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David L. Richards and Ronald D. Gelleny
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Good Things to Those Who Wait? National Elections and Government Respect for Human Rights*

DAVID L. RICHARDS

Department of Political Science, University of Memphis

RONALD D. GELLENY

Department of Political Science, University of Akron

What exactly is it about democracy that enables it to protect human rights? As part of the research program addressing that important question, this article examines the relationship between democratic national legislative and presidential elections and government respect for human rights in over 100 countries from 1981 to 2000. Both presidential (direct and semi-presidential) and lower-house national legislative elections are found to be reliably associated with greater government respect for human rights, but only in the years following an election and not in election years themselves. Interestingly, national legislative elections were found to be associated with greater government respect for human rights, while presidential elections were associated with less respect for human rights. Consequently, the authors caution that the historically popular concept of electoralism (the use of elections alone as a proxy for full democracy) is unlikely to play a positive part in any policy intending to protect human rights.

Introduction

There is a firm consensus that democracy is reliably associated with greater government respect for human rights (see Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; Poe, Tate & Keith, 1999). Indeed, theorists and policymakers alike have hailed the promotion of democracy as a solu-

tion to the predicament of societal violence. Yet, in the light of this, little attention has been devoted to systematically examining the specific components of institutional democracy that encourage greater government respect for human rights. What is it about institutional democracy that enables it to offer such protection? This is an important question, as continued internal instability in countries making the transition to liberal democracy demonstrates that some crucial democratic features are not taking root (Barkan, 2000; Bejarano & Leongomez, 2002; Ottaway, 2003; Zakaria, 1997). Establishing the linkages between particular institutional elements of democracy and government respect for human rights is

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central to the formulating of successful courses of action designed to effectively decrease societal violence. In addition, the promotion of human rights is often cited as one reason for a foreign policy that includes nation-building.

Hence, in this article we examine the relationship between democratic elections – both national lower-house legislative and presidential elections¹ – and government respect for human rights in over 100 countries from 1981 to 2000. Particularly, we focus on government respect for physical integrity rights, a subset of internationally recognized human rights including the freedoms from torture, summary execution, disappearance, and political imprisonment.

Elections play an important role in configuring the boundaries of acceptable political conduct and providing incentives for appropriate political organization (Jackman, 1986; Przeworski, 1999; Steiner, 1988). They are the primary means to legitimate the leadership and institutions of a democracy – regardless of whether the democracy is established or nascent. Moreover, elections have been increasingly promoted by policymakers and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as the preferred means to temper social violence, including human rights abuses, in countries transitioning from internal conflict and authoritarian rule (African Studies Center, 2002; Lyons, 2002; Snyder, 2000). A successful democratic election introduces numerous issues to the electorate that would not normally be addressed within the political system, thereby encouraging an exchange of ideas among citizens (Wolff, 2003). Davenport (1997) suggests that this activity raises citizen awareness of governmental behavioral regulation. From this, it can be assumed that citizens will express a choice for greater respect for physical integrity rights.

A few studies have looked at the relationship between national elections and govern-

ment respect for various human rights, with mixed results. Davenport (1997, 1998) found national elections to be contemporaneously associated with decreased government censorship and political restrictions. Richards (1999) found national elections to exert no significant contemporaneous effect on government respect for physical integrity rights. However, these studies treat all types of national elections the same, focus on elections as politicizing events rather than representative democratic mechanisms that may produce respect for human rights at much later times due to electoral outcomes, and use very small country samples.

By examining the relationship between democratic national lower-house legislative and presidential elections, we recognize that electorally induced representation and accountability vary among democratic institutions, thereby potentially affecting government response to human rights issues in different ways. Further, the established association between institutional democracy and respect for human rights dictates that we should look at democratic elections (as opposed to demonstration elections or those otherwise in authoritarian states). Our analyses find both presidential and national legislative elections to be reliably associated with government respect for human rights in the years following an election. In particular, we found lower-house national legislative elections to be associated with greater levels of government respect for human rights in the years following an election, while presidential elections are associated with a decrease in government respect for human rights in the year following an election.

Elections and Human Rights

In this section, we discuss, in turn, why national legislative and presidential elections might be associated with levels of government

¹ Our presidential election analyses include direct and semi-presidential (or mixed) elections.

respect for human rights, physical integrity rights in particular. The focus of this discussion is on how elections may affect respect for these rights by what might happen afterwards in a country as a result of a particular type of election. We follow with a brief discussion of elections as politicizing events that may affect respect for human rights immediately before or during an election itself.

National Legislative Elections

The argument that legislative elections should be associated with increased government respect for human rights is not new. James Madison asserted in *Federalist Paper Number Forty-Nine* that 'The members of the legislative department ... are distributed and dwell among the people at large. Their connections of blood, of friendship, and of acquaintance embrace a great proportion of the most influential part of the society. The nature of their public trust implies a personal influence among the people, and that they are more immediately the confidential guardians of the rights and liberties of the people' (Hamilton, Madison & Jay, 1961: 316). Madison suggests that legislators are more likely than executives to bear the interests of the common citizen, because unlike an executive, they are more likely to be drawn from that section of society. Thus, legislators are in better positions to articulate the sentiments and attitudes of the state's citizens. Simply put, legislatures are often the only genuine representative of the people's will and thus more responsive to a wider range of the *populus* (Diamond, 1999; Hague & Harrop, 2004).

