

# Comparing Two Measures of Electoral Integrity in the American States

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## Abstract

We compare two widely publicized measures of state electoral integrity in the United States: the Electoral Integrity Project's 2016 U.S. Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Survey and the Pew 2014 Elections Performance Index. First, we review the theoretical and empirical differences between the two measures and find that they correlate at a surprisingly low level across the states. Second, given this low correlation, we examine the component parts of these indices and find that both are capturing multiple dimensions. Third, we examine how the components and the individual indicators that comprise each measure are linked to citizens' stated perceptions about electoral integrity. Throughout the article, we articulate a set of preemptive recommendations that urge researchers to be cautious and deliberate when choosing among measures of electoral integrity to use in future empirical studies.

## Keywords

U.S. state politics, electoral integrity, election administration, public opinion

A Gallup public opinion poll conducted immediately before the November 2016 election reported that only 35% of respondents were “very confident” that votes would be accurately cast and counted in the election, while 21% were “not too confident” and fully 12% were “not confident at all.” After his victory, Donald J. Trump repeatedly referenced that millions of votes were fraudulently cast and that he, not Hillary Clinton, won the national popular vote. Although embroiled in an election-related scandal due to an uncertain level of Russian intervention, President Trump called for a Presidential Commission on Election Integrity to investigate his allegations of widespread voter fraud.

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At its most basic level, votes being cast with confidence is a fundamental prerequisite for the legitimacy of democracy (Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008; Birch 2008; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001; Hill 1994; Norris 2014). Whether one feels that their vote is accurately counted has important consequences for overall support of democratic principles (Dalton 1999), democratic institutions (Bowler et al. 2015; Bowler and Donovan 2002; Dalton 1999), and democratic processes (Price and Romantan 2004; Rahn, Brehm, and Carlson 1999). It also has consequences for whether people vote and participate through institutional means (Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008; Birch 2010; Highton 2004) or through engaging in protest and other extra-institutional avenues (Norris, Frank, and Coma 2015).

The 2016 election is not the first to raise questions about the level of confidence Americans have in our elections or whether the broader system is broken and in need of reform. After the contested 2000 presidential election, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to establish federal standards and provide administrative support to states. Similarly, after the 2012 election, President Obama called for a bipartisan Presidential Commission on Election Administration. Despite these two pushes for a more active role for the federal government, election administration still rests largely at the hands of the state where there exists significant variation in legislation to make voting more accessible and to promote the integrity of the election process (Alvarez and Grofman 2014; Stewart 2014). For example, recent court cases have blocked partisan/racial gerrymandering redistricting efforts in Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. The U.S. Supreme Court recently refused to hear a case regarding North Carolina's photo identification law—which the Federal Appeals Court argued “target[ed] African-Americans with almost surgical precision.”

Moreover, a report (based on one of the data sets we examine in this article) that argued the state of North Carolina can no longer rightly be considered a democracy after passing a variety of legislation aimed at electoral administration gave rise to considerable public debate (Gelman 2017; Reynolds 2016). This eye-catching argument attracted national media coverage in outlets as diverse as *GQ* (Darby 2017) and *The Huffington Post* (Hamze 2016) before being sharply criticized by Andrew Gelman in an article for *Slate*. In addition, scholars associated with the Electoral Integrity Project have widely promoted their work across a variety of outlets including *Vox* (Norris et al. 2016a), *The Washington Post* (Norris et al. 2016b), and *The Conversation* (Norris 2016). The increasing attention, both popular and scholarly, to questions of electoral integrity makes comparing empirical measures of the concept across the American states a worthwhile and necessary task.

In light of this increasing attention, we systematically compare two prominent and widely publicized measures of state electoral integrity: the Electoral Integrity Project's 2016 U.S. Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Survey and the Pew 2014 Elections Performance Index. First, we review the theoretical and empirical differences between the two measures and find that they correlate at a surprisingly low level across the states. Second, given this low correlation, we examine the component parts of these indices and find that both are capturing multidimensional concepts. Third, we examine how the components and the individual indicators that comprise each measure are

