

Competing and Cheating:
The Consequences of Electoral Malpractice for
Public Opinion

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Public Opinion

PhD Dissertation

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Laurits F. Aarslew,
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Preface

This report summarizes the PhD dissertation *Competing and Cheating: The Consequences of Electoral Malpractice for Public Opinion*. Apart from this summary report, the dissertation consists of the following three self-contained, single-authored studies.

Article A: Aarslew, L. F. (2022). "Why Don't Partisans Sanction Electoral Malpractice?", *British Journal of Political Science* (Online First), 1-17.

Article B: Aarslew, L. F. (2022). "The Limits of Party Loyalty: How Election Cheating Affectively (De)Polarizes Voters", *Working Paper*.

Article C: Aarslew, L. F. (2022). "Does Election Fraud Erode Support for Autocrats?", Invited to Revise and Resubmit in *Comparative Political Studies*.

Chapter 1

Introduction

On March 31, 2019, when Ukrainian voters went to the polls to elect a new president, many were surely surprised to find the same name - Y.V. Tymoshenko - appearing twice on the ballot. This was no coincidence or innocuous printing error. Instead, it was a deliberate attempt to skew the odds against the former Prime Minister, Yulia Volodymyrivna Tymoshenko, seen by many as the key challenger to incumbent Petro Poroshenko's reelection bid (Cheeseman and Klaas 2019). Tymoshenko's rivals had found a *doppelganger* candidate (a candidate with the same initials and surname) to tilt the electoral playing field against her. This candidate, Yuriy Volodymyrovich Tymoshenko, was a Member of Parliament and claimed that there was nothing undue about his decision to run for president (Reuters 2021). However, when pressed by journalists, Yuriy Tymoshenko could not account for how he managed to raise funds to pay the required \$92,000 registration fee that would, according to his income declaration, have taken many years to earn (Cheeseman and Klaas 2019).

The idea of having two identical names on the ballots was to dilute Yulia Tymoshenko's vote totals so that the incumbent could shore up another election win. The scheme seemed to work, as the "fake" Tymoshenko received more than 100,000 votes. In the end, however, the *doppelganger* scheme did not determine the outcome as both the incumbent president and former prime minister were surprisingly overtaken by the comedian and political novice, Volodymyr Zelenskiy. As Cheeseman and Klaas (2019, vii) write, while "Ukrainian politics descended into trickery and farce, the country's citizens took refuge in a satirist."

This dissertation (consisting of this summary report and three self-contained articles) explores the implications of electoral malpractice - such as the *doppelganger* candidate scheme in Ukraine - for voters' political attitudes across multiple countries. At a time when many scholars and experts worry that citizens' commitment to the rules and principles of democracy is declining, this dissertation zooms in on the heart of democ-

racy. Understanding how electoral malpractice affects voters' attitudes is important for several reasons, as both elections and public opinion serve key roles for how democracies and autocracies endure and function.

First, although most political scientists and observers would agree that democracy involves far more than holding free and fair elections (e.g., Dahl 1971), it goes without saying that democracy without elections cannot work. Elections provide the basis for each citizen to contribute on an equal footing in collective decision-making, which is crucial to democratic governance. In that light, scholars have characterized contested elections as the "lynchpin of democracy" (Birch 2011, 1; see also Collier and Adcock 1999; Møller and Skaaning 2012). Even in the more restricted conceptualizations of democracy, elections are the mechanism that ensures institutionalized uncertainty (Przeworski 1988). Elections determine who gets access to wield legitimate power. Lasswell (1950) famously stated that politics is about "who gets what, when, and how?" In a similar vein, Easton (1953, 129) conceived politics as the "authoritative allocation of values for a society." Elections, from that perspective, are the institution that allows citizens to have a say in who gets what. Moreover, elections allow citizens to hold elected leaders accountable for their actions and performance (Downs 1957). Voters can use elections to reward parties and politicians who deliver valued public goods to society and punish those that do not (Fearon 1999; Ferejohn 1986; Healy and Malhotra 2013), providing citizens with an opportunity to "throw the rascals out" (Miller and Wattenberg 1985). Thus, elections constitute a bond between the people and the system (Anderson et al. 2005; Banducci and Karp 2003). In other words, "without elections, there can be no democracy" (Kelley 2012, xv).

Second, the focus on electoral malpractice is important because recent research argues that democracy is under pressure (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Waldner and Lust 2018). Today, democratic breakdowns are not sudden events (such as coups) but rather an incrementally declining process from within (Bermeo 2016). By gradually diminishing and undermining the quality of democracy's institutions, elected leaders and established parties can chip away at democracy's foundation and stability. Discouragingly, recent research suggests that counterfeit democrats can attack democracy's institutions without losing support from their core base (e.g., Graham and Svobik 2020; Simonovits et al. 2022). We have yet to understand, however, how electoral malpractice - a violation of democracy's most important institution - affects voters. As democratic backsliding involves "gradual setbacks to democratic quality [that] are veiled by a legal façade" (Lührmann and

Lindberg 2019, 1095) and "relatively fine-grained degrees of change" (Waldner and Lust 2018, 95), voters may respond differently to more brazen violations of democracy's rules. Hence, understanding how voters respond to parties and politicians who violate democracy's foundational institution helps us understand the stability of contemporary democracy and the apparent allure of electoral autocracy.

Free and fair elections have come under increasing pressure, even in consolidated democracies. This became abundantly clear, as elections became a key battleground for democratic stability in the United States following the 2020 presidential election. Former president Donald Trump's efforts to overturn the outcome of the 2020 presidential election by false accusations of systematic election fraud and the subsequent violent riot at the US Capitol demonstrate the importance of election fairness. Similarly, in the 2016 US presidential election, confidence in the election's legitimacy took a serious hit due to Russian interference, especially among Democratic voters (Sinclair et al. 2018; Tomz and Weeks 2020). While there is no evidence of systematic, widespread election fraud in modern American history, the picture becomes more discouraging as we dive deeper into elections below the federal level.

In one of the most serious cases of electoral malpractice in recent US history, Mark Harris, a Republican candidate for the 9th Congressional District in North Carolina in 2018, was found guilty of illegally harvesting absentee ballots and saw his election win annulled (New York Times 2019). In 2016, Harris had lost the Republican primary for that district by a mere 134 votes, all because of a handful of dubious mail-in votes from Bladen County. In 2017, Harris met with McCrae Dowless, the 'election guru' who had orchestrated Harris' loss a year earlier. Harris and Dowless quickly struck up a collaboration that would eventually result in a congressional election being overturned - the only time that has happened in modern American history (Politico 2021). Harris won North Carolina's 9th Congressional seat in the 2018 midterm election, beating the Democratic candidate, Dan McCready, by a 905-vote lead. In Bladen County, however, the results once again looked suspicious. Although the election was very close across the board, Harris won 61% of absentee ballots although only 19% of the county's voters were registered Republicans. In the end, a few hundred votes changed the outcome of the race (New York Times 2019), and in testimony during a hearing by the State Board of Elections, Harris admitted his involvement in the absentee-ballot scheme. The story of Mark Harris, McCrae Dowless, and

the overturned election in North Carolina goes to show just how simple election cheating can be.¹

Third, the study of citizens' reactions and responses to electoral malpractice is important because, as Wuttke et al. (2020, 416) write, "democracy without democrats is not sustainable." In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville recognized the "sovereign power of the populace", which presides over all institutional designs and constructions of democracy. Stable, well-functioning democracy, in other words, requires that a sufficient number of citizens support the basic institutions that make a democracy (Almond and Verba 1963; Claassen 2020; Dahl 1956; Easton 1953; Lipset 1959). Studying how voters respond to violations of the core institution of democracy tells us a lot about the stability of democracy. It is a crucial task for democratic citizens to hold elected leaders accountable for their actions, especially when they break democracy's rules. When parties engage in electoral malpractice, people's ability to make reasoned, informed decisions, adjust their views, and sanction the perpetrators becomes a guardrail against would-be authoritarians, allowing democracy to self-correct.

Finally, it is important to study as almost all countries hold elections for political office. Even among the world's dictatorships, elections are now the rule rather than the exception (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). Only five autocracies have not held formal elections at least once since 2000, and about 75% of nondemocratic elections involve multiparty competition (Frye 2021). Authoritarian elections range from the farcically rigged elections in North Korea to the relatively competitive elections in Kenya under Daniel Arap Moi. Citizens in democracies and autocracies, therefore, increasingly share the experience of voting in elections (Schedler 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002). There are, of course, marked differences between the extent of electoral malpractice in authoritarian and democratic regimes. In autocracies, electoral manipulation is ubiquitous. Although dictators formally invite political competition, in reality, they subvert the process through pervasive manipulation. Indeed, authoritarian elections are, by definition, not free and fair. Authoritarian regimes use elections to sustain an illusion of public support and legitimacy, while simultaneously (mis)using them to distribute spoils among

1. While Harris' case and the overturned election represent a rare instance of blatant malpractice, it is not the only time that parties have turned to undue means to win an election. As recently as September 2022, the FBI arrested a Republican elections official based on indictments charging him with illegally using voter information to apply for mail-in ballots in the names of people who had no interest in voting, did not request Schofield's assistance, and did not know that he was using their information (CNN 2022; Fox News 2022).

the ruling coalition and co-opt opposition candidates (Schedler 2002, 2013; Seeberg 2019). Although manipulation in authoritarian elections is pervasive, autocrats can rarely get away with completely falsifying elections, and some nondemocratic elections are more free and fair than others. Timothy Frye writes:

”Although autocratic regimes engage in objectionable practices during elections, they also use strategies common to democratic elections. Operating in this gray area requires much more effort than just stuffing ballot boxes on Election Day, and it raises the odds of an unpleasant outcome - but it allows autocrats to maintain a veneer of legitimacy too and gives them some ground to claim a popular mandate.”

(Frye 2021, 67)

Falling short of democratic standards for elections, however, is not a strictly authoritarian problem (Norris 2015). Many nominally democratic regimes continue to face problems of electoral malpractice (Mauk 2020; Norris and Grömping 2019). Many new democracies have struggled to “get elections right.” In her seminal work on electoral malpractice, Sarah Birch (2011, 2) notes that many elections “fail so radically to embody democratic ideals that [they] bear virtually no resemblance to what the majority of people want.”

Even though autocrats can rule without a public mandate, we have ample evidence that public support is important for regime stability and that autocrats pay great attention to public opinion (Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017; Frye et al. 2017; Geddes 1999; Gerschewski 2013, 2018; Rozenas 2016). There are at least three reasons why public support is important for dictators. First, it deters elites who may want to challenge the authoritarian incumbent. When elite members of the ruling coalition see that the authoritarian leaders enjoy high levels of personal support in the public, they may think twice before seeking to replace them. Second, high public backing reduces incentives for mass mobilization against the autocrat. Mobilizing against an authoritarian leader is dangerous and costly; when citizens think the leader enjoys genuine public support, mobilizing against him may seem futile. Finally, public approval reduces the costs of governing and surviving. Without public support, dictators must resort to costly and repressive survival and governance strategies. Consequently, scholars increasingly devote attention to understanding public opinion dynamics in nondemocratic regimes (e.g., Frye 2019, 2021; Greene and Robertson 2017; Matovski 2021; Şaşmaz et al. 2022; Svolic 2021). Given the prevalence of authoritarian elections and the impor-

tance of public support for autocratic survival, it is, therefore, crucial that we understand the implication of electoral malpractice for public opinion in authoritarian regimes.

Gaps in the Existing Literature on Electoral Malpractice

Given the centrality of elections for democratic governance, the comparative literature has devoted considerable attention to studying the causes and consequences of electoral malpractice. Relying mainly on cross-national analyses, this literature has examined whether electoral malpractice serves goals above and beyond simply winning elections (see e.g., Birch 2011; Hafner-Burton et al. 2014; Dawson 2020; Gehlbach and Simpser 2015; Harvey 2016; Rozenas 2016; Simpser 2013), the institutional structures under which electoral malpractice is more likely to occur (e.g., Birch 2007, 2011; Birch and Van Ham 2017; Fjelde and Höglund 2016; Van Ham and Lindberg 2015; Van Ham and Garnett 2019), the impact of election observations on election quality and the potential for unintended negative consequences (Asunka et al. 2019; Kelley 2012; Luo and Rozenas 2018; Simpser and Donno 2012; Roussias and Ruiz-Rufino 2018; Von Borzyskowski 2019), as well as the role of electoral malpractice in sparking post-election protests (Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Harvey and Mukherjee 2018; Tucker 2007; Rød 2019; Kuntz and Thompson 2009; Ong 2018).

Despite the progress made by scholars in the comparative literature on electoral malpractice, we still have a limited understanding of the individual-level implications of electoral malpractice.² To what extent do partisan loyalties undermine support for election fairness? Are voters willing to condone electoral malpractice by the party they are affiliated with? What do citizens in authoritarian regimes think of their elections and electoral malpractice? Does it shape their support for incumbent autocrats? These questions are left unanswered by the current literature. Hence, we still know relatively little about the consequences of electoral malpractice for political attitudes, including whether those consequences

2. Within the comparative literature on malpractice, a sub-literature zooms in on electoral clientelism and vote buying. In this sub-literature, scholars have paid much more attention to the individual-level implications (e.g., Bratton 2008; Carreras and İrepoğlu 2013; Frye et al. 2019; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2019; Kramon 2016; Jensen and Justesen 2014; Mares and Visconti 2019). At a broader level, however, the comparative literature on malpractice has largely neglected the micro-level implications.

differ by voters' partisan loyalties, regime contexts, and whether citizens would turn a blind eye to electoral malpractice if it helps their party win. In this dissertation, I set out to address these gaps.

Citizens as Complicits

Electoral malpractice is transgressions of free and fair elections that seek to give a specific side (party, candidate, coalition, etc.) an advantage over its opponents. As illustrated in the two examples above, someone always stands to gain from electoral malpractice. Poroshenko had an advantage over Tymoshenko due to the *doppelganger* scheme, and Mark Harris gave Republican voters in North Carolina's 9th district a better chance of having their preferred representative elected to Congress. Indeed, the objective of electoral malpractice is to see a given party or candidate win an election they might lose otherwise, thereby substituting partisan interests for public goods (Birch 2011). Do voters, then, dislike electoral malpractice and turn against the parties and politicians who violate election fairness for their gain?

People may think quite differently about electoral malpractice depending on whether it benefits or harms their party's chances of winning. Political scientists have long recognized the centrality of partisan identification for political attitudes and behaviors, even in autocracies (Campbell et al. 1960; Bartels 2002; Gandhi and Ong 2019; Robertson 2017; Zaller 1992). Indeed, the dominant view in most research on political behavior holds that partisanship is more important than *anything else* for how voters think about and interact with politics and political institutions (Barber and Pope 2019; Costa 2021). While research on the impact of electoral malpractice on political attitudes and opinion is scant, related literature paints a discouraging picture of citizens' commitment to the rules and principles of democracy. Recent evidence shows that voters rarely vote against their party to punish political malfeasance (e.g., corruption or violations of democratic principles) (e.g., Anduiza et al. 2013; Breitenstein 2019; Eggers 2014; Graham and Svobik 2020; Gidengil et al. 2021; Solaz et al. 2019; Svobik 2019; Saikkonen and Christensen 2022). According to some scholars, partisans desire to see their party win at all costs (Finkel et al. 2020; Webster 2020).

Electoral malpractice inevitably puts some subset of voters under pressure between two preferences. On the one hand, people value democracy and its institutions, even in weak democracies and autocracies (Carey et al. 2019; Frye 2021; Pasek et al. 2022). Electoral malpractice

violates the basic rules of democracy's core institution, suggesting that voters should respond negatively to it. On the other hand, many citizens are also passionately invested in their party winning elections, and research seems to suggest that voters are willing to condone violations of democracy's rules and values for partisan self-interest (Graham and Svoblik 2020; Gidengil et al. 2021; Simonovits et al. 2022). A key question is, therefore, what a voter does when she is confronted with electoral malpractice that advances her party's chances of winning: Does she sacrifice fairness values for partisan gain or sacrifice the partisan gain for fairness values? In many ways, this dissertation is as much about partisanship and the potentially dangerous implications for citizens' adherence to basic democratic rules as it is about electoral malpractice. To my knowledge, this dissertation and the three self-contained articles are the first to systematically pit clear violations of election fairness against partisan self-interest head to head. How do voters fare in that cross-pressure between democratic prerogatives and (tribal) partisan instincts? And do voters in consolidated democracies, new democracies, and authoritarian regimes respond similarly to electoral malpractice? The main question I attempt to answer in this dissertation (the present summary and the three self-contained articles it includes) is as follows:

How do voters respond to electoral malpractice, and what, if any, are the effects of violations of election fairness on political attitudes in democratic and nondemocratic regimes?

To answer this question, I break down the main question into three parts. In the first article (Article A: Why Don't Partisans Sanction Electoral Malpractice?), I ask:

SUB RQ1: How do voters evaluate the use of electoral malpractice?

Article A examines how voters evaluate the use of electoral malpractice, and, in particular, whether their interpretation of information about malpractice is colored by partisan loyalties. In this article, I contrast two commonly used explanations for why partisans might not sanction electoral malpractice or similar misconduct by their co-partisans. One explanation suggests that partisans apply biased standards when evaluating malpractice, disapproving less fervently of in-party malpractice than otherwise identical malpractice by the out-party. Another explanation suggests that partisans evaluate malpractice objectively, but trade off fairness principles for partisan gains. These are qualitatively very different explanations, but existing work is not well suited to differentiate

between them. The main objective of Article A is to disentangle these two explanations.

In the second article (Article B: The Limits of Party Loyalty), I build on the findings in Article A to examine the impact of electoral malpractice on voters' partisan attachment. Article B raises the question:

SUB RQ2: How does electoral malpractice shape political attitudes?

Contrary to recent studies arguing that parties can violate democracy's rules and norms without severe punishment from their core base (Graham and Svobik 2020; Gidengil et al. 2021; Simonovits et al. 2022), I argue that electoral malpractice drives voters to distance themselves from the perpetrating party, even the most hardened partisans.

Finally, in the third article (Article C: Does Election Fraud Erode Support for Autocrats?), I examine the possibility that these effects may differ in authoritarian regimes, by asking:

SUB RQ3: Do the effects of electoral malpractice on political attitudes differ by regime context?