Although this study includes states with both unicameral and bicameral legislatures, we focus on democratic national elections for the lower legislative house. Lijphart (1984) points out that in a bicameral system, one chamber usually represents the general *populus*, while the other represents some group of organized interests, such as regions or states. This distinction is important given the

emphasis here on the human rights of the general *populus*. Lower chambers are also, more often than not, popularly elected bodies. Upper chambers, on the other hand, often consist of appointed members or a mix of appointed and elected members. Finally, most legislative systems are dominated by unicameralism. In 2001, of the world's 178 parliaments, 115 possessed only one chamber (Russell, 2001). Moreover, human rights activists are aware that the road toward human rights protection may very well begin in the lower legislative chamber. In 2002, the Tonga Human Rights and Democracy Movement sought changes in Tonga's governmental structure that would better protect human rights. The group lobbied for a split of the existing unicameral legislature into a bicameral legislature where the lower house would be wholly constituted of elected representatives (*Pacific Magazine*, 2002).

National lower-house legislative elections may promote improved government respect for physical integrity rights in several ways. First, legislative representatives have the important function of articulating the will of their constituencies. Although legislative elections can produce an absolute majority for a single party, they often give representation to a number of political parties (Linz, 2003). Consequently, legislative elections provide an incentive for political elites from various ethnic and social groups to pursue political power and seek an opportunity to influence policy in the legislative chamber (Fischer, 2002; Przeworski, 1999). This provides an opportunity for citizens, through their representatives, to convey a choice among various policy alternatives (Dahl, 1989). It is assumed, from this perspective, that citizens would prefer greater, rather than lesser, respect for human rights. Simply put, electoral representation provides citizens with the chance to make a human rights-friendly choice among other alternatives. Representatives who fail to advocate policies favored by their constituency

face the possibility of being expelled from the legislature at the next national election. Thus, national legislative elections can have a strong hand in performing what Bollen (1980) believes to be the principal end of democracy: maximizing the power of non-elites and minimizing the power of political elites.

The representative function of legislatures may also lower the incentive for governments to impose repressive policies. Governments often violate human rights when they feel that their practices or beliefs are under threat from mass protest (Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; Richards, 1999). However, legislative democracy offers political leaders and elected representatives avenues of bargaining and compromise as a 'meaningful alternative for handling conflict if leaders choose to use it' (Henderson, 1991: 123–24). Indeed, Beer & Mitchell (2004) found that, in Mexico in the years 1994–97, state legislative elections were associated with fewer reports of human rights abuses to the authorities. Thus, the political leadership can move away from violence and begin the process of the demilitarization of politics. Over time, party politics establishes itself as the 'only game in town', thereby promoting societal stability and respect for human rights.

Another general function assigned to the legislature is to serve as a deliberative body. Legislative representatives meet, debate, publicize issues, and mobilize support for their policy preferences through the formation of legislative alliances (Fischer, 2002; Lyons, 2002). Key issues can find their way to the legislative floor and eventually set the tone for national political debate, forming part of a continuous election campaign (Hague & Harrop, 2004). Issues like political repression will garner greater national and international exposure, consequently encouraging the mobilization of voters, financial resources, like-minded political elites, and perhaps even international actors. If the costs of government repression are increased, the ruling elites will be encouraged to follow established

democratic norms of conflict resolution. Thus, the deliberation function of the legislative body can increase the accountability of the executive with respect to human rights policymaking.

Many constitutions assign to representatives of the legislature the function of approving legislative bills as well as the responsibility of overseeing the executive. Executive power must be tempered by a procedure of law that allows for some competition of conflicting legislative views (Przeworski, 1999). Accordingly, the preferences of even smaller parties are given the opportunity to weigh in on the policy-making process. Moreover, the oversight function allows representatives the ability to question the government, debate, and investigate the conduct of governmental action, question the legality of policies, and perhaps even charge the executive with wrongdoing. In such situations, the function of legislative oversight provides clear guidelines or boundaries that the executive must respect. As a result, political elites may hesitate to resort to societal violence to accomplish policy goals because of the possible electoral consequences of their action. Thus, they will seek a different and more tolerant approach toward attaining their policy goals (Arendt, 1973; Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; Wolff, 2003).

Furthermore, political elites and their supporters anticipate that they will continue to hold representation in the government and/or the legislature, thereby solidifying a stake in the political system (Linz, 2003). This encourages the continued shift of resources to political rather than military objectives, the continued development of civil society, and the establishment of norms and confidence of democracy and the respect for human rights (Maharramov, 2005). El Salvador provides an example of how legislative elections in a nascent democracy can encourage the demobilization of government troops and the transformation of militias into political parties, thereby overcoming the persistent distrust

among former enemies. The insurgent FMLN successfully converted itself to a legal political party capable of winning significant popular electoral support. It increasingly shifted its focus toward building a national political network and building political alliances with other parties on the left to contest elections (Lyons, 2002).

National Presidential Elections

Presidential elections may encourage or discourage greater government respect for physical integrity rights. On the positive side, presidential elections, like national legislative elections, provide an opportunity for citizens to openly and freely debate political issues. Indeed, the widespread media attention that is generally associated with a presidential race may entice more citizens to get involved with the political campaign and further the democratic norm of political debate. Furthermore, given the modern potential for widespread media coverage, the costs of carrying out a campaign of repression grows considerably. Domestic as well as international actors may react negatively to human rights abuses during the campaign. As such, it is often much more efficient to 'buy off' voters with programs rather than resort to the tool of repression.

Likewise, the national base of political support behind the president allows him/her to rise 'above the political fray' and interject a moderating tone to a contentious debate. In a climate of political turmoil, the president can become a symbol of moderation, producing a calming effect on the domestic environment. As the president of France, for instance, Charles de Gaulle was able to use his national popularity to extract France from Algeria and steer the country clear of the outbreak of a civil war. Thus, without the ability of a leader to balance an unruly legislature, a state may very well experience domestic conflict resulting (almost inevitably) in decreased government respect for physical integrity rights.