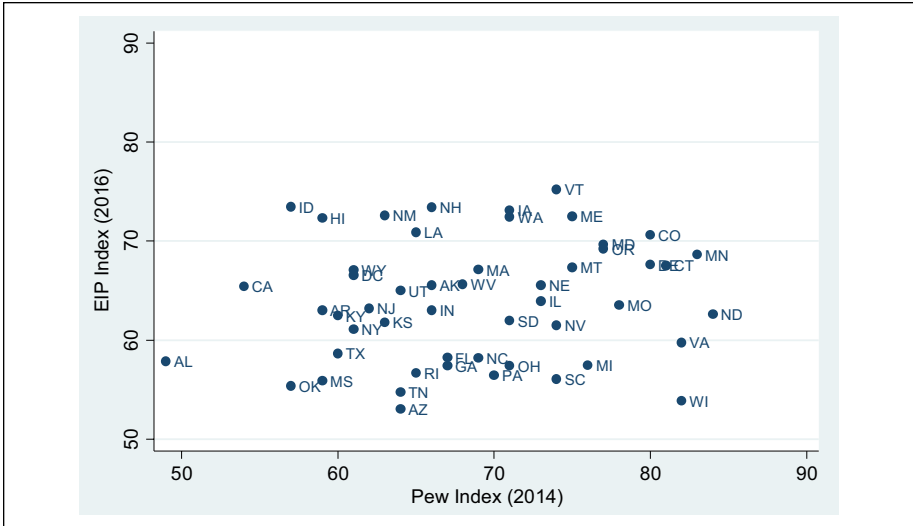
linked to citizens' stated perceptions about electoral integrity. Throughout the article, we articulate a set of preemptive recommendations (rather than punitive appraisals of previous studies) that urge researchers to be cautious and deliberate when choosing among measures of electoral integrity to use in future empirical studies.

## Comparing the Two Measures

We focus our investigation on two measures.<sup>1</sup> First, we examine recently released data on state elections for 2016 compiled by the Electoral Integrity Project and led by Pippa Norris, Alessandro Nai, Holly Ann Garnett, and Max Grömping (2016) (hereafter "EIP"). Although the EIP measure touches on the specifics of election administration, it also takes a broader approach. For example, Norris (2014, 21) defines electoral integrity as the "agreed upon international conventions and universal standards about elections reflecting global norms applying to all countries worldwide throughout the electoral cycle, including during the pre-electoral period, the campaign, on polling day, and its aftermath." According to the EIP measure's "Perceptions of Electoral Integrity" codebook, state electoral integrity is measured by asking 726 political experts to evaluate elections in their state using 49 items, grouped into 11 categories that reflect the whole electoral cycle. The 11 categories include electoral laws, electoral procedures, boundaries, voter registration, party registration, campaign media, campaign finance, voting processes, vote counting, postelection procedures, and electoral authorities.<sup>2</sup>

Second, we examine the 2014 Elections Performance Index from the Pew Charitable Trusts (hereafter "Pew"). Pew, in partnership with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, created an advisory panel of state election officials and academics to develop an objective measure of the quality of state election administration. To construct this objective measure, the advisory panel selected 17 categories to measure electoral performance. The categories include data completeness, disability or illness-related voting problems, the percentage of mail ballots rejected, the percentage of mail ballots unreturned, the percentage of military and overseas ballots rejected, the percentage of military and overseas ballots unreturned, whether online registration is available, whether a postelection audit is required, the percentage of provisional ballots cast, the percentage of provisional ballots rejected, registration or absentee ballot problems, the percentage of registrations rejected, the residual vote rate, voter registration rate, the availability of voting information online lookup tools, voting wait time, and voter turnout. In identifying the appropriate standards, the advisory panel of academics and election officials prioritized that data ought to come from a reliable source, be available and consistent over time, be available and consistent for all states, reflect salient outcomes or measures of good elections, be easily understood by the public with a relatively unambiguous interpretation, and should be able to be replicated in the near future (Pew 2016).<sup>3</sup>

Both measures include an overall composite score that allows for initial comparisons. The EIP measure (that imputes values for states when and where necessary) scores the states in terms of the overall integrity of elections on 0 to 100 scale, ranging from a low of 53.0 in Arizona to a high of 75.2 in Vermont. The Pew measure also



**Figure 1.** Correlation between Pew and EIP measures.  
 Note. Pew = The Pew Charitable Trusts; EIP = Electoral Integrity Project.

aggregates state election administration performance by averaging across all 17 categories on a 0 to 100 scale, ranging from a low of 49 in Alabama to a high of 84 in North Dakota. Figure 1 displays a scatterplot of the two measures and suggests that there is little linear relationship between them.

A close inspection of the calculated difference in rank ordering for the two measures in the rightmost column of Table 1 reveals substantial disagreement in state evaluations. In rare occasions, states fare similarly across the EIP and Pew measures. For example, Colorado performs well according to both while Oklahoma performs poorly. Far more often, however, the two measures come to markedly different conclusions. For example, Idaho is the second highest ranked state according to the EIP measure but the 48th highest according to the Pew measure. This works in the other direction as well. Wisconsin is the 50th highest ranked state (or next to lowest) according to the EIP measure but the 4th highest according to Pew. Indeed, the average overall difference in state ranking between the two measures is fully 16 states and the median difference is 12 states. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that across the states the two measures correlate only modestly at .13. Given this low correlation, our first recommendation is that *scholars should not utilize these two measures interchangeably or use them to serve as a robustness check for one another in future statistical analysis.*