To answer this question, I examine how revelations of election fraud shape Russians' views of the regime and support for President Vladimir Putin. I argue that the main difference is that the distribution of prior expectations for electoral integrity differs in autocracies because opponents of the incumbent regime are likely already aware of the regime's interference in elections. Thus, I argue that only the regime's core supporters are sensitive to news of election fraud, whereas regime opponents are already 'priced in' on election fraud.

Hence, each of the three articles answers a specific sub-question, which provides an answer to the research question posed above. Table 1.1 below gives an overview of the three studies. This summary report serves to tie these studies together to provide an answer to the question raised above.

Table 1.1: Overview of Studies

Article	Status	Sub-question
Study A: <i>Why Don't Partisans Sanction Electoral Malpractice?</i>	Published in <i>British Journal of Political Science</i>	Sub-question #1: <i>How do voters evaluate the use of election cheating?</i>
Study B: <i>The Limits of Party Loyalty: How Election Cheating Affectively (De)Polarizes Voters</i>	Working paper	Sub-question #2: <i>How does election cheating shape political attitudes?</i>
Study C: <i>Does Election Fraud Erode Support for Autocrats?</i>	R&R in <i>Comparative Political Studies</i>	Sub-question #3: <i>Do the effects differ by regime context?</i>

The Main Contributions of This Dissertation

Throughout this dissertation, I find consistent, negative effects of electoral malpractice, ranging from subtle gerrymandering to blatant ballot stuffing, on voters' perceptions of government legitimacy and political support. Even when malpractice gives an individual's in-party an advantage, I find that people distance themselves from parties and politicians that engage in malpractice. Hence, contrary to much recent work, I show that partisans are not willing to win at all costs, at least not in the case of elections.

More specifically, there are three key findings in this dissertation. First, voters do not apply a partisan double standard when evaluating electoral malpractice, disapproving more strongly of malpractice by the out-party. In two very different democracies (Mexico and Denmark), I find that voters' evaluation of malpractice do not differ depending on their partisan affiliations. That is, I provide evidence from a new and a consolidated democracy that voters do not engage in *partisan hypocrisy*. Second, I demonstrate that exposure to electoral malpractice by the individual's in-party weakens her sense of partisan loyalty and increases partisan ambivalence, even in the *hyper-partisan* setting of the United States. Hence, I find that there are limits to what partisans will tolerate to beat their opponents. Finally, this dissertation shows that voters in authoritarian regimes evaluate the use of electoral malpractice in a way similar to voters in new and consolidated democracies. However, in an authoritarian regime, regime-opposing voters are likely already aware of how the regime interferes with elections. Hence, only the regime's core base is responsive to information revealing electoral malpractice.

The findings presented in this dissertation make several contributions to at least three sub-fields in political science: the comparative literature on electoral malpractice, the behavioral literature on citizens' commitment to democracy, and the comparative literature on authoritarianism. From a general perspective, the dissertation contributes to these strands of research in four ways. First, it makes theoretical contributions by integrating social psychological theories of procedural justice to explain the micro-level relationship between electoral malpractice and public opinion and by incorporating a more nuanced understanding of opinion change. Second, the dissertation contributes by focusing on democracy's core institution. Against the backdrop of previous studies' focus on democratic backsliding, zooming in on elections adds important qualifications and nuances to the current narrative about voters' declining commitment to democracy. Third, from a methodological perspective, the dissertation contributes by using survey experiments that capture multiple types of malpractice. This allows me to probe for potential differences between the various types of malpractice and allows for stronger causal claims than previous work on the effects of malpractice on political attitudes. Finally, the dissertation contributes to existing work by examining this relationship across very different contexts. From authoritarian Russia, over Mexico's new democracy and Denmark's well-functioning democracy, to the world's oldest democracy: the United States of America, it provides novel evidence of the impact of electoral malpractice on legitimacy beliefs and political support.

More specifically, the dissertation advances the comparative literature on electoral malpractice by providing novel evidence of the implications of electoral malpractice at the level of the individual. While most previous research has examined the causes and consequences of electoral malpractice from a comparative, cross-national perspective, this dissertation breaks new ground by investigating the consequences of malpractice from the perspective of the individual. Second, the dissertation contributes to ongoing debates about citizens' commitment to the rules and principles of democracy by zooming in on the core institution of modern democracy. While previous work has focused on voters' partisan responses to democratic backsliding, this dissertation expands the scope to electoral malpractice, violations of democracy's most important institution, and finds no evidence of partisan biases suggested in previous work. Finally, this contributes to the comparative literature on authoritarianism by adding evidence of the impact of electoral malpractice (a ubiquitous feature of authoritarian elections) on public opinion. In doing so, the dissertation advances discussions about the regime (de)stabilizing effects of

authoritarian elections. Furthermore, it joins an emerging body of research seeking to integrate insights from political psychology into the study of authoritarianism.

The findings made in this dissertation have implications for our understanding of contemporary democracy and autocracy. First, the results suggest that violations of key democratic institutions, such as malpractice, can drive even the most hardened partisans to distance themselves from their party. In the context of ongoing debates about pernicious polarization across consolidated democracies (Finkel et al. 2020; Gidengil et al. 2021; Simonovits et al. 2022), the findings presented here are encouraging, as they indicate that there are limits to partisan loyalty. Complementing a small set of studies showing that there are limits to what partisans tolerate (e.g. Lelkes and Westwood 2017), I show that partisans across very different contexts (from Denmark to Russia) do not condone electoral malpractice, although their preferred party benefits from it. Druckman et al. (2019) show that exposure to harsh incivility in in-party media leads partisans to distance themselves from their party (see also Skytte 2022). Eady et al. (2022) show that the 2021 insurrection at Capitol Hill led to a marked decrease in self-expressed partisan affiliation among Republicans on Twitter. Similarly, I show that even relatively modest malpractice (gerrymandering) by the in-party causes voters to report a weakened sense of partisan belonging and increased partisan ambivalence.

While contemporary narratives would have us expect that in-party loyalty is the be-all and end-all of political behavior, my findings carry positive implications for democracy as electoral malpractice potentially deflects and demobilizes at least some co-partisans, in turn raising the political costs of not playing by the rules. To be sure, scholars are right to be concerned about the extent to which citizens are willing to forego liberal democratic principles and values for partisan self-interest. However, when it comes to electoral fairness, such willingness is constrained by deep-rooted fairness considerations.

Second, these findings have implications for our understanding of how authoritarian regimes endure and function. Scholars have long been intrigued by the role of nominally democratic institutions in autocracies. Specifically, research has sought to understand how democratic institutions, such as elections, may help sustain authoritarian rule (Seeberg 2019; Svobik 2012; Knutsen et al. 2017). The findings in this dissertation provide new evidence, at the level of the individual, to such debate, advancing our understanding of election dynamics in authoritarian regimes by providing fine-grained evidence of how the public evaluates electoral

malpractice and by highlighting which voter groups are most responsive to news of electoral malpractice.

Summary Outline

The rest of this summary report is structured as follows. In Chapter 2, I define the concept of electoral malpractice as illicit and intentional attempts to influence the outcome of an election in favor of a given party or candidate. This chapter also proposes a stylized model of opinion change, which forms the basis of this dissertation's approach to studying the effect of electoral malpractice on political attitudes. The chapter then outlines expectations based on the existing literature as to how voters will respond to electoral malpractice to situate the framework in the literature. Contrary to that body of work, I draw on social psychological theories of procedural justice to argue that electoral malpractice has profound negative impacts on public opinion.

Chapter 3 turns the attention to the methodological approach in the dissertation. The chapter discusses the strengths and limitations of the survey experimental approach. Readers should keep the limitations in mind when interpreting the results of articles A-C (summarized in later chapters), particularly concerning generalizability, treatment strength and authenticity, social desirability bias, and preference falsification. This chapter then discusses the steps taken in the three articles to address such limitations, including measuring individuals' level of self-monitoring, selecting cases to zero out differences in treatment strength, and designing multiple treatments to avoid reliance on powerful treatment material only. Notwithstanding the challenges that survey experiments face, they offer a unique way of examining voters' reactions to and feelings and opinions about electoral malpractice.

In Chapters 4-6, I summarize the three articles in the dissertation. Chapter 4 summarizes Article A, which investigates how respondents in two widely different democracies update factual beliefs about elections, interpret the consequences of malpractice for the government's legitimacy, and update their levels of affect for the government when presented with information about electoral malpractice. The main findings in Article A are two-fold. First, voters in two very different contexts update their factual beliefs with reasonable accuracy, interpret such information in a meaningful way, and use it to form opinions about the government. Only the most hardened partisans may be willing to tolerate malpractice for partisan ends. Importantly, they do not apply partisan

double standards or turn a blind eye to in-party malpractice. On the contrary, even strong partisans objectively acknowledge the legitimacy costs of in-party malpractice and withdraw support from the in-party. However, a small subset of the strongest partisans may hold such powerful prior beliefs about opposing parties that they are nevertheless willing to sacrifice a degree of election fairness if it ensures that an out-party does not win control of the government.

Chapter 5 summarizes Article B, which builds on the first article to address sub-question two: how does electoral malpractice shape political attitudes? To do so, I zoom in on the United States, a case of a consolidated democracy where partisan polarization and animus are rampant, and there are real-world examples of electoral malpractice to inform the experiment's treatment material. Article B relies on two original survey experiments, reaching the same conclusion. The overall conclusion in Article B is that electoral malpractice is such a clear-cut norm violation that voters distance themselves from the perpetrator regardless of partisanship, even for subtle types of malpractice. Electoral misconduct by the individual's in-party strongly decreases her sense of partisan belonging and increases partisan ambivalence. Even more subtle, legally disguised forms of malpractice - gerrymandering - causes citizens' to distance themselves from the party violating norms of election fairness. More brazen types of malpractice (misinformation or mail-in ballot fraud) even cause voters to report warmer feelings towards the out-party.

Next, Chapter 6 summarizes Article C, which addresses sub-question 3 by examining how voters in Russia (an electoral authoritarian regime *par excellence*) respond to information revealing electoral malpractice (fraud) in the 2020 vote on Constitutional Amendments. The findings show that voters' expectations for election fairness depend on partisan affiliation, with supporters of regime-opposing parties already having 'factored in' election fraud. Similar differences were observed for regime legitimacy beliefs. As a consequence, only supporters of the Kremlin's party (United Russia) are sensitive to the experiment's treatments and respond by adjusting their views on elections and the regime's legitimacy. However, the experiment does not find a similar backlash against Putin, not even among voters who were otherwise responsive.

In Chapter 7, I take stock of the key findings, the contributions, the implications of the findings, and point to some avenues for future research.

Chapter 2

Framework: Citizen Responses to Electoral Malpractice

This chapter presents the framework that ties the three self-contained studies together. Articles A-C include self-contained theoretical arguments (summarized in chapters 4-6), which are made to answer specific research questions (see table 1.1). The goal of this framework summary is, therefore, to give readers an understanding of the theoretical core that the three studies share. First, this chapter defines the concept of electoral malpractice as illicit and intentional attempts to influence the outcome of an election in favor of a given party or candidate. Next, the chapter proposes a stylized model of opinion change in response to information about electoral malpractice, which forms the basis of this dissertation's approach to studying the effect of electoral malpractice on political attitudes, and identifies three key variables to examine. Subsequently, I outline some expectations based on current literature as to how voters will respond to electoral malpractice to situate the framework in the literature. Contrary to that body of work, I draw on social psychological theories of procedural justice to argue that electoral malpractice has profound negative impacts on public opinion. It is from this core that Articles A-C (summarized in chapters 4-6) set out to address the three sub-questions posed above.

What is Electoral Malpractice?

Like many concepts in political science, electoral malpractice is difficult to define. Some scholars define electoral malpractice from a *legalistic perspective*, according to which malpractice refers to electoral strategies and actions that do not comply with a country's electoral rules and laws. Lehoucq (2003, 235), for example, considers an action "fraudulent if it breaks the law." Despite the appeal of such a parsimonious conceptualization, a legalistic definition cannot consider actions that are within a

country's rules but are nevertheless clearly undemocratic as malpractice. The rules governing elections may not themselves be democratic, which is the case in many electoral autocracies and new democracies. A legalistic definition, therefore, faces substantial limitations. Another approach is to define malpractice from a *sociological perspective*, by which malpractice is in the eye of the beholder (Elklit and Reynolds 2002). In this view, whether a given action is considered malpractice depends on whether citizens in that country perceive such actions as malpractice. However, a perceptual definition such as this faces limitations concerning comparability. What constitutes malpractice will likely differ between countries and between groups within the same country. A third approach is to define malpractice by reference to *international best practices*. In this view, malpractice is identified by bench-marking against international standards (Goodwin-Gill 1994). The Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights establish the best practices, to which elections ought to adhere. However, as international law remains silent on many facets of electoral conduct (cf. Birch 2011), such a definition is ill suited for the present purposes.

Instead, this dissertation closely follows the *normative* approach, which builds on democratic theory (Birch 2011; Simpson 2013). The main function of elections, Birch argues, is to ensure that "policy outputs correspond in some meaningful way with opinions and desires of the population" (2011, 19). From this perspective, electoral malpractice refers to all actions and instances that distort elections from serving ideal democratic purposes (Simpson 2013). Such a definition of malpractice requires understanding elections as vehicles facilitating democratic collective decision-making. This implies a range of criteria for democratic elections. First, they must ensure that all competent members of the populace have the ability to express their views and have an adequate number of options. For example, this means that selectively filtering out targeted candidates, as is common in Russian elections (Szakonyi 2021), is considered malpractice. Second, voting must be policy-directed; voters must cast their ballots with a motivation to influence public policies. This precludes all non-programmatic motivations, such as vote-buying (Gans-Morse et al. 2014; Nichter 2008, 2014; Kramon 2016; Jensen and Justesen 2014; Stokes 2005).

Finally, elections must ensure an effective aggregation of votes; all cast votes must be accurately counted, weighted, and contribute equally to the outcome. This criterion precludes malapportionment. In Singapore, for example, the ruling party, PAP, has been able to maintain more than 90% of the seats in parliament despite a steady decline in vote share

from about 90% in the late 1960s to about 60% in 2011 (Tan 2013). Schedler (2002) works from a similarly principled understanding of what constitutes a democratic election and proposes a "chain of democratic choice", in which the links are:

- Empowerment: elections grant access to offices that exercise real power
- Free supply: an adequate range of options (parties, candidates) must be available
- Free demand: voters must be able to freely form their preferences
- Inclusion: universal franchise
- Insulation: voters must not face bribery or coercion
- Integrity: honest and equal counting of votes
- Irreversibility: the outcome must be final so that the winners can assume office and exercise power

Electoral malpractice, then, refer to violations of any one of those links (Schedler 2002; Simpser 2013). Within this broad conceptualization of democratic elections (from which deviations are classed as malpractice), we can distinguish between different types of malpractice alongside a range of dimensions. Some scholars differentiate between pre-election manipulation and election-day manipulation (e.g., Hafner-Burton et al. 2014; Simpser and Donno 2012). While pre-election manipulation seeks to tilt the electoral playing field long before election day, election-day manipulation refers to efforts where actors try to get an illegitimate advantage on or just before polling. Another approach distinguishes between types of malpractice based on which element of an ideal-typical democratic election they target (Schedler 2002). We can, then, differentiate between manipulation of the rules governing elections, of voters and their preference formation, and the votes (Birch 2011).

A further distinction needs to be made, however. We must distinguish flaws and errors in the electoral conduct due to incompetence, lack of resources, noise, and simple human error on the one hand from systematic, intentional attempts to influence the outcome of an election on the other (Elklit and Reynolds 2005). As Birch (2011, 26) notes, malpractice characterizes a "particularization of the electoral process", by which some actor tries to "substitute personal or partisan gain on the part of a restricted number of political actors for popular control by all." Furthermore, from

an abstract perspective, all electoral activity (campaigning, debates, infomercials, etc.) are efforts to influence voters. When a party canvasses door-to-door or distributes campaign material on social media, it is to induce a behavior (turnout or vote choice) that voters would not otherwise have engaged in. Persuasion of this sort should, self-evidently, not be considered malpractice. We should, therefore, distinguish between permitted, legitimate manipulation and illicit, illegitimate manipulation. Illicit is understood by reference to the normative objectives of democratic elections. Against this background, this dissertation works with the following definition of electoral malpractice.

Electoral malpractice refers to illicit and intentional attempts to influence the outcome of an election in favour of a given party, candidate, or outcome.

As with any concept in political science, the definition used in this dissertation leaves considerable room for disagreement. Nevertheless, I believe that the conceptualization above makes it possible to study malpractice. Based on the above, table 2.1 presents an overview of the different types of electoral malpractice. This dissertation's working definition of malpractice implies that a broad range of tactics is considered malpractice. On the one hand, encompassing the entire "menu of manipulation" (cf. Schedler 2002) means that I can compare multiple actions and probe for potential differences between them (see also Harvey and Mukherjee 2018; Szakonyi 2021). For example, in Article B, I compare subtle institutional malpractice (gerrymandering) to more brazen manipulation of voters (misinformation). On the other hand, such a broad conceptualization also implies that short-term, election-day cheating and structural biases in the electoral system are lumped together despite their qualitative differences. We should be aware of such differences and the limitations they pose for theoretical generalizability (e.g., making sure not to extrapolate from vote-buying to malapportionment). Yet, despite the differences between different types of malpractice, they still "function as different, normatively unacceptable means to a *common end*" (Simpser 2013, 35, emphasis added). Another important implication is that some grey-zone actions are considered malpractice, while others are classed as legitimate. For instance, in the case of redrawing election districts, this thorny issue means that some instances would be considered gerrymandering, whereas others would be seen as legitimate redistricting. However, as this dissertation consists of a series of survey experiments in which I manipulate the degree of malpractice, I can make sure to avoid such grey zones.

Table 2.1: Types of Malpractice

	Legitimate	Illegitimate
Manipulation of institutions	Choice of election system (majoritarian vs. proportional)	Gerrymandering (Art. B), candidate filtering
Manipulation of voters	Argumentation-based persuasion during campaigns (e.g., debates, infomercials)	Vote-buying (Art. A & C), voter coercion (Art. A & C), misinformation (Art. B)
Manipulation of voting	N/A	Ballot-box stuffing (Art. A & C), tampering with tallies, mail-in fraud (Art. B)

Note: Based on Birch (2011). In parentheses, I list the articles, where these examples are used.

