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on Democracy Studies*



Election Management Bodies and Public
Confidence in Elections:
Lessons from Latin America

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William and Kathy Hybl Democracy Studies Fellowship Paper

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Abstract

Voter confidence in elections is critical, as confidence has an effect on the legitimacy of elected officials, support for government policies and institutions and the quality of democratic representation. However, few studies examine how attitudes towards Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and the nature of EMBs influence individual perceptions of election quality and political participation. Using public opinion data from 18 Latin American countries, as well as aggregate data on the institutional design of EMBs, this study attempts to fill this gap in the literature. I find individuals tend to have greater confidence in EMBs that are non-partisan, independent and professional, although the relationship is not strong. Second, I find that confidence in EMBs is a strong predictor of voter confidence in election outcomes. Finally, I find that low confidence in election outcomes can reduce the individual likelihood of voting.

Introduction

Several studies suggest election administration is a key variable in understanding democratic transitions and for explaining democratic consolidation (Pastor 1999; Mozaffar and Schedler 2002; Hartlyn, McCoy and Mustillo 2008). Many new democracies created Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) as institutional anchors to assist in the development of free, fair and accurate elections (López-Pintor 2000; Wall et al. 2006). While specific duties of EMBs differ across countries, typically they are involved in all aspects of elections, including registering candidates, regulating campaign finance, monitoring political party activities, maintaining voter registration databases, polling place operations, publishing official election results and resolving many types of election-related disputes. In developing democracies without a history of strong democratic institutions, EMBs can help promote or detract from, the credibility of the election process and ultimately, the regime itself, depending on the perceived legitimacy of the EMB.

Different institutional structures of EMBs across states impact the political context in which election outcomes are perceived to be more or less fair, and more or less fraudulent. For example, some EMBs are highly partisan institutions that may be perceived to be biased in favor of the governing party or against small opposition parties. Others are staffed by election professionals considered to be independent of political parties. Several scholars argue that EMBs closely tied to political parties and the government may reduce the perceived independence of the institution, and hence, confidence in election outcomes (Elkit and Reynolds 2002; Hartlyn et al. 2008). Voter confidence in election outcomes is critical in these newly democratic states. A process seen as open and fair will promote legitimacy of the state and its efforts in building democratic institutions. Research indicates confidence in governing institutions, especially procedural fairness, promotes regime support and compliance with government order and greater support for new government policies (Braithwaite and Levi 1998; Tyler 2001). Thus, such perceptions of the election process are critical for the legitimacy and maintenance of a democratic state.

Yet, given the importance political elites have ascribed to the characteristics of EMBs during transitions towards democracy (e.g. Lehoucq and Molina 2002; Eisenstadt 2004), and the perception among election assistance practitioners that EMBs have an impact on public confidence in elections (e.g. Wall et al. 2006), little work has examined whether citizens perceive EMBs as an important factor influencing confidence in election outcomes. The present study addresses this gap by examining voter confidence in elections in Latin America.

The conduct of free and fair elections is at the heart of the democratic process. Elections serve as the institutional mechanism within a democracy to induce responsiveness among rulers and also to ensure that these same rulers are held accountable for their actions (Kitschelt 2000). If the winners and losers in an election fail to regard the outcome as legitimate, voters and candidates will fail to feel represented by public officials, and in extreme cases, a severe political crisis may result (Atkeson and Saunders 2007; Alvarez, Hall, and Hyde 2008; Birch 2008). Believing an election is legitimate is especially important in

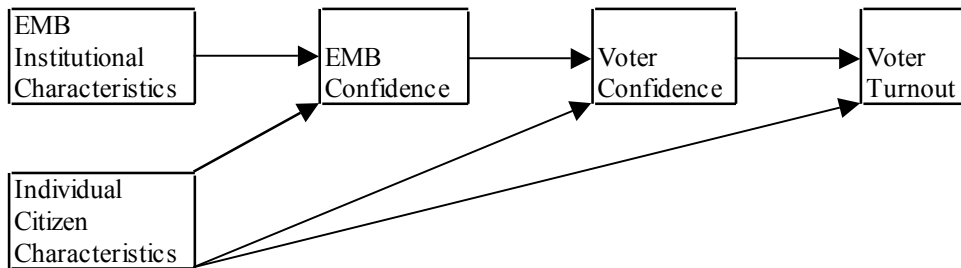
developing democracies, where democratic norms are still evolving. Even if a political crisis is not imminent, there are other political consequences, such as reduced legitimacy of and compliance towards new state policies (Braithwaite and Levi 1998; Tyler 2001). Voter confidence in election results is crucial to avoid these outcomes.

One of the most important ways in which elections can be regarded as legitimate is through the development of credible election administration institutions (López-Pintor 2000; Wall et al. 2006). EMBs that are independent from interference by other government institutions and political interests, impartial in their decision-making and professional in their make-up are considered a crucial component for conducting a free and fair election in newly democratic states (Wall et al. 2006; Hartlyn et al. 2008). EMBs with excessive partisan influence or exclusive commissions that limit political input in the administration of elections may lead to a perceived lack of professionalism and impartiality that lead citizens to question the fairness of the election process. Citizens may also question the validity of election results due to a perceived lack of professionalism in the conduct of elections or as a result of perceived bias in electoral administration. Therefore, individuals who have little confidence in the EMB may have reduced confidence in the accuracy of how ballots are counted. Such lack of confidence in election results may have additional consequences, such as reduced electoral participation, or an increased propensity to engage in protest activity.

Individuals learn about EMBs through personal experience with elections, the media and political elites. Elections are the most frequent way in which individuals interact with their government. If problems arise in obtaining voter identification or voters arrive at the polls to find they are not on the list of registered voters, they may question the professionalism of the EMB. In addition, if polling places open late, close early, never open at all, are poorly run or election officials fail to bar political activists who may intimidate voters from the polling location, voters may develop negative opinions towards the administration of elections or feel the EMB is biased towards certain political interests. The media and political parties also provide information about EMBs to their viewers and supporters. If there is a question of political bias within the EMB, excluded political parties are likely to publicly question the independence and legitimacy of the EMB. Furthermore, during a campaign, the media is likely to publish any problems that arise in the running of the election, such as problems with the voter rolls, inadequate training of polling officials or questionable decisions taken by election commissioners that may introduce bias into the election process. For these reasons, not only is it likely that individuals will develop opinions about the quality of the election and the legitimacy of the EMB, it is important to understand how these attitudes influence other political attitudes and behavior.

However, little research examines how the administration of elections and the nature of EMBs relate to individual perceptions of election quality, overall voter confidence in the election process and voter turnout (López-Pintor 2000, 110). I argue in this paper that confidence in a country's EMB has significant influence on voter confidence, which in turn, influences voter turnout. Figure 1 presents the proposed detailed theoretical model. I suggest that characteristics of EMBs influence the level of individual confidence in the institution. Confidence in the EMB then influences the level of confidence individuals have in the quality of elections, which then affects individual decisions about political participation.

