Keeping electoral peace? Activities of United Nations peacekeeping operations and their effects on election-related violence

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Abstract

In war-torn countries, elections are held to support peacebuilding, but they sometimes trigger new violence. While PKOs regularly accompany electoral periods, we lack systematic knowledge on how they influence election-related violence. I argue that variation in peacekeepers' activities is fundamentally important: Only if PKOs assist with securing and organizing elections, can they reduce election-related violence. Using novel data on PKOs' election-related activities and accounting for endogeneity in both peacekeeping deployment and activities, the analyses of all 630 elections in conflict-affected countries support this expectation. The result implies that the design of PKOs is crucial for effectively managing post-war political transitions.

Keywords

Peacekeeping, elections, election-related violence, peacebuilding, democracy

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Introduction

Do United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations (PKOs) contribute to more peaceful elections in conflict-affected countries and, if so, how? Since the end of the Cold War, elections have become a prominent feature of war-to-peace transitions and often a "core business" of multidimensional peacekeeping operations (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2008, 22). According to the Capstone Doctrine, a high-level guideline for contemporary peacekeeping operations, peaceful elections are a benchmark for peacekeeping success and even a pre-condition for handing over peacebuilding responsibilities to post-war governments (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2008, 87-89). Whether and how PKOs help stabilize the electoral environment is also important for the peacebuilding process. Peaceful elections can support the establishment of political order after war by providing legitimacy for post-war governments, establishing an accountability mechanism and offering incentives for good governance (Reilly 2008; Wantchekon 2004).

While promoting elections as a stepping-stone to peace, the UN also recognizes its dangers. For instance, the High-Level Panel of Peacekeeping Operations (2015, 48) notes that "peace processes do not end with [...] an election. Such events constitute merely a phase, rather than the conclusion, of a peace process. In fact, they may be times of great vulnerability." In the 1989–2012 period, about one third of the elections held in conflict-affected countries was marred by severe events of election-related violence, that are, acts of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arise in the context of electoral competition (Sisk 2008a).[1] Violent elections hamper peacebuilding by exacerbating divisions in society (Gutiérrez-Romero 2014), reducing government

legitimacy (Collier and Vicente 2012) or even triggering renewed fighting (Brancati and Snyder 2013). Thus, whether and how PKOs help prevent election-related violence is an important question.

My argument starts from the premise that election-related violence is distinct from other forms of political violence in terms of its purpose, i.e. to affect the electoral process and outcome, and its targets, i.e. voters, candidates, election workers and materials. Only if PKOs adapt their activities to the distinct nature of election-related violence, can they contribute to peaceful elections. Specifically, I argue that peacekeepers' effectiveness in reducing incentives for coercive electoral tactics hinges on whether they engage in election-related activities, i.e. "efforts to organize, monitor and carry out free and fair elections through the provision of security, technical advice, logistical support and other forms of electoral assistance" (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2008, 28). In so doing, they can augment the costs of electoral coercion and reduce electoral manipulation and, in turn, mitigate stakeholders' incentives for employing election-related violence. By contrast, if PKOs are not engaged in election-related activities, their attention and resources likely shift to other priorities and they fail to mitigate election-related violence.

Case studies on peacekeeping in post-conflict elections support this conditional effect (Kumar 1998). For instance, Mozambique's first post-conflict elections in 1994 remained largely peaceful. This outcome is credited to "the presence of the United Nations Operations in Mozambique", its ability to supervise domestic security forces' electoral security operations and "its willingness to investigate any complaint, regardless of its plausibility, [which] ensured transparency and built confidence in the process" (Turner et al. 1998, 171). Similarly, Sisk (2008b, 216) finds that in Liberia in 2005 "both rounds

of elections went off peacefully, in no small measure attributable to ... the ability of the UNMIL force [the PKO] to provide security." In contrast, if PKOs do not assist with electoral security or the election organization, they likely fail in preventing election-related violence. For instance, the PKO in the 1992 elections in Angola neither had the mandate to secure elections, nor the power to postpone them to a less volatile period (Ottaway 1998, 144). The Angolan elections were marred by violence and led back to war. Likewise, Leininger (2006, 512) concludes for Haiti that "the peacekeeping missions' narrow focus on police reform was rather to the disadvantage of democratization." Indeed, the scraping of all election-related functions from the PKOs' mandate correlated with wide-spread unrest during the 1997 parliamentary elections in Haiti. In short, the effect of PKOs depends on their engagement in election-related activities.

