

Rushing to the Polls: The Causes of Premature Postconflict Elections

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Abstract

In the post-cold war period, civil wars are increasingly likely to end with peace settlements brokered by international actors who press for early elections. However, elections held soon after wars end, when political institutions remain weak, are associated with an increased likelihood of a return to violence. International actors have a double-edged influence over election timing and the risk of war, often promoting precarious military stalemates and early elections but sometimes also working to prevent a return to war through peacekeeping, institution building, and powersharing. In this article, we develop and test quantitatively a model of the causes of early elections as a building block in evaluating the larger effect of election timing on the return to war.

Keywords

civil war, elections, and peacekeeping

Postconflict elections mark a turning point in the recovery and reconstruction of countries emerging from civil war. For some, the first postconflict election ushers them across a threshold toward the consolidation of peace and democracy, but for

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all too many it serves as a revolving door casting them back toward war and authoritarian rule. Whether elections prompt consolidation or conflict depends in large part on the timing of these elections and the consequent environment in which they take place. As Lakhdar Brahimi, former UN envoy to Afghanistan and Iraq, states “[A]n election will produce all the good expected of it only if it takes place at the right time in the sequence of activities that constitute the peace process.”¹

Holding elections soon after a civil war ends generally increases the likelihood of renewed fighting (Brancati and Snyder 2009). Quick elections increase the odds that one side to the conflict will reject the results and have the means to return to war. Early postwar elections also increase the odds that the newly elected government will be composed of antireform elites who adopt policies likely to renew conflict. Especially dangerous are elections that take place between evenly balanced, armed sides in the absence of institutionalized guarantees of core group security. For these reasons, elections are likely to lead back to war when they follow negotiated settlements or truces rather than decisive military victories, take place in the absence of powersharing agreements, and precede the demobilization of the rebel army and the creation of strong governmental institutions.

The potential for early elections to renew fighting is alarming because the post-cold war era is marked by a trend toward early elections. Since 1989, the average time to the first post-civil war election has dropped from 5.5 years to 2.7 years. A parallel trend toward settlements and truces rather than decisive victories also characterizes the post-cold war era, with the international community pressing countries in this period to end conflicts with settlement agreements (Fortna 2005). The combination of early elections and inconclusive war outcomes creates exactly the conditions that make elections especially dangerous. However, international involvement can sometimes create conditions that mitigate the risk of renewed fighting by providing for peacekeeping, the demobilization of armed forces, and the building of robust political institutions. Thus, international pressure in favor of early elections strengthens peace when it provides these stabilizing instruments, but it undermines peace when pressures to democratize are not backed up by effective means to achieve stable democracy.

This interpretation depends on inferences from a two-step model of the impact of election timing on the return to civil war. The first step is a model of the causes of early elections, which we present in this article. We argue that governments are more likely to hold elections when they are relatively evenly matched militarily by rebels at the end of the war, as when wars end in settlements or truces and when peacekeeping troops are present. In this context, governments, both financially weakened and militarily exhausted from the war, cannot resist international and domestic pressures to hold elections. Governments are also more likely to hold elections when powersharing institutions, which reduce the likelihood of governments losing the elections, are in place. The second step in understanding this process is a model of the impact

of early elections on the return to war, which we present in separate work (Brancati and Snyder 2009).

Understanding the causes of early elections is important for reasons of both policy making and methodological rigor. To illuminate the impact of policy choices, we seek to determine the impact of international actors on elections and war, including the ways in which international influences may cause risky early elections but may also mitigate their adverse effects. From a methodological standpoint, we model the causes of early elections to determine whether the same factors that cause early elections also directly cause a return to war. If that were the case, then early elections might be merely a side effect rather than a cause of the return to war. In so doing, we also consider the possibility that early elections are a strategy politicians consciously choose to force a return to war with the opposition. This article lays the groundwork for testing these inferences by analyzing quantitatively the timing of postconflict elections for all civil wars that ended between 1945 and 2008.

Perspectives on Election Timing

Policy makers and scholars generally agree that postconflict election timing matters, but they disagree sharply about the optimal timing for postconflict elections, with some asserting that holding elections soon after civil wars end fosters peace and democracy, and others, like Brahim, claiming the opposite is true. The promise of early elections is vital to peace and democracy, according to some scholars, because it facilitates peace settlements and convinces foreign countries to contribute peacekeeping forces to postconflict settings by providing them with a clear end date for the peacekeeping mission (Lyons 2002). Elections are also important, some scholars argue, because they expedite the democratization process (Berman 2007; Carothers 2007; Lindberg 2003) and help postconflict countries attract much-needed foreign aid (Kumar 1998; Lyons 2002).

In contrast, skeptics of early elections argue that elections occurring soon after wars end undermine peace and democracy because they are generally poorly run and hastily designed (Reilly 2002). At the same time, they claim that these elections tend to be dominated by former combatants who have not yet been demobilized, and politicians who make nationalist, sectarian, and radical appeals at the expense of prodemocracy elements (de Zeeuw 2008; Mansfield and Snyder 2007; Paris 2004; Reilly 2002). As a result, skeptics contend that early elections are more likely to be seen as illegitimate, politicians are more likely to inflame political tensions and undermine democratic reforms once in power, and former combatants are more likely to return to war if they lose the election.

Analyzing all civil wars that have ended in the post–World War II period, we find that the skeptics have reason for concern (Brancati and Snyder 2009). The less time that elapses between the end of a civil war and the onset of an election, the more likely civil wars are to reoccur. However, we also find that certain conditions make early elections less likely to result in renewed fighting. Decisive victories,

demobilization, and peacekeeping, for example, reduce the probability that negative reactions to the election results will prompt renewed fighting, while powersharing reduces the likelihood of either side to the conflict opposing the election results in the first place. Peacekeeping and strong political institutions reduce the odds of renewed fighting by facilitating demobilization, promoting genuine elections, and empowering more proreform groups.

