

ARTICLE

Why Do States Intervene in the Elections of Others? The Role of Incumbent–Opposition Divisions

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Abstract

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

Keywords: election interventions; policy polarization; text analysis

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

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

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

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

While we agree that countries seek friendly governments abroad, we note a crucial oversight. International relations scholars typically only consider the position of the *current* government. Yet, most countries hold elections to decide which party will rule. As described by Wagner *et al.* (2018, 540), 540, 'there has been very little attention to parties as ideational and political agents in security policy'. The current literature essentially assumes that if a country is acting in an unfriendly manner to the United States, and the government is replaced as a result of an election intervention, the post-intervention government will pursue more friendly policies toward the intervening power (Levin 2016). For us, what matters is the competition for power *between different parties*. Understanding the orientation and policies of the government in office supplies only part of the puzzle. It is also important to know whether the opposition favors policy continuity or change to understand the true attractiveness of election interventions.

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

We start by linking foreign interest in elections to policy divisions in the state that outside powers could target with an intervention. We define two types of election interventions: those designed to strengthen or weaken the rules of the game (for example, helping to organize clean elections), and those that seek to boost support for a specific candidate (such as conditioning foreign assistance on who wins). We argue that policy polarization between incumbent and opposition parties should predict both types of interventions, since they are alternative or complementary means of boosting a candidate's chance of victory. When foreigners like the incumbent party more than the opposition, they will invest in weakening the democratic rules of the game and generating more support for the incumbent. When the opposition is preferable, foreign actors will seek to strengthen the rules of the game and boost the vote share of the opposition. We demonstrate the theoretical importance of taking both the government's and the opposition's positions into account.

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

¹There is an enormous corpus of work. Three recent contributions are Stokes (2001), Bawn and Somer-Topcu (2012), Jäger (2017).

We demonstrate the utility of the exercise by comparing our polarization measurement to two well-known potential alternatives available in the literature: a measurement of policy alignment based on a country's United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voting record (Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten 2017) and the left–right ranking of party policy positions from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Volkens et al. 2018). When measuring foreign election interventions, our measurement outperforms the other two alternatives as it has less noise and is less likely to be biased.

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

Why Intervene?

Scholars have long known that democratic elections matter; such contests have mostly been treated as an independent variable. Research on elections as a dependent variable – that is, an event that attracts international attention and action – has focused primarily on the role of external actors as promoters of democracy. In pioneering work, Hyde (2011) has shown why and how states invite external election observers. In many cases, a trade-off is seen between fighting for freedom and fairness, and getting the right person to win the elections (Donno 2013; Kavakli and Kuhn 2020).² A number of studies have examined the issue of taking sides – foreigners intervening in a partisan manner in elections. Corstange and Marinov (2012) and Shulman and Bloom (2012) show how voters evaluate partisan foreign interventions in their elections. Levin (2016) argues that superpower support enabled targeted candidates to win during the Cold War. Tomz and Weeks (2019) investigate how Americans would like to push back against hypothetical intervention scenarios in their elections. We extend the insights from these studies by assessing which factors provoke interventions. We focus on what we believe is an important factor – incumbent–opposition policy divisions.

Hypotheses

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

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

We assume, in keeping with observed empirical regularities, that a more biased election (rigged vote count, difficult registration, etc.) benefits the incumbent's chances of re-election,

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

whereas a cleaner election benefits the opposition. We also assume that more votes for one party will benefit that party and may lead to its victory. The incumbent wins, and the opposition loses, through a combination of rigging the rules and garnering votes. Either may work by itself, and the success of one may partly depend on the other (fewer votes may result in a higher final tally under more biased rules).

We further assume that an intervener has two options: (1) support candidates directly, by investing resources in their campaign (for example, promising aid if they win) or (2) alter the election rules, for instance by insisting on a cleaner election or tolerating repression of opposition activists. We refer to the former as candidate or c investments, and to the latter as process or p investments. The two distinct interventions change candidate support: $\chi(c)$, and the bias: $\beta(p)$. The post-intervention vote share therefore becomes: $f(\chi(c), \beta(p)) = f(c, p)$.

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

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

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

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

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

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

HYPOTHESIS 1: Candidate interventions c are more likely if polarization π is increasing.

HYPOTHESIS 2: Process interventions p are less likely if polarization π is increasing.

We formally derive these hypotheses for a suitable choice of functional forms in Appendix A.⁶ The first hypothesis simply says that if an outsider wants a candidate to win, they will invest in that candidate’s vote share. The second hypothesis predicts that outsiders can also – in addition or instead – invest in influencing the rules in a manner that favors their candidate. In different cases, the mix of process and candidate interventions would vary depending on local conditions

³We introduce a generic cost term $s(c, p)$.

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

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

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

and intervener preferences. What concerns us is the sign of the slope of the investment in either strategy over polarization, which we argue will hold.

We would like to emphasize that the difference between the government's and the opposition's policy positions is key to interventions. When the polarization parameter π is set to 0, interventions of either kind only generate costs and would thus not be undertaken.

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

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

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

Notes on Polarization

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

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

The Role of Democratic Outside Power as a Driver of Interventions

So far, we have assumed that the intervener has no inherent preference for cleaner rules, and would invest whatever maximizes the return on policy in light of the cost. According to our model, even non-democracies would sometimes promote democratic elections if this would enhance the effectiveness of pro-candidate interventions. For example, in the 1945 Finnish election, the Soviet Union demanded that the communists should be given more freedom to

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

⁸Wittner (1982).