### Unpacking the Two Measures

Why are these two prominent measures of state electoral integrity only modestly correlated? The first notable difference between the two measures is their conceptual

**Table 1.** Comparing the Two State Electoral Integrity Measures.

State	Pew score	EIP score	Pew rank	EIP rank	Difference in rank
Wisconsin	82	54	4	50	46
Idaho	57	73	48	2	46
Hawaii	59	72	47	8	39
New Mexico	63	73	38	5	33
Virginia	82	60	3	36	33
Michigan	76	57	11	41	30
South Carolina	74	56	14	46	30
North Dakota	84	63	1	30	29
California	54	65	50	23	27
New Hampshire	66	73	30	3	27
Louisiana	65	71	33	9	24
Wyoming	61	67	42	18	24
Ohio	71	57	19	42	23
Pennsylvania	70	56	23	45	22
Washington, DC	61	67	40	19	21
Nevada	74	62	15	34	19
Arkansas	59	63	46	28	18
Iowa	71	73	22	4	18
Missouri	78	64	8	26	18
Arizona	64	53	35	51	16
Georgia	67	57	27	43	16
North Carolina	69	58	24	39	15
Tennessee	64	55	34	49	15
Vermont	74	75	16	1	15
Washington	71	72	20	7	13
Kentucky	60	62	43	31	12
New Jersey	62	63	39	27	12
Rhode Island	65	57	32	44	12
Utah	64	65	36	24	12
Alabama	49	58	51	40	11
Minnesota	83	69	2	13	11
South Dakota	71	62	21	32	11
Connecticut	81	68	5	15	10
Florida	67	58	28	38	10
Alaska	66	66	29	21	8
Massachusetts	69	67	25	17	8
Delaware	80	68	7	14	7
Illinois	73	64	18	25	7
Maine	75	72	13	6	7
Texas	60	59	44	37	7
New York	61	61	41	35	6

*(continued)*

**Table 1. (continued)**

State	Pew score	EIP score	Pew rank	EIP rank	Difference in rank
West Virginia	68	66	26	20	6
Nebraska	73	66	17	22	5
Colorado	80	71	6	10	4
Kansas	63	62	37	33	4
Montana	75	67	12	16	4
Maryland	77	70	9	11	2
Oregon	77	69	10	12	2
Indiana	66	63	31	29	2
Mississippi	59	56	45	47	2
Oklahoma	57	55	49	48	1

Note. See text for description of each measure of state electoral integrity. States are ordered by difference in rank (from largest difference to smallest). Pew = The Pew Charitable Trusts; EIP = Electoral Integrity Project.

scope. The Pew measure is restrained to specific mechanics of election performance or administration and the 17 categories are largely targeted to the registration process and the ballot. In contrast, the EIP measure relies on 11 categories that cover a much broader terrain including the drawing of legislative district lines, media coverage, and campaign finance laws.

The second notable difference is in the details of how the two measures are calculated. The Pew measure is based on objective indicators that are selected for inclusion by a panel of experts. The EIP measure, by contrast, is based on expert evaluations of various political and electoral conditions in each state (see Norris 2014, chap. 3). Although valid criticisms have been raised regarding how the EIP scores of U.S. states compare with notoriously undemocratic countries around the world (see Gelman 2017), those concerns are not directly relevant here since our goal is only to evaluate how these measures fare when comparing U.S. states to one another in a relative sense.<sup>4</sup> In other words, in this article we offer no appraisal of the validity of making cross-national comparisons with the EIP measure and instead confine our evaluation to the utility of comparisons across the states *within* the United States.

As the composite scores are only modestly related to one another, it is prudent to take a closer look at the underlying indicators that comprise each index. The internal reliability of the different indicators, 19 in the case of the Pew measure (see Note 3) and 11 in the case of the EIP measure, should give scholars pause before utilizing the composite score. Specifically, the EIP measure has a Cronbach's alpha of .89,<sup>5</sup> while the alpha for the Pew measure is only .30.

A principal component analysis of the EIP measure retains two components with eigenvalues greater than 1 that explain 65% of the variance (see Table 2, Panel A). Party registration and postelection procedures load more strongly on the second component while the remainder of the indicators load on the first. The fact that these two indicators are theoretically connected is sensible, as both are targeted toward whether

**Table 2.** Principal Component Analysis Component Loadings.

Panel A: EIP measure						
	Component 1		Component 2			
Electoral laws	0.3417					-0.1303
Electoral procedures	0.3392					-0.1552
Boundaries	0.3067					0.0631
Voter registration	0.2978					-0.4182
Party registration	0.2931					0.3871
Campaign media	0.2856					0.1740
Campaign finance	0.3175					0.2531
Voting process	0.3221					-0.2483
Vote count	0.3032					0.1072
Postelection	0.1283					0.6389
Electoral authorities	0.3241					-0.2335