Despite the importance placed on election timing, scholars have been relatively silent about the causes of postconflict election timing. Understanding these factors is important, though, since election timing is not exogenous to peace. Specifically, we find that two factors according to the aforementioned analysis, which make holding an election more likely, namely, UN peacekeeping and powersharing, also make renewed warfare less likely and one factor that makes holding an election more likely, namely, settlements and truces, makes renewed fighting more likely. Neglecting to take these confounding factors into account could lead to spurious conclusions about the effects of election timing on the likelihood of renewed conflict. However, even after adjusting for these factors using matching methods in this analysis, we find that elections occurring soon after wars end are more likely to lead to renewed fighting (Brancati and Snyder 2009).²

While debate about the causes of election timing per se is limited, the postwar democratization literature offers some insights into this issue. Focused largely on international influences, this literature suggests that foreign intervention can motivate local actors to democratize postconflict countries and facilitate this process. Wantchekon (2004) argues, for example, that governments democratize in order to avoid foreign intervention and the expropriation of domestic economic resources. Other scholars suggest that UN peacekeepers help countries democratize by providing security and logistical support for elections (Doyle and Sambanis 2000; Fortna 2008b). Still others have focused on the economic incentives that the international community provides countries to encourage them to democratize and to assist them in this endeavor, including financial assistance (Dunning 2004; Finkel, et al. 2007; Knack 2004) and memberships in international organizations (Pevehouse 2002).

We also expect international considerations to be important in explaining the timing of the first postconflict election. Not only has the international community helped put elections on the peacebuilding agenda, but it has also actively promoted them through both pressure and sponsorship. However, in only looking at democratic elections, this literature misses much since most postconflict elections fall short of democratic standards. Moreover, many of the factors that motivate countries to hold democratic elections are different from that which motivate countries to hold any elections. A relatively symmetric balance of power at the end of a war, for example, might motivate countries to hold quasi-democratic elections but not necessarily fully democratic ones, since governments hold elections in this case to prevent a return to war, not because they are committed democrats. In contrast, international electoral assistance may help explain why countries hold democratic elections soon

after civil wars end, but it is less important in explaining why countries hold sham ones since economic assistance speaks to a country's preparedness for and even commitment to democracy. Thus, in broadening the scope of this study beyond the question of whether countries hold democratic elections to when they hold any elections, we hope to provide a more robust understanding of postconflict elections and their role in peacebuilding.

Determinants of Election Timing

The timing of the first postconflict election, we argue, is shaped most strongly by the balance of power between governments and rebels at the end of the war and the degree of international involvement in postconflict countries. Early elections are most likely to occur when the peace is tenuous and incumbents and rebels are evenly matched, as is the case when wars end in settlements and truces. In this context, rebels are strong enough militarily to insist on elections, while international actors are capable of using their leverage to press for early elections. When wars end in settlements and truces, rebels are likely to demand elections to win power and achieve politically what they could not on the battlefield. The Maoist rebels in Nepal made elections, for example, a central part of negotiations to end Nepal's decade-long civil war in 2006 for this reason.

For their part, governments are likely to hold elections to prevent the opposition from returning to war. Nepal's government only agreed to hold elections after massive civil unrest led by the Maoists and seven parliamentary factions threatened to depose the king. The fact that the government and the opposition are evenly matched also makes renewed fighting more likely because both sides can return to the battlefield if an opportunity arises to gain an edge on the battlefield. The decision to hold an election in postconflict settings is similar to that of noncivil war settings, where governments arguably hold elections to maintain stability in response to popular mobilization (Przeworski 1991).

Elections can occur after a decisive military victory since winners may want to legitimize their victories through the ballot box, especially if the rebels win. However, in many cases, the winner is an incumbent authoritarian government that has no desire for elections and little need to legitimize its rule through elections after a military victory. Rebels have weaker claims to legitimacy than incumbent governments, which at one point may have been elected even if through fraudulent elections, and, thus, are more likely than incumbents to hold elections. Rebels are also more vulnerable to international pressure to hold elections because rebel victories tend to be harder fought. Wars resulting in rebel victories are longer on average and result in more deaths and displacements than wars resulting in incumbent victories. Consequently, rebel-led governments are more likely to be exhausted financially at the end of a war and in need of international assistance to rebuild than are incumbent governments.

Incumbent governments generally base their decision about whether to hold an election on their perception of the rebels' strength since rebels have an incentive

to keep information about their true military capabilities private to enhance their bargaining position in any settlement negotiation (Fearon 1995). The government's perception of the rebels' strength may be based on a number of factors, including military intelligence or recent battlefield performances. In the end, the stronger the government perceives the rebels to be, the more likely it is to acquiesce to their demands for an election. When governments perceive the rebels to be strong, they are also likely to invite in peacekeeping troops to help demobilize the rebels and prevent them from returning to war. This contention is consistent with empirical findings showing that countries with small government armies are more likely to invite in UN peacekeeping troops than those with large armies (Fortna 2004; Gilligan and Stedman 2003).

Peacekeeping can lead to earlier elections for other reasons as well. First, international peacekeepers are likely to prefer early elections and the presence of armed peacekeepers gives them the clout to insist on elections. Second, international peacekeepers reassure both sides to a conflict that the election will not lead to renewed fighting. Peacekeepers can reduce the likelihood of renewed fighting by helping to monitor and implement the stipulations of a peace settlement and by preventing small skirmishes from escalating into conflagrations, among other things (Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Fortna 2008a). Empirically, peacekeepers do not intervene more often in democracies, which may be more inclined to hold elections, than in non-democracies (Fortna 2008a; Gilligan and Stedman 2003).

International actors also wield a lot of leverage over postconflict countries when incumbents and rebels are evenly matched because internationals are frequently involved in negotiating settlement agreements and are even responsible in many cases for warring factions agreeing to end their conflicts with settlement agreements in the first place (Fortna 2005). Sometimes internationals are even in charge of running an interim government until elections are held. In this context, international actors press for early elections to promote democracy and in their view, thus, peace and stability.