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

campaign, and more access to the media. The Soviets based their demands on threats to Finish post-war recovery and territorial integrity.¹⁰

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

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

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

The Process–Party Dataset

We start by identifying all (potentially) competitive global elections over the period 1945–2012 using the National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset (Hyde and Marinov 2012). Following Hyde and Marinov (2012), we require that at least the following minimal conditions for political competition are present: more than one candidate or party competes, and the incumbent’s office is subject to electoral competition (these are variables available in NELDA). All regimes we study are ‘shades of democracy’, though some may be more on the authoritarian spectrum. We then take a stratified random sample: for each country, we pick one Cold War and one post-Cold War election (the period may be important for patterns of interventions). We rely on random selection to produce results representative of the general relationship between polarization and interventions.

In a next step, for all elections in our sample, we predefined a list of powers that potentially had a stake in the contest. We rely on the following selection criteria: all global/great powers (veto-yielding members of the UN) and regional powers, former colonial powers, immediate neighbors and regional political organizations. Potential interveners are selected regardless of whether they actually intervened. The full list is part of the online codebook. Each election has eight potential interveners on average.

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

To find appropriate information, we asked research assistants to conduct targeted searches for each election cycle of databases, such as LexisNexis, ProQuest, Google News, historical newspaper archives, policy content generated by the actors themselves, and scholarly work related to a particular election in journals and books. This procedure ensured access to a variety of English-language sources from around the world. In addition, the researchers processed French, German, and Spanish sources. The resulting articles were checked for appropriate information on interveners, policy stances and relations. Once we located information, we saved it and provided coding notes to document the coding choices.¹¹

¹⁰Zilliacus (1995).

¹¹We offer more information on the search procedure in Appendix B. Also see Bubeck and Marinov (2019).

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

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

The most frequent type of candidate intervention in the dataset is public endorsements (32 per cent). A full 25 per cent of candidate interventions qualify as providing support for a party, such as campaign funds or propaganda. Promises of economic rewards or club membership (for example, in the European Union) that are tied to a candidate make up 16 per cent of candidate interventions. Only about 1 per cent of candidate interventions are candidate-specific military threats or acts of violence. Most interventions include more than one action, such as linking aid to a candidate's election and joint campaign appearances with the US ambassador.

Process interventions capture whether a foreign power sought to enhance (+1), weaken (-1), or exerted no effect (0) on the electoral process. Values of 0.5 and -0.5 are allowed for less clear (mixed) interventions, with one type dominating. Some examples of a positive process intervention include a state or organization: (a) sending or supporting credible election monitors to testify about the fairness of an election, (b) attempting to even the playing field in accordance with national electoral laws and internationally accepted standards, (c) ensuring orderly and free and fair elections by providing security for voters, or (d) threatening consequences if fraud occurs, such as economic sanctions or freezing aid. Examples of negative process interventions include if a state or organization: (1) tries to legitimize an election process that is clearly corrupt, (2) helps governments change voting rules in a way that distorts the playing field, (3) endangers orderly and free and fair elections by approving or assisting in violence against voters or a political group or (4) provides benefits to governments that orchestrated electoral fraud.

Again, noting that most interventions feature more than one element, we observed predominant patterns. Praising polls with widely recognized shortcomings (31 per cent) was the most frequent type of negative intervention, followed by playing down evidence of bad play (23 per cent) and actively supplanting democratic institutions, which occurred in 11.4 per cent of all negative process interventions. The following positive interventions were the most common: observing elections (35.3 per cent), providing positive reports and rewards for clean elections (31.3 per cent), providing negative reports and punishments for flawed elections (22.3 per cent), and providing aid, security or logistics for the electoral process (12.7 per cent).

All actions coded in either the candidate or process support variables concern only the pre-electoral period. We seek to avoid judgement about the effectiveness of different intervention strategies, so we merely record whether an intervention of any kind has occurred.¹²

According to our argument, policy polarization accounts for outsiders' decisions about whether to intervene in an election. The variables A_{gov} and B_{opp} capture the orientation of the government and opposition toward the intervening power. More precisely, this is the stance of the relevant actor on the policy issues a foreign power cares about in relation to that country. Government is defined as the political party or parties and/or leader in office at the time of

¹²Our scheme and documentation enable researchers to turn plausible conjectures about the seriousness or effectiveness of different kinds of interventions into testable hypotheses.

the election.¹³ The opposition is defined as the opposition party or parties in parliament, their frontrunners, and/or new parties or candidates attracting a substantial amount of public support.

A_{gov} and B_{opp} range from friendly (+1) to neither friendly nor unfriendly (0) to unfriendly (-1). Intermediate values of 0.5 and -0.5 denote mixed messages on relations with the foreign power, with one direction predominating. While we consider and document stances on all issues of concern to the outside power in an election, the orientation coding is a single numeric value that reflects the human coder's judgment on the overall stance of the actor toward the intervening power. If there is more than one government or opposition party, the coding takes the strength of each party in previous elections or in the pre-election polls into account.¹⁴

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

The measurement for polarization π is based on the difference between A_{gov} and B_{opp} . Consequently, π ranges, in increments of 0.5, from +2 (friendly government, unfriendly opposition) to -2 (unfriendly incumbent, friendly opposition).¹⁵

Table 1 shows the coding scheme at work in nine elections. The data collection takes as its starting point the NELDA dataset (Columns 1 and 2). Columns 3–7 come from our new coding. In the Brazil-as-intervener case in the Uruguayan 2004 legislative election (165-2004-1031-L1), the governing party in Uruguay had neither a friendly nor unfriendly attitude toward Brazil (0), and the opposition parties had a friendly stance toward Brazil. According to the last two columns, Brazil supported the opposition with a candidate-targeting election intervention but refrained from seeking to affect the rules of the game.