Using novel data on PKOs' election-related activities, I provide the first study to systematically test this expectation across a global sample of all 630 elections during or after the end of an armed conflict in the 1989–2012 period and a reduced sample of 92 elections accompanied by a PKO in the same period.[2] Evaluating the effectiveness of PKOs is generally complicated by selection effects (Gilligan and Stedman 2003). In the absence of good instruments for PKOs' presence and election-related activities, I use statistical matching to better approximate PKOs' effects. Matching pre-processes the original sample of electoral periods to create two balanced samples where influential covariates are similarly distributed across *(i)* periods with and without a PKO and *(ii)* periods with and without PKOs' election-related activities, respectively. In both the original sample and the two post-matching samples, the argument receives empirical support. PKOs reduce election-related violence if they are actively involved in assisting with elections.

This article's contribution is three-fold. First, the peacekeeping literature largely agrees that PKOs reduce war-related violence (Fortna 2008; Beardsley 2011; Hultman et al. 2016). It remains debated, however, whether PKOs mitigate violence that is below the threshold of war and that does not directly mimic the wartime master cleavage (Autesserre 2014; Di Salvatore 2019; Bara 2020; Fjelde and Smidt 2020; Smidt 2020b). This article contributes to this debate on peacekeeping effects beyond war and is one of two studies to provide systematic evidence on whether and how PKOs help reduce violence related to elections (see Fjelde and Smidt 2020, for the other one). Second, a small but growing body of literature finds that peacekeepers' activities on the ground matter for peacekeeping effectiveness (e.g. Hultman 2010; Murdie and Davis 2010; Heldt 2011; Dorussen and Gizelis 2013; Smidt 2020b). Yet, *election-related* activities, a core part of the peacekeeping agenda, have been overlooked in cross-national research on peacekeeping (see Mvukiyehe and Samii 2017; Smidt 2020a, for case studies). Using original cross-national data on PKOs' activities, this study fills this gap. Its findings point to one causal pathway through which peacekeepers may help stabilize post-war political transitions.

Finally, the study contributes to our growing knowledge on how international organizations shape domestic electoral politics. It thus complements assessments of election monitoring (Daxecker 2012; Simpser and Donno 2012; Little 2012; Hyde and Marinov 2014; von Borzyskowski 2019a; Luo and Rozenas 2018; von Borzyskowski 2019b) and technical election assistance (von Borzyskowski 2016; Birch and Muchlinski 2018; Lührmann 2019).

After reviewing existing research on international interventions in elections, I develop my argument on how peacekeepers' election-related activities mitigate election-related violence. The subsequent

sections detail the research design and present evidence for the argument. The article concludes by suggesting how its findings inform theory and policy.

What we know about peacekeepers' effects in elections

An increasing number of contemporary PKOs engage in election-related activities, ranging from reforming electoral law and transporting election equipment to securing polling stations and election rallies (Kumar 1998; United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2008). Peacekeepers actively assist with about 15 percent of all elections in conflict-affected countries in the 1989–2012 period. Five currently ongoing PKOs in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kosovo, Mali and South Sudan are tasked with supporting elections. Yet, we have little systematic knowledge about the contribution that peacekeepers may make to peaceful elections across countries and over time. Given the prominence of elections in peacebuilding strategies, it is timely to study the links between peacekeeping and election-related violence after war.