Panel B: Pew measure						
	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4	Component 5	Component 6
Website registration status	-0.2809	0.0248	0.1002	0.0030	0.0080	0.5709
Website precinct ballot	-0.2546	0.0214	-0.0272	0.4066	-0.3314	-0.1615
Website absentee status	-0.1712	0.3114	0.2915	0.1131	0.2427	-0.0730
Website provisional status	-0.0433	0.0453	0.3734	0.3189	0.2654	0.1537
Registrations rejected	0.2075	-0.2535	-0.1726	0.1536	0.3998	0.0775
Provisional ballots cast	0.2961	-0.0003	0.4115	-0.2146	-0.0484	-0.1675
Provisional ballots rejected	0.3313	-0.1445	0.2851	-0.2567	0.1273	0.0101
Mail ballots rejected	0.2384	0.3939	-0.2540	-0.0830	0.0491	0.1122
Mail ballots unreturned	0.3767	0.2012	-0.0339	0.2098	0.2728	0.0263
Overseas ballots rejected	0.2694	-0.1322	0.3264	-0.0180	-0.2292	-0.227
Overseas ballots unreturned	0.3026	0.0712	-0.0959	0.4068	0.2136	0.0081
Data completeness	-0.1171	0.2754	0.1365	0.0544	-0.0062	-0.4984
Postelection audit requirement	0.1778	-0.0524	-0.0024	-0.2027	-0.3437	0.3614
Disability/illness-related problems	-0.1705	-0.3659	0.0979	0.2556	0.0847	0.0065
Registration or absentee problems	0.2042	0.3138	-0.0238	0.1818	-0.3315	-0.0049
Online registration availability	0.2291	0.1048	0.0928	0.3803	-0.3784	0.2122
Voting wait time	0.0002	-0.2981	0.3429	0.1429	-0.0620	0.0485
Voter registration rate	-0.0810	0.2593	0.3552	0.0030	0.0196	0.3034
Voter turnout	-0.1704	0.3444	0.1476	-0.2460	0.1571	0.0589

Note. EIP = Electoral Integrity Project; Pew = The Pew Charitable Trusts.

the opposition was denied the opportunity to run for office or disputed/challenged the election results.

A principal component analysis of the Pew measure retains fully six components with eigenvalues greater than one. Together, they explain 73% of the variance. When examining Panel B of Table 2, it is less clear that theoretical connections can be made across the components. However, some make intuitive sense. For example, the fifth component clearly speaks to voter registration issues—the number of registrations rejected loads most strongly on this component while registration problems and the availability of online registration load most negatively on this component. However,

some have less clear overlap. For example, both the number of provisional ballots rejected and the number of mail ballots unreturned load most strongly on the first component.

To echo our first recommendation above, these measures should not be treated as complementary rivals. Instead, given the low correlation between the two measures, we feel confident suggesting they are capturing distinct concepts or, perhaps, different dimensions of the same concept. Moreover, both the EIP and Pew measures have distinct components within each measure. Taken together, these two measures are conceptually and empirically different—which raises the question of which one (if either) is more fully capturing electoral integrity. Our purpose here is not to adjudicate between the two measures but to provide scholars tangible recommendations on how to use each. The increased media attention for the EIP makes this a more timely and fruitful line of inquiry. Although some studies (i.e., Bowler et al. 2015) have used the composite Pew measure, we urge caution before proceeding. Indeed, we think there are strong reasons to believe both indices are tapping into multiple conceptual dimensions and, therefore, our second recommendation is that *scholars should proceed with caution and avoid use of the overall composite measures in future empirical studies.*

## Citizens' Perceptions of Electoral Integrity

Given (1) the weak statistical relationship between two indices that aim to measure the same underlying concept of electoral integrity, (2) the mixed reliability of the composite scales, and (3) the multidimensionality of each measure, we believe one straightforward way to compare their validity is to investigate how aspects of each measure relate to citizens' stated perceptions of electoral integrity. Accordingly, our goal in this section is to further our understanding about electoral integrity and its link to citizens' attitudes by empirically evaluating the relationship between the EIP and Pew measures and citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity. By doing so, we hope to provide preemptive guidance to scholars who plan to use one of the measures in future studies of state electoral integrity.

Recent research has examined the link between election-related policy reforms and voter confidence (Ansolabehere 2009; Ansolabehere and Persily 2008; Berinsky 2005; Bowler et al. 2015; Bowler and Donovan 2016). The most prominent and recent example of a state policy reform that engages the perceived integrity of the election is photo identification laws. In general, research has found that the public is more likely to believe that these types of reforms prevent voter fraud rather than restrict participation (Atkeson et al. 2014).<sup>6</sup> However, partisanship plays an integral role in explaining support for photo identification (Gronke et al. 2015; Hicks et al. 2015; Stewart, Ansolabehere, and Persily 2016)—Republicans are more homogeneously in favor while Democrats experience more disagreement within their camp.