Presidential elections may also revive life in a stagnant political climate. A president that is enthusiastic about democratic political reform can inspire citizens to be active participants in the electoral process. Through presidential initiative, the political system can be reformed to allow greater participation by political parties, labor unions, and civil societies. The net result is greater citizen demand for democratic dialogue during elections, thereby reinvigorating the national democratic movement. In the early 1980s, Abdou Diouf, President of Senegal, embarked on a campaign to democratize the country. Diouf not only overturned laws restricting the activities of political parties and organizations, he also approached social groups that had been previously excluded from society. Furthermore, he publicly challenged the corrupt nature of Senegalese politics and actively sought to encourage a more open political system (see Coulon, 1990). As a result of Diouf's policy initiatives, elections replaced political repression, and a marked improvement in human rights was experienced in Senegal.

Although it has been argued that presidential cabinets may not adequately reflect the diverse nature of a state, this may not always be the case. Indeed, in some political arenas, a single party may dominate the legislature. In such a situation, the majority party may dominate the government and/or all important legislative positions. On the other hand, a president may intentionally make his cabinet relatively diverse and reflective of society (Mainwaring & Shugart, 1997). In such cases, presidential elections are likely to promote elections that encourage the involvement of a wide segment of society. Again, citizens can rally around the election campaign as a peaceful means to express their political attitudes and wants.

Finally, the case that presidential rigidity or inflexibility is a serious threat to institutional democracy may be overstated. In fact, many legislative bodies, particularly parliamentary

systems, are characterized by substantial turnover of their legislative members in the government and/or other positions of power. Legislative instability can lead to societal volatility owing to the ineffective nature of policymaking that is often associated with such regimes. In such cases, presidential stability may provide some policy predictability and stability to the state (Mainwaring & Shugart, 1997). A president who is elected for a fixed period is in a position to rise above the partisan and social divisions that typify the legislature and advocate and initiate policies that promote economic growth and social cohesion, thereby reducing the possibility of widespread and violent political discontentment.

On the negative side, the independent power of the office makes the presidency a potentially very lucrative position. Specifically, the president is often endowed with significant constitutional power that is independent of the legislative branch. This relative political independence may tempt a president to label his or her policies as the popular will of the citizenry and label those of political opponents as the selfish designs of special interests. As Linz (2003: 262) warns, a president's demonstration of 'indifference, disrespect, or even blatant hostility toward the political opposition' is not to be minimized. Political stability attained through bargaining and deal-making is sacrificed for contentious politics. Indeed, if political opponents sufficiently threaten or challenge the implementation of presidential policy, the government is likely to turn to repression to subdue the opposition.

Second, the members of the president's cabinet hold their positions solely at the discretion of their chief. In many cases, presidential cabinets lack independent-minded members who are willing to challenge presidential decisions or offer advice that diverges from the status quo. As a result, excluded political opponents will often see an inward-looking presidential office that is arrogant, inflexible, and insensitive to the needs beyond

the electoral base of the president (Shively, 2005). Moreover, an isolated president also undermines party unity. Rogowski (1987: 204) notes, 'where continued control of the nation's most powerful office does not depend on parliamentary majorities, parties can afford greater internal dissension'. In an environment characterized by an arrogant executive office and an incoherent political party, it is not uncommon for presidents to 'grow too big for their boots'. Simply put, there is very little standing in the way of a president intent on extending presidential power and inhibiting the development of the rule of law (Hague & Harrop, 2004; Lijphart, 2000). One thinks of Latin American countries where constitutional term limits were expanded or an ambitious president turned into a dictator.

The scenario increases the fear of the political opposition that they will be permanently excluded from political power. Countries characterized by deep ethnic or cultural divisions are particularly vulnerable in such situations. Since negotiation and bargaining with the executive is not a viable or satisfactory policy option, an alternative strategy for an ethnic group that feels unfairly treated or prosecuted is to take up arms and oppose the executive.

Third, presidential systems are characterized by periods of uninterrupted leadership. That is, presidential systems allow for the president to remain in office for a fixed period of time. As such, it is extremely difficult to remove a president from office, rendering the system inflexible. Consequently, the lack of accountability sharply delineates winners and losers for the entire presidential term of office (Linz, 2003). The presidential 'winner-take-all' format increases the probability that the losers will be left out of participation in governance.

As a result of these factors, presidential candidates may view presidential electoral races as a zero-sum game. Political elites cannot be confident that they will retain a role in the policymaking process, however

limited that role may be. Simply put, political opponents may find the risks of losing a presidential election – the disintegration of the rule of law – to be so great that they are willing to use force to disrupt the political campaign. In return, the incumbent president may decide that the only way to ensure victory and avoid the negative consequences of an electoral loss is to use repression. The result is domestic conflict and greater violations of human rights.

Contemporaneous Effects of Elections

Much anecdotal evidence has shown that elections, as politicizing events, might be associated with increased or decreased respect for human rights in the time period immediately surrounding an election. The fundamental logic of democratic elections providing greater contemporaneous respect for human rights is that they provide an avenue for the peaceful resolution of issues that might otherwise lead to conflict associated with decreased government respect for physical integrity rights. That is, elections provide a channeling mechanism through which citizens can express opinions that, were they not so channeled, might otherwise lead to repression-invoking, non-traditional participation (e.g. riots or strikes). Rather than clashing with political opponents on the streets, democratic elections can induce competing parties to comply with electoral rules and standards. During democratic elections, citizens are generally permitted to discuss contentious issues regularly, mobilize preferences through interest groups, and vote on legislative representatives (Davenport, 1997; Przeworski, 1999; Richards, 1999). Hence, political opponents are not required to resort to radical means, such as national strikes, to express their views.