Figure 1. Model of how EMBs influence individual attitudes and behavior



Previous Research

While the design of EMBs varies widely across states, the most common model across the globe in recently democratized or democratizing regions such as Africa and Latin America is an autonomous, permanent and professional EMB. Fifty-five percent of EMBs across the globe follow the *independent* model, 26% of EMBs exist as part of the national government and 15% have a mixed model of independent and government-run EMBs (Wall et al. 2006, 8). Even in the U.S., some election experts are now advocating a move towards non-partisan, independent and professional EMBs at the state-level (CDEM 2009).

Nevertheless, in a number of states, partisan influence in the conduct of elections has been a controversial issue. For example, Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) faced credibility problems following the 2003 selection of commissioners to the IFE, where the opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) was excluded from the nomination process by a coalition of National Action Party (PAN) and Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) legislators (Lawson 2004; Eisenstadt and Poiré 2006; Estévez, Magar and Rosas 2008). The politicization of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) in Nicaragua following constitutional and electoral reforms in 2000 also had an impact on the perceived legitimacy of the election process in that country, due to the exclusion of a number of smaller opposition parties from the EMB in favor of the larger Sandinista National Liberation Front and Constitutional Liberal Party (Hoyt 2004; Carter Center 2007). However, there are a number of cases where partisan influence in the EMB has not affected the legitimacy of election administration. Uruguay, the most well-known example in Latin America, includes partisan representatives at the national level in the country's EMB, the *Corte Electoral*, as well as at the sub-national level with popularly elected departmental level officers (López-Pintor 2000, 153-65).

The importance of election administration issues in the relative success of democratic transitions has been noted in a number of Latin American states (Hartlyn 1998; Lehoucq and Molina 2002; Eisenstadt 2004). The development of credible EMBs has also been important in the development of democracy in a number of African states (Mozaffar 2002; Elkit and Reynolds 2002), India (Singh 2004) and Asia (Lopez-Pintor 2000; Wall et al. 2006). Even in countries that have transitioned to a democracy, EMBs continue to be well known and sometimes controversial institutions. This is seen in recent developments in Mexico, continued controversy over partisan influence in the EMB in Nicaragua and concerns of executive influence in the EMB in Venezuela (Kornblith 2003; 2007).

Despite the importance of EMBs in democratization, few studies have looked at how EMBs influence confidence in elections. Research on voter confidence has so far taken two different approaches. The first approach is to explain the determinants of voter confidence. A cross-national analysis of 28 countries that combines country and individual level data suggests formally independent EMBs are related to lower levels of voter confidence (Birch 2008), a somewhat counterintuitive finding considering the widespread norm in the election community in favor of independent, non-partisan EMBs (IDEA 2002; Wall et al. 2006). However, the validity of this finding is questionable for a number of reasons. Birch (2008) combines western, industrialized democracies with long histories of democratic elections, with a number of third-wave democracies. Election administration institutions in 'old' democracies were typically developed under a different historical context. Third-wave democracies, on the other hand, developed EMBs as a response to questions over the ability of authoritarian regimes to hold free and fair elections in a transition context. These newer democracies do not have a long history of conducting democratic elections, and questions of fraud are still salient. Second, older democracies typically have strong civil service traditions with non-partisan bureaucracies, while many third-wave democracies are still struggling with partisan influence and a lack of professionalism in administrative bodies (Geddes 1994; Linz and Stepan 1996). For these reasons, Birch's findings may be an artifact of her case selection.

Other studies have suggested that confidence in election administrators is related to confidence in election outcomes. In a study of Latin American parliamentary elites, Barrientos del Monte (2008, 17) found significant correlations between confidence in EMBs and confidence in election outcomes in some countries, but not others. In the United States, one study found that increased confidence in the county clerk, the main election administrator in many U.S. counties, led to greater voter confidence (Atkeson and Saunders 2007).

At the aggregate level, one study suggested that in Latin America, independent, non-partisan EMBs were positively associated with higher quality elections (Hartlyn et al. 2008). These authors coded 104 Latin American elections over a 23-year period as acceptable, flawed or unacceptable. Using a combination of reports from domestic and international election observers, media assessments and country experts, Hartlyn et al. (2008, 77-78) coded elections based on perceptions of the procedural fairness and technical soundness of the election process. Independent, non-partisan and professional EMBs were found to be positively associated with acceptable elections as defined by elites. However, it is unclear whether such factors influence individual level opinions regarding the quality of elections.

Factors other than election administration institutions have also been found to be important predictors of confidence such as: knowledge of problematic election processes outside one's own voting experience (Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008), type of voting technology used, mode of voting and support for the winner (Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008; Atkeson and Saunders 2007). A number of demographic and socio-economic characteristics have also been found to be related to voter confidence (Atkeson and Saunders 2007; Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008; Birch 2008).

The second approach is to look at other types of political behavior, to determine if voter confidence has an influence on participation, such as voter turnout. In the US context, Alvarez, Hall and Llewellyn (2008) suggest that voters who are less confident in the election process may be less likely to turnout, although the evidence is weak, while Ansolabehere and Persily (2008) find no relation between perceptions of fraud and turnout. Similarly, studies of Mexico suggest that individuals less confident in the cleanliness of elections are less likely to vote (McCann and Domínguez 1998; Levin and Alvarez 2009). More general literature on trust in government has failed to find much convincing evidence that relates trust to voter participation (see Levi and Stoker 2000 for a review), although these findings may be dependent on the various levels of institutional strength between new and old democracies. In addition, some studies suggest that declining support for or trust in government institutions may lead to an increase in protest activity and other forms of participation outside institutional channels (Muller and Jukam 1977; Muller, Jukam, and Seligson 1982), while others have suggested support for democratic institutions can increase behavioral support for democratic government (Gibson 1996).

These studies provide some evidence that election administration and confidence in institutions matter, while others fail to look at multiple aspects of election administration using aggregate and individual level data. This research advances the study of election administration and voter confidence in a number of ways. First, this study applies cross-national individual level data to questions regarding EMBs, voter confidence and turnout, extending the range and scope of research in this area. Second, this research focuses exclusively on democracies in developing countries, unlike previous studies that looked at voter confidence (e.g. Birch 2008) in developed countries. Third, this study builds off of previous work by providing novel measures of election administration institutions. And finally, this study advances the theoretical discussion on how election administration impacts individual level attitudes and behavior.

The relatively new area of research on voter confidence has still not answered a number of important questions. This present study has two main research goals. The first goal is to examine the relationship between confidence in EMBs and voter confidence. The second goal is to look at the influence of voter confidence on turnout. Public opinion data collected by Latinobarómetro in 18 Latin American countries¹ and aggregate country-level data collected from a number of sources will be used to achieve these goals.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. I first discuss the main dependent variables in the analysis, voter confidence and voter turnout. Next, I discuss the main independent variables, focusing on EMB characteristics, confidence in EMBs and knowledge of vote buying as well as political variables, such as partisanship, and a number of socio-demographic characteristics. Third, I present empirical results. And the final section concludes.

¹Available at <http://www.latinobarometro.org>. I draw from data from the 1997-2006 surveys, although the multivariate analysis relies on the 2006 dataset due to the inclusion of a number of necessary variables not available in other years. While relying on a single year when countries have different election cycles, the 2006 data is ideal for looking at these questions since 13 of the 18 countries under study had some type of national election in 2006, either presidential, legislative or a national referendum.