But do laws, like photo identification, have an effect on citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity in their state? Previous studies have examined the relationship between voting technology and voter attitudes (Atkeson and Saunders 2007; Bullock, Hood, and Clark 2005) and between poll workers (as "street-level bureaucrats") and



voter attitudes (Atkeson and Saunders 2007; Claassen et al. 2008; Hall, Monson, and Patterson 2007; 2009) and found that they have at least a small effect on citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity. Most closely related to the focus of our current study, Bowler and Donovan (2016) find little evidence of a general relationship between voter photo identification laws and confidence in state elections. However, they do find a relationship conditioned by partisanship: Republicans living in states with strict identification laws report more confidence while Democrats report less confidence. Furthermore, in related research, Bowler et al. (2015) examine the relationship between election administration more broadly (using the 2012 version of the Pew measure) and citizens' perceptions of election fairness and find that citizens are more likely to report that the electoral process and elected officials are "fair" in the World Values Survey in states with higher electoral integrity scores. However, from a substantive standpoint, they note that the effect of state electoral integrity on perceptions of fairness is rather modest relative to partisanship and demographic explanations.

To investigate the possible relationship between the two measures of state electoral integrity and citizens' perceptions, we use data from the 2016 wave of the American National Election Studies (ANES) to measure citizens' perceptions about the integrity of elections. In particular, we focus on respondents' answer to the following question from the postelection survey: "In your view, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections? Votes are counted fairly." The response categories are "all of the time, most of the time, about half of the time, some of the time, or never." The dependent variable is scaled 1 to 5, recoded such that higher values indicate greater confidence in electoral integrity (i.e., more likely to think votes are counted fairly).

We select this dependent variable in particular because we believe it is the ANES item that most directly queries respondents about their perceptions of the integrity and fairness of elections.<sup>7</sup> The overall health of a democracy rests on the consent of the governed and the ability to cast a meaningful vote, and trust that it is counted fairly is paramount to this consent. Moreover, confidence that votes are counted fairly is associated with other positive outcomes like higher rates of participation (Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008) and is conceptually different from other diffuse measures of system support (Atkeson, Alvarez, and Hall 2015).

Our estimation strategy is to model citizens' survey responses as a function of electoral integrity in their state. To do this, we run a series of separate regression models. We examine the relationship between the components of the EIP and Pew measures and whether respondents believe their votes were counted fairly. In all models, we include a series of individual and state level control variables to account for possible confounding factors that either our theoretical expectations suggest or previous studies have documented are important in predicting citizens' attitudes about electoral integrity. At the individual level, we include covariates for the intensity of a respondent's political partisanship,<sup>8</sup> their self-reported attention to government and politics, their level of education, income, gender, age, as well as dummy variables for whether a respondent is African American or Hispanic (Atkeson and Saunders 2007; Bowler et al. 2015; Bowler and Donovan 2016). We include measures of intensity of partisanship and attentiveness to politics with the expectation that more politically involved

and interested citizens will be more likely to expect fair elections (compared with nonpartisans and those who pay little attention to politics). Similarly, we expect people who are wealthier and more educated (and, by extension, have more political resources) to report a greater belief in electoral fairness. Following Bowler et al. (2015, 5), we include gender because “Although women are not a demographic minority, they do constitute a minority in terms of their descriptive representation. The enduring underrepresentation of women in American politics may cause women to view elections as unfair on multiple dimensions.” We include age with expectation that citizens will be more trusting of the electoral process (and government in general) as they grow older. Because of historical disenfranchisement and generally lower levels of political efficacy and trust in government, we expect both African American and Hispanic respondents to be less likely to think votes are counted fairly.

At the state level, we include covariates for the percentage of a state’s residents who are nonwhite, the percentage of a state’s residents who were born outside the United States, and the closeness of the 2016 presidential election in a respondent’s state.<sup>9</sup> The first two variables are included based on the expectation that a state’s citizens (especially its white citizens) might perceive a greater likelihood of voter fraud if there is a larger proportion of racial minority or immigrant residents. We include the closeness of the 2016 election variable with the expectation that citizens may think voter fraud is more likely when the presidential race in their state is close and campaigns and supporters have more to gain by possibly tipping the outcome.

We use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for all models and report standard errors that are clustered by respondents’ state of residence to account for the fact that respondents nested within the same state are not statistically independent from one another (Arceneaux and Nickerson 2009; Primo, Jacobsmeier, and Milyo 2007). Importantly, however, we find substantively identical results to those presented below if we instead use an ordered probit estimator or if we use a multilevel (individuals nested within states) linear model that includes random intercepts for each state.