The international community has been most active in promoting democracy as a peacebuilding strategy since the end of the cold war and the democratization of Eastern Europe and Russia (Dunning 2004). Due in part to this activism, most civil wars that end in the post-cold war era end in settlements or truces. By our calculation, more than two-thirds of civil wars that ended between 1990 and 2008 resulted in settlements or truces while less than 20 percent of civil wars that ended in the cold war era (1945–1989) ended in this way. By the same token, more than one-third of the peace treaties signed between 1989 and 2005 included a provision for elections or electoral reforms.³

Early elections are also more likely when powersharing arrangements, often favored by international actors, guarantee significant political representation for the major contending groups. Elections pose a risk to governments wielding the ultimate authority to call elections because governments can lose power as a result of these elections, especially if they do not have broad support within the electorate at-large. Powersharing, however, reduces the risk that elections will leave either side to the

conflict powerless and vulnerable. In essence, powersharing enables governments to hedge their bets when electoral outcomes are uncertain while satisfying the demand for elections from former combatants and the international community.

Through institutions, like decentralization, powersharing multiplies the number of political offices open for competition and the number of opportunities, therefore, that groups have to participate in the government. Powersharing also lowers the barriers to small-group representation through electoral rules such as proportional representation, and in some cases, it even outright guarantees it through reserved seats. Through these different institutions, powersharing can also reduce the odds of either side to the conflict rejecting the election results and returning to war in the short term. By empowering former combatants, however, powersharing can hinder democratization and increase the likelihood of renewed fighting in the long term.

In brief, we argue that postconflict governments, in the face of strong international pressure to hold elections, hold elections to prevent rebels from returning to war. Thus, we expect elections to occur earlier when civil wars end in settlements or truces than when they end in victories, more so in the case of rebel victories than in the case of incumbent victories. In this context, we also expect elections to occur earlier when UN peacekeepers are present and powersharing institutions are in place at the end of a war, since these institutions undercut the risk that elections pose to governments.

Methodology

In order to test this argument, we conduct a quantitative analysis of all civil wars that have ended over the post–World War II period. In this analysis, we use event history models to predict the timing of the first postconflict election held in countries emerging from civil war. We do so for two distinct reasons. First, we measure election timing in this analysis in terms of the number of months that have elapsed after a civil war has ended and the first postconflict election is held in a country, and second, some countries have not yet held postconflict elections and are, therefore, censored. We use Cox proportional hazards models because they do not make assumptions about the shape of the underlying hazard function.⁴ To deal with ties, we use the Efron method and to account for the fact that some countries experience multiple civil wars and hence multiple first elections, we cluster the standard errors by country. Since new civil wars sometimes occur before elections are held, we also include an indicator variable in our analysis representing whether or not a new civil war occurs before an election takes place, which significantly reduces the likelihood of holding an election across all models.⁵

Elsewhere we explore different frailty models to deal with any potential unobserved heterogeneity in the models and event dependence.⁶ Substantively and statistically, the results of the variance-corrected (VC) models used in this analysis and the frailty models are very similar.⁷ We present the VC models here because neither heterogeneity nor event dependence appear to be an issue based on significance tests

of the frailty terms in the case of the former and an examination of the cumulative hazards for each number of events/elections in the case of the latter.⁸

Data and Measurements

In describing the data we use and the measures we employ in the statistical analysis, we first provide an explanation of our dependent variable—postconflict election timing. Next, we describe the main factors that we argue determine election timing—balance of power, peacekeeping, and powersharing, and finally, we present the various controls that we use in the analysis.

Postconflict Election Timing

First postconflict elections (FPEs) are the first direct national or subnational elections in a country following the end of a civil war. We identify postconflict elections based on an 12-point coding criteria provided in the appendix. We measure *postconflict election timing* as the number of months that have elapsed since the end of a civil war and the first postconflict election regardless of the extent to which these elections are democratic. We measure timing separately for all first postconflict elections (FPEs) and for all first postconflict national elections (FPnEs). For each, we calculate election timing based on the first day of the election since elections can take place on multiple months, days, and even years.⁹ We identified the dates of these elections from various sources, including official government sources (e.g., electoral commissions and legislatures) and other primary resources (e.g., newspapers, Keesing's World Archives, and electoral observer reports), as well as various secondary resources.¹⁰

To identify civil wars, we follow Doyle and Sambanis (2006) who define civil wars as armed conflicts that result in at least 1,000 deaths from relatively continual fighting between the government of a sovereign, internationally recognized state, and one or more armed opposition groups that recruit mostly locally and control part of a country's territory. We also use the Doyle and Sambanis (2006) list of post-World War II civil wars as the basis of our data set. For the purposes of this project, we have updated and expanded their list, adding thirteen cases of civil war to their 151 for a total of 164 civil wars over the post-World War II period.¹¹

The Doyle and Sambanis (2006) definition of civil wars differs from others in a number of respects, such as annual death totals and the local recruitment of rebels. To ensure that our results are not driven by case selection, we have kept track of differences between their data set and two other major civil war data sets, Fearon and Laitin (2003) and PRIO (2006). To do this, we have identified the data sets in which each civil war is included and have coded the potential reasons why a civil war is not included in each data set. We identified at least seven such reasons related to ambiguity over whether the cases meet the Doyle and Sambanis criteria for battle deaths,

two-sidedness or being internal in nature, the division of a civil war into multiple wars due to a gap in violence or a change in actors, as well as differences in time periods covered by the data sets, or another unknown reason. We then performed various robustness tests dropping cases according to each of these different reasons. Our results are robust to case selection.