We documented the grounds for each decision. There are case studies for each intervener in each election, in which information from the original sources is saved. Our method of annotating the case studies allowed us to use natural language processing text analysis tools. We highlighted portions of the original text with pre-defined 'keys' that justify a specific coding of a variable. We implemented the highlights as a custom-created simple mark-up language in LATEX that is rendered as colors in the resulting PDF file for the convenience of coders and readers; the choice of colors is arbitrary. In addition to transparency, this type of documentation offers other advantages, which we discuss in the next section.

Automatic Identification of Directionality

We want to know whether a machine-learning algorithm would be able to produce numeric values from the saved, annotated notes that are similar to the ones our human coders provide. In particular, we seek to find out whether 'positive' and 'negative' directions in government and opposition classifications are so consistently coded that an algorithm could learn to precisely distinguish them. To that end, we retrieve all snippets with their related code. In this setting, each highlighted piece of text is associated with a binary label (- or +), referring to either an overall negative or positive stance toward the foreign country. We employ a Support Vector Machine (SVM), a very popular supervised-learning model for classification, adopted in both natural

¹³If the government was in office very briefly as in the case of a caretaker government, we consider the previous administration as A_{gov} for the coding.

¹⁴For instance, a major opposition party with a friendly stance of +1 and a minor opposition party with an unfriendly stance of -1 would result in a coding of B_{opp} of +0.5.

¹⁵In the situation of an unknown and irrelevant opposition coded 77, polarization becomes 0 because the opposition is unable or unwilling to formulate a foreign policy position that is independent of the government's stance.

Table 1. Illustrative codings

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

language processing research (Joachims 1998) and the text-as-data community (D’Orazio et al. 2014; Merz, Regel and Lewandowski 2016).

It is crucial for supervised-learning approaches to provide training examples, which are pieces of text that either fit a certain description or not (Jäger 2018, 509). The SVM classifier uses the example to map the text as points in a multi-dimensional space. Subsequently, it finds the vector that separates points belonging to the two classes (in our case, these are highlighted strings that point to negative or positive stances by the government or opposition). Then, when the SVM is provided with a new snippet of text that needs to be classified, it maps it again into that same space and predicts the class, based on the position of the point with respect to the separating vector. Based on this distance, the SVM can also provide us with the level of confidence of the prediction.

We test the SVM in a tenfold cross-validation setting (see Manning, Manning and Schütze 1999) in comparison with a different classification algorithm, a Naive Bayes (NB) classifier. For each, we experiment with both term-frequency (TF-IDF) and semantic (w-emb) vector representations of texts.¹⁶ We are able to achieve a good performance with the different classifiers – up to 80 per cent accuracy with the SVM employing word embeddings – which means that the property under study is better captured when modelling the underlying semantics and not just the frequency of words.¹⁷

We used this algorithm in a cross-validation setting to produce machine-generated predictions for all highlighted texts in our collection.¹⁸ The SVM classifier also gives us the opportunity to move beyond the binary label provided for each highlighted text. In order to obtain a continuous value, ranging between -1 (highly negative) to 1 (highly positive), we employ the confidence score of each decision and re-scale each prediction.

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

¹⁶We experimented with two different ways of providing snippets to the classifier in the form of numerical vectors (the type of input required by the algorithm to map them as points in space). The first was to represent them as term frequency-inverse document frequency (TF-IDF) vectors, which capture word-frequency information (Manning, Raghavan and Schütze 2008). The second method averaged word embeddings (w-emb) (Mikolov et al. 2013), which are vectors that capture the semantic properties of texts, such as addressing the same topic using different words. While word-frequency vectors have been largely adopted in text-based political science research (D’Orazio et al. 2014; Hillard, Purpura and Wilkerson 2008; Merz, Regel and Lewandowski 2016), word embeddings, due to their novelty, have only been recently employed, in particular for ideological positioning (Nanni et al. 2019; Rheault and Cochrane 2020). Choosing between the two representations largely depends on whether the information that the classifier is designed to capture is mentioned explicitly or is conveyed in a more implicit way.

¹⁷When the confidence of the classifier is above 80 per cent, its precision reaches over 90 per cent.

¹⁸We performed this exercise in ten different experiments, each time changing the 90 per cent of examples used as training data and the 10 per cent used as test, on which we obtained the predictions and related confidence scores.

Automatic Identification of Policy issues at Stake

International relations tends to divide issues of concern in relations between states into broadly economic and military/political categories. Past studies have generally treated military-related issues of security as dominant since they pertain to state survival (Gilpin 1987).