Table 3 displays the results from our first series of regression estimations, with each row reporting a separate model. The table only reports the coefficient and corresponding standard error for the principal components (identified in Table 2) of each electoral integrity measure in the model, and omits the coefficients for the battery of control variables that we include and are discussed above.

Of the two components from the EIP measure, only the first component has any meaningful relationship with citizens’ perceptions. As a reminder, nine of the 11 indicators loaded more strongly on this component—including electoral laws, electoral procedures, boundaries, voter registration, campaign media, campaign finance, voting process, vote count, and electoral authorities.

Moving to the Pew components, only the sixth component is positively associated with whether citizens believe votes are counted fairly. Two of the 19 individual indicators load most strongly on this sixth component—whether registration status can be looked up online and whether the state has a postelection audit requirement.

Next, we turn our attention to a series of regressions using the individual indicators that make up each composite measure as separate independent variables using the

**Table 3.** The Relationship between Principal Components and Citizens’ Attitudes about Votes Being Counted Fairly.

<b>EIP component 1</b>	<b>0.0561* (0.0178)</b>
EIP component 2	-0.0184 (0.0175)
Pew component 1	0.0038 (0.0098)
Pew component 2	0.0049 (0.0109)
Pew component 3	0.0062 (0.0189)
Pew component 4	-0.0164 (0.0189)
Pew component 5	-0.0118 (0.0150)
<b>Pew component 6</b>	<b>0.0292* (0.0092)</b>

Note. Each row in the table is a separate regression model. Dependent variable for all models is individual 2016 ANES respondent’s belief that “votes are counted fairly” (1–5, more confidence coded higher). Cell entries are the OLS regression coefficient for the indicated independent variable (with standard errors clustered by state reported below in parentheses). All models control for intensity of partisanship, attention to politics, education, income, gender, age, race, and the % nonwhite, % foreign born, and closeness of the 2016 presidential election in a respondent’s state. EIP = Electoral Integrity Project; Pew = The Pew Charitable Trusts; ANES = American National Election Studies; OLS = ordinary least squares.

\* $p < .05$  (two-tailed test); Statistically significant values are presented in bold.

same model specifications as described above (see Table 4). We uncover results that partially conform to theoretical expectations set forth in the literature. Specifically, we find that the coefficients for three of the EIP indicators are positive and statistically different from zero, including expert evaluations of (1) the voter registration process, (2) the voting process itself, and (3) state electoral authorities.

The regression results for the individual indicators from the Pew composite measure are less encouraging. Specifically, we find that only one individual indicator—requiring a postelection audit—is linked to citizens’ evaluations of electoral integrity at conventional levels of statistical significance. This finding echoes previous research (Alvarez, Atkeson, and Hall 2012). By contrast, for the remaining 18 indicators—many of which assess aspects of election administration that impact the electoral process—we find no meaningful relationship.

In sum, across the component parts and the individual indicators of both the EIP and Pew measures, our findings are theoretically intuitive and largely consistent with previous studies on citizens’ perceptions of electoral fairness. Of the overall component parts or the individual indicators used to create each composite measure, only ones that are theoretically likely to impact voters’ experience at the polls relate to citizens’ perceptions of electoral fairness, which is consistent with findings in previous studies (Atkeson and Saunders 2007; Bullock, Hood, and Clark 2005; Claassen et al. 2008; Hall, Monson, and Patterson 2007; 2009). More plainly, aspects of electoral integrity or election administration that, behind the scenes, impact the overall quality of elections have little direct impact on citizen perceptions. Only those components or indicators that the individual voter visibly experiences firsthand impacts whether they believe their votes are counted fairly. Given these findings, our third recommendation