Instead of pursuing political power through violence and suppression, incumbent governments may find it less costly to moderate their own behavior and submit to political debate

(Przeworski, 1999; Wolff, 2003). Cingranelli & Richards (1999b) provide anecdotal evidence that the time immediately surrounding an election can be a time for worried politicians to grant concessions in order to stay in power. They tie a decrease in political imprisonment in many African states immediately following the Cold War to political elites letting the prison doors open for a time in order to gather the goodwill necessary to win impending elections.

However, we must also recognize that elections, as events, may decrease government respect for human rights. This occurs when political elites resort to violence and intimidation as the most effective way of winning votes (Chaturvedi, 2005). Austin (1994), for instance, has argued that spikes in violence and human rights abuses have accompanied national parliamentary elections in India and Sri Lanka.

The reasoning behind such a negative relationship between elections and respect for human rights stems from the reluctance of incumbent political elites to risk losing their place in power. That is, rather than competing with political opponents through democratic standards, the political elites curb numerous aspects of political life and ratchet up state repression. In some cases, fearing the election of unsympathetic legislators, the military will aggressively involve itself in the electoral campaign. In Colombia, for example, the military has actively involved itself in elections, using violence as a means to suppress its opponents. As a result, opposition groups have likewise turned to violence during electoral campaigns (Bejarano & Leongomez, 2002). The end result has been a series of bloody legislative elections.

A number of examples of government disrespect of physical integrity rights can be found during and after presidential campaigns. For example, in March 2002, more than 3 million Zimbabwean voters cast ballots in a presidential election. However,

rather than being hailed as a triumph of democracy, the presidential election was marked with human rights abuses. During the electoral campaign, the ruling government, headed by President Robert Mugabe, recruited several thousand jobless young men and trained them in paramilitary tactics and the use of force, including torture. They were then unleashed, killing at least 100 political rivals of President Mugabe (Makumbe, 2002; Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2002).

Moreover, elections may also incite nationalistic and ethnic tensions within diverse states (Reilly, 2002; Snyder, 2000). Accordingly, the desire to gain access to the legislature provides an incentive for some political elites in divided states to play the 'ethnic card' at election time, using nationalistic rhetoric to inflame and mobilize voters. These elections lead to abuses of power and reinforce ethnic tensions that are already in a heightened state. In the aforementioned Zimbabwean example, Mugabe urged his supporters to invade the few remaining white-owned farms, resulting in the additional deaths of over 100 white farm owners and black farm workers (Makumbe, 2002). A prominent example of the use of nationalistic rhetoric to garner electoral support is that of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Kupchan, 1998; Lyons, 2002). The 1996 Bosnia and Herzegovina election was characterized by ethnic rhetoric to ensure a strong electoral base for the main political parties. The Serbian Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina warned Bosnian Serbs that a vote against the party was a vote against the Serbian nation (Lyons, 2002). The leading Croatian and Muslim parties made similar chauvinistic statements. The result was a strengthening of national hardliners and a situation that made a travesty of the institutions designed in the Dayton Accord to repair the past communal violence that had characterized the region (Kupchan, 1998).

Data and Models

For its analyses, this article uses a database of information about more than 140 countries from 1980 to 2000.² The country sample is representative of all geographic regions and levels of economic development.³ Countries included in these analyses are those having a population greater than 500,000 and that are included in both the dataset Democratic Electoral Systems Around the World, 1946–2000 (Golder, 2005) and the CIRI Human Rights Dataset (Cingranelli & Richards, 2005).

Dependent Variable: Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights

Physical integrity rights are a subset of internationally recognized human rights and include rights such as freedom from torture, summary execution, disappearance, and imprisonment for political beliefs. The physical integrity rights data used in this article come from the Cingranelli–Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Dataset (Cingranelli & Richards, 2005). The CIRI dataset contains standards-based indicators of the level of government respect for 13 internationally recognized human rights for 195 countries from 1981 to 2005.

The CIRI data describe the human rights practices of governments (and their agents), not overall human rights conditions in a country, which can be affected by non-state actors. The scoring of CIRI indicators of government respect for physical integrity rights is based on information about government respect for these rights found in both Amnesty International's *Annual Report* and the US State Department's annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. It is standard procedure in the systematic study of human rights to check these two sources of information against each other (Gibney & Dalton, 1996;

² The actual number of countries included in a given analysis will vary based on factors such as missing data, the use of lagged variables, some countries not existing for the whole time period, and the number of countries where elected presidents are the head of government.

³ See <http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets>.

McCann & Gibney, 1996; Poe & Tate, 1994; Poe, Tate & Keith, 1999). In the CIRI data, when a discrepancy occurs between the two information sources, Amnesty International's position is treated as authoritative. Poe, Carey & Vazquez (2001) show that these two sources of information have become similar over time in their assessments of government respect for human rights.

We use the CIRI physical integrity rights index as our measure of the level of government respect for this category of human rights (Cingranelli & Richards, 1999a). This index is a nine-point additive scale derived from a Mokken scaling analysis of four ordinal indicators of government respect for physical integrity – the rights against torture, summary execution, disappearance, and political imprisonment. The index ranges from 0 (no respect for any of the four physical integrity rights) to 8 (full respect for all four physical integrity rights). Mokken scaling is a probabilistic cumulative scaling technique, and the homogeneity of the CIRI index was tested using a polychotomous extension of Mokken scaling, because of the ordinal nature of these human rights data.