The Process of Updating Opinions: A Stylized Model

This dissertation asks about the attitudinal consequences of electoral malpractice and whether and under which conditions people may be willing to condone malpractice for partisan self-interest. Providing a comprehensive answer requires a model of opinion updating. Most work on citizens' conditional support for democracy relies on candidate choice experiments focusing on vote choice as the sole outcome (e.g., Graham and Svulik 2020; Gidengil et al. 2021; Saikkonen and Christensen 2022; Carey et al. 2020). Although voting intentions convey signals about voters' *net* preferences, such an approach has potential downsides. Learning and using information about politically relevant events or developments are not straightforward tasks. We can conceive of opinion change as the net outcome of a chain of behavioral steps, which require that people, at the very least, receive and comprehend information and adjust their thinking based on the information. Hence, I argue that we need to look at more than just voting intentions to fully understand *how* voters evaluate malpractice and *how* - if at all - such evaluations are moderated by partisan loyalties.

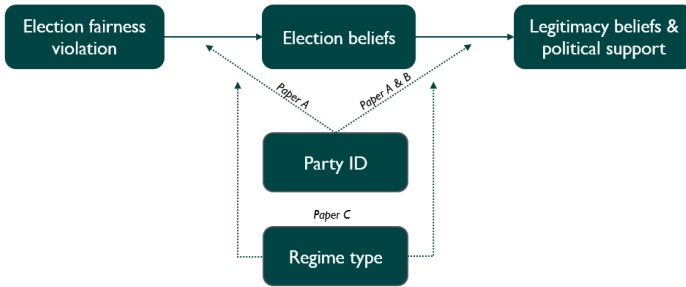
According to Zaller's (1992) canonical framework, there are three steps at the core of the opinion updating process: receiving, accepting, and using information. In their work on the electoral punishment for corruption (or lack thereof), de Vries and Solaz (2017) similarly identify three key stages in voters' responses to corruption information: (1) information acquisition (voters need to observe or otherwise learn about corruption), (2) blame attribution (voters must attribute respon-

sibility to parties/candidates and adjust their evaluations of said parties/candidates), and (3) behavioral response (voters must balance corruption information against multiple other factors to change voting behavior).¹ Here, we can make additional distinctions. Bisgaard (2015; 2019), for example, finds that although providing voters with unambiguous information about the economy may reduce perceptual biases - that is, voters "get the facts right" - they may still be reluctant to hold their party responsible for a failing economy. Similarly, Gaines et al. (2007) distinguish between updating factual beliefs (getting the facts right) and interpreting information about facts (ascribing valence to events). When people receive information about some event, they must change their beliefs about facts, achieving reasonable accuracy, and then update their interpretations of reality based on their factual beliefs. Hence, we should be able to tease out how voters update factual beliefs and how they interpret such beliefs.

Based on this work, I argue that a framework for studying citizens' responses to and evaluations of electoral malpractice should take three questions into account. First, do people update factual beliefs about elections when given information about electoral malpractice? Particularly, do voters deny inconvenient information about co-partisan malpractice (i.e., engage in fact avoidance), or do they accurately adjust their beliefs? Second, how do voters appraise and interpret such information? Here, I am mainly concerned with understanding whether voters view in-party malpractice as less incriminating and de-legitimizing than otherwise similar out-party malpractice (i.e., do voters engage in meaning avoidance?). Finally, do voters use information about malpractice to adjust their partisan loyalties, or do they find ways of exonerating their in-party? These steps are difficult to observe empirically, but we can identify some traces that allow us to say something about these questions. I propose to analyze how voters respond to information about electoral malpractice by examining how voters update election beliefs, legitimacy beliefs, and political support. This model of opinion updating informs the three studies in this dissertation. In figure 2.1 below, I present an - admittedly highly stylized - illustration of the main framework, on which articles A-C rest. This model allows me to probe how voters evaluate electoral malpractice, the downstream effects on political support and legitimacy beliefs, and the potential conditionality of shared partisanship.

1. For a similar model applied more broadly to retrospective voting, see Healy and Malhotra (2013).

Figure 2.1: The Theoretical Core Tying the Studies Together



Note: Stylized summary of the main theoretical framework used in this dissertation.

To the extent that voters accept the information about electoral malpractice and update their factual beliefs, we should see that they adjust their election beliefs. In particular, when people learn about misconduct, they should view elections as less fair, all else equal. To the extent that voters interpret electoral malpractice as wrong, severe, and illegitimate, we should see that they adjust their perceptions of legitimacy. Elections are the institutional foundation of democratic legitimacy (Anderson et al. 2005), so if voters interpret malpractice information in a meaningful way, they should view authorities as less legitimate. Finally, to the extent that voters care about election fairness and use information about misconduct to form their opinions, we should see that these changes produce downstream consequences for political support.

Thus, the main factors I focus on in this dissertation are election beliefs, legitimacy beliefs, and political support. For election beliefs, I focus on perceived election fairness, which is a commonly used measure of election beliefs (Birch 2008; Daxecker and Fjelde 2021; Kerr 2013). Legitimacy beliefs refer to the perception that the government is entitled to rule (Gilley 2009; Lipset 1960). Citizens who believe that government (or a related authority) is legitimate tend to feel a moral obligation to comply with government decisions (Tyler 1997, 2006; Levi et al. 2009). Finally, political support refers to the attitude “by which a person orients himself to an object either favorably or unfavorably, positively or negatively” (Easton 1975, 436) The object of evaluation differs between the three articles. Article A focuses on the government, whereas Article B focuses on parties. In Article C, which focuses on authoritarian regimes, the object of evaluation is President Putin. Political support is a broad

concept, effectively capturing a general like-dislike continuum. We can distinguish between *generalized* and *manifested* support. While generalized support follows Easton's definition of support, referring to general sympathy or affect towards a given object (see Broockman et al. 2022), manifested support speaks to the expression of generalized support, for instance through voting. Although legitimacy and political support are neighboring concepts, there are important differences between them. For example, the same individual can acknowledge a government's right to govern without liking its decisions, policies, or leader. Indeed, such consent is the hallmark of democracy (Anderson et al. 2005). Similarly, one can imagine a scenario in which the same voter views a given government as illegitimate (i.e., not entitled to make binding political decisions) while still holding a favorable view toward it.

The Conventional View: Citizens as Conditional Democrats

At first glance, the question raised in this dissertation may seem trivial. One may think that voters, naturally, would not play fast and loose with something as important as democracy and the principles of free and fair elections. When a party or a politician behaves in ways that violate or undermine the rules and principles of democracy, citizens should set aside partisan self-interested considerations to protect the foundations of democracy. At least that is what we would hope from a normative point of view. From an empirical point of view, we know that voters across democracies and non-democracies value democratic institutions and the concept of self-governance (Frye 2021; Pasek et al. 2022; Wuttko et al. 2020), so there are reasons to expect that voters would do so. However, recent research has shown that citizens are often reluctant to hold their party accountable for misconduct and often condone undemocratic behavior that helps their party (De Vries and Solaz 2017; Graham and Svobik 2020).

According to an emerging body of research, democracy faces a major challenge from partisan polarization. Scholars have raised concerns about the implication of partisan loyalties for citizens' commitment to the rules and principles of democracy (Carey et al. 2019; Finkel et al. 2020; Kingzette et al. 2021). People may care so strongly about their party winning that they are willing to accept undemocratic behaviors to get their way. Webster argues that anger directed at the out-party causes partisans to "prioritize 'victory' over the other side above winning 'fairly'" (2020,

109). Similarly, work in political psychology argues that voters derive a "psychic satisfaction" from "defeating and humiliating" the out-party (Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018, 212). Identifying with a party may lead voters to reward in-partisans for humiliating the out-party, maybe even at the expense of democracy's rules.

In a recent study, Graham and Svulik (2020) use a candidate choice experiment to show that only a small number (between 3.5% and 13.1% depending on the choice scenario) of Americans are willing to vote for the opposing party if their co-partisan candidates adopt undemocratic positions (such as saying that the in-party governor should ban far-right group rallies in the state capital). Voters, Graham and Svulik argue, trade off democratic principles for partisan gains and employ partisan double standards when punishing politicians embracing undemocratic positions. As "only a small fraction of Americans prioritize democratic principles in their electoral choices when doing so goes against their partisan identification or favorite policies", they conclude that voters are "partisans first and democrats only second" (Graham and Svulik 2020, 406 & 392). Candidate choice experimental studies have uncovered similar findings in other Western democracies such as Canada, Germany, and Finland (Gidengil et al. 2021; Lewandowsky and Jankowski 2022; Saikkonen and Christensen 2022; see also Mazepus and Toshkov 2021). In a similar vein, Simonovits et al. (2022) argue that in the mind of the polarized voter, the out-party presents such a threat that it is preferable to keep the in-party in power, even at the expense of democratic norms. Simonovits et al. provide observational and experimental evidence that partisans display *democratic hypocrisy*; they tend to support giving elected leaders discretion over democratic principles (such as banning protests and disregarding biased court decisions) when their party is in power.

Others argue that partisanship may color how citizens perceive democratic norm violations in the first place, leading partisans to view in-party violations as disproportionately less inappropriate than otherwise similar norm violations by the out-party. Tomz and Weeks (2020) show that Republicans and Democrats view foreign election interference as more severe and illegitimate when it benefits the opposing party. Krishnarajan (2022) argues that partisanship may drive people to rationalize their understanding of what democracy is when confronted with undemocratic behavior by the in-party. When the in-party does or says something inconsistent with democratic norms and values, people may adjust their conceptualization of what democracy is to realign the in-party's behavior with democratic principles. In a similar vein, recent evidence suggests that partisans trivialize corruption scandals and political scandals by the

in-party (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Anduiza et al. 2013; Breitenstein 2019; Eggers 2014; Solaz et al. 2019; Walter and Redlawsk 2019).

Thus, the dominant expectation from existing research on citizens' commitment to the rules and principles of democracy is that partisans somehow condone undemocratic behavior by the in-party but sanction the same behavior by the out-party. For partisans, "political losses can feel like existential threats that must be averted - whatever the cost" (Finkel et al. 2020, 533). Hence, we should expect that voters display some level of hypocrisy concerning electoral malpractice.

Why Fairness Principles May Constrain Partisan Self-Interest

Contrary to the conventional view, the main argument that I build in this dissertation is that although partisanship is central for political opinions, attitudes, and behaviors (including for how citizens think about elections and democratic norms), electoral fairness principles trump partisan self-interest in most contexts. This core argument stands on two legs. First, I argue that fairness principles form a deep-rooted concern, hard-wired into our psychology. Second, I argue that electoral malpractice represents a qualitatively different violation of democratic institutions. While voters may condone or perhaps even endorse subtle, piecemeal violations of democracy's norms, electoral malpractice is such a clear-cut violation of basic democratic rules that it is hard for even hardened partisans to construe it as anything but wrong.

Fairness Is Part of our Political Psychology

This dissertation takes procedural justice theory as its theoretical backdrop. The most commonly accepted model of public opinion assumes that citizens are ultimately *outcome orientated* and, therefore, follow party cues in supporting whatever action, institution, or rule that would help their party succeed. However, social psychologists have long told us that people care not only about the outcome of decisions but also about *how* those decisions are made. People evaluate authorities based on the perceived fairness of decision-making, above and beyond their ability to provide desired outcomes (Thibaut and Walker 1975; Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996; Tyler and Lind 1992; Lind and Tyler 1988; Lind et al. 1990). The main argument from procedural justice theory, hence,

is that individuals place a high premium on the fairness of democratic institutions.

Research has shown that such fairness norms and intuitions also play a crucial role in voters' evaluations of political institutions and actors (Becher and Brouard 2020; Linde 2012; Magalhães 2016, 2017; Magalhães and Aguiar-Conraria 2019; Rhodes-Purdy 2020; Bøggild 2016a; Tyler 2006; Ulbig 2008; Hibbing and Theis-Morse 2008). People tend to evaluate political decision-making procedures and institutions based on criteria of voice (whether people are allowed to express their views), impartiality (whether decision-makers have personal stakes in specific outcomes), neutrality (whether all views are represented equally), and accuracy (whether the outcome is based on all available information) (see Blader and Tyler 2003; Bøggild 2016b). Scholars have even argued that these fairness intuitions form a deep-rooted, evolutionarily adapted part of our psychology to help tackle adaptive problems of leadership delegation (Bøggild and Petersen 2015; Hibbing and Alford 2004).

Regardless of the origins of procedural fairness intuitions, there is abundant evidence that individuals care strongly about fairness when making judgments about political institutions, authorities, and actors. Concerning elections, previous work has drawn on procedural justice theory to explain why citizens sometimes oppose electoral reforms (such as same-day registration) that would otherwise benefit their party (Biggers 2019; Mccarthy 2019; Virgin 2021; Plescia et al. 2020). Given the connection between individuals' fairness intuitions and the basic principles of democratic elections, applying procedural justice theory to studying citizens' opinions about elections and electoral reforms makes sense.

How do voters respond to unfairness? Previous work has shown that unfair procedures are associated with negative emotions. Krehbiel and Cropranzano (2000) find that unfavorable outcomes generated by unfair procedures generate anger and frustration, but receiving desired outcomes generated by similarly unfair processes causes feelings of guilt and anxiety. Even when people get what they want, unfairness can leave a bitter aftertaste. In a similar vein, Ulbig (2008) shows that individuals respond negatively to participating in an unfair process. Her findings show that giving people a voice (allowing them to express their opinions) but no influence (not having their opinions considered) makes people more unsatisfied with the outcome/process than in the case where they could not participate at all (see also Rhodes-Purdy 2020). In other words, participating in a pre-determined decision-making process sparks a *frustration effect* (cf. Cohen 1985), whereby people become even angrier than

had they not been allowed to participate at all. As Hibbing and Alford (2004, 64) succinctly put it: "people hate being played for a sucker."

Against this background, the theoretical foundation of Articles A-C is that election fairness constitutes a powerful, visceral norm, and the political institutions, actors, and authorities that fail to adhere to such fairness norms lose popular legitimacy and support (see also Tyler 2006). Procedural fairness intuitions and considerations play a key role in shaping an individual's judgments about elections and political actors as well as their behavior in elections. Hence, at the core of the dissertation, I argue that procedural fairness principles also apply when voters evaluate parties and politicians engaged in electoral malpractice. Elections represent the most important collective decision-making process in any democracy - and, to an increasingly large degree, also in autocracies. It is, therefore, reasonable to expect that voters rely on such fairness intuitions to evaluate elections. Electoral malpractice violates two key fairness criteria on which people rely to make judgments about procedural fairness: voice and equal treatment. Voice, in this view, refers to "whether an individual was able to participate in the election", and equal treatment refers to "whether all individuals have equal influence" (Wiling 2011, 141). The dissertation, therefore, works from the premise that voters respond negatively to parties and politicians that engage in electoral malpractice.

The Blatancy of Electoral Malpractice

Secondly, I argue that electoral malpractice represents a more severe, unambiguous violation of fundamental democratic rules and norms than the types of undemocratic behavior previously studied. Previous work has focused mainly on tolerance for democratic backsliding (e.g., Frederiksen 2022; Gidengil et al. 2021; Simonovits et al. 2022).² This line of work is important as incremental setbacks from within represent the most common mode of democratic breakdown today (Bermeo 2016). However, we cannot apply findings from the previous work on individuals' conditional tolerance of democratic backsliding to electoral malpractice without invoking further assumptions. Democratic backsliding is gradual (Waldner and Lust 2018) and often hidden behind a legal dis-

2. To be clear, previous work has looked into minor violations of election fairness amongst other types of undemocratic behavior (Graham and Svulik 2020; Krishnarajan 2022). However, these are often very ambiguous violations or based on statements (e.g., a candidate proposing to reduce the number polling stations in opposition-dominated areas or proposing to prohibit opponents who support/oppose Obamacare from campaigning near hospitals). This dissertation, I believe, is the first to systematically examine the relationship between electoral malpractice, partisanship, and public opinion.

guise (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). These setbacks are often very subtle efforts of executive aggrandizement and undermining of institutional checks and balances. Indeed, when viewed separately, any one of these derogations may not constitute an attack on democracy. Hence voters may not realize that such attacks undermine the quality of democracy. As Haggard and Kaufman write "the wider public may not recognize that the playing field has been decisively tilted until it is too late to mount a meaningful defense" (2021, 38). As an example, Graham and Svulik examine Americans' punishment of candidates for undemocratic statements such as "the [in-party] governor should prosecute journalists who accuse him of misconduct without revealing sources" (2020, 397). While such a statement does pose questions about the candidate's commitment to democratic civil liberties, it is not straightforward why this is such a severe violation of democracy's rules that it warrants electoral punishment.

This point is important because research has shown that reality sets limits to partisan biases. Parker-Stephen (2013) finds that partisans' disagreement about economic facts recedes when they are provided with sufficiently unambiguous information about the economy. In a similar vein, when exposed to consistent disconfirming evidence, partisans can reach a tipping point at which they begin to accurately update their views and objectively evaluate new information (Redlawsk et al. 2010). Doherty and Wolak (2012) find that people tend to focus on outcomes when procedural fairness is ambiguous, but not when procedures are clearly unfair. Research on voters' tolerance of elite incivility also shows that while partisans may tolerate or even endorse modest degrees of incivility targeting the out-party, they distance themselves from severe and harsh incivility (Skytte 2022). Druckman et al. (2019) show that faced with strong incivility in in-partisan media, partisans come to like their party less and the opposition party more. This is so, Druckman et al. argue, because incivility causes negative emotional reactions, leading partisans to cling less strongly to their partisan attachment and increasing partisan ambivalence (see also Frimer and Skitka 2018). Much related to the topic of this dissertation, Eady et al. (2022) find that the January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol led by former president Trump caused a significant decrease of self-expressed partisan affiliation among Republicans in Twitter 'bios'. Their findings suggest that extreme events, such as unambiguous violations of democratic rules and norms, can "drive even some avowed partisans to distance themselves from their party" (Eady et al. 2022, 6). Taken together, a handful of studies seem to suggest that there are limits to partisan loyalty (see also Lelkes and Westwood 2017).