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

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

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

We created a dictionary of terms (Appendix D) around those issues and used text analysis techniques to classify their presence in each intervener-targeted-election pair, essentially checking all the highlighted text on which A_{gov} and B_{opp} decisions are made. To do so, we built a semantic representation of each issue (that is, a centroid) as the average of the word embeddings of all its seed words (Manning, Raghavan and Schütze 2008). Then, given the semantic representation of a snippet, we measured its relevance to each issue as the cosine similarity between the two vectors (representing the snippet and the issue).¹⁹ The relevance score reflects the extent to which the discussion of the stances of the government and opposition on policies of interest to an outsider matches each of the policy stakes we created.

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

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the issues at stake for interveners for each election in our data. Six histograms show the importance of alignment, armed conflict, economic items, democracy and human rights, left–right issues, and global bads such as terrorism and drug trafficking. Each panel overlays two histograms in the interest of space. The results confirm that political

¹⁹Appendix Figure D.3 shows the obtained centroids.

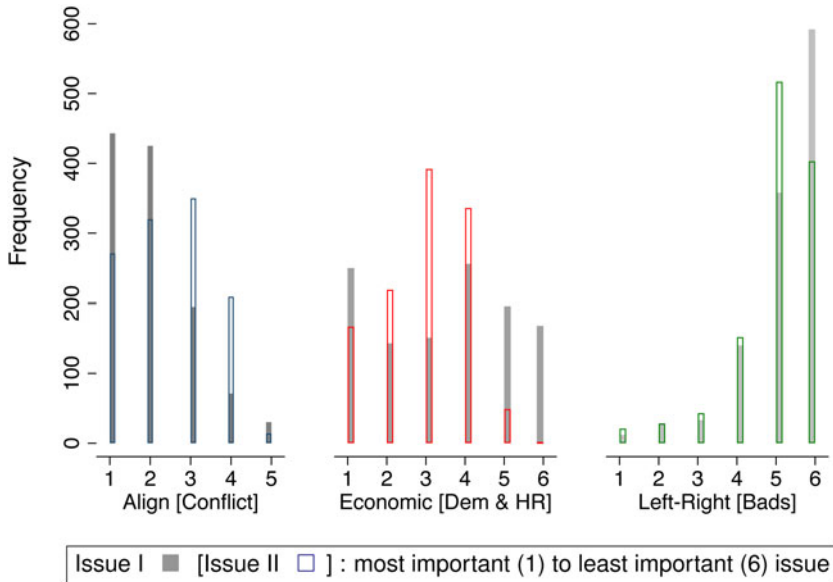


Figure 1. Policy issue at stake in relations between intervening power and target country: text classification based on nearest-neighbor centroid

alignment and security are dominant themes when candidates discuss relations with a specific external power. Economic matters come in third place. Democracy and human rights issues are of intermediate concern. Left–right divisions and terrorism do not make it to the top of the agenda for most cases.²⁰

Improvements over other Data Sets

The data we provide on political polarization is an advance over the available alternatives. The CMP is a well-known and highly respected effort to assemble a large dataset of what each party said it would do, in written form, before an election was held (Budge et al. 2001).²¹ Human interpretative coders estimate a variety of position placements for all major political parties based on fifty-six policy categories, which are extracted from the parties' electoral programs. In addition, scholars have used the manifesto corpus to create alternative policy categorizations and to automatically scale positions based on text. While the dataset is impressive and constitutes an excellent resource for many research agendas, its utility for studying election interventions is limited. For instance, CMP historically has focused on about fifty, mostly developed, countries. It does not cover all the potential issues that may drive a country's relationships with foreign powers. There are some variables related to internationalism, peacefulness and left–right divisions that may be salient for foreign powers. We pick the left–right dimension available from CMP for a comparison to our data as a predictor of interventions. It may be somewhat important in itself, or as a proxy for other dimensions.

UN voting alignment data is also a plausible alternative dataset. UNGA voting patterns have received considerable attention in the literature (Márin-Bosch 1987; Voeten 2012) and constitute the most widely used measurement of countries' foreign policy preferences (Bailey, Strezhnev and

²⁰Although these are the dominant issues, they may not explain the divisions between the candidates. Whether domestic candidates are more likely to disagree on matters related to alignment but agree on matters related to economics is a separate, interesting issue we do not pursue here.

²¹<https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/>.

Voeten 2017). Given the broad range of topics that are voted on every year, and the fact that the large majority of countries are part of the UNGA (Chelotti, Dasandi and Mikhaylov 2019), scholars have been interested in using the expressed preferences from states' voting behavior – and the resulting voting similarities – as an indicator of state relationships that is comparable across time and space (Kim and Russett 1996; Voeten 2012). While measures for extracting policy preferences and constructing relationship structures are abundant and range from simple (see Voeten 2012 for an overview) to more complex (Magu and Mateos 2018), recent studies question whether any of these measures can actually capture states' underlying preferences.²² For us, the concern is that issues that are up for a vote at the UN may not correlate with the set of issues at stake in relations between two countries. Furthermore, UN voting is available only for the government, thus ignoring the position of the opposition. Nonetheless, in what follows, we use voting similarity on UNGA votes (in the year before an election) to check whether it predicts US election interventions. We focus on all, rather than only important, votes because these are shown to be highly correlated for most significant purposes.²³

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

When does the United States Intervene in Elections?