Existing research on international intervention in electoral politics focusses on election monitoring and technical election assistance (and not peacekeeping). International election monitors deter violent and fraudulent behaviour by exposing and shaming its perpetrators (Daxecker 2012; Simpser and Donno 2012; Hyde 2010; Hyde and Marinov 2014; Little 2012). Although election monitors' exposure of fraudulent behaviour also increases contentious mobilization by election losers (Fearon 2011; Daxecker 2012; von Borzyskowski 2019b), the net effect of election monitoring is a security-enhancing one (Luo and Rozenas 2018). Researchers suggest similar positive

effects for international technical election assistance. Weak and dysfunctional election management structures can trigger election-related violence. Technical election assistance can strengthen and professionalize election management bodies and thus prevent violence (Birch and Muchlinski 2018; von Borzyskowski 2016), at least if governments principally support credible elections (Lührmann 2019).[3] As PKOs' election-related activities also include monitoring and technical election assistance, evidence for positive effects of these activities done by other international organizations should make us optimistic about the prospects of peacekeepers' contribution to electoral peace. Yet, beyond monitoring and technical assistance, this article also examines PKOs' unique ability to augment electoral security (see also Fjelde and Smidt 2020).

The peacekeeping literature tends to focus on peacekeepers' effectiveness in reducing the risk of renewed war and related violence. Researchers agree that peacekeeping deployment helps stabilize post-war environments (Fortna 2008; Beardsley 2011; Hultman et al. 2016). Some analyses also suggest that the deployment of PKOs during electoral periods lowers the risk of civil war recurrence after elections (e.g. Brancati and Snyder 2013; Sisk 2008b). Yet, this finding tells us little about whether PKOs prevent war *despite* elections or actually mitigate election-related violence. Recent studies have revealed the significant limitations of peacekeepers in curbing post-war violence that does not mimic the wartime master cleavage, such as crime or local power struggles (e.g. Autesserre 2014; Di Salvatore 2019; Bara 2020). Thus, PKOs' ability to reduce violence motivated by election dynamics could also be questioned. Related, Autesserre (2009) finds that PKOs generally lack the willingness and ability to address violence of lower intensity than war-fighting, including election-related violence (see also Pouligny 2000). Instead, PKOs often

view low-intensity violence as "innate and therefore acceptable" in conflict-affected countries (Autesserre 2009, 249). [4] Thus, while the literature on election monitoring and technical election assistance provides a basis for optimism, whether peacekeepers help or hinder electoral security remains an open question (see Fjelde and Smidt 2020, for the only other study providing cross-national evidence for PKO's electoral security-enhancing effects).

Incentives of election-related violence

How may PKOs help reduce the risk of election-related violence in conflict-affected countries? The answer to this question starts with understanding why electoral stakeholders organize election-related violence. The main electoral stakeholders in war-torn countries are election candidates competing for local or national offices and armed groups (Daxecker and Jung 2018), that either directly participate in elections as candidates or indirectly participate in elections by backing their preferred candidate or obstructing the campaign of candidates with incompatible policy positions (Matanock and Staniland 2018).[5] Following existing research, I argue that these electoral stakeholders employ election-related violence to maximize electoral gains, i.e. political power after elections (Dunning 2011). Election-related violence is thus distinct from war-related violence due to its motives, i.e. to affect the electoral process and outcome, and its targets: Before elections, electoral stakeholders may violently target rival candidates to hamper their campaign, intimidate opposition voters to lower their turnout, and forcefully disrupt the work of election officials in competitors' strongholds. After elections, electoral losers may target rival supporters and state agents with the aim of forcing an election re-run or entering a power-sharing agreement (i.e. von Borzyskowski 2019a). Various parameters shape electoral

stakeholders' incentives to supplement their electoral strategies with violence (Fjelde and Höglund 2020). I focus on those that can be tackled by PKOs' election-related activities: *(i)* cost of election-related violence and *(ii)* likelihood of electoral manipulation.