Voter confidence and turnout

In recent years, a number of scholars have begun to examine voter confidence in the election process; a specific type of confidence that is much more narrow than the vast research on trust in government. In the United States, scholars have defined voter confidence as the trust voters have that their ballot was counted as intended (Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn 2008; Atkeson and Saunders 2007). Recent work has also demonstrated that voter confidence is a unique measure, different from trust in government, and is not just a rationalization based on evaluations of incumbents and government in general (Atkeson, Alvarez and Hall 2009; Gronke and Hicks 2009). This narrow focus at the local level makes sense considering that elections are administered at the county or jurisdictional level in the U.S. However, in many countries, and especially in Latin America, the final arbiter on election results is a national level institution, typically a national electoral council or tribunal that produces the official results and resolves post-electoral conflicts. Thus, in a comparative context, it seems more appropriate to define voter confidence as confidence in the general election results.²

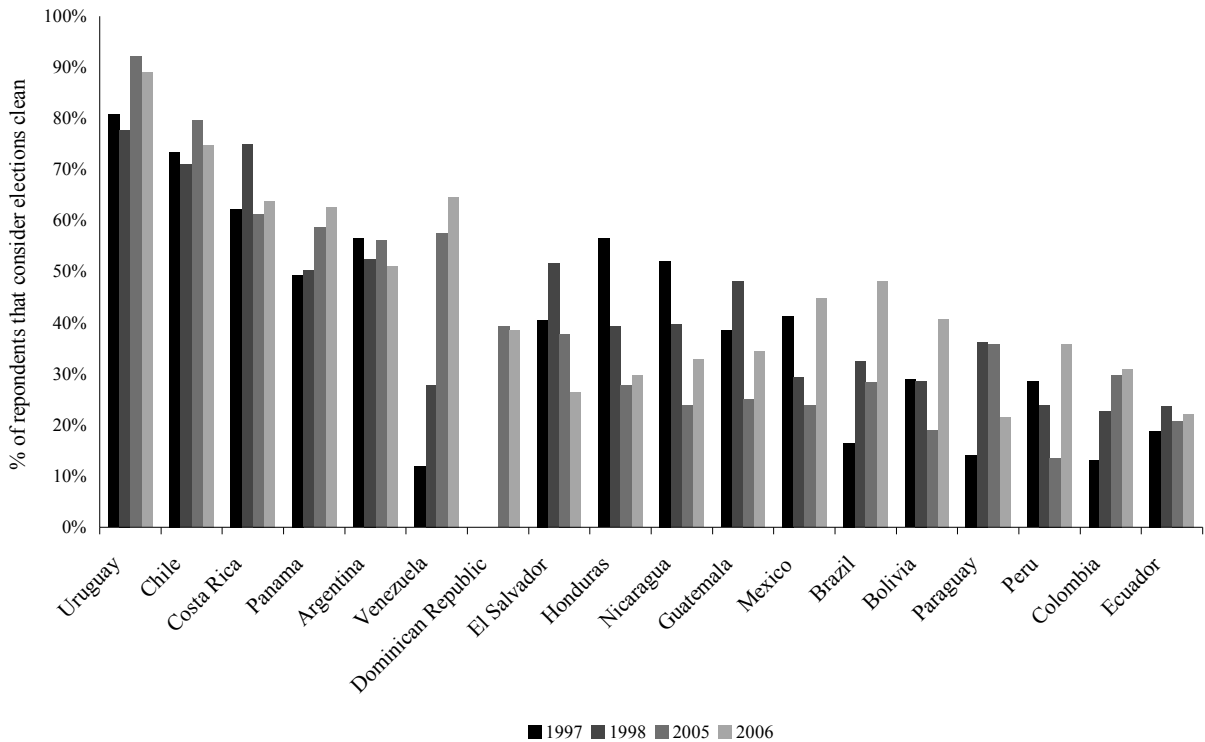
Other scholars who have looked at voter confidence outside the U.S. have reached similar conclusions. In studies of Mexican voters, confidence in the electoral process is typically defined as the extent to which elections are clean or fraudulent as perceived by voters (McCann and Domínguez 1998; Levin and Alvarez 2009). In the single cross-national study that looks at voter confidence, Sarah Birch (2008) defines confidence as the perceived fairness of the most recent election. In this study, voter confidence is operationalized in a similar way, using a question present in a number of Latinobarómetro surveys that asks individuals, “Generally speaking, do you believe that the elections in this country are clean or fraudulent?”³ The respondent only has two choices; therefore the dependent variable is dichotomous, with clean elections coded as 1.

Figure 2 displays the percentage of citizens who agree that elections are generally clean from 1997-2006 in the region. There are three main trends worth noting in Figure 2. First, in most countries, a minority of respondents consider elections clean. However, there is wide variation across the region, with consistently negative attitudes towards elections in Ecuador, Peru and Paraguay, and fairly positive evaluations of elections in Uruguay, Costa Rica and Chile – countries with longer histories of democratic elections. Second, in some countries, there has been an increase in perceptions of cleanliness over time, most notably in Brazil, Bolivia, Panama, Colombia and Venezuela. Venezuela shows the most drastic increase in perceptions of cleanliness, from a region-wide low of 12% in 1997 to 65% in 2006. Finally, in the Central American countries of El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, there is a general decrease in voter confidence since the late 1990s, possibly due to the partisan nature of election administration in these countries.

² In all Latin American countries, votes are first counted at the precinct level, although regional and national authorities typically have the responsibility and authority to aggregate these results, check for errors, and in the extreme, nullify local level results if fraud or egregious errors are detected.

³ “¿Cree Ud., en términos generales, que las elecciones en este país son limpias o son fraudulentas?” This question is present in survey years 1997, 1998, 2005, and 2006. A slightly different version of the question was used in 2000, asking respondents to rate the cleanliness of their elections on a 5-point scale.

Figure 2. Voter confidence in Latin America, 1997-2006



Since EMBs are in charge of many aspects of the election process and are highly visible institutions in many Latin American countries, it seems plausible that voter confidence is related to confidence in EMBs. In Table 1, we see exactly this relationship. For those who have a lot of confidence in the EMB, almost 70% of individuals perceive elections in their country to be clean. In contrast, for those with no confidence in the EMB, 80% of respondents consider elections to be fraudulent.⁴ Considering that almost 55% of Latin Americans in 2006 felt that elections were generally fraudulent, confidence in the EMB seems to go a long way in explaining why some view their elections as clean.

⁴ Individual country cross-tabs confirm this same relationship holds for each Latin American country. However, the strength of the relationship is somewhat weak in Ecuador and Uruguay, the two countries where there is very little variation in levels of voter confidence.

Table 1. The Relationship between Confidence in the EMB and Voter Confidence in Latin America, 2006.

EMB Confidence	Voter Confidence		Total EMB Confidence
	<i>Clean Elections</i>	<i>Fraudulent Elections</i>	
<i>A lot</i>	69.1% (2176)	30.9% (975)	18.0% (3151)
<i>Some</i>	57.2% (3221)	42.8% (2410)	32.1% (5631)
<i>Little</i>	35.9% (1832)	64.1% (3266)	29.0% (5098)
<i>None</i>	19.5% (717)	80.5% (2962)	21.0% (3679)
<i>Total Voter Confidence</i>	45.3% (7946)	54.8% (9613)	

Source: Latinobarómetro 2006. Pearson's Chi-square test significant at $p < .001$ level. Kendall's tau- $c = 0.39$, sig. at $p < .001$.