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

Figure 2 and Table 2 show the linear fit of an ordinary least squares (OLS) model for candidate and process interventions undertaken by the United States against polarization as measured by the Process–Party data.²⁴ Polarization is defined as the difference between two -1 to 1 measures, A_{gov} and B_{opp} , and thus ranges from -2 to 2 . It also shows the same by CMP (left–right split) and against the target government's voting alignment in the UNGA. The UNGA data is the government's voting alignment, normalized and rescaled so that the minimum in the sample is -2 and the maximum is 2 , essentially setting the opposition's unobserved alignment to 0 . We are forced to do that since no opposition measure is available. As discussed above, we expect an upward slope ($\beta_1 > 0$) for candidate interventions and a downward slope ($\beta_1 < 0$) for process interventions.

The Process–Party dataset bears the predictions of the theoretical model, expecting upward-sloping candidate interventions and downward-sloping process interventions over policy polarization.²⁵ When the United States wants the government to win (positive and high polarization),

²²At the heart of this debate is the question whether countries are free to casting their votes due to findings of external influences on UNGA voting in the form of foreign aid and vote buying (Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten 2017; Carter and Stone 2016; Dreher, Nunnenkamp and Thiele 2008; Wang 1999), voting blocs (Kim and Russett 1996; Lijphart 1963), or to what extent voting similarity occurs either only through changes in the resolution (Brazys and Panke 2017) or simply by chance (Häge 2011; Häge and Hug 2013). Current debates on UNGA voting reflect these problems and discuss the extent to which these votes represent a valid indicator of policy preferences of if other sources are more appropriate (Chelotti, Dasandi and Mikhaylov 2019).

²³Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten (2017, 441) notes, when comparing votes on important vs not-important resolutions: 'The broad patterns are the same, but minor differences do exist, and these may be the more appropriate measures for some analyses. The bivariate correlation between ideal points estimated based on important votes and all votes is 0.92.'

²⁴The linear model fit is based on the values $\{-1, -0.5, 0, 0.5, 1\}$ for p and c from the Process–Party data as outlined in section 'The Process–Party Dataset'. In Figure 2 the label $d+$ on the y -axis represents $p = 1$ and $g+$ represents $c = 1$ in order to improve the readability of the combined figure.

²⁵The list-wise approach deletes missing opposition/government scores (since polarization is not available). This concerns one-tenth of the cases. If we set the missing score to 0 , the results are not significantly altered.

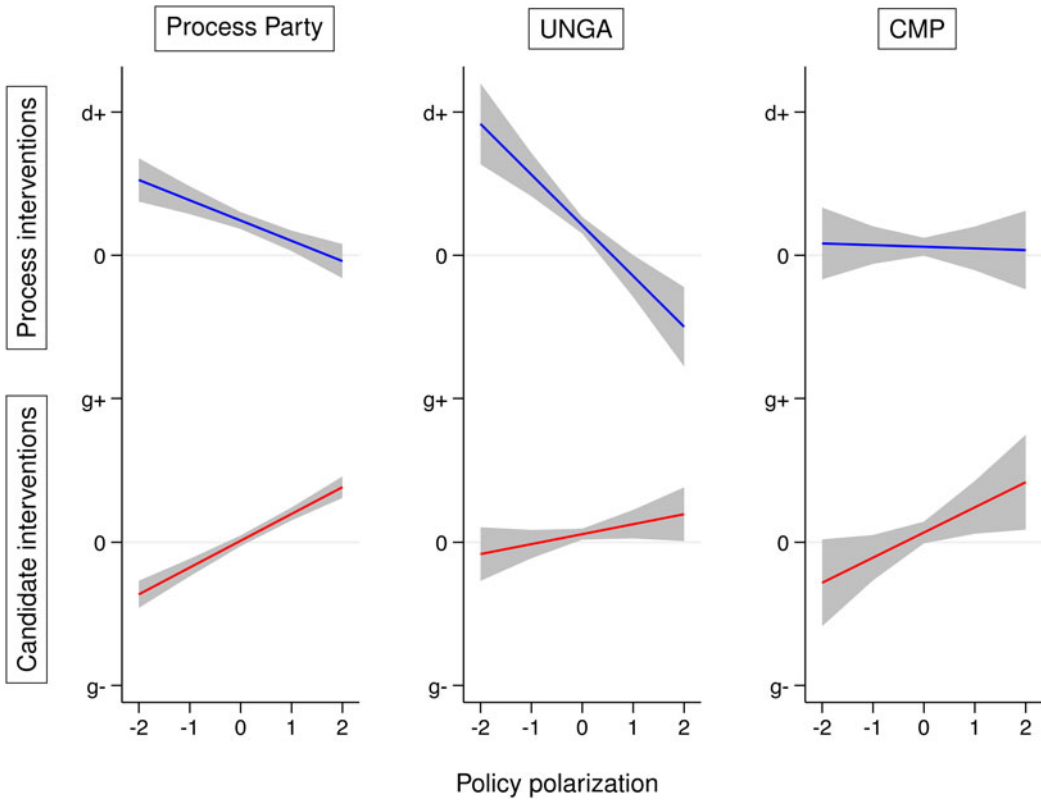


Figure 2. US process and candidate interventions: OLS on Process–Party data, UNGA voting alignment, L–R polarization from CMP

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

Table 2. US process and candidate interventions

	Process interventions			Candidate interventions		
Polarization	-0.134*** (0.0341)			0.190*** (0.0286)		
UNGA alignment		-0.336*** (0.0669)			0.0696 (0.0581)	
Left-right (CMP)			-0.0116 (0.0323)			0.176** (0.0842)
Constant	0.230*** (0.0300)	0.196*** (0.0265)	0.0593* (0.0301)	0.00302 (0.0172)	0.0568*** (0.0193)	0.0682* (0.0392)
Observations	232	221	58	232	221	58
R ²	0.082	0.107	0.001	0.304	0.010	0.085