This dissertation argues that electoral malpractice is qualitatively different from other types of democratic backsliding and that it represents such a blatant violation of democracy's rules that it may trump partisan self-interest. First, elections are at the heart of democracy. As mentioned in the introduction, democracy cannot exist without elections (Birch 2011; Collier and Adcock 1999; Møller and Skaaning 2012; Kelley 2012). Citizens seem to be aware of the centrality of free and fair elections. In mass surveys, voters across democratic and authoritarian regimes consistently name elections among the most important and valued institutions (Frye 2021; Ferrín and Kriesi 2016; Hernández 2016; Knutsen and Wegmann 2016). Second, malpractice benefits one party at the expense of its competitors. Lelkes and Westwood (2017) find that while partisans may be willing to grant minor favoritism to other in-party members, they are not more likely to discriminate against or otherwise harm out-partisans. While partisans may tolerate some subtler, more piecemeal violations of democratic norms, a central argument in this dissertation is that people may distance themselves from parties and politicians that engage in electoral malpractice, even when it benefits the in-party.

Chapter 3

On Using Survey Experiments to Study Citizens' Reactions to Electoral Malpractice

The three articles in this dissertation rely on a series of survey experiments in Denmark, Mexico, the United States, and Russia. I discuss the selection of cases in more detail in chapters 4-6. In this chapter, I briefly outline the reasons for choosing a survey experimental approach and discuss the strengths and limitations of such an approach, particularly concerning the topic of electoral malpractice. The purpose of this chapter is not to go into detail with each experiment. Instead, this chapter discusses the value of the methodological approach and its limitations, including in relation to generalizability, treatment strength and authenticity, demand effects, social desirability bias, and preference falsification. This chapter also discusses the steps taken in the three articles to address such limitations, including introducing a measure of individuals' level of self-monitoring, selecting cases to zero out differences in treatment strength, and designing multiple treatments to avoid reliance on powerful treatment material only.

Survey Experiments and the Study of Public Opinion

Survey experiments are a widely used tool to study public opinion in political science. Survey experiments combine the experimental control of a laboratory experiment with the costs and reach of a mass survey (Mutz 2011). Due to these tangible benefits and technological advances, political scientists' use of survey experiments has increased dramatically (Druckman and Green 2021). Because public opinion scholars are interested in understanding how voters form preferences, attitudes, and

opinions, mass surveys represent a unique way of collecting information about large numbers of individuals.

[S]urvey experiments that integrate representative samples with the experimental control of questions represent the most valuable tool for gaining access to the processes that underlie opinion formation.

(Lavine 2002, 242)

Survey experiments are valuable tools to study public opinion because they facilitate causal inference due to randomization. Randomly assigning survey respondents to treatment and control conditions allows us to examine whether one factor (treatment) causes another (outcome). The key strength of survey experiments is the strong claims for internal validity (McDermott 2002, 2012). A simple definition of what constitutes a survey experiment is that it is a method that embeds "experimental designs in opinion surveys by randomly assigning respondents alternative versions of questionnaire items" (Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk 2007, 1). Of course, there are now several ways of embedding experimental designs in surveys (Sniderman 2018), but this understanding remains valid.

Can We Use Survey Experiments to Examine Reactions to Electoral Malpractice

Although survey experiments are omnipresent in political science (from international relations to political psychology), they are few and far between in the comparative literature on electoral malpractice.¹ One reason for the lack of survey experimental work in this literature is that scholars have only recently turned to studying electoral integrity/malpractice from the perspective of individual voters. The first research in this 'new turn' has relied on cross-sectional analyses of survey data (e.g., Norris 2014; Wellman et al. 2018). For example, scholars have used cross-sectional data such as the World Values Survey to study the impact of citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity on political legitimacy and satisfaction with democracy (Norris 2014, 2019). However, cross-sectional analyses such as these are ill suited to draw causal inferences, as they likely suffer from thorny issues regarding confounding

1. Some notable exceptions are recent work by Bush and Prather (2017; 2018), Ahlquist et al. (2018), Tomz and Weeks (2020), Claassen and Ensley (2016), and Reuter and Szakonyi (2021).

and endogeneity. Do voters view government authorities as illegitimate *because* they perceive elections as unfair? Or do they perceive elections to be unfair *because* they have little trust in the government authorities that run elections? Additionally, there is evidence that people tend to view an election as fairer if their party wins, all else equal (Anderson et al. 2005; Cantú and García-Ponce 2015; Sinclair et al. 2018). Beaulieu (2014) uses a survey experiment to show that voters become more suspicious about the integrity of a fair election if the in-party loses. People may think differently about their experiences at the polls if their preferred party ends up on the losing side. Hence, the observed correlation between perceived election quality and satisfaction with democracy may be accounted for by such a partisan winner-loser gap. Survey experiments allow researchers to side-step such issues by experimentally controlling the assignment of respondents to treatment and control groups.

Although the use of survey experiments has been limited in the study of electoral malpractice, scholars have employed survey experiments to study a range of related misconducts such as undemocratic behavior (Graham and Svobik 2020; Gidengil et al. 2021; Simonovits et al. 2022; Frederiksen 2022; Webster 2020; Krishnarajan 2022), corruption (Anduiza et al. 2013; Banerjee et al. 2014; Breitenstein 2019; Bøttkjær and Justesen 2021; De Figueiredo et al. 2022; Klačnja and Tucker 2013; Snegovaya 2020; Yair et al. 2020), political scandals (Bhatti et al. 2013; Swire-Thompson et al. 2020; Rothschild et al. 2021; Walter and Redlawsk 2019; Wolsky 2022), and political violence (Hou and Quek 2019; Kalmoe and Mason 2022; Gutiérrez-Romero and Lebas 2020; Westwood et al. 2022). In other words, survey experiments have been widely applied to study the consequences of malfeasance (broadly defined) for public opinion.

Besides, there are a couple of reasons why it may even be necessary to rely on survey experiments to study the impact of electoral malpractice on public opinion. First, electoral malpractice is often not visible (Seeberg 2019). Parties and politicians who engage in malpractice go to great lengths to hide their actions from the public. For example, a recent poll found that most Americans were largely unaware of the redistricting processes in their states (Pew 2022). Another reason for using survey experiments is that it allows me to vary the perpetrating party. An implication of this dissertation's focus on voters' behavior at the intersection between partisan self-interest and electoral malpractice is that we must observe respondents' behavior across different conditions (in-party vs. out-party and electoral malpractice vs. no malpractice). The experimental setting grants me control over which party benefits or per-

petrates electoral malpractice, allowing me to examine how, say, Republican voters' reactions to misinformation differ depending on whether it was perpetrated by the Democratic or the Republican Party (see Article B, summarized in Chapter 5).

The advantages of survey experiments notwithstanding, it is worth reiterating that such experiments do not estimate the impact of *experiencing* malpractice on voters' attitudes but rather the impact of *information about malpractice* on their attitudes. From this perspective, the treatment stimuli in survey experimental studies are less like interventions known from field experiments and more accurately described as "a variation in information presented or highlighted for respondents" (Sniderman 2018, 260). The three articles in this dissertation build on four original survey experiments embedded in descriptively representative samples in Denmark and Mexico (Article A), the United States (Article B), and Russia (Article C). The vignettes differ across studies but share some common characteristics, making them easily comparable. Table 3.1 provides an overview. Chapters 4-6 present the exact experimental wording for each study shown in table 3.1.

Limits of Survey Experiments

Survey experiments are no panacea. Most of the limitations in survey experiments are well understood, although the practical implications for specific studies is often uncertain, and there are rarely obvious solutions. In this section of the summary, I briefly discuss the most important limitations of survey experiments, their potential implications for the studies in this dissertation, and potential remedies.

External Validity, Authenticity, and Unrealistic Treatments

A critique often leveled at survey experiments concerns external validity. External validity refers to a study's generalizability or "inferences about the extent to which a causal relationship holds over variations in persons, settings, treatments, and outcomes" (Shadish et al. 2002, 20; see also McDermott 2012). The problem of generalizability limits is well known in experimental political science research (Iyengar 2012). Survey experimentalists originally celebrated the potential gains in external validity from embedding experimental manipulation in population-based surveys (Mutz 2011; Lavine 2002). However, claims of generalizability

Table 3.1: Overview of Data and Methods

Study	Design	Conditions	Key Outcomes	Sample
Study A	Cross-country factorial experiment	Fair election (control)	Election fairness	Mexico (N = 2,500)
		Ballot-stuffing	Government legitimacy	Denmark (N = 2,500)
		Vote-buying	Government support	(YouGov)
Study B1	Factorial vignette experiment	Voter Coercion		
		Fair election (control)	Election fairness	USA (N = 5,000)
		Misinformation	In- and out-party affect	(Lucid)
Study B2	Block-randomized vignette experiment	Absentee-ballot fraud	Voting intentions	
		Fair election (control)	Election fairness	USA (N = 1,800)
		Misinformation	In- and out-party affect	(Lucid)
Study C	Vignette experiment	Gerrymandering	Voting intentions	
		Baseline (control)	Election fairness	
		Ballot-stuffing	Regime legitimacy	Russia (N = 1,500)
		Vote-buying	Support for Putin	(YouGov)
		Voter Coercion	Protest inclination	

are now more muted (Barabas and Jerit 2010). Based on the quote from Shadish et al. above, we see that the external validity of an experiment depends on the sample (is the sample or recruitment pool representative of a broader population?), the setting (is the setting in which the experiment takes place realistic?), the treatments (do the treatments reflect how people would encounter such treatment outside the experiment?), and the outcomes (would we find similar results using different ways of measuring outcomes?). Below, I discuss the external validity of the articles' treatments and settings. Here, I turn my attention to the samples' representativeness and the outcomes.

First, relying on online samples, particularly the opt-in samples provided by survey companies such as YouGov and Lucid, poses limitations for external validity. People who sign up for such panels are, simply put, different from those who do not. Hence, we cannot be certain that the responses from our samples accurately depict how the broader population thinks and feels about the topics we are studying. In Article C, for example, I examine Russians' reactions to malpractice using an online sample provided by YouGov. In Russia, however, large parts of the rural population are not frequent internet users. Those who do use the internet frequently are likely not representative of the broader, rural population. How do the findings, then, generalize to the broader population? Furthermore, can we use the case of Russia and Article C's findings to say something more general about the cause-and-effect relationship between election fraud and support for autocrats?

At a more general level, it is worth thinking twice about the desire for external validity. While experimentalists (survey or otherwise) should undoubtedly recognize the limits to external validity, it is worth pointing out that the main objective of a survey experiment is to ensure internal validity. Experiments are well suited to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between two factors. The idea that a single experiment can be externally valid, McDermott (2012, 34) argues, "often results from a misunderstanding that generalizability can result from, or be contained within, a single study, as long as it is large enough or broad enough." Instead, McDermott argues, we should think of external validity as the result of replication across time, space, settings, outcomes, and treatments. From this perspective, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of the implication of malpractice for public opinion by using an internally valid experimental approach *and* by examining this relationship across very different contexts and with different measures of the central outcomes. For example, I find broadly similar response dynamics in Russia, Mexico, Denmark, and the US. In Article A, for instance, I se-

lect cases (Mexico and Denmark) from a most-different-systems-design logic. Because the cases vary on most other theoretically important factors, there are reasons to believe that the findings (which are similar across the two cases) generalize to a broader population of democracies. The articles also use slightly different measures of legitimacy and political support. Article A, for example, measures legitimacy by asking respondents whether they think that the "government is entitled to make binding political decisions", whereas Article C measures legitimacy through three items that capture willing compliance with government rules. While these operationalizations may seem different, they speak to the same underlying concept (Gilley 2009; Levi et al. 2009).

Treatment Strength

A similar caveat with survey experiments relates to treatment strength. Experimental findings may be driven by particularly strong treatment material that would rarely occur outside the experimental setting. To the extent that experimental treatments are too strong, "the observed effects may not generalize beyond the particular study at hand" (Barabas and Jerit 2010, 227). In other words, treatment information provided in survey experiments may be overly powerful, making it difficult to draw inferences about the real world.

Regarding the experiments in this dissertation, such concern mainly applies to Articles A and B, which focus on democracies (while the treatment information in Article C is also unambiguous, it only matches the Kremlin's pervasive manipulation of elections). For example, asking Danish respondents to imagine a scenario in which the Social Democrats engage in vote-buying (*"After the election, it becomes clear that many voters were paid to vote for the Social Democratic candidate"*, see Article A) runs the risk of being artificially strong. The implication could be that we only learn about Danes' responses and reactions to severe malpractice, which would not occur in a million years. Yet, there are at least two reasons this experiment contributes to our understanding of the implications of malpractice for public opinion. First, Article A examines how partisan affiliations may pervasively bias people's evaluations of malpractice. In that sense, the focus is on differences between how Danish respondents view the same malpractice depending on whether it benefits the Social Democrats or the Liberals. While the treatments (e.g., vote-buying) undoubtedly come across as strong, there is no reason to believe that the treatment strength should differ across partisan conditions. Secondly, in Article A, I compare Danes to Mexicans. While all the types of malprac-

tice used in the experiment in Article A will seem remote in a Danish context, they are well known in Mexico. As I find similar responses to all kinds of malpractice across the two cases, there is little reason to believe that the results are driven completely by treatment strength.

In addition, in Article B, I rely on real-world examples of malpractice in the United States to inform the treatment material. Nevertheless, one of these treatments builds on the Harris case described in the introduction. This is one of the most blatant instances of malpractice in recent US history (and the only time an election result has been overturned). The question, then, is: What do we learn about the impact of electoral malpractice on partisan loyalty from such an experiment? The concern from Barabas and Jerit (2010) would be that the findings may not generalize to more commonly used forms of malpractice. However, in Article B, I also construct a treatment based on misinformation (one party misinforming out-partisans about election day), which is, unfortunately, a more common practice (Common Cause Foundation 2008; MIT Technology Review 2020; NPR 2020; The Washington Post 2020). Moreover, in the second experiment in Article B (Study B2), I compare the effects of the misinformation treatment to a much subtler malpractice of gerrymandering. The exact wording of this treatment (for a respondent affiliated with the Republican Party) is:

Imagine that there was a congressional election in a typical “toss-up” state next month. The Republicans wins a close election, which has seen the parties go neck and neck in most polls.

After the election, it becomes clear that the Republican Party benefited from a new redistricting plan recently carried out by the Republicans. The new electoral map meant that the Democratic Party won fewer seats than their opponents despite winning the statewide popular vote.

The vignette does not explicitly mention that the redistricting plan intended to harm the Democrats (or to induce bias to the conversion mechanism). Nor does it explicitly mention the severity of gerrymandering. Hence, respondents have “license to rationalize” that this redistricting gave a two-, three-, or ten-seat advantage. Article B (summarized in Chapter 5) finds that gerrymandering moves the needle similarly to misinformation and mail-in fraud, albeit more attenuated. Hence, Article B effectively demonstrates that voters’ reactions, when faced with

extreme violations of democracy's rules, are stronger (i.e., blatant malpractice causes stronger reactions), but also that voters' responses to blatant malpractice capture their opinion dynamics when faced with subtler, less brazen malpractice.

Authenticity

A related concern with survey experiments is the lack of authenticity. We can understand authenticity in one of two ways. First, it could refer to real-world realism regarding the treatment information. In that sense, it is similar to the concern of treatment strength. Second, authenticity could refer to the level of mundane realism (Mutz 2011). That is, how closely does the survey setting in which respondents receive and engage with the treatment material correspond to how people receive and engage with the same treatment in the real world? In this dissertation, there are three main challenges to authenticity.

First, a potential limitation concerns the level of abstraction, particularly regarding hypotheticality. The experiments in Articles A and B in this dissertation ask respondents to engage in a fictitious, future scenario in which malpractice occurs (or, in the control conditions, does not occur). Article C does not provide hypothetical information. Although this approach is common in experiments on malfeasance (e.g., Bøttkjær and Justesen 2021; Graham and Svobik 2020; Wilking 2011), a concern related to this design choice is that voters may react differently to hypothetical scenarios than they would in the real world. Boas et al. (2019) compare the results from a field and a survey experiment on electoral punishment of corruption in Brazil. Their findings suggest that voters are more willing to sanction malpractice in the abstract than their real-world behavior indicates. People, in other words, do not walk the talk. Hence, the findings in Articles A and B capture stated preferences and reactions rather than real-world behavioral changes, which could question the findings' external validity. However, when studying the impact of electoral malpractice in democracies where violations of electoral integrity are rare, there may not be viable alternatives. Telling survey participants that a party has violated electoral rules poses ethical concerns of deception. The most common way of not deceiving participants is to use hypothetical scenarios. More broadly, recent evidence vindicates hypotheticals. Hainmueller et al. (2015) compare survey experimental findings to findings from real-world behavioral data and find similar results, indicating that individuals do not "behave" differently in surveys. In a similar vein, Brutger et al. (2022) run a series of experiments varying

the degree of *situational hypotheticality* and find no evidence that such hypotheticality substantively changes respondents' responses.

Second, these experiments rely on forced exposure to the treatment information. Participants who are assigned to a treatment condition will receive the information no matter what. Experiments of this type "typically obliterate the distinction between the supply of information, on the one hand, and its consumption, on the other. That is, experiments are normally carried out in such a way that virtually everyone receives the message" (Kinder 2007, 157). It is unlikely that everyone gets the message in the real world, as people are often too busy to pay much attention to the politics. Consequently, the effects uncovered in survey experiments may not accurately describe the effects that would occur in the real world. In Article C, for example, the experiment assigns Russian respondents to one of three treatment conditions (see Chapter 6), in which they are shown information describing pervasive regime interference in the 2020 public vote on constitutional amendments in Russia. Most Russians will not encounter such information in their daily lives. Russian state-controlled media rarely broadcast news about malpractice. As most Russians get their news from state-controlled TV, they would have to actively look for an alternative, independent sources of information to read about malpractice. The question, then, becomes: What do we learn about the impact of revelations of election fraud on support for Putin if most Russians never get such information in the first place? Here, it is worth noting that such critique conflates two fundamentally different theoretical questions. One question relates to the effect of information about malpractice on voters' political attitudes. The second question relates to how voters receive information. The experiments in this dissertation concern the former. Hence, the experiment in Article C teaches us something about which Russians react to fraud revelations and how given that they received the information. We cannot use the data to say anything about how voters would find such information or indeed whether they ever would.