Cingranelli & Richards (1999a) demonstrate several important attributes of the CIRI physical integrity rights index. First, the four rights in this index are empirically demonstrated to form a strong homogenous scale. Second, the Mokken scaling technique is stochastic – taking error into account when determining whether the crucial assumptions of both single and double monotonicity have been met.⁴ Third, the fact that the assumption of double monotonicity has been met allows this index to reasonably overcome the problem of policy substitutability that is so prevalent in additive indices.

⁴ For an excellent introduction to Mokken scaling and a discussion of its capabilities, see van Schuur (2003). For more details on the physical integrity index used in this article, see Cingranelli & Richards (1999a) and the CIRI Human Rights Data Project Coding Guide at <http://www.humanrightdata.org>.

Legislative and Presidential Elections

Our elections data come from the Democratic Electoral Systems Around the World, 1946–2000 dataset (Golder, 2004, 2005). This dataset contains detailed information about democratic elections in 199 countries from 1946 to 2000 such as the presence and number of legislative and presidential elections, electoral system type, and institution type. Our research question in this article is based on the question ‘What is it about democracy that enables it to protect human rights?’, so, in exploring national elections as a possible contributing factor to democracy's ability to protect human rights, we are interested in only those elections conducted within a democratic framework. Thus, Golder's (2004, 2005) dataset of democratic elections is well suited to our needs. The sources of information used to compile the elections data are listed in Appendices 9 and 10 in Golder (2004).

In our analyses, we use two electoral indicators as the independent variables of chief theoretical interest. The first of these is a dichotomous variable that indicates the presence or absence of a democratic election for the lower house of a national legislature in a given country year. The original indicator in Golder's (2004, 2005) dataset records the actual number of such elections occurring in a given country-year. In our data sample, the maximum number of these elections was two, and these instances accounted for only six (approximately 0.002%) of the cases in our sample. Thus, we dichotomized this variable to indicate only the presence or absence of at least one lower-house national legislature election so that it would be comparable with the presidential election variable (which is dichotomous in its original form). We felt the gain in comparability was worth the dichotomization.⁵

⁵ To be cautious, we ran versions of our models using the original electoral count variable, and no difference was seen in those results compared to the results reported in this article.

Our second elections variable indicates the presence or absence of a democratic presidential election in either a semi-presidential or fully presidential system. Our presidential election analyses do not include non-democratic or pure-parliamentary systems. Countries were sorted among these categories using the institution-type variable from Golder's (2004, 2005) dataset. To account for differing levels of executive authority across different systems with presidential elections, we add to our presidential models a seven-point ordinal variable from the Polity IV dataset accounting for the 'extent of institutionalized constraints on the decision-making powers of chief executives' (Marshall & Jaggers, 2003: 22). A higher score on this indicator indicates greater executive constraints, that is, less executive autonomy.

Alternative Explanations

Because national elections could not possibly be the only factor influencing the level of government respect for physical integrity rights, four variables found by previous research to reliably affect government respect for human rights are included in the models for analysis (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2006a,b; Henderson, 1991, 1993; Mitchell & McCormick, 1988; Poe & Tate, 1994; Poe, Tate & Keith, 1999; Richards, Gelleny & Sacko, 2001; Zanger, 2000). These four variables represent a country's level of interstate conflict, level of domestic conflict, level of economic development, and population size.⁶ Below, we account for our data sources.

Indicators of a country's level of interstate conflict and intrastate conflict are drawn from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset Version 3-2005 (Gleditsch et. al., 2002). These variables are originally both four-point scales ranging from 0 to 3, as follows: no con-

flict (0), minor armed conflict (1), intermediate armed conflict (2), and either interstate or intrastate war (3) (Strand et al., 2005: 15). However, we follow the advice of the coding manual and collapse the original indicators into three-point scales by merging the minor and intermediate categories. Our measures of a country's population size and level of economic development come from the World Bank's World Development Indicators on CD-ROM (World Bank, 2005). Following the aforementioned body of literature, we use the logged per capita value of a state's gross domestic product (GDP) (purchasing power parity) as our indicator of economic development. Owing to their distributional nature, our indicators of both population size and economic development are logged (natural) for use in the analyses (Tufté, 1974).

Findings

Because our dependent variable is ordinal, ordered probit is used to estimate the models.⁷ Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, the most frequently used technique in quantitative human rights research, assumes the distance between categories of a dependent variable to be equal. However, this assumption does not hold true for ordinal measures, by definition. Thus, using OLS on an ordinal dependent variable can lead to biased inferences, particularly an increase in the risk of rejecting a true hypothesis (McKelvey & Zavoina, 1975). Consequently, ordered probit is a more suitable estimation technique (McKelvey & Zavoina, 1975; Richards, Gelleny & Sacko, 2001; Long & Freese, 2006).

All standard errors reported are sandwich, or 'robust' standard errors. These standard errors account for the fact that while observations are assumed to be independent across countries, they are not necessarily assumed to be independent within countries in the panel

⁶ We also wish to note a methodological reason for the inclusion of population size. Since the dependent variable (government respect for physical integrity rights) is based on event count information but does not control for population size itself, differences in population size must be accounted for in any models using these data.