Since the date of the election is central to this study, we have also kept track of the extent to which the end date of each civil war in the Doyle and Sambanis (2006) data set is different from the end dates in the Fearon and Laitin (2003) and PRIO (2006) data sets. We then performed various robustness tests based on alternative dates for the civil wars contained in these data sets and the relevant postconflict election.¹² Our results are also robust to differences in the end dates. Over the post–World War period, an average of fifty months (4.2 years) have elapsed between the end of a civil war and the first postconflict election. National elections have occurred less than one month earlier on average. More than two-thirds of first postconflict elections occur at the national level while the remaining one-third occur at the subnational level or at both levels simultaneously. At the national level, 61 percent of first postconflict elections are legislative elections. Another 15 percent are presidential elections and the remaining 24 percent are concurrent legislative and presidential elections.

Balance of Power

Since governments are more likely to hold elections when civil wars end in settlements and truces rather than victories, we also measure the outcome of the previous civil war. Initially, we only distinguish between civil wars that end in *victories* coded 1 and those that do not coded 0. Subsequently, we distinguish between four potential outcomes—*government victory*, *rebel victory*, *truce*, and *settlement*—with indicator variables representing each outcome, since elections are likely to occur earlier in the case of rebel as opposed to government victories. The coding is based on Doyle and Sambanis (2006), which we have updated in line with their coding criteria.

Peacekeeping

Since UN peacekeeping forces are likely indicative of how closely the government believes that it and the rebel forces are matched militarily, we also distinguish between civil wars involving *UN intervention* and those lacking it, with an indicator variable coded 1 for cases of UN intervention and 0 otherwise.¹³ We also measure *non-UN peace operations* with an indicator coded 1 for these operations and 0 otherwise, although they tend to be on a much smaller scale than those of the United Nations and less likely to affect election timing as a result. We also combine UN and non-UN peace operations into a single variable representing *all peacekeeping operations*, coded 1 if the United Nations or another organization conducted a peacekeeping operation in a country and 0 otherwise. The data on peacekeeping are based on Doyle and Sambanis (2006), which we have updated using information from the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

Powersharing Institutions

Since powersharing institutions can reduce the risk posed to governments and former combatants and increase their willingness and ability to hold elections, we measure whether or not postconflict elections take place under powersharing systems. We focus on three different institutions to evaluate the extent to which political systems are based on principles of powersharing, namely, proportional representation (PR), unitary executive systems, and decentralization. PR, shared as opposed to unitary executive systems, and decentralization are all forms of powersharing. Each is coded based on the system in place at the time the civil war ended.

Proportional representation systems distribute seats in multimember districts in proportion to the number of votes that parties receive. PR systems are represented by a single indicator variable coded 1 if national legislative elections are based on PR and 0 otherwise. In *unitary executive systems*, national executive power rests squarely in the hands of a single individual and, thus, a single political party. Presidential systems have unitary executives while semipresidential and parliamentary systems do not. In semipresidential systems, parties may share power by controlling either the presidency or the office of the prime minister while in parliamentary systems, they may share power through coalition governments. Unitary executive systems are coded 1 if countries have presidential systems and 0 if they have semipresidential or parliamentary systems.

Decentralization refers to a division of authority between a country's national and subnational levels of government. It is coded 1 in this analysis if the subnational level of government is elected and has either administrative, fiscal, or political decision-making authority over at least one issue area and 0 otherwise. Decentralization is measured broadly in this analysis, including administrative as well as political decision-making authority, since many systems were not even fully delineated at the time the war ended and had little detailed information available about them as well.

Control Variables

With the international community most active and effective in exerting pressure on countries to hold elections in the cold war period, we distinguish among civil wars that end in the post-cold war era and those that end earlier. Accordingly, we measure the *post-cold war era* with a single indicator variable coded 1 if a civil war has ended after 1989 and 0 otherwise. In the cold war era, an average of about sixty-six months (5.5 years) has elapsed from the end of a civil war to the first postconflict election. In the post-cold war period, only thirty-two months (2.7 years) have elapsed between these two events. Postconflict election timing follows a similar trend for national elections, averaging sixty-three months (5.3 years) in the cold war era and thirty-seven months (3.1 years) in the post-cold war period.

Since the international community has not only pressured postconflict countries to hold elections but has helped them to conduct elections as well, we measure international electoral assistance in terms of assistance from the United Nations, as well as the USAID. Although they are not the only organizations that offer countries assistance, they are major contributors of democracy assistance abroad. In terms of UN electoral assistance, we measure whether or not countries received electoral assistance from the United Nations based on data from the UN Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) with an indicator variable called *UN assistance*, coded 1 if a country received any form of electoral assistance from the United Nations and 0 otherwise.¹⁴

International electoral assistance has grown dramatically since the end of the cold war in large part due to the activities of the United Nations. Since its establishment in 1992, the EAD has provided assistance to nearly half of all first postconflict elections occurring in the world, turning down requests from only two postconflict countries, Sri Lanka (2004) and Angola (2008).¹⁵ In addition to the United Nations and other international organizations, like the European Union, which provide assistance to countries, individual countries often provide postconflict countries with electoral assistance as well. Not surprisingly, the United States is a major contributor of democracy assistance abroad. Between 1990 and 2004, the USAID distributed USD 479 million (constant year 2000 USD) in electoral assistance to postconflict countries prior to holding their first postconflict election.¹⁶

Unfortunately, the EAD cannot reliably estimate the amount of assistance it distributes to countries. We are able though to distinguish among the seven types of assistance that countries receive from the United Nations with indicator variables for each: (a) technical assistance and advisory services, (b) coordination and support for international observers, (c) observation, (d) organization and conduct of elections, (e) supervision regarding the validity of all aspects of the electoral process, (f) verification of elections in terms of the extent to which they are free and fair, and (g) support for national observers including training.¹⁷ Technical assistance is the most common type of assistance countries receive from the United Nations with two-thirds of first postconflict elections receiving this type of assistance. It includes a broad range of activities, including material and logistical support to advice on election management, voter registration, polling, and civic education among other forms of support.