**Table 4.** The Relationship between Individual Indicators and Citizens’ Attitudes about Votes Being Counted Fairly.

EIP electoral laws indicator	0.0024 (0.0012)
EIP electoral procedures indicator	0.0038 (0.0021)
EIP boundaries indicator	0.0008 (0.0014)
<b>EIP voter registration indicator</b>	<b>0.0066 (0.0023)*</b>
EIP party registration indicator	0.0006 (0.0020)
EIP campaign media indicator	0.0041 (0.0024)
EIP campaign finance indicator	0.0027 (0.0030)
<b>EIP voting process indicator</b>	<b>0.0075 (0.0028)*</b>
EIP vote count indicator	0.0046 (0.0033)
EIP postelection indicator	-0.0017 (0.0026)
<b>EIP electoral authorities indicator</b>	<b>0.0051 (0.0018)*</b>
Pew registration status website lookup indicator	0.0503 (0.0570)
Pew precinct ballot website lookup indicator	0.0522 (0.0344)
Pew absentee status website lookup indicator	0.0266 (0.0351)
Pew provisional ballot status website lookup indicator	-0.0003 (0.0341)
Pew registrations rejected indicator	0.4070 (0.5766)
Pew provisional ballots cast indicator	-0.2141 (1.0100)
Pew percentage of provisional ballots rejected indicator	-2.6775 (11.9750)
Pew percentage of mail ballots rejected indicator	9.9173 (6.4046)
Pew percentage of mail ballots unreturned indicator	0.1260 (0.1733)
Pew percentage of military and overseas ballots rejected indicator	-0.2161 (0.5404)
Pew percentage of military and overseas ballots unreturned indicator	0.0190 (0.0985)
Pew data completeness indicator	0.2635 (0.2151)
<b>Pew postelection audit requirement indicator</b>	<b>0.0909 (0.0364)*</b>
Pew disability or illness-related voting problems indicator	-1.6505 (0.9255)
Pew registration or absentee problems indicator	0.5281 (1.0996)
Pew availability of online registration indicator	0.0541 (0.0407)
Pew voting wait time indicator	-0.0076 (0.0071)
Pew voter registration rate indicator	0.7445 (0.4008)
Pew voter turnout rate indicator	0.3262 (0.2289)

Note. Each row in the table is a separate regression model. Dependent variable for all models is individual 2016 ANES respondent’s belief that “votes are counted fairly” (1–5, more confidence coded higher). Cell entries are the OLS regression coefficient for the indicated independent variable (with standard errors clustered by state reported to the right in parentheses). All models control for intensity of partisanship, attention to politics, education, income, gender, age, race, and the % nonwhite, % foreign born, and closeness of the 2016 presidential election in a respondent’s state. EIP = Electoral Integrity Project; Pew = The Pew Charitable Trusts; ANES = American National Election Studies; OLS = ordinary least squares.

\* $p < .05$  (two-tailed test); Statistically significant values are presented in bold.

is that scholars should let their theoretical expectations about the relationship between electoral integrity and a given dependent variable guide their selection of relevant indicators (rather than using a flawed composite measure).

## Summary of Practical Recommendations

In this article, we first reviewed the theoretical and empirical differences between two prominent measures of electoral integrity: the EIP's 2016 U.S. Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Survey and the Pew 2014 Elections Performance Index. The two measures correlate at a notably low .13, which is particularly modest if the two are thought to be measuring the same underlying concept of state electoral integrity.

Next, due to the fact that each composite measure is an aggregation of individual indicators, we engaged in additional analysis of the composition of each. The EIP measure has a Cronbach's alpha of .89 while the Pew measure's alpha is a much noticeably lower .30. By examining the principal components of each index, we also demonstrated that each measure is capturing multiple dimensions. The EIP measure retains two distinct components while the Pew measure captures fully six different components.

Given the weak relationship between the two composite measures as well as the multidimensional nature of each measure, we then evaluated the relationship between the components and individual indicators that make up each measure of state electoral integrity and citizens' perceptions that votes are counted fairly and observed that some factors play a more pronounced role than others. In particular, the component parts and individual indicators that are theoretically intuitive and reflect causal mechanisms from previous studies generally have a clearer relationship with citizens' perceptions of whether votes are counted fairly.

From this series of analyses, it is our judgment that scholars should adhere to the following recommendations when using measures of state electoral integrity in future studies:

1. Scholars should not utilize these two measures interchangeably or use them to serve as a robustness check for one another in a statistical analysis.
2. Scholars should proceed with caution and generally avoid use of the overall composite measures in future studies.
3. Scholars should let their theoretical expectations about the relationship between electoral integrity and a given dependent variable guide the selection of relevant individual indicators to include in their analysis.

Perhaps most importantly, this article underscores the potential utility of generating new ways to measure and quantify the concept of electoral integrity at the state level. We do see value in creating a composite measure that scholars and practitioners could use to assess the overall electoral integrity across states and municipalities (Gerken 2009). Moreover, we see value in adapting lessons from the Variety of Democracies (V-Dem) project to identify composite measures, components parts, and individual indicators (Coppedge et al. 2017).

To do so, scholars should first look to the EIP and Pew measures to generate ideas about appropriate indicators of electoral integrity. Although we have identified areas for improvement and urged caution against theoretically and empirically inappropriate

usage, each measure does have virtues that are worthy of emulation. For example, a notable feature of the Pew measure is its reliance on objective, quantifiable criteria that allows for relatively easy comparisons across states and across time. Likewise, one virtue of the EIP measure is that it takes a broader approach rather than just focusing on the internal mechanisms of election administration. Using these as a starting point, identifying additional relevant characteristics and indicators that are part of electoral integrity is worth pursuing. For instance, researchers may seek to incorporate documented incidents of voter impersonation at the polls as well as documented incidents of voter intimidation into future measures. In addition, researchers may want to quantify the administrative procedures in place in each state to ensure an accurate and timely counting of ballots. These are but two examples of the various types of relevant indicators that are not currently incorporated into either measure. Because of the fundamental importance of free and fair elections for the health of American democracy, our final recommendation is that *scholars should continue to improve and refine the measurement of electoral integrity in the states for future empirical studies.*

### Authors' Note

Authors' names are listed alphabetically to reflect equal contributions to the research. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 2017 State Politics and Policy Conference in St. Louis, Missouri; and at the 2017 meeting of the American Political Science Association in San Francisco, California.