Electoral stakeholders have greater incentives for coercive electoral tactics if violence incurs few costs. War shapes this cost parameter in ways that augment the risk of violent elections (Flores and Nooruddin 2012; Brancati and Snyder 2013). First, perpetrators may face low reputational costs for election-related violence because war-induced financial and logistical challenges prevent domestic "watchdog" groups, such as journalists or civil society organizations, from effectively monitoring electoral processes and calling out abuse (Kumar 1998). Even if domestic groups manage to monitor elections, political divisions in war-torn societies likely reduce the credibility of their reports (Snyder and Mansfield 2012). Moreover, wars tend to lower the implementation costs of election-related violence. Armed conflicts produce a surplus of violence-specialists (Staniland 2015; Christensen and Utas 2008). Since wars weaken courts and law enforcement bodies, electoral stakeholders may use these violence-specialists with impunity (Höglund 2009, 421). Wars also erode institutional constraints that could prevent governments from misusing state security forces for coercive electoral strategies (Flores and Nooruddin 2012; Hafner-Burton et al. 2014). Yet, wars do not only increase the availability of violence-specialists. Given long-standing grievances in war-torn countries, electoral stakeholders may also find it easy to mobilize ordinary citizens for violence (Cederman et al. 2011). Overall, the low costs of election-related violence may encourage opportunistic election-related violence. Electoral stakeholders may choose to supplement their electoral strategy with

coercive tactics if it is cheap to do so (see Fjelde and Smidt 2020, for distinguishing reputational and implementation costs).

Second, electoral stakeholders use violence if a high risk of electoral manipulation makes peaceful electoral tactics seem futile for maximizing electoral gains. That is, electoral stakeholders deem violence necessary to compensate for opponents' electoral misbehaviour and resulting disadvantages in elections (Beaulieu 2014). Wars tend to increase the likelihood of electoral manipulation. As elaborated above, capacity constraints and divisions in war-torn society hamper effective and credible domestic monitoring of the electoral process (Flores and Nooruddin 2012). The lack of oversight means that stakeholders might escape reputational costs for manipulating elections. In war-torn countries, constraints on implementing electoral manipulation are likely low too. Wars tend to erode the capacity and independence of state institutions in general (Brancati and Snyder 2013; Flores and Nooruddin 2012) and election management bodies specifically (Höglund 2009). If electoral management bodies are weak or biased, governments face few obstacles to manipulating the vote (Opitz et al. 2013). Finally, missing state capacity and infrastructure may make election logistics, such as transport of election materials, vulnerable to political interferences. Overall, electoral manipulation is likely increasing the incentives for coercive electoral strategies: Electoral stakeholders are afraid of being put at a disadvantage due to competitors' electoral misbehaviour and they engage in violence to compensate for or protest and retaliate against these real or perceived disadvantages (Beaulieu 2014). In manipulated elections, violence become a rational electoral strategy (Collier and Vicente 2012).

If PKOs engage in election-related activities, they may augment the costs associated with election-related violence and reduce the

likelihood of electoral manipulation, thereby decreasing incentives for coercive electoral strategies. Yet, there are additional determinants of violent elections, e.g. the stakes in elections (Fjelde and Höglund 2015) or the chances of victory in future elections (Przeworski 2015), which PKOs may not influence. Therefore, I expect peacekeepers to have a violence-reducing effect at the margins.

The impact of peacekeepers' election-related activities

PKOs may discourage electoral stakeholders from supplementing their campaigns with coercion if they engage in election-related activities. Election-related activities consist of two types: Electoral security-related activities that increase the costs of coercion and election organization-related activities that help prevent electoral manipulation. In contrast, if PKOs do not engage in these election-related activities, their attention and resources shift away from electoral processes and they may fail to mitigate electoral stakeholders' incentives for using coercive tactics.