We also measure international assistance in terms of the amount of electoral assistance countries received from the USAID between 1990 and 2004 (Finkel et al. 2008).¹⁸ For each election, the variable *USAID* is equal to the total amount of money a country receives from the USAID the year after the civil war ends through the year in which the first postconflict election takes place (measured in terms of millions of constant year 2000 USD). The USAID allocates funds to countries for different purposes. In this analysis, we focus on only two of these purposes, “elections and political processes” and “democracy and governance.” The latter encompasses all funds allocated in the interest of democracy, including elections and political processes as well as the rule of law, civil society, mass media, and so forth.

Since having held elections in the past speaks to a country's underlying disposition for elections, we also measure whether elections prior to the civil war followed a country's constitutionally mandated electoral cycle using an indicator variable called *regular elections* coded 1 if the last two elections in a country followed this electoral cycle, and 0 if they did not. For presidential systems, where presidential and legislative terms are fixed, we code this variable 1 if the last two elections followed a country's electoral cycle exactly and 0 otherwise. For parliamentary systems, where terms are not fixed, we code this variable 1 if each of the last two national elections occurred within the upper bound of a country's electoral cycle and 0 otherwise (e.g., four year or less if the electoral cycle is every four years).

We measure the institutional capacity of countries to hold these elections in terms of their existing infrastructures as well as their potential to construct new ones. Countries that have held elections recently should possess a greater capacity to hold elections in the future. We measure the proximity of *previous elections* with an indicator variable coded 1 if the last national election in a country occurred within ten years of the first postconflict election and 0 otherwise. We also use a continuous variable to denote exactly the number of days that have elapsed between the last national election held in a country and the first postconflict national election. We also denote whether these elections were democratic or not based on a country's Polity II score, ranging from -10 (authoritarianism) to 10 (democracy), that year.

War severity can also affect institutional capacity, with greater severity weakening a country's institutional capacity to conduct elections further. We measure severity in terms of the *duration (months)* of the civil war, as well as the number of *deaths* and *displacements* incurred in the war. Unfortunately, data on deaths and displacements are sparse and not always reliable. We use Doyle and Sambanis (2006) as the source of these data, which we have updated to accommodate our expanded data set.¹⁹

Since economically advanced countries are more likely to have the institutional capacity to conduct elections, we measure economic development in terms of *per capita income* using data from Fearon and Laitin (2003).²⁰ We also measure economic development in terms of *electricity consumption* (kwh per capita) and *paved roads* (percentage of total roads) based on data from the *World Development Indicators Online* (The World Bank 2002). Electricity can advance the electoral process by allowing for computerized registration while paved roads may prevent weather-induced delays in elections by helping to get people to registration centers and polling stations more quickly.

Results

Our analysis of postconflict election timing is based on 136 civil wars that have ended over the post-World War II. Our full data set includes 164 civil wars but we have excluded sixteen civil wars from the analysis because they were ongoing as of December 2008, and twelve civil wars, which resulted in two or more states

that do not participate in joint elections.²¹ Postconflict elections (at either the national or subnational level) have not occurred in three cases: Burma/Mynamar (1960–1995), Somalia (1988–1991), and Sudan (1983–2002), making for a total of 133 first postconflict elections in the analysis. In addition, China has not held national elections following three different civil wars although they have held subnational elections, making for a total of 130 FPnEs included in the analysis.

In Table 1, we explore the international dimensions of postconflict election timing. For ease of interpretation, we present all of our results in terms of hazard rates, that is, the probability that at any given point in time, an event (in this case an election) will occur given that it has not already occurred. Values above 1 increase the likelihood that an election will occur given the fact that it has not already occurred, while numbers below 1 reduce the likelihood that an election will occur given the fact that it has not already occurred.

According to the results in Table 1, civil wars ending in the post–cold war era are more likely to hold postconflict elections than civil wars ending earlier. The effect is not robust across models, however. The post–cold war era is only strongly significant in models 3 and 6, but these models are principally confined to the post–cold war period due to the inclusion of the USAID data. In alternative models, we explore different periodizations of the cold war era, using 1991 as the end point, the year the Soviet Union officially ceased to exist, as well as 1986. Dunning (2004) uses 1986 as the end date of the cold war in his analysis of democratization, arguing that the Soviet Union withdrew from sub-Saharan Africa by this time, facilitating US democracy promotion in the region. Even under these alternative periodizations, however, the cold war era is generally insignificant.

UN intervention also seems to increase the likelihood of countries holding national elections. If we replace UN intervention with all forms of peacekeeping missions, intervention continues to increase the likelihood of holding national elections although at a lower level of significance, suggesting that most of the effect of third-party interventions is due to the United Nations and not smaller regional organizations, like the African Union.

UN electoral assistance, albeit positively associated with election timing, is not significant in any model. In part, this may be because the data do not distinguish between elections receiving extensive support from the UN and those receiving only a modicum of support. However, the amount of assistance that countries receive from the USAID does not have a significant effect on postconflict timing either, according to models 3 and 6. In these models, we investigate the effect of assistance from the USAID for “elections and political processes.” In alternative models, we examine it in terms of all areas of “democracy and governance.” USAID is not significant in these models as well.