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### Notes

1. Since the 2000 election, several studies have sought to engage the specific aspects of election administration. For example, see the edited volumes from Burden and Stewart (2014) and Alvarez and Grofman (2014). Likewise, see Hale, Montjoy, and Brown (2015) for a useful descriptive overview and Alvarez, Atkeson, and Hall (2013) for a sound overview of how data and oversight can improve how elections function.
2. Detailed information on the individual items that make up these 11 categories is available online at <https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/pei-core-survey-items>.
3. Detailed information on the individual items that make up these 17 categories is available at [http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2016/08/epi\\_methodology.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/assets/2016/08/epi_methodology.pdf). We use state scores from the 2014 election because they are the most recent data available from Pew.

- The residual vote rate category is only calculated during presidential election years, so (since we use data for 2014) we exclude this variable from our analyses below. In addition, the availability of voting information online lookup tools category is comprised of five separate indicators: (1) registration status, (2) location of polling place, (3) voter-specific ballot information, and tracking the status of (4) absentee ballots and (5) provisional ballots. All states in 2014 allowed for online lookup of the location of one's polling place, so it is excluded from our analyses below. Including the remaining four online lookup tools as separate indicators gives us a total of 19 indicators for our analyses below.
4. However, one important concern with the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP) that requires further exploration is the number of experts who responded in each state. For instance, fully 28 of the states had fewer than 10 experts respond to the survey. The average number of responses per state was 14.23 and the median was 8. It is important to note that the low correlation between the two measures persists regardless of the number of experts a state has for the EIP measure. For example, across the 23 states with 10 or more expert responses, the Pew and EIP measure correlate at .12.
  5. One likely reason that the EIP measure has a high degree of internal consistency is that the individual state experts who filled out the survey on political and election conditions aimed to be consistent across their answers. Likewise, high profile recent events, like court challenges to gerrymandered district boundaries or implementation of photo identification requirements, could uniformly lead experts in a state to anchor responses in a particularly positive or negative direction.
  6. These types of laws are not implemented at random. As the passage of the Help America Vote Act, states have chosen divergent paths to make voting more accessible—for example, some state work to make voter registration automatic—while others have passed legislation to protect the integrity of elections—for example, by passing more restrictive photo identification laws (Alvarez and Grofman 2014; Biggers and Hanmer 2015; 2017; Hanmer 2009; Hicks et al. 2015; Stewart 2014).
  7. Importantly, we also ran the same series of models discussed below but with a different dependent variable to examine the relationship between the EIP and Pew measures of electoral integrity and citizens' political attitudes more broadly (the full regression results are reported in the online appendix). These four additional dependent variables include (1) whether respondents think politicians are trustworthy, (2) whether they trust the federal government to do what is right, (3) whether they believe public officials care what people like them think, and (4) whether they think people like them have a say in what government does. Surveying all of these additional regression estimations in their totality, we find little evidence that the components or the individual indicators that make up each measure are linked to these additional measures of citizens' political attitudes. The fact that neither of the two measures of electoral integrity are linked to more general attitudes about democracy suggests that our narrower focus on citizens' perceptions of votes being counted fairly is an appropriate empirical strategy.
  8. Intensity of partisanship is constructed by folding the American National Election Studies (ANES) seven-point partisanship scale with strong Democrats/Republicans coded as a 4, weak Democrats/Republicans coded as a 3, leaning Democrats/Republicans coded as a 2, and independent respondents coded as a 1. We also ran models with the standard seven-point strong Democrat to strong Republican partisanship variable (instead of the folded strength of partisanship scale) and its coefficient was not statistically different from zero in any of the regression estimations (i.e., Republicans are no more or less likely than Democrats to think votes are counted fairly). Similarly, when including (separately) a dummy variable for Democrat and for Republican, we do not find any partisan differences in respondents' beliefs about votes being counted fairly.

9. Data on state racial composition are five-year averages from the American Community Survey administered by the U.S. Census. Data on the percentage of state residents who are foreign born is from the Migration Policy Institute. Data on 2016 presidential election vote totals by state are from Daily Kos Elections. The presidential election closeness variable is computed by taking the absolute value of the difference in the vote share of Donald J. Trump and Hillary Clinton in a state and then multiplying by negative one so larger values indicate a closer presidential contest in that state.

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