To measure voter turnout, a Latinobarómetro survey question was used. It asks whether or not the respondent voted in the last election. Since Latinobarómetro is a cross-national survey, it is not possible to specify which election each respondent participated in, although it is assumed the last national-level legislative or presidential election that took place within each country prior to the survey.⁵ Turnout is dichotomous, with voting coded as 1.

⁵ The 2006 Latinobarómetro survey was in the field from October through November 2006. I pull from election data in national-level elections conducted prior to the survey being placed in the field.

Election administration variables

Some of the most important principles in designing election management bodies require the arbiter of the election process to be impartial in decision making, credible to all relevant actors and acts in a professional manner (López-Pintor 2000; Wall et al. 2006). EMBs perceived as biased towards one or a few political parties reduces the perceived legitimacy of an election. Similarly, unprofessional election administrators may cast doubt upon their ability to conduct a free and fair election, and consequently reduce voter confidence.

There are a number of different institutional design models for EMBs, but the most popular in Latin America and newer democracies has been the creation of a permanent and professional election management body that is institutionally autonomous from other branches of government. These EMBs are typically considered a fourth branch of government, in addition to the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Nevertheless, there is some variation in the 18 countries included in the present study. While 14 of the 18 countries follow the model of a single independent election commission, the government of Argentina runs elections through their judicial branch, the only Latin American country where the Interior Minister and the judiciary are jointly in charge of the election process (López-Pintor 2000, 28; Ferreira Rubio 2007). Chile, Colombia and Peru are more similar to the independent EMB model, although in these countries there are multiple independent bodies in charge of different aspects of election administration, such as one body is in charge of running the election, while another independent body is in charge of resolving legal disputes (López-Pintor 2000).

Impartiality, independence and professionalism are considered as some of the key principles for election administrators. I am interested in determining how each of these principles relates to individual confidence in EMBs and indirectly on voter confidence. Therefore, each country's EMB was coded according to these principles. Since few scholars have attempted to develop quantitative measures of EMBs, a consensus on how to proceed does not exist. Hartlyn et al. (2008) developed the most thorough coding of partisanship and independence. A 4-point scale measures the level of partisanship in an EMB and a 10-point scale measures the degree of formal independence of the body based on the appointment process. In contrast, Birch (2008) uses a simple dummy variable to distinguish between formally independent EMBs and EMBs under the authority of other government institutions. I developed an approach, in between Hartlyn et al. and Birch, using a series of dichotomous measures to examine partisanship, independence and professionalism.

Dichotomous measures are used for two reasons. First, from the perspective of an individual citizen, it is not clear that parsing the degree to which a sub-set of political parties have influence over the EMB is as salient as whether or not there is any partisan bias or influence in running elections. Similarly, individuals are more likely to make a general distinction between an EMB that seems to make decisions independent of pressures from other branches of government or parties and one that makes decisions that favor incumbents. Second, using ordinal scales with multiple values in a study of only 18 countries

leads a number of the categories to essentially serve as country-level dummy variables, leading to problems of interpretation.⁶

Impartiality is operationalized in terms of partisan influence within the EMB. Partisan involvement in EMBs may affect the perceived impartiality of the institution, especially in cases where certain political actors are left out of the decision-making process, or excluded all together from the EMB. Therefore, EMBs can be put into two categories, those considered partisan, and those considered non-partisan, impartial institutions (See Appendix A for how individual countries were coded). Coding is based on actual partisan influence within individual EMBs, drawing from election observation reports and academic articles that discuss the workings of the EMBs. This is important in Latin America because there is a wide gap between the formal-legal institutions and their informal practice (Helmke and Levitsky 2006).⁷ Only four Latin American EMBs actually legally require partisan representatives,⁸ and most prohibit it, although the reality is far different for many countries.

The level of independence from other branches of government is operationalized as the degree of independence from the other branches during the appointment process. A simplified version of the scale devised by Hartlyn et al. (2008) is developed that dichotomizes the level of independence. All countries where election commissioners are selected by the executive and/or the legislature are given a score of 0. States where the judicial branch, civil society groups and politicians select election commissioners are given a score of 1 (See Appendix A for how each country was scored). This independence measure relies on the legal process described in constitutions and electoral laws. For the most part, Latin American countries do follow these basic processes for appointing EMB commissioners, although Venezuela is a notable exception in recent years (Kornblith 2003; 2007). I expect that more independent EMBs will lead to greater confidence in EMBs, and thus, I should find a positive relationship.

My final measure regarding the institutional design of EMBs is a professionalism variable. Hartlyn et al. (2008, 79-80) conflate partisanship and professionalism, although theoretically, they are separate principles; it is possible for individual commissioners to be partisan and have professional qualifications in regards to elections. Professionally run elections are a crucial component of holding free and fair elections. Even in the absence of fraud, elections which are unprofessionally run can lead to many types of errors, from poorly trained poll workers, misprinting of ballots, failed delivery of election supplies, problems with chain-of-custody issues regarding ballots, a lack of or incorrect information provided to voters, poorly maintained registration lists and mistakes in the tallying of results. Thus, professionalism in election administration is just as important as impartiality and independence from political actors in the eyes of voters and candidates.

⁶ In the analysis that follows, if I substitute in the coding used by Hartlyn et al. (2008), I obtain substantively similar results.

⁷ In fact, I coded each EMB according to formal requirements for partisan representation in the EMB and according to actual partisan representation, and the correlation between the two scores was only 0.49.

⁸ Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Uruguay. Nicaragua and Honduras legally require partisan representatives at the subnational level, and Mexico's EMB allows non-voting partisan representatives.

For the present study, a binary variable was created based on the professional requirements necessary to serve on the EMB. Countries are divided between those where there are no requirements, other than basic citizenship and age requirements,⁹ and those where all commissioners must meet a number of formal requirements. Many countries stipulate that EMB commissioners must meet the same requirements as those that sit on the Supreme Court, such as Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Panama, while others require university degrees and a certain number of years of experience as a lawyer or judge, such as Chile, Mexico and Venezuela. These countries are coded 1, while countries without professional requirements were coded 0 (See Appendix A for the full coding).¹⁰ Formal requirements for professionalism were used, since it is currently not possible to examine the backgrounds of all election commissioners in Latin America. Even if each country selects commissioners based on the legal requirements stated in their respective constitutions and electoral laws, there is no guarantee these individuals are qualified to run elections or have any election experience. Nevertheless, the present measure is a rough proxy for the professionalism of election administration as a whole in each country, and is the best measure currently available. Professional EMBs will lead to greater confidence in the institution, and hence a positive relationship is expected.

It is possible that individuals do not make separate judgments of EMBs based on each characteristic, but rather judge the institution as a whole based on performance. In light of that, three measures were combined to distinguish between EMBs that were non-partisan, independent and professional and those that did not meet all three of these standards. EMBs that met all three standards were coded 1, the rest were coded 0. In the multivariate analysis, I present one model using the individual characteristics of EMBs, as well as another model using the single measure.