A number of factors may be conspiring to produce these results. Our analysis of the United Nations and USAID does not take into account the original need of countries. Potentially, countries that receive a lot of aid from these organizations may

Table 1. International Considerations

	All elections			National elections		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Post-cold war era	1.50 (.37)	1.53* (.35)	4.60** (2.86)	1.28 (.33)	1.33 (.31)	5.64*** (3.57)
UN intervention	1.20 (.21)	1.21 (.21)	0.93 (.19)	1.52** (.27)	1.55** (.28)	1.19 (.27)
UN assistance	1.11 (.25)	1.45 (.47)	1.45 (.47)	1.13 (.29)		1.55 (.52)
Intervening war	0.28*** (.06)	0.28*** (.06)	0.21*** (.06)	0.33*** (.07)	0.34*** (.06)	0.18*** (.07)
UN technical assistance		1.05 (.23)			1.01 (.25)	
USAID			1.00 (.00)			1.00 (.00)
Log likelihood	-501.83	-501.89	-218.65	-491.00	-491.12	-218.01
Observations	133	133	72	130	130	71

Note: Figures represent hazard rates. Standard errors of the coefficients are in parentheses.
 *** $p < .01$. ** $p < .05$. * $p < .10$.

need much more aid than countries that receive a little aid. At the same time, the little assistance that the latter countries receive may be sufficient to help them conduct elections while the larger amount of aid that the former countries receive may not. In our analysis of USAID, we also lose almost half of our observations due to the limited time span for which the data are available.

In Table 2, we build on this analysis by considering various domestic factors, which may affect postconflict election timing. Across all these models, victories significantly decrease the likelihood of holding a postconflict election. In model 7, for example, civil wars that end in victories reduce the likelihood of holding an election by 45 percent over civil wars that end in settlements or truces. In model 10, they decrease the likelihood of holding a national election by 30 percent. Once we control for victories, the main effect for UN intervention in the case of national elections is no longer significant. It is noteworthy that almost three-quarters of the time that the United Nations intervenes in a country following a civil war, it is in the context of a settlement or truce.

Distinguishing between government and rebel victories, as we do in models 8 and 11, reveals that government victories are less likely to result in elections than settlements/truces but rebel victories are not. If we disaggregate the results still further, we find that settlements are less likely than truces to result in postconflict elections but not in the case of national elections. Victories that involve UN intervention are more likely to result in elections than those that do not, according to models 9 and 12. The main effects for victories and UN intervention, and the interaction term between the two, are jointly significant in both models.

Having held elections regularly in the past, which speaks not only to the desire of countries to hold elections in the future but also to their institutional capacity to conduct them, significantly increases the likelihood of holding elections. Across the various models in Table 2, having regularly held elections in the past increases the likelihood of postconflict elections by about 61 to 71 percent. Whether or not the last national election that countries held was within ten years of their first postconflict election does not have a significant effect on the timing of postconflict elections.

In alternative models, we measure the exact number of days that have elapsed from the last national election in a country and the first postconflict election. These models, which include only countries that held elections in the past, suggest that the more time that has elapsed between these two elections the more likely countries are to hold elections in contrast to expectations. The substantive effect is rather trivial, however. We also analyze in separate models the effect of democracy on election timing in terms of the Polity II score of the last election and at the end of the civil war. Neither has a significant effect on timing.

Just as a country's electoral history has a mixed effect on postconflict elections, so does the political system under which countries hold their first postconflict election. While proportional representation, decentralization, and unitary executive systems all speak to the extent to which power is shared by multiple groups in government, only PR and decentralization have a significant effect on election timing.

Table 2. Domestic Considerations

	All elections				National elections			
	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)		
Post-cold war era	1.04 (.24)	0.97 (.21)	1.01 (.23)	1.01 (.25)	1.00 (.25)	0.98 (.25)		
UN intervention	0.86 (.18)	0.89 (.19)	0.64* (.16)	1.29 (.28)	1.28 (.27)	1.01 (.25)		
UN assistance	1.39 (.34)	1.17 (.29)	1.38 (.32)	1.31 (.30)	1.26 (.30)	1.23 (.28)		
Intervening war	0.32*** (.09)	0.31*** (.09)	0.29*** (.08)	0.35*** (.08)	0.35*** (.08)	0.31*** (.07)		
Victory	0.55*** (.11)		0.42*** (.10)	0.70* (.13)		0.55** (.13)		
Victory-rebel		0.81 (.20)			0.76 (.19)			
Victory-government		0.43*** (.10)			0.66* (.15)			
Victory* UN intervention			2.33** (.98)			2.21** (.75)		
Regular elections	1.68** (.37)	1.71** (.37)	1.61** (.35)	1.69** (.38)	1.69** (.38)	1.66** (.36)		
Previous elections	1.27 (.37)	1.14 (.32)	1.22 (.35)	0.88 (.27)	0.85 (.25)	0.84 (.26)		
PR system	1.54** (.30)	1.59** (.33)	1.64*** (.31)	1.63** (.33)	1.65** (.33)	1.69*** (.34)		
Mixed system	1.32 (.39)	1.40 (.41)	1.30 (.38)	1.40 (.51)	1.43 (.52)	1.38 (0.52)		
Unitary executive system	1.02 (.20)	0.96 (.19)	1.04 (.20)	1.16 (.25)	1.15 (.25)	1.15 (0.24)		
Decentralization	1.89*** (.42)	1.98*** (.44)	1.86*** (.40)	1.80** (.44)	1.82** (.44)	1.77** (.42)		
Log likelihood	-487.94	-485.29	-486.44	-479.90	-479.77	-478.68		
Observations	133	133	133	130	130	130		

Note: Figures represent hazard rates. Standard errors of the coefficients are in parentheses.

*** $p < .01$. ** $p < .05$. * $p < .10$.

Across all models in Table 2, proportional representation increases the likelihood of holding an election relative to majority/plurality systems by about 54 to 69 percent, while decentralization increases the likelihood of holding an election relative to centralization by about 77 to 98 percent.

In separate models, we interact each of the different powersharing institutions shown in Table 2 with victories, believing that these institutions are more important in the case of settlements and truces than in the case of victories. Indeed, we find that powersharing institutions significantly increase the probability of an election occurring somewhat more in the case of settlements and truces than in the case of victories, with PR and decentralization having the strongest effects. These effects are true of all elections and national elections in particular.