Augmenting costs of election-related violence

Similar to election observer missions, PKOs' electoral security activities entail gathering information on the electoral environment and documenting violent incidents. Yet, beyond adopting the usual functions of election observers, PKOs also set-up investigation and complaint mechanisms for election-related human rights violations. For instance, during the 2011 parliamentary elections, "UNOCI has established an integrated human rights monitoring and investigation task force to document violations and a 24-hour call centre to receive information about alleged violations. The call centre has received more than 9,000 calls" (United Nations Security Council 2011). PKOs' information on the electoral security environment

and violent incidents is used for internal planning, but also shared with a wider audience. This information enters PKOs' regular reports to the UN Secretariat, Security Council members and troop-contributing countries and it is distributed to domestic and international journalists at press conferences and in UN media. For instance, before the 2018 elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, UN News released detailed information on government responsibility in pre-election violence (United Nations 2018).

The exposure of election-related violence is associated with reputational costs at both the international and domestic level (see Fjelde and Smidt 2020, for the distinction between international and domestic reputational costs). International stakeholders in elections in war-torn countries often condition their support on compliance with norms of electoral integrity. Thus, government-affiliated electoral stakeholders risk aid cuts or trade embargoes if PKO reports provide credible information on violent non-compliance. Leaders of opposition parties and armed groups likely face targeted sanctions such as frozen bank accounts. In some instance, the exposure of violence may also serve as "tripwire" for more robust peacekeeping action (Fortna 2008, 98-99). For example, after the PKO in Côte d'Ivoire called attention to government responsibility in the 2011 post-election violence, the Security Council first issued sanctions and then unanimously passed Resolution 1975, which authorized UNOCI to "use all necessary means" to protect civilians – despite the fact that the defeated government called for the PKO's departure.

In addition, peacekeepers' exposure of violent incidents may also trigger domestic reputational costs. While election-related violence is usually intended to de-mobilize targeted voters and candidates, its exposure may provoke a popular backlash (see Fjelde and Smidt 2020, for this mechanism). Indeed, research shows that voters often

defy rather than submit to intimidation by sanctioning violent candidates and voting for more peaceful ones (e.g. Collier and Vicente 2014; Gutierrez-Romero and LeBas 2020). In summary, PKOs' electoral security activities in the form of monitoring, documenting and reporting incidents of violence augment both domestic and international reputational costs of election-related violence.

Beyond mirroring the functions of election observers and imposing reputational costs, PKOs have the unique ability to engage in electoral security activities and augment the implementation costs for organizing election-related violence (see **?**, for distinction between reputational and implementation). Electoral security activities entail patrols at electoral sites, such as polling stations and rallies, and the re-deployment of UN forces to vulnerable electoral districts. These operations augment the capacity of UN forces to militarily retaliate against perpetrators of election-related violence (Hultman 2013). For instance, after the 2015 elections in Côte d'Ivoire, "peacekeepers repelled an attack by armed individuals against the electoral office in Bonon and extricated UNOCI and Ivorian polling staff to another location" (United Nations Security Council 2012, 2). Oftentimes, UN military is also involved in security planning for election logistics. For instance, the PKOs' military component in Cambodia "relocated a number of polling stations at last minute" and "arranged the transportation of voters to new sites" to protect the electoral process from attacks by the Khmer Rouge rebel faction (Whalan 2013, 116). Thus, electoral security operations constrain and deter election-related violence and reduce violence-specialists' effectiveness and possibly their availability. In so doing, peacekeepers augment the implementation costs for electoral stakeholders who command election-related violence.

Moreover, PKOs' electoral security activities increase the implementation costs of election-related violence by de-escalating ongoing electoral conflict. For example, the PKO in Côte d'Ivoire used inter-positioning and on-the-spot mediation to help restore order during violent clashes among rival partisan youth groups that had ensued after the results of the 2015 presidential elections were announced (United Nations Security Council 2015, paragraphs 35-38). Inter-positioning and mediation thus constrain electoral stakeholders who try to exacerbate tensions and incite rioting, e.g. to mobilize supporters or intimidate opponents.