Finally, the experiments convey unambiguous information that malpractice occurs. In reality, when people get political news, for instance about malfeasance, it is rarely as one-sided. Instead, people are bombarded with contradicting frames and arguments. In the study of malfeasance, the actors accused of breaking the rules have incentives to frame themselves as innocent or "less guilty", and certain partisan media outlets have incentives to emphasize certain parts of a news story that will sit well with their target audience. What, then, do we learn if voters would never receive such one-sided information in the real world? In a similar

vein to the argument regarding forced exposure, we should be cautious to not conflate fundamentally different questions. If, for example, we are interested in understanding whether ordinary Americans tolerate electoral malpractice (or similar undemocratic behavior) by the party they are affiliated with, we should design experiments fit for that purpose. Providing competing narratives would yield interesting answers but to a different question. More broadly, Brutger et al. (2022) show that adding more contextual information attenuates treatment effects. This, however, is best explained by a reduction in participants' ability to correctly recall treatment. In other words, 'thick' descriptions are not necessarily more accurate than 'thin' descriptions, but they do make it more difficult for respondents to focus on the variation of interest. Similarly, Kreps and Roblin (2019) find no difference between short vignettes and longer mock news stories in terms of respondent satisficing and perceived information credibility.

Do Respondents Provide Trustworthy Answers?

Another strand of criticism often leveled at survey experiments relates to voters' incentives to provide honest answers to the questions they are posed. There are many ways that responses to survey questions could misrepresent the participants' *true* opinions. One reason may come from experimenter demand effects; the bias that arises when respondents guess the purpose of an experiment and answer questions to confirm the inferred hypothesis. If respondents guess the researcher's expectation, they may respond to questions in ways that would help the researcher confirm her expectation, hiding their private opinions along the way. Such demand effect could present a "major threat to internal validity [because] participants are motivated to respond to subtle cues in the experimental context suggesting what is wanted of them rather than to the experimental manipulation itself" (Iyengar 2012, 77). On the other hand, Mummolo and Peterson (2019) show that providing information about the experimenters' hypotheses does not alter responses. They test the prevalence of demand effects by replicating five well-established political science survey experiments and randomly assign half of the respondents to read descriptions of the experiments' purposes before participation.

A related concern comes from potential social desirability bias, which refers to bias coming from respondents' efforts to portray themselves in normatively appealing ways. This could inflate the estimated treatment effect because participants give normatively desirable responses. In Article B, for example, it could be the case that voters distance them-

selves from the in-party when exposed to information about electoral malpractice, mainly because they wish to present themselves positively. On the one hand, social desirability bias should arguably be more pervasive in studies on democratically inappropriate behavior. As Article B finds no evidence of partisan hypocrisy in response to malpractice, it may be caused by such bias. On the other hand, many studies find signs of partisan biases in regards to corruption (Anduiza et al. 2013; Anderson and Tverdova 2003), undemocratic behavior (Graham and Svobik 2020; Gidengil et al. 2021; Lewandowsky and Jankowski 2022; Simonovits et al. 2022), and even political violence and dehumanization of the out-party (Cassese 2021; Kalmoe and Mason 2022; Martherus et al. 2021). It is not self-evident that the experiments in this dissertation should be more prone to inducing social desirability bias. For example, Tomz and Weeks (2020) examine voters' responses to foreign countries "hacking into voting machines" to influence elections. Writ large, the literature to which this dissertation speaks has yet to provide solutions to the thorny problems of social desirability. Some argue that using candidate choice experiments may reduce socially desirable responding because respondents cannot know which attribute the researcher is focusing on. However, in such experiments, respondents are presented with statements such as "[s]upported a proposal to reduce polling stations in areas that support opposing parties" (from Frederiksen 2022), which would rarely be presented alongside the other candidate information. I would argue that the socially desirable response is no more disguised, regardless of the conjoint design.

In Article B, I take another step to examine the extent of social desirability. I follow the approach used by Webster et al. (2022) to measure self-monitoring, a trait that captures the individual's tendency to misrepresent their views to appease others (Berinsky 2004; Berinsky and Lavine 2011). In other words, individuals with high levels of self-monitoring are more aware of how others perceive them and are more likely to adjust stated attitudes in ways they think are seen as desirable. Using this measure in a *treatment-by-covariate* interaction, Article B finds no substantial evidence of social desirability. To be clear, this approach has as many flaws as other attempts to avoid social desirability bias. For one, the items used to capture self-monitoring (cf. Berinsky 2004; Berinsky and Lavine 2011; Webster et al. 2022) are vague and likely correlate with several potentially important characteristics. The robustness provided by this approach, therefore, remains suggestive and tentative.

Finally, a concern particularly associated with Article C is preference falsification. Collecting data on public opinion in authoritarian regimes

could be challenging if respondents feel pressure to respond in certain ways on sensitive topics (Kuran 1995; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012). As Article C examines reactions to electoral malpractice and support for Putin, survey respondents may think twice before condemning the regime and the incumbent dictator. After all, being in opposition to an autocrat is associated with tangible social, psychical, and economic risks (Gandhi and Ong 2019; Young 2019). Article C (summarized in Chapter 6) finds that regime supporters do not negatively adjust their views on Putin when exposed to information revealing election fraud in the 2020 vote on constitutional amendments. To what extent is this driven by preference falsification? Is this finding caused by a fear of sanctions among regime supporters? It is difficult to establish the level of preference falsification with any certainty. However, previous studies have spent considerable effort to examine the extent of preference falsification in authoritarian Russia. This body of work generally shows that Russians feel comfortable "going public with private opinions" (Rose 2007). Frye et al. (2017), for example, use a series of list experiments to show that Putin's approval rating is genuinely very high and largely unaffected by (modest levels of) attitude falsification. Similarly, qualitative interviews suggest that Russians feel comfortable voicing critique of Putin and speaking freely about issues that are potentially sensitive, such as the quality of democratic institutions in Russia and corruption (Greene and Robertson 2019). Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that the data for Article C was collected prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, by which point fears of repression intensified.

Despite these inherent challenges, survey experiments offer a unique way of examining voters' reactions to, feelings and opinions about a range of phenomena, including electoral malpractice and malfeasance more broadly. Survey experiments pave the way for causal inference, which is difficult when studying attitudinal changes in response to malfeasance. The approach allows for the collection of specific data on voters' attitudes and reactions to malpractice in a highly controlled setting, and for comparing effects across different contexts.

Chapter 4

How do Voters Evaluate Electoral Malpractice?

This chapter summarizes the first article in this dissertation (Article A: Why Don't Partisans Sanction Electoral Malpractice?). Article A examines *how* voters evaluate electoral malpractice, particularly whether voters' partisan pre-convictions color their evaluation of malpractice. The first set of theoretical expectations relates to the potential moderating influence of partisanship on *how* voters evaluate parties that cheat in elections. Article A sets out to adjudicate between two rival explanations that previous work has proposed to explain why voters do not seem to punish in-party malfeasance (broadly defined) at the ballots. Despite marked differences between these explanations, previous work has been unable to differentiate between them as they are observationally equivalent when looking at vote choice.

The first explanation suggests that pervasive partisan biases drive individuals to view in-party malpractice as less wrong, severe, or illegitimate than otherwise identical out-party malpractice (Ahlquist et al. 2018; Claassen and Ensley 2016). Tomz and Weeks (2020), for example, argue that Republicans and Democrats disapprove disproportionately of foreign election interference (such as hacking into voting machines) when it happens to benefit the opposing party. The other explanation suggests that partisans may accurately evaluate and interpret in-party malpractice but trade off election fairness principles for partisan ends. In this view, voters value partisan loyalty over democratic principles (Graham and Svulik 2020). Even though partisans may accurately interpret and disapprove of malpractice by the in-party, it may not be enough for them to vote against it. Accordingly, this study tests two hypotheses:

- H1:** Individuals disapprove more strongly of electoral malpractice by opposing parties than otherwise identical malpractice benefiting their party.

H2: Individuals prefer a in-party government that has engaged in electoral malpractice to an out-party government that has not.

It is crucial to understand the differences between these two accounts. If voters condone electoral malpractice (or similar undemocratic behavior), we must understand the underlying causes. Do voters tolerate in-party malpractice because pervasive partisan biases prevent them from viewing malpractice as wrong when the in-party is behind it? Or are they simply willing to sacrifice a degree of legitimacy for desired political outcomes? If we do not understand how the response chain breaks, we are hard-pressed to fix it.

Article A, thus, sets out to answer sub-question 1. To do so, it employs cross-country factorial vignette experiments in Mexico and Denmark to examine the different steps in how partisans evaluate and use information about electoral malpractice (see fig. 2.1). That is, I explore how voters in two very different democracies (new democracy and a consolidated democracy) adjust factual beliefs, interpret such beliefs, and update their opinions when given information about malpractice. By doing so, Article A can distinguish between the two substantively different explanations for why partisans rarely vote against their party to sanction malfeasance.

Selecting Cases to Increase Generalizability

Article A relies on survey experiments, which necessarily limits the scope to a few cases. I chose Mexico and Denmark to approach a most-different-systems-design. Mexico and Denmark are both democracies but differ on most theoretically relevant factors that could potentially shape the moderating effect of partisanship on voters' reactions to election cheating. Denmark is a long-standing democracy that has rarely experienced electoral malpractice (Elklit 2020), whereas Mexico recently transitioned into democracy and has a long history of manipulated elections (McCann and Domínguez 1998; Cantú 2019). Socialization into democratic governance may increase sensitivity to electoral malpractice, which could lead to differences in respondents' reactions to malpractice. Denmark and Mexico also vary in economic performance. Previous work has established a positive relationship between economic performance and citizens' support for and legitimization of political authorities (Easton 1965). It could be that people respond differently to malpractice depending on the economic context (Rød 2019). Finally, Mexico and Denmark differ in the degree of polarization. To the extent that polar-

ization drives tolerance for violations of democracy's rules (Graham and Svulik 2020), this could lead to observable differences between Danes and Mexicans concerning their reactions to electoral malpractice. Selecting these cases enhances the generalizability of the study's conclusions by providing a variation on these factors (Blair and McClendon 2021; Mutz 2011; Seawright and Gerring 2008). Evidence in both cases for either hypothesis gives reason to believe that such findings apply to a broader population of democracies.

Research Design

Study A relies on a cross-country, factorial experiment. The experiments randomly assigned each respondent to one of three treatment conditions or a placebo condition (all hypothetical scenarios about a future election). The vignettes also randomized which party had employed illicit strategies; I focused on the major parties, vying for the office of president or prime minister, in both cases. The exact treatment wordings are shown table 4.1. The vignettes were designed to ensure comparability. Hence, the only differences between the Danish and Mexican vignettes were country-specific references to parties, social programs, or election type.

It is worth noting, however, that such comparability sets limits for context-sensitivity, effectively reducing the level of authenticity that can realistically be achieved. The types of malpractice included in the experiment (vote buying, ballot stuffing, and voter coercion) are well-known in Mexico (McCann and Domínguez 1998; Cantú 2019) but not in Denmark. One may worry that Danish respondents cannot respond meaningfully to such far-fetched scenarios. Importantly, however, the case selection provides variation on how strong the information in the treatment appears to respondents. Finding similar patterns of partisan responses in both cases effectively demonstrates that the results are not driven by treatment authenticity. Faced with a trade-off between comparability and authenticity, I chose to keep the vignettes as identical as possible to avoid adjusting treatments to contexts (Blair and McClendon 2021).

Findings

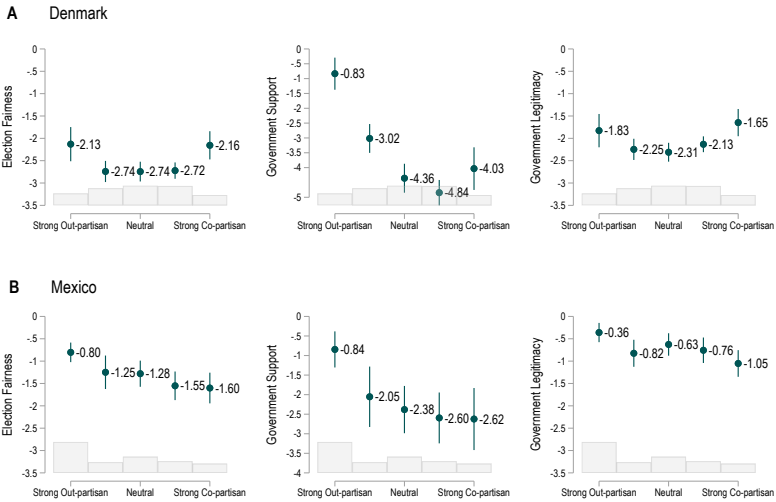
I present the main findings from Study A in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 below. To ease interpretation, figures 4.1 and 4.2 collapse the three malpractice treatments into a dichotomous measure of *any malpractice*. Figure 4.1

Table 4.1: Experimental wording (Article A)

Preamble:	Now, we would like you to imagine a scenario. Imagine that (presidential/parliamentary) elections were to be held next month. The candidate representing a coalition led by [PARTY] is elected (president/prime minister). After the election, it becomes clear that [EXPERIMENTAL CONDITION].
Placebo:	there were more (presidential/prime minister) debates on TV than usual for this election.
Treatment 1:	many voters were paid to vote for the candidate from [PARTY].
Treatment 2:	many voters faced threats of losing access to social programs, such as (Prospera/Børnebidrag), if they did not vote for the candidate from [PARTY].
Treatment 3:	fake ballots for the candidate from [PARTY] were added to the ballot boxes.
<p><i>Note:</i> N (Denmark) = 2,526. Control group = 623 n (24.66 %), treatment group 1 = 637 n (25.22 %), treatment group 2 = 629 n (24.90 %), and treatment group 3 = 637 (25.22 %). N (Mexico) = 2,528. Control group = 630 (24.92 %), treatment group 1 = 635 (25.12 %), treatment group 2 = 628 (24.84 %), and treatment group 3 = 635 (25.12 %).</p>	

shows the differences in treatment effects on the three outcomes (perceived election fairness, perceived government legitimacy, and generalized government support) depending on co-partisanship. Strong co-partisans reported high affect ratings for the party that won the election in their vignette, and strong out-partisans reported very low affect ratings for the party in their vignettes (based on pre-treatment partisanship items). The first expectation suggests that partisans may engage in fact avoidance, meaning avoidance, or blame avoidance. When respondents face electoral malpractice by the in-party, they may deny that malpractice happened, dismiss it as inconsequential, or avoid holding their party to blame. These *disconnects* suggest that the marginal effects of malpractice are smaller for co-partisans on either perceived election fairness (fact avoidance), legitimacy (meaning avoidance), or government support (blame avoidance). I will spare the technical details for Article A, but if voters perceive in-party electoral malpractice as less wrong, severe, or illegitimate, we should observe significantly smaller marginal effects of malpractice on perceived election fairness or government legitimacy among in-partisans.

Figure 4.1: Partisans Do *Not* Apply Biased Standards When Evaluating Malpractice



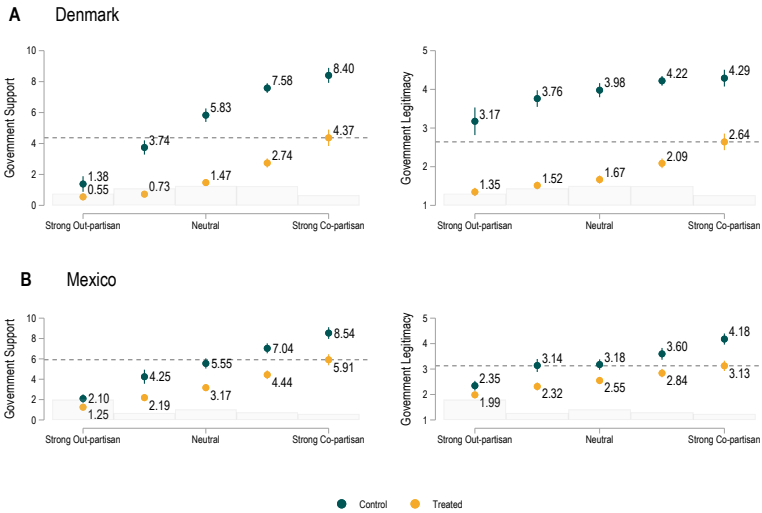
Note: Difference between a fair election and election cheating, estimated by partisan affiliation for both Denmark (A) and Mexico (B). Dots are point estimates and bars are 95% confidence intervals based on unstandardized OLS regression estimates. Gray bars are the distribution of partisan affiliation.

Article A found no evidence of partisan double standards in voters' evaluation of electoral malpractice, neither in Mexico nor Denmark. Compared to respondents in the control condition, individuals who received electoral malpractice treatments were more likely to believe that elections were unfair, that government was less entitled to make binding political decisions, and to report lower levels of support for the government. These effects were not moderated by partisanship, such that respondents were less sensitive to the treatments if they shared party affiliation with the perpetrators. If anything, Figure 4.1 suggests that information about malpractice produced more negative reactions among in-partisans of the perpetrator. However, as people are naturally more supportive of an in-party government *ex-ante*, in-partisans have higher baseline levels of support and legitimacy beliefs, and more room to adjust. In the supplementary material to Article A, I show that these apparent differences are best accounted for by floor- and ceiling effects. Overall, the findings in figure 4.1 demonstrate two things. One, partisans punish their party for

engaging in malpractice. Two, pervasive partisan biases do not drive voters to apply double standards when evaluating malpractice, disapproving more strongly of out-party malfeasance than otherwise identical in-party malfeasance.

Next, Article A examines the mean levels of support for the government and perceived government legitimacy across experimental group assignment and partisanship. The findings are shown in figure 4.2. The second expectation (H2) concerns relative *levels* of support among different experimental conditions. To examine whether voters are willing to sacrifice electoral integrity for partisan ends, I compare means levels of support and legitimacy across individuals in the treatment and control conditions. If voters express higher support for a government, which they know have been involved in malpractice than *they would have expressed* for an out-party government that has not cheated, it indicates that malpractice is not enough for them to vote for the out-party. Following the approach proposed by Arias et al. (2018), Article A establishes these quantities (relative preferences) by measuring by government support across treatment conditions and partisanship.

Figure 4.2: Strong Partisans Remain More Supportive of Their Party Despite Malpractice



Note: Marginal means, estimated by partisan affiliation for both Denmark (A) and Mexico (B). Dots are point estimates (green = control and yellow = treatment) and bars are 95% confidence intervals based on unstandardized OLS regression estimates. Gray bars are the distribution of partisan affiliation.