Finally, in Table 3, we explore the importance of institutional capacity. We have already explored institutional capacity in terms of international aid as well as international peacekeeping forces, which can reduce residual violence so that countries can conduct elections. Here, we examine the importance of economic development and the severity of the previous civil war. Due to missing data, we have substantially fewer observations in these analyses than in previous ones. While economic development in terms of having a higher per-capita income, greater energy consumption and more paved roads, seems to increase the probability that a country will hold an election, the effects are not significant. In terms of civil war severity, the number of displaced persons significantly reduces the likelihood of holding an election and a national election in particular, but the duration of the war and number of deaths incurred by the war do not.

Conclusion

Domestic political actors in post-civil war settings make decisions about the timing of elections based on the balance of power between contending groups in light of international pressures to democratize. In conjunction with our work on the effects of early elections on a return to war (Brancati and Snyder 2009), we demonstrate that the increasingly common combination of early elections and inconclusive civil war outcomes creates exactly the conditions that make elections especially dangerous. International pressures in favor of negotiated settlements together with quick elections have contributed to this trend over the past two decades.

Fortunately, however, international involvement can also create conditions that mitigate the risk of renewed fighting by providing robust peacekeeping, facilitating the demobilization of armed forces, and helping to build effective political institutions. International actors also often back powersharing deals that can stabilize early elections by reducing the costs to powerful actors of losing the election. Thus, international pressure in favor of early elections can strengthen peace when it is accompanied by these stabilizing supports but can undermine peace when it is not backed by adequate means to achieve stable democracy.

A conditional policy prescription follows from this conclusion. In states that are small, pliable, or reasonably well prepared for a democratic transition, international

Table 3. Institutional Capacity

	All elections				National elections			
	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)		
Post-cold war era	1.13 (.38)	1.66 (.70)	1.53 (.86)	1.59 (.72)	2.10 (1.19)	5.05** (3.79)		
UN intervention	0.83 (.35)	1.04 (.55)	1.72 (.99)	1.31 (.47)	2.36* (1.12)	1.57 (.86)		
UN assistance	1.56 (.55)	1.16 (.44)	0.76 (.29)	1.42 (.40)	0.67 (.26)	1.02 (.50)		
Intervening war	0.31*** (.10)	0.26*** (.11)	0.03*** (.04)	0.38*** (.14)	0.49*** (.18)	0.15** (.11)		
Victory	0.61 (.21)	0.43** (.17)	1.21 (.64)	0.78 (.22)	0.68 (.25)	0.73 (.35)		
Regular elections	1.25 (.46)	2.00* (.73)	1.31 (.50)	1.17 (.41)	2.98*** (1.23)	1.44 (.56)		
Previous elections	1.37 (.51)	2.01 (.85)	0.37 (.37)	0.62 (.29)	0.84 (.32)	0.39 (.33)		
PR system	1.77** (.50)	1.25 (.40)	2.38** (1.04)	1.79** (.51)	1.39 (.49)	1.86 (.77)		
Mixed system	1.80 (.78)	1.15 (.61)	4.91** (3.97)	1.49 (.59)	2.24* (1.07)	6.25*** (4.00)		
Unitary executive system	0.74 (.25)	0.71 (.24)	0.54* (.20)	0.96 (.36)	0.81 (.28)	0.61 (.30)		
Decentralization	1.87* (.71)	1.63 (.69)	0.50* (.18)	1.76 (.81)	1.10 (.49)	0.68 (.24)		
Per capita income	1.08 (.11)			1.07 (.11)				
War duration	1.00 (.00)			1.00 (.00)				
Deaths	1.00 (.00)			1.00 (.00)				
Displaced	0.99* (.00)			0.99** (.00)				
Electricity		1.00 (.00)			0.99 (.00)			
Paved roads			1.00 (.01)			0.99 (.01)		
Log likelihood	-227.95	-190.88	-103.31	-221.23	-185.95	-99.94		
Observations	75	67	44	72	64	42		

Note: Figures represent hazard rates. Certain figures have not been rounded because they round to the whole number 1. Rounding, thus, obscures the fact that these variables decrease the likelihood of holding an election. These figures are Displaced (models 13 and 16), Electricity (model 16) and Paved roads (model 17). Standard errors of the coefficients are in parentheses.
 *** $p < .01$. ** $p < .05$. * $p < .10$.

action can help provide the necessary conditions for fairly early elections to succeed without a great risk of a return to civil war, as in Kosovo. However, in states where the task is too difficult for international action to create the conditions for immediate success, like Angola or Liberia, proponents of democratization should consider a longer-term strategy of strengthening facilitating conditions before insisting on elections. Thus, in deciding which countries to invest in and how, international actors must employ nuanced strategies that are appropriate for the countries they seek to aid.

Appendix

First Postconflict Election Coding Criteria

All Elections

1. Countries for which the civil war has resulted in two or more states that do not participate in joint elections are excluded. A country is considered a state when two major powers recognize it. Major powers are those countries that have a veto power on the Security Council: China, France, Russia/USSR, United Kingdom, and the United States.
2. Colonial wars of independence resulting in two separate states (as per 1 above) are excluded.
3. Indirect elections are not included.
4. By-elections are not included.
5. Partial elections are included (i.e., elections to a subset of the seats in a given legislature).
6. Since elections can take place on multiple months, days and even years, only the start date of the election is coded.
7. For civil wars in which it is impossible to precisely determine whether the election proceeded or followed the end of the civil war, the dates of the first two elections are identified and analyzed.

National Elections

8. National elections to any office are included (e.g., presidential, constituent assembly, lower house, and upper house).
9. Elections in which one or more actors in a conflict are not allowed to participate, or choose not to participate, are included.

Subnational Elections

10. Elections for subunits of the state at the level of the municipality/village or above are included.
11. In countries where rebel groups have fought for control over a specific territory and/or where rebels purport to represent a group that constitutes the dominant group in a particular territory, only elections in that territory are included.

12. If fighting involves multiple territories, elections do not have to occur in all regions to be coded as the first subnational elections in a country.