Finally, PKOs' electoral security assistance augments implementation costs of election-related violence since peacekeepers train and supervise domestic security forces in electoral security operations. Research shows that the provision of police and military training by peacekeepers improves the professionalism of host state forces and even diffuses norms of non-violence (Belgioioso et al. 2020). Professional security forces likely refuse to implement coercive electoral strategies, e.g. threatening and intimidating voters and opposition candidates. PKOs' electoral security assistance usually also entails co-location of UN military and police with domestic security forces in "integrated" electoral security operations. Sometimes, PKOs even help integrate domestic non-state armed groups in electoral security arrangements (Stedman 1997, 31). As UN force commanders supervise and obtain control over domestic forces, they create obstacles and implementation costs for electoral stakeholders that seek to organize election-related violence.

Overall, the reputational and implementation costs imposed by PKOs' electoral security activities may reduce opportunistic election-related violence (see Fjelde and Smidt 2020, for this argument). As the cost of coercive electoral strategies increase, its associated expected

benefits decrease and peaceful campaigning becomes a relatively more beneficial tactic for maximising electoral gains.

Reducing the likelihood of electoral manipulation

Beyond securing elections, PKOs' election-related activities also include election organization assistance, e.g. peacekeepers help reform electoral laws, advise electoral commissions and transport election materials. Through assisting the election organization, PKOs can, much like electoral observers, increase the reputational costs of electoral manipulation by augmenting the probability that electoral manipulation is detected, publicized and punished (e.g. Daxecker 2012; Hyde and Marinov 2014, on election monitoring). While modern PKOs are seldom tasked with election monitoring as such, their election organization-related activities allow them to gain oversight over crucial steps in the electoral process and collect information on fraudulent behaviour, e.g. during voter registration or tabulation of ballots. Through regular reports, press conferences and UN media, PKOs' information on non-compliance with electoral rules is channelled to multiple domestic and international audiences and trigger reputational costs for the principals behind electoral manipulation. In this way, PKOs likely decrease the likelihood of electoral manipulation.

Unlike election monitoring organizations, PKOs do not only observe but also assist with the election organization and constrain electoral stakeholders' ability to manipulate them. Election organization assistance entails both advice and training of local and national electoral commission personnel. By providing this assistance, peacekeepers help insulate these election management bodies from undue interference by governments and other electoral stakeholders. Indeed, cross-national research suggests that such technical election

assistance can improve election quality (Finkel et al. 2007). Related, PKOs tend to be involved in procurement of sensitive election material such as ballot papers and election-related technology. For instance, the PKO in East Timor organized the procurement and delivery of ballots, which had been printed in Australia on special security paper (UNTAET 2001). In so doing, PKOs shield contentious electoral processes from political interference and manipulation.

Finally, logistical election support is a crucial part of election-related organization activities by PKOs in countries where infrastructure is wrought by war. For example, the PKO in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, assisted the first post-war with "the transport of electoral materials and personnel, including the use of the air assets of UNAMSIL to reach areas inaccessible by road, the storage and distribution of election materials prior to the elections, the movement of ballot papers after the elections, logistical assistance to international election observers, and the use of the civilian communications facilities of UNAMSIL in the provinces" (Atuobi 2009, 23) In so doing, PKOs make it harder for electoral stakeholders to manipulate election logistics to their advantage, e.g. by disrupting ballot delivery or election monitoring in opponents' strongholds. A report of the elections in Sierra-Leone concludes that "UNAMSIL exercised such overwhelming control over the electoral process that it appeared to some citizens of Sierra Leone that the NEC [National Election Commission] had been sidelined" (ibid, 23). Logistical support reduces the influence of domestic agencies and actors and may thus insulates the electoral process from political interference. For instance, Nelson (1998) argues for the elections in Haiti in 1995 that the PKO "UNMIH made certain that technical pieces were in place and that politicians could not use implementation problems to delay or subvert the elections for purely political reasons."[6]