Figure 4.2 essentially displays respondents' willingness to sacrifice legitimacy to win elections. In Mexico and Denmark, the malpractice vignettes shifted views on relative legitimacy. At baseline, respondents view an in-party government as more legitimate than an out-party government, all else equal. However, exposure to electoral malpractice by the in-party caused partisans to report lower levels of government legitimacy than *they would have reported* for an out-party government not involved in malpractice (as shown by the yellow dot and bars for strong out-partisans). However, strong in-partisans in Mexico and Denmark remain relatively more supportive of an in-party government despite sanctioning malpractice. That is, while strong co-partisans in the treatment conditions came to see the in-party government as relatively less legitimate than an out-party government, they still expressed greater affinity for the in-party government compared to the out-party government. To illustrate, comparing strong co-partisans in the treatment group to strong out-partisans in the control group among the Danish respondents shows

that in-partisans are about 30 percentage points higher affect for the in-party government. Notably, this is despite punishing the in-party for engaging in malpractice. Another way of interpreting this is that partisans feel relatively more negative about an out-party government than an in-party government, although their preferred party violated basic electoral rules and norms.

Chapter 5

Does Malpractice Shape Party Loyalty?

Having established that voters accurately evaluate electoral malpractice, unbiased by their partisan stripes, Article B addresses the second sub-question by examining the impact of electoral malpractice on party loyalty. Article B builds on the theoretical core presented in Chapter 2 but also incorporates insights from social identity theory to argue that in-party malpractice causes voters to distance themselves from the in-party.

What happens when the in-party undermines election fairness by engaging in electoral malpractice? From social identity theory, we know that individuals derive self-esteem by positively differentiating the in-group from the out-group, and the in-party from the out-party (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Greene 2004). People want to perceive their preferred party as morally superior to the out-party and have others recognize it as such. When the in-party violates norms or rules in ways that undermine this positive differentiation, it causes negative emotional reactions among in-partisans (Van Kleef et al. 2015). In a similar vein, social psychologists have shown that receiving desired outcomes by unfair processes is associated with feelings of guilt and anxiety (Krehbiel and Cropanzano 2000). Negatively valenced emotions, such as anxiety and guilt, have specific behavioral consequences, including making individuals less certain about and reliant on their partisan pre-convictions and more open to new information (Gervais 2019; Valentino et al. 2008; Valentino et al. 2011). In addition, social psychological theories of the so-called "black-sheep effect" suggest that people tend to derogate (punish) in-group deviance more than otherwise identical out-group deviance to maintain or restore a positive in-group image and differentiation (Bown and Abrams 2003; Eidelman et al. 2006; Fousiani et al. 2019; Marques et al. 1988; Marques and Paez 1994). To maintain a positive self-image, individuals are motivated to push norm-violating in-partisans away and keep themselves at a distance. Hence, the core expectation in Article B is that malpractice by the in-party decreases the sense of belonging and increases partisan ambivalence among in-partisans. Against this back-

drop, Article B tests the following expectations regarding the impact of in-partisan electoral malpractice on partisan loyalty:

H1A: Electoral malpractice by the in-party reduces affect for the in-party.

H1B: Electoral malpractice by the in-party reduces propensity to vote in-party.

H2A: Electoral malpractice by the in-party increases affect for the out-party.

H2B: Electoral malpractice by the in-party increases propensity to vote for the out-party.

When the out-party engages in electoral malpractice, Article B argues, the opposite happens. Electoral malpractice by the opposing party justifies the negative view that partisans already hold toward the out-party, substantiating the in-group out-group differential. Gervais (2019) presents experimental evidence that incivility by out-party elites generates feelings of anger, leading voters to cling more fervently to the partisan pre-convictions (see also Brader and Marcus 2013; Valentino et al. 2011). In experiments that directly manipulate feelings of out-party-directed anger, Webster (2020) documents that such anger cements in-party loyalty. With this backdrop, I expect that electoral malpractice by the out-party leads to increasing in-party loyalty and decreased partisan ambivalence. Out-party malpractice causes partisans to double down on support for their in-party to amplify the positive distinction from political opponents.

H3A: Electoral malpractice by the out-party reduces affect for the out-party.

H3B: Electoral malpractice by the out-party increases affect for the in-party.

Article B conceptualizes party loyalty in two ways; (1) as generalized support or affect towards the in- and out-party and (2) as voting intentions. One way to think about these two measures is as *generalized* and *manifest* support. Generalized support captures more broad sympathies towards one's own party (the in-party), and speaks to Easton's definition of political support as the attitude "by which a person orients himself to an object either favorably or unfavorably, positively or negatively" (Easton 1975, 436). Indeed, the concept of affect captures an individual's

”judgments about many dimensions of an attitude object to a *single dimension* of overall liking or disliking” (Broockman et al. 2022, 4, emphasis in original). But for such support to be politically consequential, it requires observable implications in citizens’ voting behavior. Article B, therefore, examines the impact of electoral malpractice on party loyalty, measured as both affect ratings and voting intentions.

The (Least Likely) Case of America

Article B tests these expectations in two experiments among Americans. I chose to focus on America for two reasons. First, the United States presents a least-likely case to find a negative impact of electoral malpractice on party loyalty in an established democracy. Today, Americans are ostensibly polarized by partisanship. Beyond their political disagreements, Democrats and Republicans express a deep-rooted dislike and distrust toward each other (Abramowitz and Webster 2018; Finkel et al. 2020; Mason 2018; Iyengar et al. 2012; Iyengar et al. 2019). As multiple salient identities (e.g., race, religion, etc.) have moved into alignment with the political parties, partisanship has morphed into a *mega-identity* (Mason and Wronski 2018), which, in turn, has become more important than anything else for political behavior (Barber and Pope 2019; Mason 2016, 2018). In the US, scholars have identified waning commitment among ordinary citizens to the rules and principles of liberal democracy (Carey et al. 2019; Finkel et al. 2020; Mason 2018). Recent studies argue that the partisan divisions in the US undermine support for basic democratic rules and norms and may even lead to out-party dehumanization and tolerance of political violence (Cassese 2021; Gidengil et al. 2021; Graham and Svolik 2020; Kalmoe and Mason 2022; Kingzette et al. 2021; Martherus et al. 2021; Simonovits et al. 2022). Webster writes:

”[t]he contemporary political landscape is one in which American citizens appear to be anything but fully committed to democracy being what Linz and Stepan (1996) refer to as ‘the only game in town’.”

(Webster 2020, 100)

Hence, we should expect that partisans in the US are among those who would give their in-party the most leeway in terms of violating foundational democratic institutions. Finding a negative impact of electoral malpractice on party loyalty among Americans would suggest that such

findings also apply to a broader population of liberal democracies, in which partisanship plays a less prominent role.

The second reason for focusing on the US is that it provides the rare opportunity to design experimental treatments based on real-world incidents of misconduct in a consolidated democracy (as exemplified by the Harris case described in Chapter 1). Again, it bears repeating that there is nothing to suggest systematic cheating in US federal elections. But at the state level, there are several cases of non-trivial electoral malpractice. The noticeable difference between the two parties' democratic behavior at the federal and state level is intriguing. Recent research has argued that the parties use state-level politics to try out different political strategies to beat their opponents, sometimes at the expense of democracy's rules (Grumbach 2022a, 2022b). The occurrence of real-world incidents of electoral malpractice at the level of federal states means that Article B can design experimental vignettes that achieve reasonable ecological validity. In sum, the American case allows an investigation of the impact of election cheating on party loyalty in a least-likely context where (A) partisan identities are extremely important and salient and (B) there are real-world examples of cheating to inform the experimental treatment material.

Research Design and Data

Study B relies on two preregistered survey experiments among representative samples of Americans.

Table 5.1: Experimental wording (Article B1)

Preamble:	Imagine that there was an election for a congressional seat in your state next month. The [Democratic/Republican] candidate wins a close election, which has seen the candidates go neck and neck in most polls. [... treatment text here]
Control:	After the election, it becomes clear that more voters than usual had watched candidate debates on TV for this election.
Treatment 1:	After the election, it becomes clear that the [Democratic/Republican] Party cheated in the election. In particular, the [Democratic/Republican] Party spread false information about the election, sending official-looking letters to voters in areas supporting the [Democrats/Republicans] stating the election had been postponed.
Treatment 2:	After the election, it becomes clear that the [Democratic/Republican] Party cheated in the election. In particular, the [Democratic/Republican] Party illegally harvested mail-in-votes to inflate their vote share. 61% of mail-in-votes were for the [Democratic/Republican] candidate, although only 19% of absentee voters were registered [Democrats/Republicans].

Note: N = 5,062. Control group = 1,684 N (33.2%), treatment group 1 = 1,690 N (33.4%), treatment group 2 = 1,693 N (33.4%),

Table 5.2: Experimental wording (Article B2)

Preamble:	Now, we would like you to imagine a scenario about a future Congressional election.
Control:	Imagine that there was a congressional election in a typical “toss-up” state next month. The [IN-PARTY] wins a close election, which has seen the parties go neck and neck in most polls.
Treatment 1:	(Control +) After the election, it becomes clear that the [IN-PARTY] spread false information about the election sending official-looking letters to voters in areas supporting the [OUT-PARTY] stating the election had been postponed.
Treatment 2:	(Control +) After the election, it becomes clear that the [IN-PARTY] benefited from a new redistricting plan recently carried out by the [IN-PARTY]. The new electoral map meant that the [OUT-PARTY] won fewer seats than their opponents despite winning the statewide popular vote.

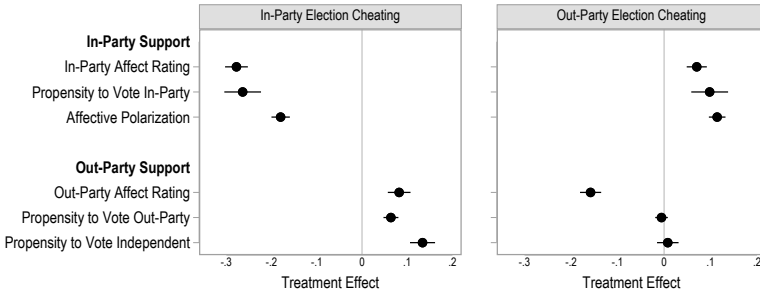
Note: N = 1,779. Control group = 594 N (33.4%), treatment group 1 = 592 N (33.3%), treatment group 2 = 593 N (33.3%).

Study B1 ($N = 5,000$) is a 2×3 factorial design, varying “no malpractice”; “misinformation campaigns”; and “mail-in fraud” and independently varying which party wins (in the control condition) or cheats (in the two treatment conditions). Study B2 ($N = 1,800$) is a block-randomized three-condition vignette experiment, varying “no malpractice”; “misinformation”; and “gerrymandering”. Study B2 blocks randomization on a pre-treatment measure of partisanship, so that respondents can only be assigned to an in-party condition. In both experiments, participants imagined a future congressional election to mimic the state-level reality. After reading about the election (either control or treatment), respondents answer a series of questions on election beliefs, their affect for both parties, as well as their future voting intentions. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 display the exact wording of the two experiments.

Results

I first present the main findings from Study B1. As mentioned above, this experiment has two treatment conditions (misinformation and mail-in ballot fraud). However, as the findings are similar for both types of cheating, I collapse them into a dichotomous treatment measure. The main findings are shown in figure 5.1. Please note that all outcomes are re-scaled from zero to one to ease interpretation. Panel A displays the effects across outcomes for respondents in the in-partisan conditions (e.g., Republicans reading about a Republican candidate). Panel B shows these effects for respondents in the out-partisan conditions (e.g., Republicans reading about a Democratic candidate).

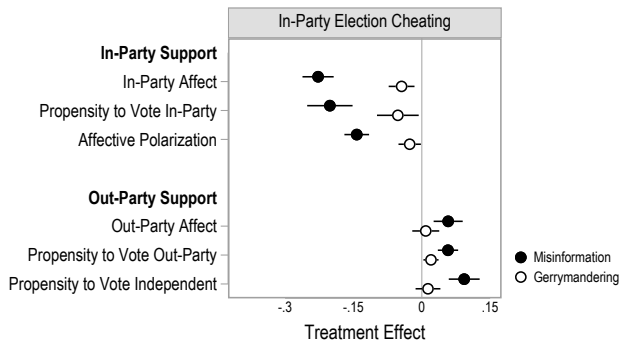
Figure 5.1: The (De)Polarizing Effects of Election Cheating (Study B1)



Note: Difference between a fair election and election cheating, estimated for both the in-party (left) and out-party (right). Dots are point estimates and bars are 95% confidence intervals based on unstandardized OLS regression estimates.

Figure 5.1 (left hand panel) shows that in-party cheating erodes in-party loyalty and depolarizes voters. Relative to the control condition, electoral malpractice by the in-party decreases in-party affect and intentions to vote for the in-partisan candidate. These findings show that partisans do not stand blindly by their "team"; major norm violations cause in-partisan voters to distance themselves from their party. Figure 5.1 also shows that in-party malpractice increases out-party affect (e.g., Republicans view the Democratic Party more positively when the Republican Party engages in electoral malpractice). Electoral malpractice pulls two levers simultaneously: (1) reducing in-party favorability and (2) increasing out-party favorability. The coefficient for net in-party favorability displays the net effect of these two movements on an individual's affective polarization (defined as the difference in positive affect for the in- and out-party, cf. Iyengar et al. 2012). Figure 5.1 (right hand panel) shows that malpractice by the out-party has the opposite effect - it polarizes voters. When the Democrats, for example, use electoral malpractice, Republican partisans double down on loyalty to the Republican Party and report even more negative feelings toward the Democratic Party.

Figure 5.2: Even Subtle In-Party Malpractice Depolarizes Voters (Study B2)



Note: Difference between a fair election and election cheating, estimated for the in-party. Dots are point estimates (black = misinformation and white/hollow = gerrymandering) and bars are 95% confidence intervals based on unstandardized OLS regression estimates.

Study B2 had two main objectives. First, Study B2 sought to replicate the findings from Study B1 regarding the effects of in-party malpractice. Secondly, Study B2 sought to examine the effects of more subtle forms of malpractice (gerrymandering). Figure 5.2 displays the findings. Two key findings stand out. The misinformation treatment in figure 5.2 is similar to the findings in Study B1, replicating the results in figure 5.1. When a party is involved in spreading misinformation about the election, it increases out-party favorability and decreases in-party favorability among those who identify with the perpetrating party. The second key finding is that even subtle malpractice (in this case; gerrymandering), produces similar effects on voters' partisan loyalty. While these effects are much more attenuated, as expected, it is reassuring that the negative impact of in-party malpractice extrapolates to much more ambiguous types of malpractice, even in setting where partisan divisions are extreme and gerrymandering is common. However, in-party gerrymandering does not seem to systematically influence how people feel toward their out-party.

Chapter 6

Do the Effects Differ by Regime Context?

The first two studies in this dissertation have established that voters do not apply partisan double standards when evaluating electoral malpractice and that malpractice by the individual's in-party decreases her partisan loyalty and increases partisan ambivalence. The third article (Article C: Does Election Fraud Erode Support for Dictators?), then, set out to answer the third sub-question put forward above. This article concerns the *regime type* box in figure 2.1 presented in Chapter 2. While Article A's focus on Denmark and Mexico provides some variation regarding the political regime context, these cases are both fundamentally democratic regimes. In the final article of this dissertation, I move across the regime divide and zoom in on an electoral authoritarian regime, providing a substantial variation on the regime variable. Study C zooms in on the case of Russia. I focus on the 2020 nationwide vote on amendments to the Russian Constitution.

Articles A and B (chapters 4 and 5) found that voters' reactions to electoral malpractice worked in a straightforward manner across a range of very different democracies. Citizens adjusted factual beliefs and interpreted malpractice in a meaningful way, and distanced themselves strongly from parties that engage in illicit electoral tactics, regardless of their partisan loyalties. However, things may not be so simple in non-democratic settings. Article C argues that there are two crucial differences. First, the extent to which voters update their beliefs about the election depends on whether the information about election fraud is new. If citizens have seen manipulation in past elections, they may already have factored in such fraud. In that case, information about election fraud is unlikely to change perceptions about elections (Frye and Borisova 2019; Hill 2017; Little 2012). I argue that prior expectations of election fairness depend on voters' partisan leanings and that regime opponents are less sensitive to news of election fraud compared to regime supporters

because they are more likely to expect elections to be unfair. Second, being in opposition to an authoritarian regime is associated with tangible personal, social, and economic consequences (Greene and Robertson 2019; Young 2019). People who publicly support opposition parties will likely risk harassment, intimidation, layoffs, social exclusion, and more to challenge the regime. Because of the risks and costs associated with challenging the regime, people who do so are likely so galvanized in their views on authoritarian regimes and incumbents that providing information about electoral malpractice does little to change their views.

In contrast, regime supporters likely use information about election violations to inform their opinions and beliefs about the regime. Elections represent the only legitimate route to public office in Russia. Article C argues that there are, at least, three reasons why regime supporters may not use information about fraud to adjust their views on Putin. First, voters may not think that Putin himself has anything to do with the orchestration of elections. The story of the *good tzar* being betrayed by *bad boyars* (elites) and *chinovniki* (civil servants) is a classic trope in Russia. Second, the current Russian climate is one in which there are no obvious, viable alternatives to Putin. For regime supporters to change their minds about Putin also means welcoming a much more uncertain future. Finally, voters may prioritize the performances that Putin previously delivered (such as extensive economic growth and the annexation of Crimea) over election fairness.

H1: Information revealing election fraud causes regime supporters, but not regime opponents, to negatively update their perceptions of election fairness.

H2: Information revealing election fraud causes regime supporters, but not regime opponents, to negatively update their beliefs about regime legitimacy.

H3: Information revealing election fraud does not shape support for dictators among either regime opponents or regime supporters.

Setting the Stage: The 2020 Vote on Constitutional Amendments in Russia

On January 15, 2020, President Putin gave an annual address to the Federal Assembly, in which he proposed several amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Although the Federal Assembly could

formally approve and ratify the proposed amendments, Putin nevertheless called for a nationwide popular vote (note that it was not an actual referendum) to ensure the bill's legitimacy. As Putin told the Federal Assembly:

”[...] considering that the proposed amendments concern substantial changes in the political system and the work of the executive, legislative and judicial branches, I believe it necessary to hold a vote of Russian citizens on the entire package of the proposed amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. The final decision must be made only on the basis of its results.”