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Notes

1. See Lakhdar Brahimi, "State Building in Crisis and Post-conflict Countries," Seventh Global Forum on Reinventing Government, June 2007.
2. Matching makes possible causal inferences about the effect of election timing on postconflict stability by matching cases of civil wars that are similar to each other in terms of each of the confounding variables identified in this study. If the matching is good and the data are balanced in terms of these covariates, then any observed effect of timing on the likelihood of renewed war is due to election timing and not these other covariates.
3. UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset (Version 1). Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Uppsala University.
4. The Cox model assumes that the survival curves for two different values of a given set of covariates have hazard functions that are proportional over time. We have tested to see if the proportionality assumption holds in this analysis using Kaplan-Meier graphs and Schoenfeld residuals, which it does in all but a couple of models. See endnote 5.
5. This variable representing intervening wars fails to meet the proportionality assumption in Table 2, models 10 to 12. The value of this variable is very similar to models in which it does meet this assumption. If we exclude this variable, which we are not interested in interpreting substantively, the effect of the other variables are the same. If we analyze separately cases in which a new war occurs before an election is held and those in which it does not, the effects of our remaining variables are the same, as they are if we interact the log of time with this variable, a standard remedy for nonproportionality.
6. Unobserved heterogeneity refers to the fact that some countries may be more likely to experience multiple civil wars and multiple first elections for an unknown and unmeasured reason. Event dependence refers to the fact that experiencing one war and one election may affect the likelihood of experiencing others.

7. We provide a table comparing the results across estimation techniques in a supplementary appendix.
8. In particular, we explore frailty models with γ -distributed random effects to deal with unobserved heterogeneity and conditional frailty models, which deal with both unobserved heterogeneity and event dependence (Box-Steffensmeier, de Boef, and Joyce 2007; Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2002). Frailty models have the following additional drawbacks. They are sensitive to the distribution of the frailty term and neither theory nor data can provide insights about the appropriate distribution. Conditional frailty models are also less efficient when there does not seem to be heterogeneity or event dependence, as in this study, and they do not estimate well the baseline hazards for each number of events when a lot of countries do not experience the same number of events, which is arguably also the case here (Box-Steffensmeier, de Boef, and Joyce 2007; Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2002).
9. For five cases, it was unclear whether the civil war ended before or after the date of the first postconflict election. For these five cases, we identified the date of the two most proximate elections and repeated the analysis using both dates.
10. For national elections, in most cases, we were able to obtain a full chronology of national election dates. For subnational elections, this was not the case. We, therefore, recorded our confidence in the election dates in terms of whether the dates were based on (a) a full chronology of all subnational elections in a country, (b) sources referring to an election as the first after a civil war, or (c) neither of these two things. Most dates are verified by at least two resources.
11. Specifically, we derived the data set used in this study in the following manner. We used as the basis of the data set the 151 civil wars included in the Doyle and Sambanis (2006) data set. We then compared the cases of civil war included in Doyle and Sambanis with those included in Fearon and Laitin (2003) and PRIO (2006) to determine if there were cases of civil war in these data sets, which fit the exhaustive criteria of Doyle and Sambanis but that were not included in the Doyle and Sambanis data set either because they were borderline cases or because they occurred after the completion of the Doyle and Sambanis data set, adding thirteen cases for a total of 164 civil wars.
12. We also updated the end dates of two civil wars (i.e., Liberia 1999–2003 and Nepal 1996–2006), which were ongoing in the Doyle and Sambanis (2006) data set, but which have since ended.
13. Although the United Nations serves different roles in postconflict situations (e.g., mediation, observation, peacekeeping, and enforcement), we do not distinguish among them because there are too few cases of each to reliably estimate their individual effects.
14. These data were provided by Robin A. Ludwig (Senior Political Affairs Officer) and Vincent Valdmannis of the EAD. EAD was founded in 1992, and according to Ludwig, electoral assistance was unlikely to have been given out to sovereign states prior 1989 (personal communication, August 22, 2008). We designate elections that occurred before 1989 as not receiving assistance.
15. See the Data and Measurements section for details on these data. Typically, when the EAD is unable to fill a request, it is because it did not receive sufficient lead time. The United Nations requires countries to request aid at least three months in advance of an election.

16. These figures are based on our own calculation of the total amount of assistance for “elections and political processes” given by the USAID since the end of the civil war and the year of the first postconflict election, regardless of whether a new war occurred prior to the election. Data are based on Finkel et al. (2008).
17. See the *Report of the Secretary General: A/49/675*.
18. USAID also publishes data on all forms of aid it distributes since 1945 through “The Greenbook,” but electoral assistance cannot be separated out from other forms of aid using this resource. See U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). *U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants: Obligations and Loan Authorizations*, July 1, 1945–September 30, 2006.
19. See Sambanis and Doyle (2006, 75) for detailed information about the coding of these two variables.
20. See Fearon and Laitin (2003) on how the authors extend the *Penn World Tables* on per capita income using data from the *World Development Indicators* and interpolating missing data with per capita energy consumption.
21. The following civil wars (with the sovereign state created from each war in brackets) are excluded as a result: France/United Kingdom [Cameroon] (1960–1961), China [Taiwan] (1946–1949), Ethiopia [Eritrea] (1974–1991), France [Algeria] (1960–1961), India [Pakistan] (1946–1948), Indonesia [East Timor] (1975–1999), Israel [Palestine] (1987–1997; 2000–ongoing), Korea [North and South Korea] (1949–1953), Pakistan [Bangladesh] (1971–1971), South Africa [Namibia] (1973–1989), and Yugoslavia [Croatia] (1991–1991). Following the state death literature, we consider a country to be a sovereign state when at least two major powers (i.e., China, France, Russia/USSR, United Kingdom, and the United States, the five veto powers on the UN Security Council) recognize it (Fazal 2007).

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