Methodological framework of the electoral integrity model

Research Note

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Abstract

This research note discusses the methodological framework of the electoral integrity model, specifically the weaknesses and strengths of the Perception of Electoral Integrity Index in its 2013 and 2014 versions. It explains the theoretical concept and the importance of measure both electoral integrity and electoral malpractices. Furthermore, emphasizes on some technical aspects related with the robustness of the ranking, the possible sources of bias in the expert surveys as well as the internal and external consistency of the findings. To give a suggestion for improving the model, it provides some adjustments. Finally, it gives a conclusion about the future of the project and the usefulness for the democratization of its knowledge built.

Keywords

democratization, electoral integrity, electoral malpractices, methodological framework, Perception of Electoral Integrity.

Originally published in Volume 29 (March 2016), pp. 310–315. Corrected November 2026: volume and issue numbering.
https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.29.19

Definition of electoral integrity and its importance

The liberal democracy recognizes a set of political rights to citizens, not only to vote to elect their representatives but also to participate in direct democracy actions. Since the beginning of the first decade of 21st century, the quality of elections has been an interest object of the electoral studies regardless of the countries' democratization degree. A recent example is the electoral integrity model, which has emerged with an innovative theoretical and methodological framework, developed by the *Electoral Integrity Project* (EIP), an academics group from universities of Sydney (Australia) and Harvard (United States), directed by Pippa Norris. Their work has been rapidly expanded for the purpose of define the concept of elections with integrity, to respond why is important measure its perception in a group of countries around the world and to publicize the results through an index.

According to Norris (2013), the electoral integrity refers to 'international conventions and global norms, applying universally to all countries worldwide throughout the electoral cycle, including during the pre-electoral period, the campaign, on polling day, and its aftermath'. On the contrary, the concept of electoral malpractice refers to 'first and second-order violations of these global norms' (3). Some of the global norms are resolutions about electoral assistance that have been made by the General Assembly of the United Nations since 1991. These stablish on detail the principles in which member states can give each other electoral assistance and promotion of democracy under the respect of the national sovereign.

To comprehend the model, its structure is composed by ten related hypotheses. The first is that the quality of elections influences in the citizens' perception about electoral integrity and malpractices. Then, this degree of perception influences at the same time in the voting participation, the violent protest or even in the political legitimacy. Subsequently, this political legitimacy influences in peaceful demonstrations, and also in voting participation or violent protest. Afterward, these three could influence in a response of the state, depending on the case, with reforms, status quo permanence or even the repression. At last, that this response makes a feedback through the media conditions to influence in the first hypothesis.

Applied research of the model

The main research work of the EIP is the *Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Index* (PEI Index), an international poll study which has been published in two versions, the 2013 and the 2014. In such study the model is applied empirically through a 100-point standardized index that evaluates how much perception of electoral integrity is perceived in the country elections. The survey consists of 49 indicators grouped in 11 stages of the electoral cycle which is applied to a group of experts on the field. The countries are selected by their membership to the United Nations Organization and they are excluded for being micro-states, not have direct popular elections or not have been held elections for their national legislature (2015: 32).

Both the 2013 and the 2014 indices the expert survey response rate was 29%. The overall of experts surveyed and their responses were 2901 with 855 in the 2013 version and 4970 with 1429 in the 2014 one. The 2013 was made based on a group of 77 legislative and presidential elections celebrated within 1 July 2012 and 31 December 2013 in 66 countries, the 2014 did based on 127 elections of 107 countries since the same date of the former from 31 December of 2014. It´s

important to emphasize in the last one, because only 54 elections organized during 2014 were added. 8 of 9 elections that belong to countries already evaluated in 2013 had a positive significant change, except United States in 2014 and Japan in 2013. The Table 1 shows the value of the PEI Index by country.

Table 1. PEI Index changes 2014 elections with respect to 2013-2012

Country	Office	Date	PEI Index 2013	Office	Date	PEI Index 2014
Mauritania	L	21/12/2013	54.1	P	21/06/2014	56.9
Romania	L	09/12/2012	58.6	P	16/11/2014	62.7
Bulgaria	L	12/05/2013	59.7	L	05/10/2014	67.3
Maldives	P	16/11/2013	61.3	L	22/03/2014	67.5
Ukraine	L	28/10/2012	63	P	26/10/2014	66.7
United States	P	06/11/2012	70.2	L	04/11/2014	69.3
Japan	L	21/07/2013	73.2	L	14/12/2014	76.5
	L	16/12/2012	73.8			
Lithuania	L	28/10/2012	77.9	P	25/05/2014	85.2
Slovenia	P	02/12/2012	79.5	L	13/07/2014	82.9

Abbreviations: L: legislative. P: presidential.