(Putin, 2020)¹

Among the proposed amendments to the Russian Constitution was a proposal to change Article 81(3), which regulates the term limits for Russian Presidents. In its then-form, Article 81(3) stated that presidents could only serve two consecutive terms. Previously, in 2008, Putin had tiptoed around this provision by letting Dmitriy A. Medvedev serve a term as president while Putin served as prime minister, allowing him to return to the presidency in 2012. Now, Putin wanted to change the article altogether, essentially precluding a similar *switcheroo* from happening again. In changing this article, the new bill proposed to reset Putin's term clock, which allowed him to extend his rule by two additional terms. If implemented, Putin could serve until 2036, at which point he would be 83 years old. The proposed bill contained a plethora of amendments to the Constitution, which would shift power in favor of the president and the federal center (see Partlett 2021), it was widely seen as a vote on extending President Putin's tenure (Teague 2020). As Hutcheson and McAllister (2021) note, these amendments consolidated Putin's authoritarian regime more than anything else.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Russian voters were a full week to vote on the proposed amendments, ending on July 1, 2020. The vote was a simple "yes/no" for the package of proposed amendments.² We should always be cautious with official election results from authoritarian regimes like Russia. This notwithstanding, nearly 78% voted in favor of the reform bill, with only 21% voting against it, according to official

1. See <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62582> for the full text of President Putin's address to the Federal Assembly.

2. The final bill was published by the official government newspaper, *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, on March 16, 2020. For the full bill, see <https://rg.ru/2020/03/16/popravka-v-konstituciyu-dok.html>.

numbers. In Russia, the regime was quick to frame the results as an emphatic win for Putin. Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, heralded the vote as a “triumphant vote of confidence in President Putin” (Arkhipov and Kravchenko 2020). Turnout for the public vote was approximately 68%.

Not all Russians, however, were convinced that the vote signalled Russians’ strong faith in President Putin. Regime opponents and domestic election monitors denounced the vote, accusing the regime of election fraud (Rainsford 2020). Voters were pressured to vote in favor of the amendments, regime supporters voted multiple times, opponents were prevented from campaigning on state-controlled media, and videos showing blatant ballot stuffing were shared on independent media.³ Frye (2021, 52) notes that “the Kremlin had many levers to ensure popular approval of the amendments, and by many measures, the vote was the most irregular of any in Russia in the last twenty years.”

Research Design

Within this context, Article C examined the effects of election fraud revelations on support for dictators. I will leave a more detailed description of the research design for Article C. Here it suffices to note that I sampled a representative sample of Russians using YouGov’s panels of survey respondents. I collected data between September and October 2020, two-three months after the public vote. The experiment randomly assigned participants to one of four experimental conditions with varying information about election fraud in the July 1 nationwide vote on Constitutional Amendments (three treatment groups and a control group). Respondents assigned to the control condition represent a baseline comparison and were not shown any text before answering the outcome questions. After stating whether they voted in the vote on constitutional amendments, respondents in the treatment groups read one of the vignettes, and respondents in the control group proceeded immediately to answer the outcome questions. The baseline condition allowed me to estimate voters’ prior expectations of election fairness, regime legitimacy, and support for Putin (cf. Arias et al. 2018). The experimental treatments were short vignettes describing the 2020 vote as being plagued by vote buying, voter coercion, or ballot-box stuffing (see treatment wording in ta-

3. <https://www.rferl.org/a/apparent-ballot-box-stuffer-is-caught-red-handed—and-blue-gloved—at-russian-polling-station/30700701.html>

ble 6.1).⁴ Dictators have several election rigging tools at their disposal (Cheeseman and Klaas 2019; Schedler 2002), and the Russian regime has used a wide selection of these throughout the years. However, vote buying, voter coercion, and ballot-stuffing are particularly well-known in Russia (Frye et al. 2014, 2019; Reuter and Szakonyi 2021) and were alleged in the 2020 nationwide vote.

Table 6.1: Experimental Wording (Article C)

Preamble:	Following the election, it is clear that there were severe irregularities in the conduct of the referendum. Secret recordings, leaked documents and e-mails, and advanced statistical vote tabulations provide evidence that a nation-wide campaign was carried out to boost votes for the amendments. In particular, a substantial amount of [treatment text here]
Treatment 1:	voters were given cash and gifts of food and alcohol, if they voted "yes" in the referendum.
Treatment 2:	voters were pressured by employers to vote for the amendments. Employees were threatened with lay-offs if they did not vote "yes" in the referendum.
Treatment 3:	fake ballots were added in favor of the amendments.
Postscript:	It is estimated that these activities significantly influenced the results in favour of the amendments, and potentially made the difference between a result for and against the changes.

Note: N = 1,538. Control group N = 388 (25.23%), treatment group 1 N = 387 (25.16%), treatment group 2 N = 382 (24.84%), and treatment group 3 N = 381 (24.77%).

Findings

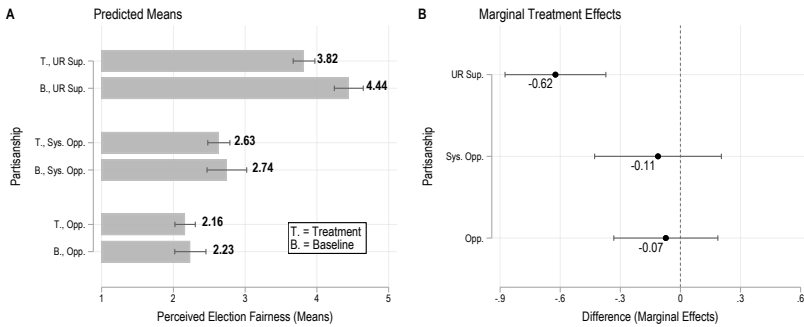
The analyses below estimate the impact of election fraud revelations on support for Putin, perceived election fairness, and regime legitimacy. A corollary of the argument presented above is I am primarily interested in how supporters and opponents of Putin's regime respond to information revealing the regime's interference in the 2020 vote on Constitutional Amendments. Below, I present the findings in three parts, each about a step in the opinion updating model presented in Chapter 2. The first subsection asks: who updates factual beliefs about the election? The second subsection asks: do voters interpret election fraud meaningfully? And the final subsection asks: do voters use such information to form opinions on President Putin?

4. In Article C, I theorize that people's reactions to fraud revelations may differ depending on the *type* of malpractice. However, I do not find evidence of such a difference.

The Effects of Election Fraud on Perceived Election Fairness

In line with the process of opinion updating put forward in Chapter 3, I first present findings for the effect of election fraud information on perceived election fairness. After reading a treatment vignette (or not reading one for the control group), respondents were asked to rate the fairness of the vote on the same 1-5 scale as used in Articles A and B (see also Birch 2008, 2010; Daxecker and Fjelde 2021). Figure 6.1 presents the findings. Panel A displays marginal means, whereas Panel B displays marginal effects (the estimated differences between the baseline and treatment means).

Figure 6.1: Information about Election Fraud Reduces Perceived Election Fairness Among UR Supporters Only



Note: Difference between baseline and *any fraud*, estimated for regime supporters (UR Sup.), systematic opponents (Sys. Opp.), and regime opponents (Opp.). Marginal means (Panel A) and difference in means (Panel B). Dots are point estimates, and bars are 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 6.1 reveals two key findings. In contrast to voters in democracies (see Articles A and B), Russians differ markedly in baseline levels of perceived election fairness. I use these baseline levels as a proxy measure of different voter groups' *priors* (cf. Arias et al. 2018). Figure 6.1A shows that UR voters (the regime's core base) express high confidence in the 2020 vote on Constitutional Amendments *ex-ante*, whereas regime opponents are very skeptical.⁵ Voters of systematic opposition parties

5. In Article C, I show that there are also systematic differences in turnout between regime opponents and regime supporters, indicating that the baseline differences in per-

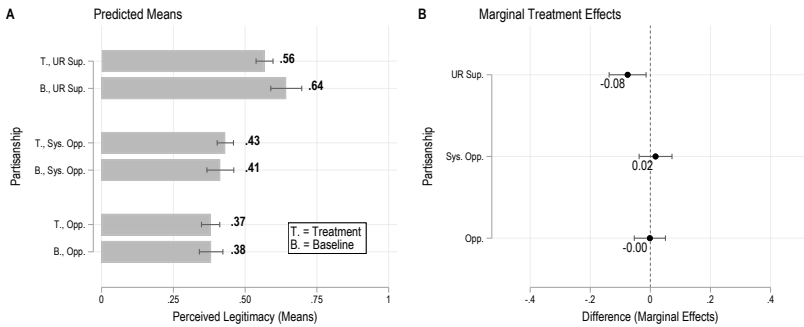
(i.e. Kremlin-sponsored opposition parties) are more aligned with "pure" regime opponents in terms of their prior expectations of election fairness. These are substantively large differences, corroborating previous findings (McAllister and White 2011; Rose and Mishler 2009; Reuter and Szakonyi 2015, 2021). Figure 6.1B shows that only UR voters update their election beliefs about the 2020 Constitutional Vote after reading about the regime's interference. In contrast, neither opposition nor systemic opposition voters update their beliefs about the election.

Downstream Consequences for Legitimacy Beliefs

Next, I turn to perceived regime legitimacy. Figure 6.2 shows that similar to election beliefs, baseline levels of perceived legitimacy (scale 0-1) vary with partisan loyalties. Regime supporters view the regime as entitled to make binding political decisions, whereas opposition voters and voters of systemic opposition parties do not. When exposed to information about how the Kremlin meddled with the vote, only the regime's core base updated regime legitimacy beliefs, which suggests that regime opponents were already priced in on the regime's electoral transgressions and illegitimacy. These findings demonstrate, contrary to recent findings (e.g., Daxecker and Fjelde 2021; Svoboda 2019), that the regime's core supporters *do* hold the regime responsible for manipulating elections and that there *are* downstream consequences of manipulating elections.

ceived election fairness reflect different prior expectations rather than a "winner's effect." For more on the winner's effect see (Anderson et al. 2005; Cantú and García-Ponce 2015; Sinclair et al. 2018).

Figure 6.2: Information about Election Fraud Reduces Legitimacy Beliefs Among UR Supporters Only

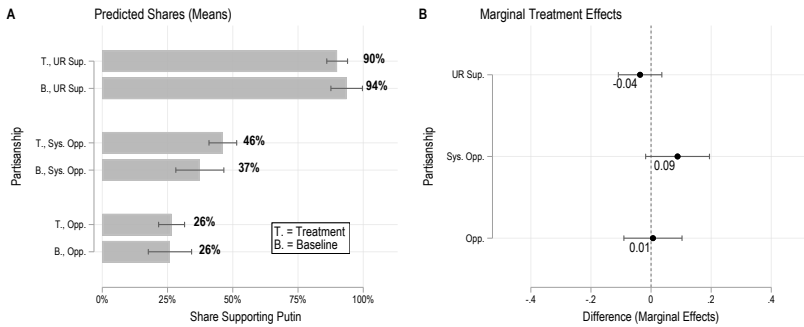


Note: Difference between baseline and *any fraud*, estimated for regime supporters (UR Sup.), systematic opponents (Sys. Opp.), and regime opponents (Opp.). Marginal means (Panel A) and difference in means (Panel B). Dots are point estimates, and bars are 95% confidence intervals.

Does Information about Fraud Reduce Support for Putin?

Do Russian voters also hold President Putin responsible for election fraud? Figure 6.3A shows substantial differences in support for President Putin in the baseline. A total of 94% of UR voters express support for another term with Putin at the helm, compared to 26% of opposition voters. Figure 6.3B shows that, in contrast to the findings on legitimacy and election beliefs, regime supporters do not change their views on Putin when exposed to information about election fraud. Although providing information about election fraud to UR voters does produce negative changes in beliefs about election fairness and the regime's legitimacy, it does not seem to cause the same backlash against Putin himself.

Figure 6.3: Information about Election Fraud Does Not Affect Support for Putin



Note: Difference between baseline and *any fraud*, estimated for regime supporters (UR Sup.), systematic opponents (Sys. Opp.), and regime opponents (Opp.). Panel A shows marginal means. Panel B shows estimated differences in means. Dots are point estimates, and bars are 95% confidence intervals based on unstandardized OLS regressions with robust standard errors.

Why does malpractice revelations cause a backlash for regime legitimacy but not for Putin’s support? There are different potential explanations for this. One of which is the lack of viable alternatives to Putin. Although disapproval of Putin may rise as a consequence of fraud revelations, it is difficult for most voters to see who could realistically replace him. The most outspoken critic of Putin, Alexei A. Navalny, has limited public appeal, attracting only a small number of Russian voters. With Putin, most Russians have a firm sense of “what they have.” Another reason may be that Putin still enjoys a “reservoir” of public support based on previous achievements such as the massive improvements he oversaw in Russia’s economy and the annexation of Crimea. Article C cannot tease out a more specific explanation for why Putin seems to get away with foul play. As a more general answer to the sub-question, however, this section suggests that the effects of election cheating on political attitudes and opinions do differ across regime contexts. Importantly, this is not because voters in authoritarian regimes do not care about election fairness or are more biased than voters in democracies. Rather, the findings suggest that this is because the distribution of priors is very different in a nondemocratic regime. Furthermore, the extent to which voters in an autocracy are willing to “sanction” dictators for election fraud may hinge on the availability of viable alternatives.

Chapter 7

Discussion and Conclusions

How do voters respond to electoral malpractice, and what, if any, are the effects of violations of election fairness on political attitudes in democratic and nondemocratic regimes? This question motivated my PhD dissertation and the three articles of which it consists. In the final section of this summary report, I take stock of the dissertation's key findings, core contributions to multiple strands of political science, implications, and some questions left unanswered.

The Key Findings

Using a series of survey experiments conducted across four very different countries, the studies in the dissertation have provided evidence of the impact of electoral malpractice on voters' political attitudes. In particular, the three studies have provided novel evidence of the effects of malpractice on election beliefs, legitimacy beliefs, and political support from authoritarian Russia, over Mexico's weak democracy and the well-functioning democracy in Denmark, to the world's oldest democracy: the United States of America. The dissertation revealed three key findings.

First, Article A provides evidence that voters do not apply a partisan double standard when evaluating electoral malpractice. In Mexico and Denmark, voters' reactions to information about three different types of malpractice were not influenced by their partisan affiliations. As an answer to the first sub-question posed in the introduction to this summary report (*how do voters evaluate the use of electoral malpractice?*), Article A examined whether Danes and Mexicans viewed the same electoral transgression differently depending on whether it helped or harmed their party in the election. The experiment revealed no substantial partisan differences in voters' reactions concerning perceptions of election fairness, beliefs about government legitimacy, and support for the government. As such, Article A found no signs of *partisan hypocrisy* across two very different settings.

Second, Article B found that information about malpractice exerted a strong, negative impact on voters' partisan loyalties, even subtle, commonly used malpractice. Building on the findings of Article A, Article B demonstrated that electoral malpractice, ranging from blatant fraud using absentee ballots to the subtle distortion of gerrymandering, caused individuals to distance themselves from the perpetrating party. Transgressions of the principles of free and fair elections led to a weakened sense of partisan belonging and increasing partisan ambivalence among voters in a *hyper-polarized* society. In two survey experiments, Article B showed that there are limits to partisan loyalty, even in a country where partisan identification is seen as a mega-identity. The second sub-question posed in the introduction was: *how does electoral malpractice shape political attitudes?* Based on the findings in Article B, the answer is that electoral malpractice has a strong, negative influence on voters' partisan attachments.

Third, Article C demonstrated that citizens in authoritarian regimes respond similarly to malpractice, with some important differences. Article C found that Russians' prior expectations to elections, regime legitimacy, and support for President Putin depended on their partisan attachments. Supporters of the Kremlin held rosy beliefs about the fairness of Russian elections and the legitimacy of the government and were positively minded about the prospect of extending Putin's tenure. In contrast, the data showed that regime opponents were already 'priced in' on regime interference in elections, had factored in such knowledge to their regime legitimacy beliefs, and were very opposed to seeing Putin continue as president after his current term limit expires. As a consequence of such baseline differences, Article C found that only the regime's political base was sensitive and responsive to information about election fraud. However, despite the public opinion backlash to fraud revelations, Putin's popular support is relatively immune. Although regime supporters expressed disapproval of fraud, they nevertheless maintained a wish to see Putin at the helm. As an answer to the third sub-question posed in the introduction (*Do the effects of electoral malpractice on political attitudes differ by regime context?*), Article C demonstrated that the effects differ due to differences in prior expectation and a smaller inclination to sanction. While I found no systematic differences between consolidated and new democracies, there does seem to be differences in reactions in fully-fleshed autocracies.

Taken together, the findings in this dissertation showed that voters evaluate malpractice in an accurate, unbiased way by adjusting factual beliefs about elections, ascribing meaningful valence to malpractice, and

using it to shape their feelings of support toward governments, parties, and presidents. The findings also demonstrated that malpractice caused voters to withdraw support from the perpetrators, although the effect in authoritarian regimes is less pronounced.

The Contributions

This dissertation and the three articles make several contributions to at least three sub-fields in political science; the comparative literature on electoral malpractice, the behavioral literature on citizens' commitment to democracy, and the comparative literature on authoritarianism. At a broader level, the dissertation makes contributions by incorporating social psychological theories of procedural justice to the study of electoral malpractice, by expanding our focus to include a more detailed understanding of opinion change in response to malpractice, by analyzing the relationship between information about malpractice and legitimacy beliefs and political support across different contexts, and by designing experiments that capture multiple types of malpractice. More specifically, the dissertation contributes to the three strands of political science in the following ways.

First, it contributes to the comparative literature on electoral malpractice by providing causal evidence of the consequences of malpractice at the individual level. As mentioned in the introduction to this summary report, contemporary research on the consequences of electoral malpractice mostly relies on cross-national analyses or case studies, for example, to examine the effect of electoral malpractice on post-election protests (Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Kuntz and Thompson 2009; Tucker 2007; Rød 2019; Harvey and Mukherjee 2018). Most theoretical arguments underpinning such a relationship, however, have roots at the level of the individual. In Article C, I examine the impact of fraud revelations on Russians' inclination to participate in protests (see the supplementary material in Article C). Similarly, scholars have relied on multi-level and/or cross-sectional analyses to examine the impact of perceived electoral malpractice (or perceived electoral integrity) on public support, perceived legitimacy, or satisfaction with democracy (e.g., Norris 2014, 2019). This dissertation's use of survey experiments allows for greater causal inferences.