⁷ Stata 8 was employed to produce the statistics used in this article.

data. Many quantitative human rights studies also include a lagged dependent variable to control for possible serial correlation. However, Achen (2000) demonstrates that the threat from serial correlation is to the standard errors, as coefficients remain unbiased in a reasonably large sample. Therefore, properly applied sandwich standard errors should correct this potential bias. Furthermore, he establishes that a lagged variable can 'artificially' dominate and bias a regression no matter the number of exogenous variables and no matter the true amount of explanatory power of the lagged term. Ill-effects are most likely when variables are heavily trended. We investigated the effect of including a lagged dependent term in our models, and, while no change was found in the relationship between elections and respect for human rights, we did see bias of the sort suggested by Achen (2000) (a coefficient taking the wrong sign) in the external conflict indicator – our variable with the least variance.⁸

Legislative Elections

Table I shows the results of four ordered probit models estimating the relationship between the presence of national lower-house legislative elections and the level of government respect for physical integrity rights. The difference between these models is the specification of the elections variable. Model 1 tests for a contemporaneous effect of elections upon respect for these rights. On the other hand, Model 2 tests the effect of an election at time $t-1$ upon respect for physical integrity rights

⁸ When a lagged dependent variable is added, the external war indicator becomes statistically significant in a *positive* direction. That is, higher levels of external conflict lead to greater respect for physical integrity rights. We can find no studies to corroborate this very counter-intuitive finding. We investigated outlying cases and even controlled for outlying events that would couple reasonable respect for human rights with elections and high levels of external conflict (e.g. the first Gulf War), and these were not responsible for this finding. However, the insignificant external war coefficient findings we report in the article can be corroborated by Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui (2005) and Abouharb & Cingranelli (2006a,b).

at time t . Models 3 and 4 test lagged electoral effects of two and three years.

The decrease in N across Models 1 through 4 is due to increases in the lag. The similitude of N in Models 1 and 2 is due to the fact that while there was electoral data for 1980 (so as to supply the lag for Model 2), there were no human rights data for that year, so it was not included in the contemporaneous analysis (Model 1).

All four models in Table I are shown to be significantly different from their null counterparts. Model 1 shows no reliable contemporaneous relationship between the presence of a national lower-house legislative election and government respect for physical integrity rights. That is, we see no evidence to suggest that these elections, as contemporaneously politicizing events, affect respect for these rights. However, Models 2 and 3 show that these elections are associated with greater levels of respect for these rights during the two years following the holding of the election. Converting and exponentiating these election coefficients tells us that a legislative election increases the odds of high respect for physical integrity rights by approximately 21% and 26% one and two years following the election, respectively.⁹ Model 4 demonstrates that any such effects cease to be reliably associated with respect for physical integrity rights after two years.

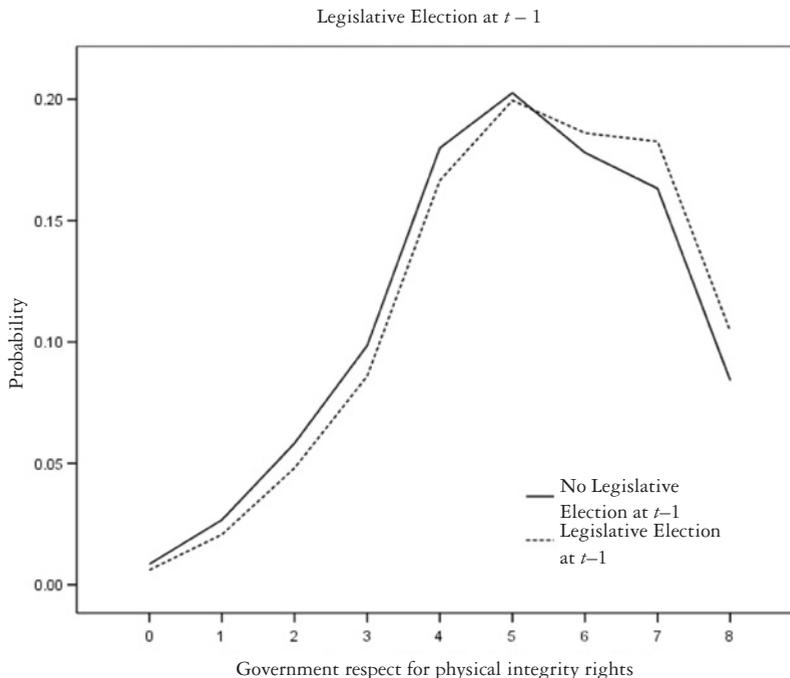
The variables representing alternative hypotheses perform consistently across all four models. In particular, population size, level of economic development, and level of domestic conflict (which is a particularly strong indicator) were associated with the dependent variable. We did not find a reliable relationship between level of external conflict and government respect for physical integrity rights, although one was found by Poe & Tate (1994) and Poe, Tate & Keith (1999). Our finding is not the first, however. Recently, several other

⁹ Ordered probit coefficients can be converted for exponentiation by multiplying them by 1.6 (see Liao, 1994).

Table I. Ordered Probit Estimates of the Relationship Between the Presence of Democratic Legislative (Lower-House) Elections and Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Population size	-.223** (.014)	-.224** (.014)	-.229** (.014)	-.230** (.015)
Economic development	.382** (.014)	.380** (.014)	.390** (.015)	.395** (.015)
External conflict	.001 (.045)	.001 (.044)	.015 (.046)	.018 (.047)
Domestic conflict	-.674** (.034)	-.635** (.034)	-.684** (.035)	-.683** (.037)
Legislative election	.018 (.050)	—	—	—
Legislative election $t-1$	—	.121** (.049)	—	—
Legislative election $t-2$	—	—	.140** (.051)	—
Legislative election $t-3$	—	—	—	.070 (.052)
Log likelihood	-4,563	-4,554	-4,304	-4,069
$P > \chi^2$	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	2,555	2,551	2,421	2,286

Figures in parentheses are sandwich (robust) standard errors; ** $p \leq .05$.