Note: OLS on Process–Party data, UNGA voting alignment, L–R polarization from CMP. Process/Candidate Interventions, $\epsilon_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{Divisions}_i + \epsilon_i$. ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1

it does not promote democracy, and it puts resources behind the governing candidate ticket. When the opposition is preferred, democracy promotion is undertaken to the fullest, and these actions are backed (or accompanied) by attempts to boost the opposition ticket via candidate support. Interestingly, some democracy support is forthcoming even when the United States has no reason to prefer one set of candidates over another (policy polarization of $\pi = 0$),

suggesting that part of the attraction of this strategy lies in the inherent appeal of promoting democracy abroad. The confidence intervals are narrow, reflecting both precise measures and the larger sample size. Data are available for all elections in the Process–Party dataset. While sometimes the two distinct types of interventions are undertaken separately, in many cases the United States engages in both simultaneously, suggesting that there are complementarities. We could account for this by jointly estimating both outcome variables via seemingly unrelated regressions. We find that standard errors only change by a tiny amount, and that this does not affect overall patterns of significance (cf. Appendix Table F.8).

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

UNGA voting alignment is likely a noisy proxy for the issues at stake in an election. The Process–Party data does not measure solely, or most importantly, foreign policy positions. An outsider may be concerned primarily about domestic issues from the target’s perspective, such as drug production, investment policy or human rights abuses. These policies may or may not overlap with the UN’s agenda. In addition, voting alignment similarity is based on observed votes: since many items never come up for a vote, the resulting measure may not reflect states’ true conflicts and similarities. India–Pakistan and Greece–Turkey had nearly perfect voting alignment while fighting wars or being on the brink of a war. In addition, the missing opposition position variable in UNGA data may bias the coefficients away from their true slope.²⁶

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

The CMP measurement of polarization does not track the issues over which interventions occur closely enough. This may help explain the wide confidence interval on candidate interventions.²⁷ Still, the slope is similar to the one we estimate with the Process–Party data, which may reflect the tendency of the left–right dimension to track anti-Americanism in the West (Chiozza 2009) and other issues of interest to the United States. In addition, since process-altering interventions may be impractical or impossible in the mostly consolidated democracies covered by CMP, it is not surprising that left–right divisions are not predictive of US decisions to promote more or less clean elections.

Even though we create c and p interventions independently of the polarization variable, we generate an additional measurement of US democratic interventions abroad in order to determine whether our results hold if we use an extraneously generated measurement of interventions. We extract the number of times a country’s election is criticized in the Congressional record from 1988 to 2016.²⁸ We replicate the democracy-promotion top part of Table 2 with the new measurement in Appendix Table G.11. The Process–Party polarization measurement predicts greater criticism of elections when the opposition has a friendlier stance. Neither the UNGA’s alignment nor the CMP’s left–right measurements produce similar effects.

Our dataset partly captures covert interventions; we discuss how missed interventions may influence our empirical predictions in Appendix C. We may be underestimating the true effect of divisions on interventions, making this a hard test of the theory.

²⁶In Appendix C we show how omitting the opposition’s position may bias the results when predicting election interventions.

²⁷The Process–Party model (on the left) yields a better fit even if restricted to the observations for which the CMP has non-missing data, suggesting that this is not due to sample selection.

²⁸We use a dictionary of terms related to elections including the country’s name and critical terms. Full documentation can be supplied on request.

Logit Models of us Interventions with Process–Party Measures

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

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

We also add controls – a dummy variable to indicate whether a target country is developed, a dummy variable measuring whether a target country is a democracy based on the V-Dem polyarchy electoral democracy measurement (Coppedge et al. 2016), and a post-Cold War dummy variable.²⁹ Table 4 shows the summary statistics for our main dataset covering US interventions.

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

Polarization remains a robust predictor of candidate interventions. The polarization variable takes values between -2 and $+2$, and its standard deviation is approximately 0.9. A logit coefficient for polarization of 2.394 in Column 2 of Table 3 translates³⁰ into an almost tenfold increase in the odds that a candidate intervention will benefit the government if polarization increases by one unit. Similarly, a one-unit increase in polarization reduces the odds that a process intervention will enhance democracy³¹ by around 42 per cent.

We also run specifications that control for various regions of the world via dummy variables (see Appendix Table F.9). The coefficient on our ordered-logit models remains similar. There is no region of the world in which candidate interventions are significantly more likely to occur relative to advanced economies; the coefficient for process interventions is positive and significant at the 5 per cent level for Latin America relative to the advanced economies. The dichotomous outcomes $Pr(g+)$, $Pr(g-)$, $Pr(d+)$ and $Pr(d-)$ display similar coefficients for polarization, but some interesting regularities affect the number of observations and the extent to which these estimations are comparable to the previous estimations. There were no candidate interventions benefiting the opposition ticket in African countries (reducing the number of observations to 159 in the respective estimation). Nor were there any process interventions in advanced economies (reducing the observation count to 166 for both models).³²

Additionally, we present evidence based on an alternative variable for candidate divisions extracted from the Process–Party dataset. We create a dummy variable to indicate if the foreign power prefers the opposition and another to denote that it prefers the government. This approach places the fewest assumptions on how much the foreign intervener prefers the opposition over the government when it comes to predicting involvement. Appendix Table F.10 shows the results of

²⁹Development set to 1 for above the global median in period in World Bank data, V-Dem electoral democracy above 0.6 set for democracy, and post-1990 is the end of the Cold War. The results do not depend on these specific cut-offs.