The level of confidence an individual has in the EMB is taken from the 2006 Latinobarómetro survey.¹¹ Each individual was asked to describe their level of confidence on a 4-point scale from no confidence to a lot of confidence. It is expected that greater confidence in the EMB will lead to greater voter confidence in the election outcome and to greater turnout. In 2006, individuals in Panama and Uruguay had the highest confidence in their EMB, with over 70% of respondents stating they had some or a lot of confidence in their EMB. In contrast, Ecuadorians had the lowest level of confidence, with over 85% saying they had little to no confidence in the EMB. Respondents in Argentina, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Paraguay also had low levels of confidence, with over 60% of individuals having little to no confidence in their EMB in these countries.

Table 2 displays the relationship between each institutional characteristic of Latin American EMBs and general confidence in the institution. In general, the findings are consistent with expectations. Comparing EMB confidence cross-nationally, citizens in countries with EMBs that are non-partisan, independent and professional have greater confidence in their EMBs than individuals who reside in

⁹ Bolivia and El Salvador are the only two cases where a majority of the members of the EMB are not required to meet any professional qualifications (3 out of 5 in each case). I classified these as the same as those countries where there are no professional requirements since a majority of the election commissioners did not need to meet any requirements.

¹⁰ Ideally it would be preferable to code each country based on the professional backgrounds of each EMB member, but the research requirements to carry this out are prohibitive.

¹¹ ¿Cuanta confianza tiene usted en El Tribunal Electoral? (ninguna, poca, algo, mucha)

countries where their EMBs do not meet these standards. However, these findings are somewhat weak as there are still significant minorities of individuals who are confident in EMBs that are partisan, closely tied to the executive and/or legislature, and are unprofessional.

Table 2. Mean level of EMB confidence by EMB characteristics, Latin America 2006

	Mean level of confidence
EMB partisanship	56.9%
EMB appointment independence	52.4%
EMB professionalism	52.2%
Non-partisan, independent, and professional EMBS	56.3%

Note: EMB confidence is dichotomized here, 0=no/a little confidence, 1=some/a lot of confidence

The final independent variable capturing the quality of election administration is a measure of individual perceptions of vote buying. While in many cases, vote buying may seem outside the purview of election administrators, in most countries it is an illegal activity that EMBs are in charge of prosecuting. Moreover, if vote buying takes place within or near a polling place, it is certainly within the scope of polling officials' duties to end the practice. In the survey, individuals were asked, "Do you know of anyone who in the last presidential election was pressured, or received something in exchange, to vote a certain way?"¹² This was a yes or no question, with 'yes' coded as 1. In Latin America as a whole, 22.3% of respondents answered yes. Knowledge of vote buying is hypothesized to lead to lower confidence in the election outcome, but has an ambiguous relationship with turnout. From a rational actor model of voter turnout, vote buying clearly increases the benefits of voting for an individual (Downs 1957; Blais 2000), but may also reduce turnout among individuals who know of vote buying but were not recipients. Across Latin America, there is much more uniformity in the percentage of yes responses. In most countries, around 15-30% of respondents said they had knowledge of vote buying.¹³

Voter confidence model controls

In addition to the variables related to election administration, there are a number of other variables that have previously been found to be related to voter confidence. To have greater confidence in statistical results, it is necessary to include these other variables in order to demonstrate what effect, if any, election administration has on voter confidence above and beyond current knowledge. The most common explanation for what increases political trust in general, and voter confidence in particular, is identification with the winner. Numerous studies have shown that support for the winning party or candidate leads to greater trust in government and increased voter confidence. In the U.S. context, this

¹² ¿Ha sabido Ud. de alguien que en las últimas elecciones presidenciales fuera presionado o recibiera algo a cambio para votar de cierta manera?

¹³ Vote buying ranges from a low of 11% giving a yes response in Nicaragua to a high of 53% saying they had knowledge of vote buying in the Dominican Republic.

finding has been convincingly demonstrated (Citrin 1974; Citrin and Luks 2001; Craig et al. 2006; Atkeson and Saunders 2007; Alvarez et al. 2008). In a comparative context, a number of scholars also found that identification with the winner led to greater confidence in election outcomes, and the government generally (Anderson et al. 2005; Birch 2008). Therefore, identification with the winning party in the last election held prior to the 2006 survey was a control. The survey asks respondents: “if elections were held today, which party would you vote for?” All individuals who identify with the party that won in the most recent election are coded as 1. Those individuals who identify with the winning party are expected to have greater voter confidence.

A number of socio-economic and demographic controls such as income, gender, age, education, ethnicity and a measure of the population size of the locality where the respondent resides were also included. Gender is a dummy variable, coded 1 for female. Females are expected to be generally less confident in election outcomes, as they are underrepresented in virtually all Latin American countries, despite the widespread use of gender quotas in parties and legislatures (Craske and Molyneux 2002). Age is included as age in number of years. Income is a relative 4-point scale from low to high based on an individual’s response to a question regarding their ability to meet basic needs with their income.¹⁴ Education is a 7-point scale ranging from illiterate to completing a college degree. There are no a priori expectations for age, income and education. Ethnicity is a dummy variable, coded 1 for those respondents whose native language is an indigenous language other than Spanish or Portuguese. Indigenous people are expected to be less confident in election outcomes due to historical patterns of exclusion and discrimination against these groups (Van Cott 2005; Yashar 2005). Population size is coded at the individual level on an 8-point scale ranging from those who live in places with less than 5,000 inhabitants up to those individuals who live in major urban centers of more than 100,000 people. Rural inhabitants, especially in Latin America, may be less confident in elections, as democratization in rural areas throughout the region has been much slower compared to urban areas (Fox 1990).

Finally, a number of country-level controls are included, such as whether or not the most recent election was a presidential election, the effective number of political parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979), the margin of victory in the most recent election, and the number of years of democracy.¹⁵ Due to the lack of previous research on this topic, there are few a priori expectations for how these variables influence voter confidence. The presidential election dummy variable is coded 1 for presidential elections, and 0 for legislative elections. The expectations for the effective number of political parties are ambiguous. An increased number of political might signal an increased level of competitiveness in the election, and therefore lead to greater voter confidence, but it may also represent the lack of a stable party system and reduced confidence in elections as a means of selecting leaders. Margin of victory may also have an ambiguous influence upon voter confidence. Closer elections may lead to greater confidence in elections, but the lack of decisiveness in the outcome may also reduce the perception that the right individual or party won the election. It is expected that longer lasting democracies will have greater overall confidence in elections and thus a positive relationship is expected between years of democracy and voter confidence.

¹⁴ Income is a 4-point scale ranging from “it does not cover my needs and I have great difficulties”, “it does not cover my needs and I have difficulties”, “it just covers my needs without great difficulties”, to “it covers my needs well and I can save some”.

¹⁵ For the most part, years of democracy is coded from the beginning of the third wave of democratization. The exceptions are Colombia (coded as starting in 1974), Venezuela (1958), and Costa Rica (1953).