Figure 1. The Impact of a Legislative Election at $t-1$ on Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights

large-N studies (e.g. Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2006a,b; Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui, 2005) have also found no reliable relationship between level of external conflict and government respect for physical integrity rights.

Figure 1 shows the effect of a national legislative election at time $t-1$ on the probability of a country receiving a particular score on the CIRI index of government respect for physical integrity rights.¹⁰ Remember that a higher score on the CIRI index means greater respect for these rights. The dashed line in each graph represents the probability of receiving a given CIRI score, given an election. The solid line represents the probability of receiving a given CIRI score if no such election were held.¹¹ Thus, the difference (or visually, the space) between the solid and dashed lines represents the impact of an election on government respect for physical integrity rights.

Given that the ordered probit coefficient was positive, we would expect an election to lower a country's probability of ending up with a CIRI index score indicating 'poor' respect for physical integrity rights and increase its probability of ending up with a CIRI index score indicating 'good' respect. But where does 'poor' respect end and 'good' respect begin? The two lines in Figure 1 give us slightly different answers to this question, but taken together, these lines say that, at least in these two country samples, the threshold occurs around a CIRI score of 5. This threshold makes sense, as Cingranelli & Richards (1999a) report that it is at a score of 5 that most countries' governments begin to manifest at least some respect for all four physical integrity rights. In Figure 1, you can see the threshold by noting where the dashed

line intersects with, and begins to rise above, the solid line. It is at this point where elections begin to increase the probability of falling into these CIRI scores.

Presidential Elections

Table II shows the results of four ordered probit models estimating the relationship between the presence of democratic presidential elections and the level of government respect for physical integrity rights. Differences in N and specification among the models are due to the lagged terms, just as in Table I. The Ns for analysis in Table II, however, are lower than those in Table I, as we include only those countries with democratic presidential and semi-presidential elections in Table II.¹²

Table II shows no contemporaneous relationship between the holding of a presidential election and the level of government respect for physical integrity rights. Model 6 does show, however, presidential elections to be associated with lesser levels of respect for these rights the year following an election. Converting and exponentiating this coefficient tells us that a presidential election in the previous year reduces the odds of high respect for physical integrity rights by approximately 29%. Although it is not represented in Table II for sake of space, we did test for a fourth-year association and none was found. The variables representing the alternate hypotheses perform as in Table I.

Figure 2 shows the effect of a presidential election at time $t-1$ on the probability of a country receiving a particular score on the CIRI index of government respect for physical integrity rights. Comparing Figure 2 with Figure 1, we see that the greatest impact of these two types of elections on human rights comes at identical CIRI scores: 4 and 7. Given the position of the greatest impact of these two

¹⁰ Only one elections graph is shown here because the impacts of legislative elections at $t-1$ and $t-2$ across the CIRI score value range are nearly identical.

¹¹ The base probabilities for Figures 1 and 2 are determined by their country samples. Remember that the presidential election analysis uses a subset of the legislative election sample and is heavy on countries from Latin America and Africa.

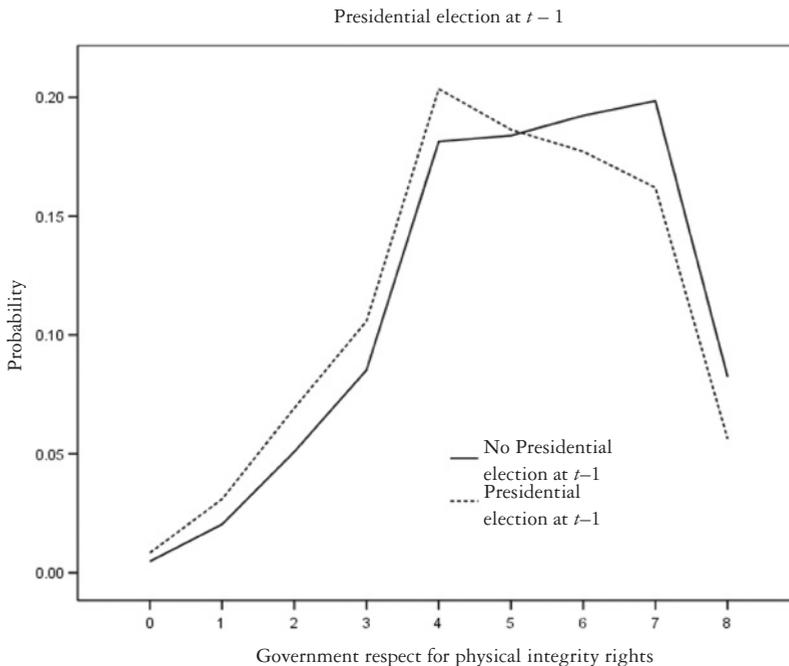
¹² Our theoretical review does not lead us to anticipate non-democratic or parliamentary system-based cases contributing substantively to our presidential analyses.

Table II. Ordered Probit Estimates of the Relationship Between the Presence of Democratic Presidential Elections and Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights

	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>	<i>Model 7</i>	<i>Model 8</i>
Population size	-.259** (.031)	-.259** (.031)	-.268** (.032)	-.275** (.032)
Economic development	.305** (.036)	.301** (.036)	.305** (.037)	.305** (.038)
External conflict	.082 (.076)	.071 (.077)	.098 (.078)	.102 (.078)
Domestic conflict	-.856** (.060)	-.862** (.060)	-.862** (.061)	-.876** (.062)
Executive constraint	.103** (.037)	.103** (.036)	.097** (.038)	.096** (.040)
Presidential election	.038 (.100)	—	—	—
Presidential election <i>t</i> -1	—	-.198* (.105)	—	—
Presidential election <i>t</i> -2	—	—	-.036 (.111)	—
Presidential election <i>t</i> -3	—	—	—	.089 (.106)
Log likelihood	-1,109	-1,105	-1,070	-1,025
P > χ^2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	631	630	609	585

Figures in parentheses are sandwich (robust) standard errors; * $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$.