Source: Prepared by author based on Norris, Pippa; W. Frank, Richard & Martínez i Coma, Ferran. (2014: 15-17) and Norris, Pippa; Martínez i Coma, Ferran & Max Grömping (2015: 8-11).

The rest of countries with elections in 2012 y 2013 had not significant changes in such value because they didn´t organize any during 2014. More than a set of ranked values, the PEI Index 2014 also provides a map of the electoral integrity degree by categories; they are very high, high, low and very low (Norris, Martínez i Coma and Grömping 2014: 12).

Methodological weaknesses and strengths

Once the empirical part has been exposed, its main methodological weaknesses and strengths will be analyzed. About the first, the electoral integrity model's vision is emphatic in the representative democracy but reductionist in the liberal democracy. However, Norris (2014) has recognized that the democratisation is more than free and fair elections because in the extreme it would fall in a type of *fallacy of electoralism*. Another weakness is related to the theoretical model that the ten hypotheses compose it because it's not clear if there is a correlation or a cause-effect relationship between them. Throughout the book the author only gives empirical evidence about why it matters but doesn't test one by one.

Three possible resources of bias in the surveys of PEI Index are studied by Martínez and van Ham (2015). They conclude that the variance in the expert judgments could be explained by their multiple definition of the object of evaluation, their different level of expertise and knowledge about electoral cycle and the context of both election and country (317-321). Though in general all of them don't have a significant deviation, some variables in particular do have a high one. For example, respectively for the tree sources, the technical questions, the familiarity with the election and the degree of media freedom. The authors recognize that were needed more cases of national

elections to study. However, for inquire more on the internal consistency of the PEI Index data this analysis can solve any doubt.

Another weakness related to the two version of the PEI Index is about the unclear interest of the EIP in respond to why the elections fail and what can be done about it. Beyond a professional theory and method of the model, the usefulness of the knowledge built can improve those countries with low or very low electoral integrity. But this cause, despite being legitimate, needs to be separated from the strictly academic.

Now, concerning methodological strengths, Norris (2014) demonstrates that there is a strong external consistency among the PEI Index 2013 and other expert indices and mass surveys like the Quality of Elections Data, the Freedom House Liberal Democracy datasets or the World Values Survey. The PEI Index 2014 is more explanatory than the 2013 in providing a scale of how much perception of electoral integrity is in the countries because it is calculated based on standard deviations from the mean. That is better than limit the values to subjective categories like democracies, hybrid regimes or electoral autocracies, as could be classified by the author.

A last strength of the model is that the PEI Index has bridges the gap of external consistency between the electoral observation and monitoring informs. Although the Organization of American States has stablished a methodology for evaluate the electoral cycle stages, this effort is only at regional level and doesn't provide indicators to rank their measures. Even considering that the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors promotes valuable guidelines for a professional monitoring, it lacks of a sophisticated method[298].

How to improve the EIP methodology?

First of all, to give a suggestion for improving the empirical part of the model, it would be convenient for its robustness a suggestion for the theoretical. The relation among the hypotheses could be more explained in terms of the variables and its testability. In this way it would be possible to bring a strong support for the technical aspects of the PEI Index.

Some adjustments in the PEI Index can be made to provide historical information about the changes and trends that each country has in the ranking. Sort the elections per year and office is a first step to avoid repeating in new version the values of the elections already evaluated in old ones. The annual periodicity enables to cover both the general and intermediate national elections over different terms among the countries. However it's necessary to make a brief case study by each election about the circumstances in which they occurred, to give them a contextualization of the statistical values in the ranking. Even though it doesn't measure the quality of the electoral system in the administrative and judiciary aspects nor its aim to translate votes into seats, highlight the most relevant cases of electoral integrity or electoral malpractices would help to understand why the countries are in their respective position.

Conclusions

The emergence of the electoral integrity as object of the electoral studies has a sophisticated theoretical and methodological framework. It improved the way in which the quality of elections

[298] These documents are '*Methods for Electoral Observation: A Manual for OAS Electoral Observation Missions*' and 'Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations'.

had been measured and even observed and monitoring. This doesn't mean that the model can't evolve over time. Surely, the Electoral Integrity Project will continue to providing key findings about the integrity of elections through a historical and comparative approach. The knowledge built will be useful not only for the academics but also for the international organizations that apply it for promoting and strengthen the process of democratization in countries that need it.

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