Voter turnout variables

The main independent variable in the voter turnout model is the previously described voter confidence measure. A positive relationship is expected between voter confidence in election outcomes and the decision to vote. In addition, included are a number of standard individual level variables considered to be related to turnout such as partisanship, age, education, income, gender and ethnicity (Downs 1957; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995). For partisanship, a simple dummy variable is coded as 1 for all individuals who named a party when asked for whom they would vote for if elections were held this Sunday.¹⁶ The sample is nearly evenly divided between those who named a party and those who refused to state a party. The assumption is those who are more partisan are more likely to have a clear preference and are therefore more likely to turnout.

A number of other country-level variables were included in the turnout model which other studies suggest have an impact upon explaining cross-national variation in turnout (Jackman 1987; Fornos et al. 2004; Blais 2006). Included are variables that account for compulsory voting, the effective number of political parties in the party system, the margin of victory in the most recent national election and a dummy to control for whether or not the last election included a presidential election. Compulsory voting is coded on a 4-point scale, using the same scale that Forno et al. (2004) used for explaining variation in turnout across Latin American countries.¹⁷ The scale ranges from 0 for those countries that have voluntary voting, to compulsory voting with no sanctions, compulsory voting with un-enforced sanctions, to 3 for countries with compulsory voting and enforced sanctions. It is fairly well established that compulsory voting leads to an increase in turnout (Powell 1982; Jackman 1987; Blais 2006). Therefore, compulsory voting should have a positive effect on turnout.

A number of cross-national studies of voter turnout included the effective number of political parties as a possible predictor of variations in turnout. The expected direction of the effect, though, is not clear. The logic behind including the number of parties is that more parties are expected to depress turnout as a voter's individual decisions become less decisive since the resulting government in a multiparty system will likely be a coalition government (Downs 1957; Jackman 1987). However, the opposite may also be the case, as more parties provide voters more options; it may lead to an increase in voter mobilization efforts due to the number of parties (Blais 2006). In the Latin American context, more parties are likely to increase turnout. Jackman (1987) primarily dealt with parliamentary systems in Western Europe, whereas in presidential systems, a smaller party still has a chance to win the presidency, and voters still have a chance to cast a decisive vote. Nevertheless, a number of Latin American studies that look at aggregate turnout have found that an increase in the number of parties is an insignificant predictor of turnout (Pérez-Liñán 2001; Fornos et al. 2004). The measure is included here, as I am unaware of any

¹⁶ While this is a crude measure of partisanship, in a cross-national survey like Latinobarómetro, this is the best available indicator.

¹⁷ I correct the coding for Mexico, which was coded as having compulsory voting with un-enforced sanctions. Mexico has no legal sanctions for not voting according to their Constitution and election law (COFIPE). The change in coding does not substantively affect the statistical results.

cross-national studies in Latin America that look at both national and individual level predictors of turnout.

The competitiveness of the election has also been shown to be a significant predictor of turnout. According to the rational actor model of voter decision-making, it makes intuitive sense that more people will turnout to vote in a close election rather than an election where an individual's vote is less likely to matter (Downs 1957; Blais 2000). Pérez-Liñán (2001) finds that greater competition leads to an increase in turnout in Latin America, while Fornos et al. (2004) do not find any significant impact for margin of victory on turnout. Here, margin of victory is included as an indicator of the competitiveness of the most recent election in each country, taking the difference between the 1st and 2nd place candidates (if they were presidential elections) or 1st and 2nd place parties (if they were legislative elections, lower house only).

Finally, since a single type of election cannot be selected due to the cross-sectional nature of the survey data, a dummy variable for whether or not the most recent election in each country was a presidential or legislative election is included. It is coded 1 for presidential elections. Presidential elections are expected to have higher turnout, as they are typically of higher salience to many voters in Latin America, and are subject to much greater mobilization and media attention. Furthermore, many Latin American countries are known for having strong presidents and weak legislatures (Morgenstern and Nacif 2002), suggesting that who wins the presidency is more important than who wins a legislative election.¹⁸

Statistical method

Since the independent variables combine different levels of analysis (country-level and individual-level), the methods used are for multilevel data structures. Ignoring the multilevel nature of the dataset leads to an incorrect estimation of the standards errors and increases the chances of committing a Type I error (Steenbergen and Jones 2002). There are a number of different statistical methods available to deal with this type of data, such as hierarchical linear modeling, clustering and random effects models, however recent research suggests the standard error estimates for each of these options are not substantively different (Arceneaux and Nickerson 2009). Thus, a clustered logistic regression with robust standard errors to account for intra-country similarity is used across each of the Latin American countries analyzed in the present study. Logistic regression is used as both of the dependent variables in the present study are dichotomous. Adopting the clustering approach also allows the use of statistical software Clarify (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000) to interpret and present statistical results in a simplified manner.

¹⁸ Nevertheless, an examination of mean turnout rates between presidential and legislative elections across Latin American countries suggests this relationship does not hold in many countries, and is even the opposite in some cases (Fornos et al. 2004, 935).

Results

Table 3 displays the results of three clustered logistic regressions, two explaining voter confidence and one explaining voter turnout. The results of the voter confidence models are discussed first.

Table 3. Multivariate analysis examining the impact of election administration on voter confidence and turnout in Latin America, Latinobarómetro 2006.

	Voter Confidence 1		Voter Confidence 2		Voter Turnout	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
<i>Country-level variables</i>						
EMB Partisanship	0.5739**	0.2726				
EMB Appointment						
Independence	-0.0634	0.2468				
EMB Professionalism	0.1109	0.3511				
Non-partisan, Independent, and Professional EMBs			0.7494****	0.1998		
Years of Democracy	0.0070	0.0049	0.0078	0.0058	-0.0051	0.0051
Compulsory Voting					0.2757***	0.1044
Presidential Election	0.2912	0.3373	0.1861	0.1998	-0.3566	0.1839
Effective Number of Parties	-0.1148**	0.0454	-0.1349***	0.0430	0.0766**	0.0303
Margin of Victory	0.0112	0.0066	0.0111	0.0057	-0.0061	0.0047
<i>Individual-level variables</i>						
EMB Confidence	0.6422****	0.0643	0.6466****	0.06442	0.0637**	0.0315
Voter Confidence					0.3766****	0.0770
Vote Buying	-0.4482****	0.0925	-0.4610****	0.0836	0.0922	0.0746
Winning Party Support	0.9205****	0.1360	0.9241****	0.1351		
Partisan					0.7302****	0.0952
Income	0.1872****	0.0340	0.1871****	0.0309	-0.0623	0.0392
Female	-0.1719****	0.0368	-0.1742****	0.0375	-0.0054	0.0474
Age	0.0142****	0.0027	0.0136****	0.0026	0.0346****	0.0043
Indigenous	-0.7191****	0.1825	-0.5422**	0.2368	-0.2968	0.1892
Education	0.1229****	0.0357	0.1209****	0.0335	0.1306****	0.0322
Population Size	-0.0294	0.0203	-0.0156	0.0177		
Constant	-3.4215****	0.3031	-3.3239****	0.2820	1.5246****	0.3602
Wald Chi-square	4611.85****		2208.88****		422.68	
Pseudo R2	0.16		0.17		0.09	
N: individuals	16700		16700		16700	
N: countries	18		18		18	