Second, it contributes to the behavioral literature on citizens' commitment to democracy by focusing on democracy's core institution. As discussed in the introduction and framework chapters of this sum-

mary report, recent research has examined voters' partisan responses to democratic backsliding or violations of democracy's liberal principles and institutions (e.g., Graham and Svulik 2020; Gidengil et al. 2021; Lewandowsky and Jankowski 2022; Mazepus and Toshkov 2021; Simonovits et al. 2022; Krishnarajan 2022). By zooming in on the *sine qua non* institution of democracy (cf. Birch 2011; Collier and Adcock 1999; Møller and Skaaning 2012), this dissertation adds important nuance to our understanding of the perils of partisan loyalty for democracy. The dissertation consistently finds that even hardened partisans disapprove of even subtle electoral malpractice, also when it benefits their party, which is an important qualification of previous literature. While partisans may be willing to turn a blind eye to in-party transgressions of some democratic norms and rules, there are clearly limits to what partisans will condone. Although this juxtaposition should temper concerns about citizens' declining commitment to democracy, it also demonstrates the dangers of piecemeal attacks on democracy's institutions. It is because of the subtlety and granularity of democratic backsliding that voters appear to condone undemocratic candidates. Moreover, this dissertation makes contributions to this literature by placing the United States in a comparative context. As shown, Americans are no less committed to the principles of free and fair elections than Mexicans and Danes, although scholars have feared so (Finkel et al. 2020; Webster 2020).

An implication of the findings in Articles A and B is to counterbalance the current narrative among scholars and experts that citizens' commitment to the rules and principles of democracy is declining. Recent research has argued that voters put their partisan loyalties before basic democratic rules and principles (Graham and Svulik 2020; Gidengil et al. 2021; Simonovits et al. 2022; Lewandowsky and Jankowski 2022; Krishnarajan 2022; Kalmoe and Mason 2022; Mason 2018; Mazepus and Toshkov 2021; Kingzette et al. 2021; Webster 2020). In stark contrast to this discouraging perspective, the findings in this dissertation demonstrate that there are limits to what partisans will tolerate, even if standing strong on democratic principles conflicts with their partisan desires. In the cross-pressure between electoral fairness and partisan self-interest, this dissertation provides evidence that the individual voter (even the hardened partisans) will more often than not privilege the principles of free and fair elections. This dissertation (particularly Articles A and B) joins a small handful of studies in highlighting the boundaries of pernicious partisanship across different types of misconduct (Druckman et al. 2019; Eady et al. 2022; Frimer and Skitka 2018; Lelkes and Westwood 2017; Westwood et al. 2022). The central implication of this dis-

sertation for the discussion of citizens' commitment to democracy is that voters across three very different democracies respond to election cheating as we would expect in a healthy, well-functioning democracy. Despite widespread concern about intractable polarization across many democracies, the findings suggest that most voters will set their partisan loyalties aside when faced with electoral malpractice. From that perspective, the findings presented in this dissertation have implications for our understanding of partisan identification as an *unmoved mover*.

How do these findings fit what we see in reality, and why do the findings differ from the current narrative? For example, we have seen Republican voters continue to express support for Donald Trump, his election lies, and his chosen far-right extremists. To many scholars, the ardent support among Republican voters for the far-right "MAGA branch" of the Republican Party is a sign of the waning commitment to democratic principles among ordinary Americans.¹ The reactions to malpractice that this dissertation discovers may seem out of touch with recent events in the United States. This juxtaposition highlights that several factors may moderate or mediate the relationship between parties' and politicians' behavior and public opinion in the real world. For example, research has shown that elite communication can strongly influence voters' democratic norms (Clayton et al. 2021). In a similar vein, the influence of partisan media on voters' attitudes (Druckman et al. 2018; Levendusky 2013a, 2013b) may help explain why we rarely witness large public opinion backlashes against parties that undermine the rules and norms of democracy.

As the experiments in this dissertation provide respondents with unmediated information (i.e. no media source, elite cues, or competing narratives), they may not accurately capture the complexity of the public opinion effects of malpractice. On the other hand, recent studies have shown that harsh incivility in partisan-friendly media causes voters to report less affinity for the in-party (Druckman et al. 2019) and that the mass riot at the US Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021 caused a substantial decline in Republican voters' self-expressed identification with the party on Twitter (Eady et al. 2022). Hence, partisan media and its effects on the relationship between malfeasance and public opinion may not account for everything. Furthermore, the most recent midterm election in the United States seems to suggest that voters resoundingly denounced the Republican Party and candidates in states where they had promised to make party-line changes to electoral rules and management.

1. MAGA is short for "Make America Great Again", a slogan capturing former president Trump's ideas of an emphatic overhaul of the American political system.

For example, the Republican candidate for Governor of Wisconsin, Tim Michels had promised to make sure that "the Republicans would never lose an election in Wisconsin again" if he won the race (The Guardian 2022). The emphatic defeat of the Republicans in states where "democracy was on the ballot" is seen by many commentators as a signal that citizens voted to protect democracy, especially compared to states without such concerns where the Republicans fared much better (New York Times 2022).

Finally, the dissertation contributes to the comparative literature on authoritarianism by adding to our understanding of the role of elections and election fraud in public opinion in authoritarian regimes. At a broad level, Article C contributes to an ongoing scholarly debate about the regime (de)stabilizing effects of authoritarian elections (e.g., Seeborg 2019; Knutsen et al. 2017). The dissertation advances this debate, as it provides experimental evidence of the complicated effects of malpractice (a defining feature of authoritarian elections) on public opinion. The dissertation also joins a burgeoning strand of research that seeks to integrate insights from social psychology into the study of authoritarianism (e.g., Greene and Robertson 2017, 2022; Young 2019). More importantly, it contributes to an emerging debate about the influence of partisan polarization in autocracies (Svolik 2019; Reuter and Szakonyi 2021). The dissertation contributes to our understanding of partisan loyalty and the nominally democratic institution of elections by integrating insights from public opinion research on the nuances in opinion change and disentangling support for Putin from regime legitimacy. The findings show that while Putin himself may avoid drops in approval when elections are rigged, there are negative downstream consequences for the regime writ large. These results advance our understanding of election dynamics in authoritarian regimes by providing fine-grained evidence of how the public evaluates electoral malpractice and by highlighting which voter groups are most responsive to news of electoral malpractice. The ability of the Kremlin to avoid a large-scale backlash against electoral malpractice may hinge on Putin's personal reservoir of support, which itself may be more fragile than we think (cf. Frye 2019; Greene and Robertson 2017).

The findings in Russia have implications for how we understand dictators who hold elections inviting political competition but undermine them by pervasive manipulation. On June 18, 2023, Turkish voters will head to the polls to elect a new president, and fears of electoral malpractice have already begun surfacing (Esen 2022). Since the failed coup attempt in 2016, the incumbent president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has

concentrated power in his own hands and tilted the electoral playing field in his own favor. As previous elections have seen electoral malpractice, it is likely that the incumbent regime will try to manipulate to re-election. To the extent that this dissertation's findings on the effect of malpractice on support for dictators travel to the Turkish case, we should expect that malpractice in the 2023 presidential election will not have a significant impact on Erdoğan's support. However, Turkey has seen a significant economic downturn since 2013, and if voters blame the incumbent AKP Party, they may be less hesitant to withdraw support from Erdoğan. Moreover, the opposition to Erdoğan's regime appears more united than the opposition to Putin, which may help mobilize grievances against the regime using electoral malpractice as a focal point (cf. Tucker 2007)

The Questions Still Unanswered

As with most scholarly projects, this dissertation probably raises at least as many questions as it answers. As a final note in this summary report, I briefly motivate some avenues for future research based on what we have learned in this dissertation.

First, the juxtaposition between the findings in this dissertation and previous work on democratic backsliding calls for further research into the boundaries of partisans' tolerance for malfeasance. An important distinction in this regard could be between foundational and liberal institutions of democracy. Future research could, for example, run conjoint experiments on the different effects of election fairness violations and violations of democracy's liberal principles. Another distinction could be between horizontal, vertical, and diagonal accountability mechanisms (Lührmann et al. 2020). While many of the liberal institutions that previous work has focused on concern horizontal or diagonal accountability (e.g., free and fair media or independent courts), elections regulate the most direct relationship between voters and elected politicians and parties. Citizens may think differently about bending or breaking the rules that govern relationships between elites and those that govern citizens' input into the political system. Another aspect worth diving into is the severity of the transgressions. Although Article B suggests that partisans also sanction gerrymandering, it may be the case that there is a tipping point at which pervasive biases kick in. One could, for instance, examine whether partisans may tolerate malpractice that gives a two-, five-, or ten-seat advantage. In a similar vein, future research could make im-

portant contributions by examining whether such a tipping point exists in authoritarian regimes. Is there a point at which even the regime's core supporters turn their backs on the incumbent dictator? For instance, Belarusian president, Aleksandr Lukashenko, had pervasively rigged elections since he was first elected president in 1994. In the 2020 presidential elections, however, mass protests erupted after Lukashenko was declared the winner. Why did the regime's meddling in elections suddenly pave the way for months of intensive demonstrations?

Second, much could be gained by examining the potential moderating effects of partisan media. In the United States, for example, most voters get political news from partisan media, which has been shown to polarize the electorate (Levendusky 2013a, 2013b). It may be that citizens cue off media sources as a heuristic for information credibility. Previous work has shown that perceived information credibility matters a lot for people's responses to scandals (Weitz-Shapiro and Winters 2017). Hence, Democrats may not be as responsive to information if provided by media outlets associated with the Republican Party. As these outlets tend to spin the news in ways that reflect well on their partisan leanings, for instance by counter-arguing or denying allegations of misconduct by in-party members, voters may never receive information about malfeasance that they find credible.

Third, future research could examine the impact of electoral malpractice in different authoritarian regimes. Article C's focus on Russia poses some limitations to the generalizability of the conclusions. Putin enjoys genuine popular support among Russians and has become a representation of a sense of community and national pride (Frye et al. 2017; Greene and Robertson 2019). As Putin has successfully concentrated power around himself, Russia has been called a highly personalized autocracy. The findings from this setting may not accurately describe how people in other, perhaps less personalized, autocracies would react to electoral malpractice. On the other hand, Putin is not alone in ruling with genuine public backing. Matovski (2021) argues that some dictators come to power *with* popular support following profound political, economic, or security crises. Matovski compares Putin to Turkey's Recep Erdoğan, Hungary's Viktor Orbán, Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, and Peru's Alberto Fujimori, who, in general, build a support base because they are seen as *fixers* who can restore economic as well as public order (see also Guriev and Treisman 2020; Rosenfeld 2018; Treisman 2011). From this perspective, Putin may not be so special after all (see Frye 2021). Nevertheless, future research could make a substantial contribution by expanding the scope to autocrats who are less popular and less tenured

to analyze the effects of violations of nominally democratic institutions on public opinion in dictatorships.

This dissertation provides a stepping-stone for such future research endeavors. The findings presented in this summary report and the three self-contained articles suggest that much could be gained from theorizing and investigating these questions systematically. Future research should do more to integrate insights from different sub-fields within political science and social science more broadly. This dissertation has shown that social psychological theories of procedural justice may help fill some gaps in the comparative literature on electoral malpractice. From this perspective, the dissertation is a first attempt at analyzing how electoral malpractice shapes people's political attitudes and behavior from a comparative perspective.

Summary

This dissertation examines how electoral malpractice influences public opinion. Electoral malpractice violates the most important institution in a democracy. Yet, our understanding of the implications of malpractice for political attitudes and behavior remains limited. When voters are faced with electoral malpractice, some are inevitably put under cross-pressure between the principles of free and fair elections and their partisan desires. A key question is, therefore, what a voter does when she is confronted with electoral malpractice that advances her party's chances of winning: Does she sacrifice fairness values for partisan gain or sacrifice the partisan gain for fairness values? This dissertation is the first attempt to systematically pit clear violations of election fairness against partisan self-interest head to head. How do voters fare in that cross-pressure between democratic prerogatives and (tribal) partisan instincts? And do voters in consolidated democracies, new democracies, and authoritarian regimes respond similarly to electoral malpractice? In three articles, I explore these questions utilizing novel survey experiments across a range of countries.

In the first article (Article A: Why Don't Partisans Sanction Electoral Malpractice?), I ask *how* do voters evaluate electoral malpractice? In particular, I focus on whether voters apply partisan double standards when confronted with malpractice, disapproving more fervently of malpractice that benefits opponents. In two survey experiments in Mexico (a relatively new democracy) and Denmark (a consolidated democracy), I examine whether voters think out-party malpractice is more unfair, more de-legitimizing, and warrants a greater backlash in terms of support. In both contexts, I find that they do not. Instead, voters evaluate electoral malpractice in an accurate, unbiased way.

In the second article (Article B: The Limits of Party Loyalty), I ask what the effects of electoral malpractice on partisan loyalty are. In particular, I focus on how malpractice by the individual's in-party shapes her sense of affiliation toward that party. Previous studies have reached disconcerting conclusions about ordinary citizens' commitment to the rules and principles of democracy. In contrast, using two novel survey exper-

iments in the United States of America - a context of rampant partisan polarization and threats to democratic institutions - I find that even hardened partisans distance themselves from the in-party when it engages in malpractice.

In the third article (Article C: Does Election Fraud Erode Support for Autocrats?), I ask whether the effects of malpractice on political attitudes are different in authoritarian regimes. As electoral malpractice is ubiquitous in autocratic elections, voters may react differently to the news of malpractice. I examine how providing Russian respondents with revelations of malpractice following the 2020 public vote on constitutional amendments shaped their beliefs about the Russian regime's legitimacy and their feelings about President Putin. The findings show that only the regime's core supporters respond to malpractice; regime opponents are already well aware of the regime's interference in elections. However, regime supporters do not seem to place responsibility for electoral transgression on Putin.

Overall, the dissertation provides consistent evidence of the negative effects of electoral malpractice, ranging from subtle gerrymandering to blatant ballot stuffing, on voters' perceptions of government legitimacy and political support. Even when malpractice gives an individual's in-party an advantage, I find that people distance themselves from parties and politicians that engage in malpractice. Hence, contrary to much recent work, I show that partisans are not willing to win at all costs, at least in the case of elections.

Dansk Resumé

Denne afhandling undersøger, hvordan valgmanipulation påvirker den offentlige opinion. Valgmanipulation underminerer den vigtigste demokratiske institution. Alligevel er vores forståelse af betydningen af valgmanipulation for vælgernes politiske holdninger og adfærd begrænset. Når vælgere står over for valgmanipulation, vil nogle nødvendigvis stå i et krydspres mellem principperne om frie og fair valg og deres partipolitiske ønsker. Et centralt spørgsmål er derfor, hvad man gør som vælger, når man konfronteres med valgmanipulation, der fremmer ens partis chancer for at vinde: Ofrer man principper om retfærdighed for partipolitisk vinding, eller ofrer man partipolitisk egeninteresse for retfærdighedsprincipper? Denne afhandling er det første forsøg på systematisk at spille brud på elektoral retfærdighed direkte op imod partipolitiske interesser. Hvordan reagerer vælgerne i krydspreset mellem demokratiske principper og partipolitiske instinkter? Og reagerer vælgere på samme måde på valgmanipulation på tværs af konsoliderede demokratier, nye demokratier og autokratiske regimer? I tre artikler undersøger jeg disse spørgsmål ved hjælp af originale surveyeksperimenter i forskellige lande.

I den første artikel (Artikel A: Why Don't Partisans Sanction Electoral Malpractice?) undersøger jeg, *hvordan* vælgerne evaluerer valgmanipulation, herunder navnlig om de vurderer valgmanipulation gennem en partipolitisk dobbeltstandard, altså tager større afstand fra valgmanipulation, der gavner deres politiske modstandere. Gennem to surveyeksperimenter i Mexico (et relativt nyt demokrati) og Danmark (et konsolideret demokrati) undersøger jeg, om vælgerne anser valgmanipulation af deres modstandere som mere uretfærdigt, mere delegitimerende og som en større berettigelse af sanktioner. I begge kontekster finder jeg, at vælgerne ikke applicerer en sådan dobbeltstandard, men evaluerer valgmanipulation på en præcis, objektiv måde.

I den anden artikel (Artikel B: The Limits of Party Loyalty) undersøger jeg effekten af valgmanipulation på partiloyalitet. Mere specifikt undersøger jeg, hvordan valgmanipulation af vælgerens eget parti påvirker deres følelse af tilknytning til partiet. Tidligere studier er nået

til nedslående konklusioner om vælgernes forpligtelse til demokratiske regler og principper. I denne artikel viser jeg – baseret på to originale surveyeksperimenter i USA (en kontekst præget af politisk polarisering og trusler mod demokratiske institutioner) – i modsætning til tidligere studier, at selv de stærkeste partisoldater tager afstand fra deres parti, når det manipulerer valg.

I den tredje artikel (Artikel C: Does Election Fraud Erode Support for Autocrats?) undersøger jeg effekten af valgmanipulation på politiske holdninger i konteksten af et autokratisk regime. Omfattende manipulation er kendetegnende for autokratiske valg, hvilket kan påvirke vælgernes reaktion på afsløringer af valgmanipulation. Jeg undersøger, hvordan russiske vælgere opdaterer deres opfattelser af regimets legitimitet og deres holdninger til Putin, når de får information om, hvordan Kreml manipulerede folkeafstemningen om forfatningsændringer i juli 2020. Resultaterne viser, at kun regimets kernevælgere reagerer på information om valgmanipulation. Regimets modstandere er derimod allerede bevidste om, hvordan Kreml underminerer valg i Rusland. På trods af, at de reagerer negativt på information om valgsvindler, synes regimets kernevælgere alligevel ikke at holde Putin ansvarlig.

Samlet set viser afhandlingen, at valgmanipulation (fra subtil gerryndering til grov valgfusk) negativt påvirker vælgernes legitimitetsopfattelser og politisk support. Selv når valgmanipulation gavner vælgerens foretrukne parti, tager de afstand fra partier og politikere, der er involveret i valgmanipulation. I modsætning til det dominerende narrativ viser afhandlingen således, at partisoldater ikke er villige til at vinde for enhver pris.

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