect on major election boycotts.*

H_{4b}: *Easily attainable conditional public finance should reduce the probability of minor election boycotts.*

Results

Two separate logit regressions were estimated to test the preceding hypotheses, because major and minor boycotts are the result of two distinct choices. In one instance, large parties and/or the bulk of the opposition are deciding whether or not to boycott, which can result in a major boycott. In the other instance, small parties are deciding whether or not to boycott, which can result in a minor boycott. Thus, the relationship between dependent and independent variables can be expressed as follows:

1. $P(\text{major boycott} | x_i) = 1/(1+e^{-x_i\beta})$
2. $P(\text{minor boycott} | x_i) = 1/(1+e^{-x_i\beta})$

Where:

$$x_i\beta = \text{Constant} + \beta_1 \text{ electoral unfairness} + \beta_2 \text{ foreign aid dependence} + \beta_3 \text{ opposition strength} + \beta_4 \text{ easy cpf} + \beta_5 \text{ monitor presence} + \beta_6 \text{ per capita GDP} + \beta_7 \text{ years democratic} + e$$

These models use robust standard errors, which have been clustered by country, to account for the fact that individual observations within a particular country are not likely to be independent of one another.

Table 3. Logit Regression Results for Major and Minor Election Boycotts

<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Model 1</i> <i>Major Election Boycotts</i> <i>(robust standard errors)</i>	<i>Model 2</i> <i>Minor Election Boycotts</i> <i>(robust standard errors)</i>
<i>Unfairness</i>	.0609* (.0231)	-.0128 (.0400)
<i>Foreign Aid Dependence</i>	-1.448 (2.846)	-79.29* (19.35)
<i>Opposition Strength</i>	.0256* (.0103)	-.0585 (.0418)
<i>Easy CPF</i>	-1.294 (1.104)	2.095 (1.605)
<i>Monitors Present</i>	.4610 (.5391)	-.3251 (.5503)
<i>per capita GDP</i>	-.0003 (.0003)	-.0002 (.0001)
<i>Years Democratic</i>	-.0228 (.0242)	.0783 (.0611)
<i>Constant</i>	-2.194 (1.239)	-.2859 (2.009)
Log pseudo-likelihood	-44.239	-12.768
Wald Chi ² (7)	20.56	34.12
Prob > Chi ²	.0045	.0000
Pseudo R ²	.2022	.4629
Number of Observations	119	119

Standard errors adjusted for clustering on country.

* $p \leq .05$ two-tailed z test

Table 3 shows the results of two logit regression models, in Model 1, major boycott is the dependent variable, Model 2 uses the same set of independent and control variables, but minor boycott is the dependent variable. The results of these two regression models further demonstrate the differences

between major and minor election boycotts and allow us to evaluate my hypotheses pertaining to the causes of major and minor election boycotts.

Based on the estimates in Table 3 we are unable to reject hypotheses 1a&b, pertaining to the effects of electoral unfairness on boycotts. Increased electoral unfairness appears to increase the probability of a major election boycott, but does not have a statistically significant relationship to minor boycotts. Thus, it appears that electoral unfairness does influence the decision to engage in a major election boycott, but has no bearing on the decision to undertake a minor boycott.

Foreign aid dependence has the anticipated effects. The lack of a statistically significant relationship between foreign aid dependence and major boycotts is likely due to the limited success with which incumbents are able to avoid a boycott. The significant and negative relationship between aid dependence and minor boycotts, indicating that increase dependence on foreign aid decreases the probability of a minor election boycott, shows that incumbents are motivated to avoid election boycotts when they are more dependent on foreign aid, and can successfully do so when the opposition they must bargain with is small and does not pose a direct threat to their power. Based on these findings we are unable to reject hypotheses 2a&b.

We are also unable to reject hypotheses 3a&b, regarding the effects of opposition strength on the decision to boycott. Larger legislative seat shares are associated with an increased probability of major election boycott, but bear no significant relationship to minor boycotts. Consistent with my theory, it appears as though stronger oppositions feel better-able to withstand the costs associated with a major boycott, while opposition strength has little bearing on the decision calculus of small parties.

The presence of easily attainable conditional public finance appears to have no bearing on boycott decisions, major or minor. While we did not expect major boycotts to be influenced by the presence of easy CPF, we did expect smaller parties to take the potential loss of such funding into consideration in their decision to boycott. These results leave us unable to reject hypothesis 4a, but

based on the lack of a statistically significant relationship between easy CPF and minor election boycotts we must reject hypothesis 4b.

Conclusion

By specifying a distinction between major and minor boycotts, this paper has provided a better understanding of why election boycotts occur. We find that two important factors influence the decision of large segments of the opposition to engage in a major boycott, and that neither of these factors are important to small parties deciding to launch a minor boycott. Furthermore, this paper has shown that the international context of elections in developing countries matters.

Major election boycotts are motivated by electoral unfairness and opposition strength. The finding that unfairness encourages election boycotts is consistent with previous work on the question of election boycotts, as well as with the reasons that boycotters themselves often provide for their actions. Here I have argued that unfairness increases the benefits associated with boycotting, because it holds out the prospect for future electoral fairness that would likely improve the electoral performance of major opposition parties. Future electoral fairness does not represent the same benefit for the small parties that might engage in minor boycotts and, accordingly, is not found to influence the decision to engage in a minor boycott.

Major election boycotts also depend on the strength of the opposition, but not in the way that has often been posited. The standard notion that opposition parties are inherently weak when they choose to boycott, and that the desire to mask this weakness might actually motivate the boycott, is not borne out by the findings in this paper. If any thing, stronger oppositions are more likely to boycott. I have argued that oppositions are motivated to launch a major boycott from positions of strength because they seem themselves as better able to withstand the short term costs associated with a boycott. Opposition strength is not meaningful to small parties, whose support in the electorate is limited, and not surprisingly, we do not find that opposition strength has any effect on minor boycotts.

By restricting the analysis to those countries that were likely to be most vulnerable to international pressures to democratize, I have shown how the context of developing countries competing for foreign benefits works to condition opposition and incumbent behavior. Heightened sensitivity to pressure to democratize encourages large opposition parties to boycott when there is a chance to increase electoral fairness. It may also lead those opposition parties to feel as though they can rely on their size and strength to withstand the short-term costs associated with a boycott, since there is an increased probability that their boycott efforts will result in reform.

Finally we see that pressure to democratize will lead the incumbent to bargain to avoid boycotts, particularly when the incumbent depends more heavily on foreign aid. Again, because of the distinct features of major and minor boycotts, the incumbent's success in averting boycotts is only evident in the case of minor boycotts, but the lack of a significant positive effect of foreign aid dependence on major boycotts suggests that when aid is at stake, incumbents are succeeding in avoiding major boycotts, at least some of the time.

Not only does this paper improve our understanding of another distinctive aspect of elections in developing countries, but it also shows that Post-Cold War democratization has had important domestic political consequences for those countries competing to secure international aid and alliances. This paper challenges future examinations of the electoral process in developing countries to take this international context into consideration when trying to understand how developing elections are different from (or similar to) elections in established democracies.

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