Note: All models are logistic regressions clustered by country, with robust standard errors

**** $p < .001$ level; *** $p < .01$ level; ** $p < .05$ level

Voter confidence

I first turn to the influence of the country-level variables. In Model 1, of the three variables capturing different aspects of the EMB, I only find that partisanship in the EMB has an influence on voter confidence. These results suggest that individuals living in countries with non-partisan EMBs have higher levels of voter confidence. In Model 2, where I combine the three individual measures into a single

measure for non-partisan, independent, and professional EMBs, I also find a significant positive effect on voter confidence. However, the results in Model 1 suggest that partisanship is what is really driving the results. It is possible that partisan bias in EMB institutions is not only easier for individual citizens to comprehend, but may also encapsulate notions of independence and professionalism. The only other aggregate measure to have a significant effect is the effective number of political parties. Countries with a greater number of effective political parties have lower levels of voter confidence, suggesting that party system fragmentation may reduce individual level confidence in elections.

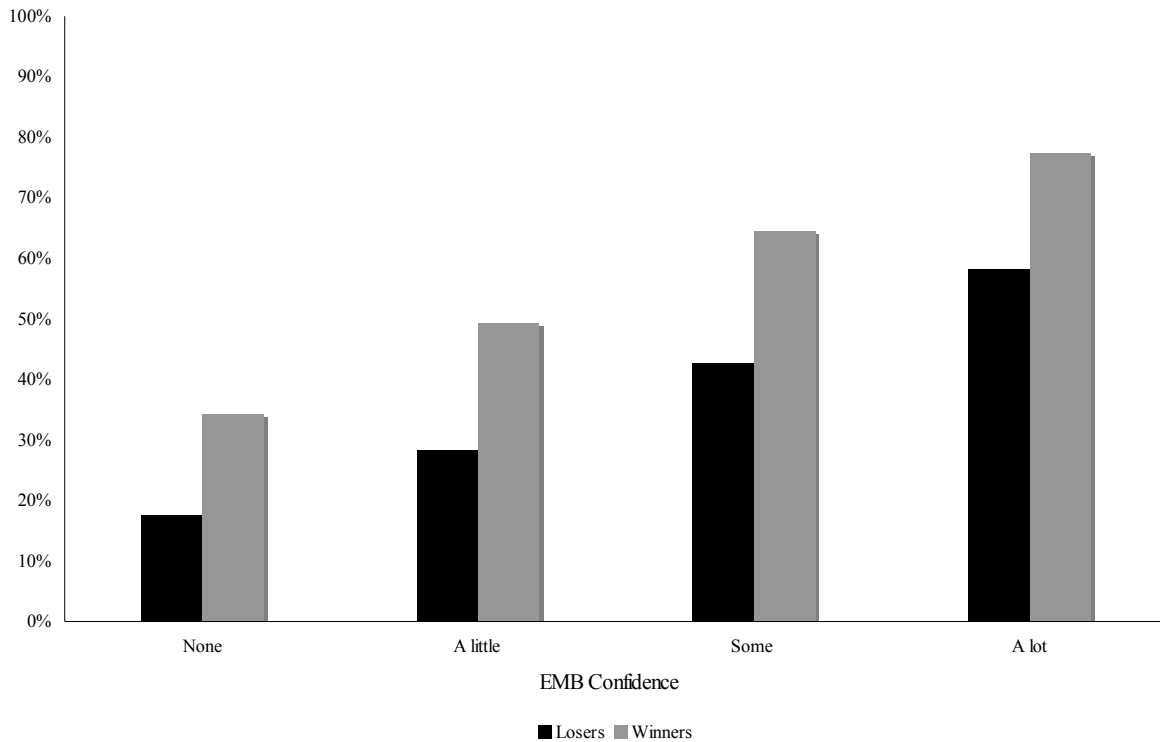
At the individual level, the results in Models 1 and 2 are almost identical. I find that confidence in the EMB is positive and statistically significant. Individuals with higher confidence in the EMB are more likely to have confidence in election outcomes, which confirms the bi-variate results presented in Table 1. I also find that knowledge of vote buying is significantly related to lower levels of voter confidence. Thus, confidence in EMBs and an election administrator's ability to control vote buying do seem to matter for how individuals perceive election fraud, even after controlling for a number of other factors that are thought to explain voter confidence.

In addition to finding support for the notion that election administration does have an impact on voter confidence, I also find a number of other significant predictors. As expected, I find that support for the winning party in the last election leads to significantly higher levels of voter confidence. In regards to the socio-demographic variables, I find that older, wealthier, and more educated individuals have greater levels of voter confidence, while as expected; I find that women and indigenous peoples generally have lower levels of confidence. I find no support for the notion that residents in smaller, rural communities have lower levels of confidence.

The coefficients in Table 3 do not tell us much about the substantive impact of these variables. Therefore, I calculated the predicted probability of being confident in election outcomes based on one's level of confidence in the EMB using Clarify. Clarify allows one to hold all other variables constant in the model in order to determine the independent impact of EMB confidence on voter confidence.¹⁹ I also differentiated between individuals who supported the winning and losing party in the last election, as support for the winner is the most commonly assumed predictor of voter confidence. Figure 3 displays the results.

¹⁹ The predicted probabilities are calculated from the results in Model 1. I held EMB partisanship, EMB independence, EMB professionalism, presidential election, vote buying, gender, indigenous, income and education at their median, and years of democracy, effective number of parties, margin of victory, age and population size at their mean.

Figure 3. The influence of confidence in EMBs on voter confidence in election outcomes, Latin America 2006



Confidence in the EMB does have a significant impact on voter confidence. Among individuals who supported the winner in the last election, there is only a 34% likelihood of believing elections are clean if one has no confidence in the EMB, compared to a 77% likelihood of believing elections are clean if one has full confidence in the EMB, holding all else constant. Among losers, we see a similar trend, although the general levels of voter confidence are depressed, as expected. Losers with no confidence in the EMB only have a 18% probability of believing elections are clean, in contrast to a 58% probability for those with a lot of confidence in the EMB.

Voter turnout

In the voter turnout model in Table 3, there is a significant and positive impact for compulsory voting laws in turnout. An increase in the effective number political parties helps explain some variation in cross-national differences in voter turnout. A higher number of effective parties can lead to a higher voter turnout. I also find no impact for the competitiveness of the election contest, as measured by margin of victory, on voter turnout.