³⁰We need to calculate the increase in the odds ratio as $e^{2.394} - 1 = 9.96$ and can compare it to the odds that a candidate intervention will benefit the government if all variables (including polarization) are set to 0, i.e. $e^{-4.245} = 0.014$, which translates in a probability of around 0.014, i.e. odds ratio = $p/(1-p)$.

³¹We need to calculate the decrease in the odds ratio as $e^{-0.550} - 1 = -0.42$.

³²We choose post-communist countries as the reference category for these estimations and find no regional category that significantly differs from it.

Table 3. Summary table for US interventions

Variables	<i>N</i>	Mean	s.d.	Min	Max
Process interventions	261	0.195	0.425	−1	1
Candidate interventions	261	0.0556	0.307	−1	1
V-Dem Polyarchy	252	0.528	0.251	0.0859	0.958
UNGA voting alignment	222	−0.00390	0.413	−0.797	0.992
Developed country	251	0.602	0.491	0	1
Polarization (process party)	232	0.267	0.916	−2	2

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

Table 4. Logit models of interventions with Process–Party polarization

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

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

Process/Candidate Interventions_{*i*} = $\beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{Polarization}_i + \gamma \cdot \text{Controls}_i + \varepsilon_i$. Process/Candidate interventions take values of −1, −0.5, 0, 0.5 and 1. For candidate interventions we estimate an ordered-logit model and binomial-logit models on dummies that take a value of 1 if *c* > 0 denoted by *g* + (and accordingly *g* − for *c* < 0). For process interventions we repeat this approach and estimate again an ordered logit as well as binomial models using dummies for *d* + (pro-democracy interventions with *p* > 0) and *d* − (for *p* < 0). ****p* < 0.01, ***p* < 0.05, **p* < 0.1

these logit models, with dummy variables as both regressors and outcome variables. Our basic intuition (presented above) still holds.

Issues at Stake

Appendix Figure E.4 and Table E.7 report the results on the importance of issues. We expect higher stakes to result in a steeper slope for interventions. We divide the sample into (1) cases in which alignment or armed conflict are the most or second-most important issues and (2) cases in which economic issues, left–right divisions, democracy and global bads assume this ranking. We expect the first group to feature higher stakes (Γ). We do, indeed, find a steeper slope for what we call higher-stakes issues. However, in a fully interactive model, the interaction term between stakes and polarization (not shown) is not significant. Thus we have suggestive, but not statistically significant, evidence that higher policy stakes drive US interventions.

A Look at all Interveners

Figure 3 and Table 5 present the OLS results for all interveners globally in the elections we study, for both the Cold War and post-Cold War periods. The results remain unchanged for the whole sample, with some interesting regularities observed by period (ordered logit yields similar results). Polarization seems to be more strongly driven by policy divisions during the Cold War, possibly

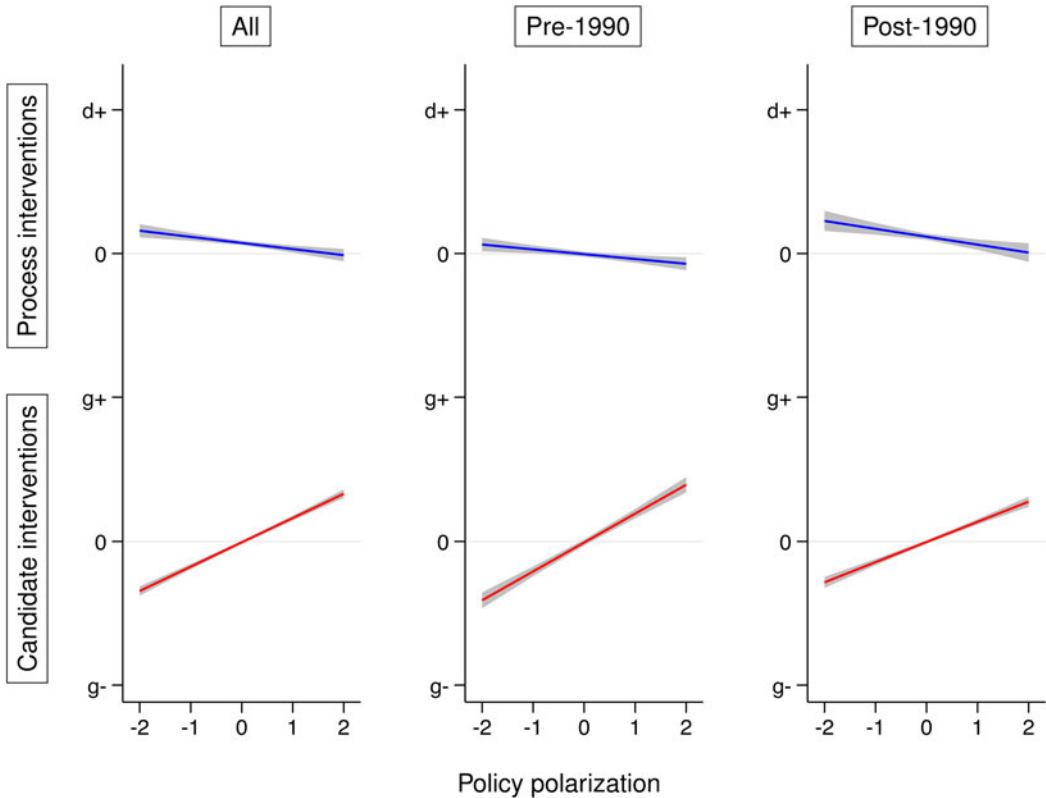


Figure 3. Process and candidate interventions by all potential (sample) interveners