Figure 2. The Impact of a Presidential Election at *t*-1 on Government Respect for Physical Integrity Rights



types of elections and that changes in CIRI scores are typically small, we could infer that both types of elections have their greatest impact on those countries that already have a reasonably high level of government respect for physical integrity rights. Also, presidential elections seem to have a greater impact than do legislative elections on countries with lower levels of respect.

Both the legislative election and presidential election variables at $t-1$ were reliably associated with respect for human rights at time t . Legislative elections were shown to have a positive effect, while presidential elections were shown to have a negative effect on government respect for human rights. The question then arises, what if these elections occur at the same time? We ran four further ordered probit models like those in Tables I and II, this time examining the effects of simultaneous legislative and presidential elections. There was one finding of significance, again at time $t-1$. Given both national presidential and legislative elections in the previous year, presidential elections reduce the odds of high respect for physical integrity rights by approximately 35%. No such reliable effect was found for legislative elections.¹³

Conclusions

In this article, we empirically examine the relationship between two types of democratic national elections and the level of government respect for physical integrity rights, a subcategory of internationally recognized human rights. By doing so, we contribute to what is known about why/how institutional democracy provides protection for physical integrity rights and, perhaps, other types of human rights as well. We found both

national lower-house legislative elections and presidential elections to be associated with government respect for physical integrity rights in the years after an election has taken place. Interestingly, we found national lower-house legislative elections to be associated with greater government respect for physical integrity rights, while we found presidential elections to be associated with less government respect for physical integrity rights.

We found no evidence to suggest that elections, as contemporaneously politicizing events, are reliably associated with government respect for physical integrity rights. This, of course, does not mean that elections are never accompanied by related surrounding violence; both a large literature and examples used in this article illustrate that they sometimes are. However, the finding that elections, as events, are not reliably coupled with related human rights abuse when looking across space and time may be taken as good news.

National legislative lower-house elections were found to be associated with increased levels of government respect for physical integrity rights in both the first and second years following the election. That legislative elections, in general, were found to be reliable associates of government respect for human rights makes sense. Indeed, in some countries, it is legislatures that are endowed with control over human rights-protecting mechanisms. According to the South African constitution, for example, the legislature controls membership of the office of public protector; and both the South African Human Rights Commission and the Commission on Gender Equality are accountable to the legislature.

Further, the lagged findings make sense from a number of perspectives, and these provide strong clues to the directions that future research might take. Perhaps the most interesting of these perspectives derives from looking at government respect for human rights as a policy output. Social welfare expenditure literature links the electoral success of

¹³ We do not report all these detailed findings, owing to space limitations in the face of only one statistically significant coefficient of interest. These full findings can be reproduced using the Stata 'do-file' and replication dataset made available by the authors at <http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets>.

parties representing those who stand to benefit from these expenditures to the enactment of policies actually making these expenditures (e.g. see Brown, 1995; Budge, 1994). It could well be that the electoral success of parties representing those persons (or societies) most requiring human rights protections is a key to delivering policies protecting human rights. The basic assumption of this logic, that most persons in most societies do not wish to have their human rights violated, seems safe – particularly regarding rights such as torture, disappearance, summary execution, and political imprisonment. Moreover, that the protective benefits of legislative elections seem rather short-lived may indicate that it is regularity in elections that is of key importance. The two-year threshold seen in the findings may be the time it generally takes for any new representatives or parties-in-power to be completely assimilated into the group of elites who control the regime.

Presidential elections, however, were found to be associated with less respect for human rights in the year immediately following an election. Moreover, our findings reveal that if both types of elections (legislative and presidential) were to be held simultaneously, presidential elections reduce the odds of high respect for physical integrity rights in the year following the election, while legislative elections revealed no such association. Our findings appear to lend credence to the argument that the rigidity and winner-take-all structure of many presidential systems can indeed contribute to the abuse of human rights. The continued abuse of human rights by Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe in the year following the presidential election presents a poignant case in point.

The findings of our article have several implications for academics and policymakers alike. First, to the extent that government respect for human rights is important to a foundation underlying democratic stability, the finding that legislative elections were associated with greater and longer-term

protections than presidential elections offers support for the thesis of Linz (1994). Moreover, we demonstrated that different components or mechanisms of institutional democracy can influence government respect for human rights differently. This finding only encourages the continued examination of the relationship between democracy and government respect for human rights. Finally, given the shifting security atmosphere in which politicians function, it is clear that the popular notion that democratic elections will translate into improved government respect for human rights is highly questionable. If the goal is to improve global respect for human rights, policymakers must carefully promote democratic change/mechanisms in the correct manner.

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- DAVID L. RICHARDS, b. 1968, PhD in Political Science (Binghamton University, SUNY, 1999); Assistant Professor, University of Memphis (2005–); Co-Director, CIRI Human Rights Data Project (<http://www.humanrightsdata.org>). Most recent publication: 'Banking Crises, Collective Protest and Rebellion' (*Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 2006). Current research interests: human rights, globalization, measurement.
- RONALD D. GELLENY, b. 1963, PhD in Political Science (Binghamton University, SUNY, 2002); Assistant Professor, University of Akron (2006–); current main interests: political economy and political behavior. Latest publication: 'Banking Crises, Collective Protest and Rebellion' (*Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 2006).