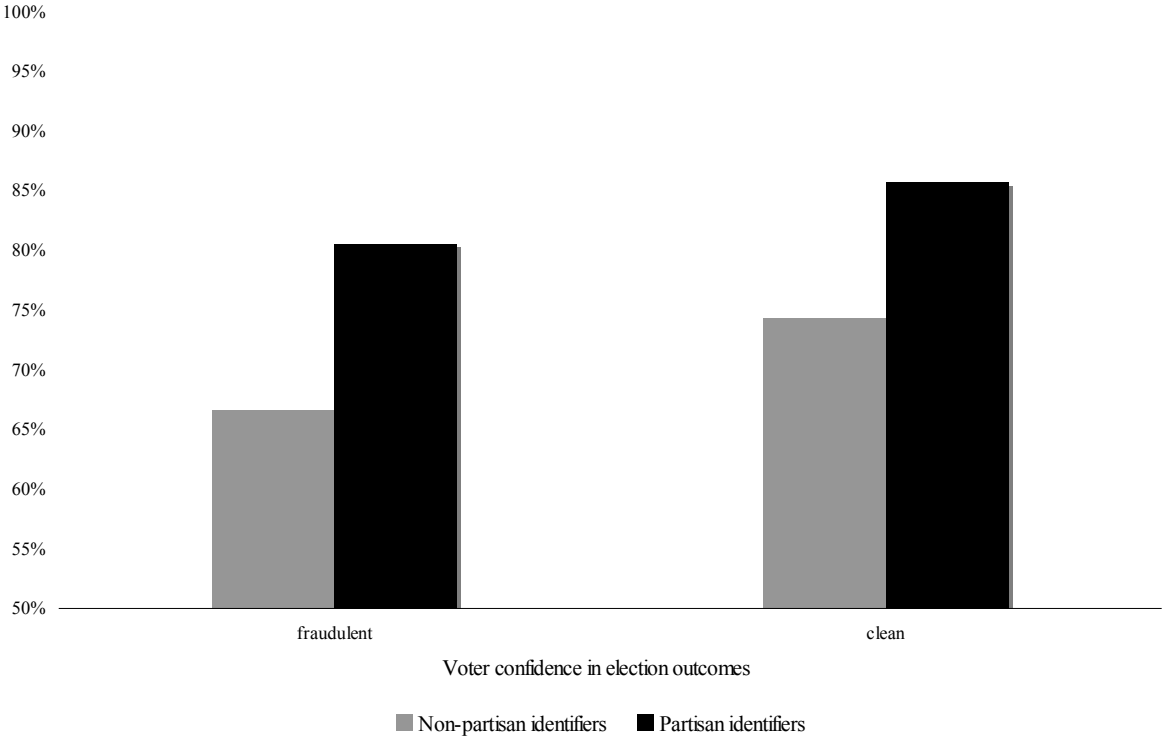
At the individual level, there is support for most of my election administration variables. Individuals who are confident in the EMB are significantly more likely to turnout to vote, and individuals who have greater confidence in election outcomes are also more likely to turnout. There was not a significant and positive impact for vote buying on turnout, which may be a result of the competing influences vote

buying might have on turnout. These findings suggest that not only do EMBs have a significant impact on voter attitudes about elections, as demonstrated in the voter confidence model, but that they also affect political participation.

The results in Table 3 also suggest that individuals with stronger partisan leanings are much more likely to turn out to vote, as the measure of partisanship is positive and statistically significant. Most of the socio-economic and demographic indicators are not significant predictors of turnout, although older and more educated individuals have a greater propensity to vote. The weak support for the SES model of voting is not surprising, as previous research also found weak evidence in support of the standard SES model in Latin America (Fornos et al. 2004).

Clarify was used to examine the substantive impact of voter confidence on turnout. Since one of the major predictors of turnout is strength of partisanship, impact of voter confidence on turnout between partisan identifiers and non-partisan identifiers was examined separately. Figure 4 displays the results.

Figure 4. The influence of voter confidence in election outcomes on turnout, Latin America 2006



Voter confidence does have a small but still significant impact on turnout, holding all other variables constant and their mean or median. Among partisan identifiers, individuals who perceive their elections to be fraudulent have about an 80% likelihood of turning out to vote, while those who believe their elections to be clean have an 86% likelihood of voting. Non-partisan identifiers have a systematically lower predicted probability of turning out to vote, but even among these individuals, voter confidence

does have an impact on their decision. Non-partisan individuals with low voter confidence have about a 67% likelihood of voting. Those with high voter confidence, have about a 74% likelihood of turning out to vote. While a change in the probability of voting of 6-7% may seem low, the substantive impact, especially in close elections, of voter confidence in elections could potentially be the difference between winning and losing for a certain candidate or party.

Conclusions

Election administration in Latin America matters, not only for explaining voter confidence in election outcomes, but also its impact on voter turnout. Individual confidence in EMBs has a significant impact on voter confidence. Voter confidence, a result of confidence in EMBs, significantly influences the decision to turnout to vote. Suggestive evidence has been presented showing specific design characteristics of EMBs may influence individual confidence in these institutions.

Future research will need to determine what explains confidence in EMBs, but it does seem likely that better measures of election administration performance, preferably at a more disaggregated level, will provide some answers. Media coverage of partisan bias or partisan conflict within the decision-making forums of an EMB may have an impact on confidence in the EMB. Knowledge of collusion between election commissioners and political elites, which may come from media coverage or through other political leaders, may lead voters to question the autonomy of the EMB vis-à-vis the other branches of government and their subsequent lack of ability to carry out an impartial election. Finally, a lack of professionalism among election administrators can lead to problems distributing voter ID cards, lack of adequate training for poll workers, problems with election tabulation software on Election Day or delays in the posting of results. These problems can be highlighted through the media and serve as a source of partisan conflict and be experienced directly by many voters on Election Day.

Voter confidence in election outcomes also matters in Latin America, as demonstrated by low levels of voter confidence depressing turnout. Political participation is a key component of a successful democracy. A lack of confidence in one of the most basic requirements of a democracy, free and fair elections, is troubling. Without confidence in election results, it is difficult to see how individuals can accord legitimacy to other institutions such as political parties, legislative bodies, and other elected officials. One implication of this finding is that political leaders may want to think twice about crying fraud after losing an election without convincing evidence in support of widespread election fraud. These findings suggest that candidates who cry fraud, but still intend to participate in the electoral arena, may be demobilizing their supporters by reducing their confidence in the electoral process.

From a policy standpoint, these findings suggest a greater need for voter education with regards to the roll of EMBs. Most voter education programs typically focus on the mechanics of voting, yet provide little information in the way of explaining the various functions EMBs are required to carry out. The results also point to a need for greater transparency in decision-making processes within EMBs. Transparency not only will alleviate concerns among political elites, but also demonstrate to voters that decisions are not being made to bias the vote in favor of a particular party or candidate.

Appendix A. Coding of EMB Institutional Design Variables

	<i>EMB Partisanship, 1=Non- Partisan</i>	<i>EMB Appointment Independence, 1=Independent</i>	<i>EMB Professionalism, 1=Professional</i>	<i>Non-Partisan, Independent and Professional EMBs = 1</i>
Argentina	1	1	1	1
Bolivia	1	0	0	0
Brazil	1	1	1	1
Chile	1	1	1	1
Colombia	0	0	1	0
Costa Rica	1	1	1	1
Dominican Republic	0	0	1	0
Ecuador	0	0	0	0
El Salvador	0	1	0	0
Guatemala	1	1	1	1
Honduras	0	0	0	0
Mexico	0	0	1	0
Nicaragua	0	0	0	0
Panama	1	1	1	1
Paraguay	0	1	1	0
Peru	1	1	1	1
Uruguay	0	0	0	0
Venezuela	0	1	1	0

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