due to the higher stakes inherent in superpower competition. Polarization only weakly predicts process interventions during the Cold War; they are much more strongly predicted in the more current period. It is possible that some substitution is at work, with states switching to the more acceptable form of election intervention – affecting democratic processes – after the end of the Cold War. Also, the overall emphasis on democracy promotion (at 0 polarization) is higher after 1990 – a reflection of the growing international concern with clean elections. The latter evidence is consistent with the additional democracy term we introduced in the model. The upward move is statistically significant, suggesting a greater λ in the post-Cold War period. It is also the case, though we do not show it here, that the United States is more committed than any other intervener to promoting cleaner processes.

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

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

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

Does polarization matter? It could be that our measurement is a poor representation of policy positions, or that whoever is elected adapts their position, rendering their pre-election positions

Table 5. Interventions by all powers

	Process interventions			Candidate interventions		
	All	Cold War	Post CW	All	Cold War	Post CW
Polarization	-0.0408** (0.0185)	-0.0347 (0.0235)	-0.0509* (0.0259)	0.169*** (0.0230)	0.197*** (0.0370)	0.142*** (0.0249)
Constant	0.0699*** (0.00983)	-0.000199 (0.0123)	0.111*** (0.0122)	-0.00656 (0.00586)	-0.00365 (0.0109)	-0.00664 (0.00627)
Observations	1,830	667	1,163	1,830	667	1,163
R ²	0.009	0.017	0.009	0.249	0.300	0.201

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

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

Table 6. Post-election policies by regime type

Abs. change in relations with US			
	in Dem = 0		in Dem = 1
Abs. polarization	0.82** (0.29)		1.25* (0.63)
Constant	-2.08*** (0.37)		-3.52*** (0.72)
Observations	125		99
Pseudo R ²	0.060		0.075

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

irrelevant. The latter may be especially the case for more democratic states, in which incumbents have an incentive to pre-empt opposition challenges through moderation.

We take advantage of two NELDA-provided variables to evaluate this possibility. We combine questions *nelda51* ('Is there a negative change in relations with the US after the election?') and *nelda52* ('Is there a positive change in relations with the US after the election?') into a new binary variable coded 1 for cases in which there was any change in relations with the United States after the election.³³ We also take the absolute value of polarization as an independent variable. We again divide the sample into democracies based on the V-Dem polyarchy electoral democracy measurement. A score of greater than 0.6 is defined as a democracy (choice of threshold does not matter).

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

Conclusion

Election interventions are here to stay. In this piece, we advance our current understanding of interventions by distinguishing between two types: a process intervention, designed to strengthen or weaken the rules of the game, and a candidate intervention, which seeks to increase support for a specific candidate. We argue that policy divisions in target countries are important

³³NELDA does not distinguish this variable further, but the variable appears to at least partly track the removal or imposition of economic sanctions.

determinants of intervention. If foreign powers prefer the government, they are more likely to weaken the democratic process and/or provide direct support for the government. By contrast, if foreign powers prefer an opposition victory, they would strengthen the democratic process and/or try to directly intervene to increase the opposition's electoral performance. This should be particularly the case if an election is important for a foreign power, while pro-democratic interventions become more likely in periods when foreign powers have a stronger commitment to democracy.

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

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

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

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

Supplementary material. The data, replication instructions, and the data's codebook can be found in Harvard Dataverse at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/DDLCMO>, and online appendix at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000186>

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APPENDIX A

Short Theoretical Model

This section illustrates our theoretical considerations by formally deriving our main hypotheses in a simple model and solve it. We assume that the true level of support for the incumbent is x . Additionally, there is an initial level of bias b in favor of the incumbent. The foreign power can change the result of the election by supporting the incumbent via candidate support $c > 0$ or it can reduce/increase the bias of an election via process interventions p , resulting in a bias $\beta(p) = b - \sqrt{bp}$. We assume that the effectiveness of process interventions depends on the initial level of bias.³⁴ The result of the election will be:³⁵

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

³⁴In consolidated democracies with a very low level of b , this would make process support rather ineffective.

³⁵We need to restrict c, p such that $f(c, p) \in [0, 1]$ or use an appropriate transformation (e.g. via a logistic function).

We assume that the election result determines the policies according to the vote shares of the platforms A_{gov} and B_{opp} and that interventions are costly (quadratic loss terms). The importance of the election result in a particular country will be determined by the parameter Γ .³⁶ The maximization problem of a foreign power is thus:

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

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

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

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

³⁶It is possible to introduce an additional term that captures the degree to which the foreign power cares about clean elections (low levels of the resulting bias β). In further extensions one could also introduce interactions between process interventions (p) and candidate interventions (c). The most promising direction for further research would however be a model that explicitly models voter preferences.