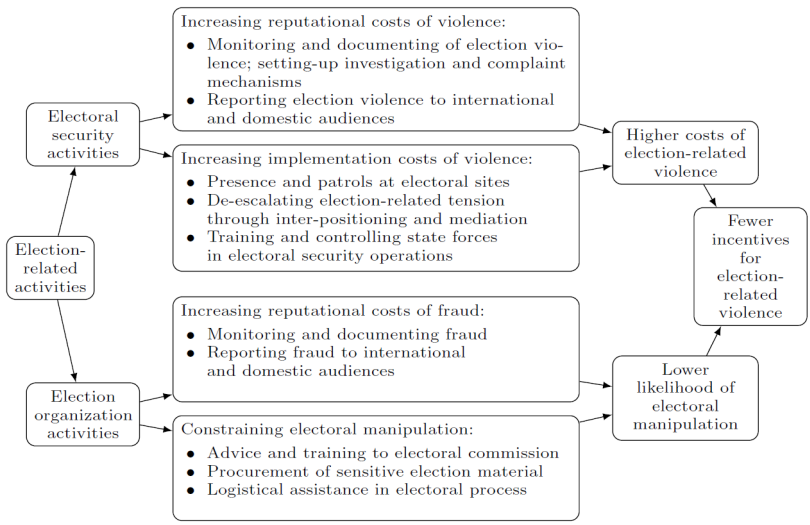
In summary, PKOs' election organization-related activities impose constraints on fraud in the electoral process through monitoring and reporting misbehaviour and taking-over crucial parts of the electoral preparation. Thus, electoral stakeholders do not have to fear that fraud puts them at a disadvantage which lowers their incentives for violent compensatory or retaliatory action. Furthermore, because PKOs constrain electoral misbehaviour, electoral stakeholders committed to clean and peaceful elections can credibly signal their intention to refrain from fraudulent activities. These signals should reduce all stakeholders' fears of being cheated on by electoral competitors. Overall, PKOs' election organization assistance can thus reassure electoral stakeholders and eliminate their incentives for coercive campaign strategies to protest against or compensate for real or perceived disadvantages in the electoral process (Fortna 2008, 98-102).

PKOs without election-related functions.

If PKOs do not engage in election-related activities, they may fail to shape electoral stakeholders' incentives for election-related violence. Modern PKOs are engaged in a wide variety of activities, ranging from disarming and demobilizing ex-combatants, over monitoring borders to protecting vulnerable civilians and delivering humanitarian aid (Paris 2004). Yet, resources of PKOs are limited. If PKOs are not involved in assisting with electoral security or organizing elections, then their attention and efforts likely shift to their other priority tasks. More specifically, electoral security activities direct peacekeepers' attention to those actors and districts that are vulnerable to election-related violence. Without this focussed attention, PKOs likely fail to detect incidents of election-related violence and trigger reputational costs. Moreover, if UN forces are

not present in hotspots of election-related violence, they are less efficient in raising the implementation costs associated with coercive electoral strategies. Furthermore, PKOs' involvement in the election organizations is crucial for imposing costs for electoral manipulation. If PKOs remain outsiders to election management processes, they cannot trigger reputational costs for fraud. Likewise, when PKOs do not help organize the elections, they do not insulate election management bodies, procurement and electoral logistics from political interference and fail to prevent manipulation.

Figure 1. Mechanisms of peacekeeping in elections



Overall, PKOs may only help secure elections if they engage in election-related activities. Election-related activities augment the costs of election-related violence and prevent manipulation, thereby encouraging electoral stakeholders' peaceful electoral behaviour. Figure 1 illustrates the mechanisms underpinning this effect. While electoral security activities and election organization activities may work through analytically and operationally distinct mechanisms,

studying their differential effects is difficult. This is because PKOs often support the security and the organization of elections simultaneously. Nevertheless, the analyses in this article provide exploratory evidence for both mechanisms. The main observable implication of the argument, however, pertains to both election-related activities together.

Hypothesis: If a PKO engages in election-related activities, then its presence reduces the risk of election-related violence.

Beyond PKOs, a variety of other international actors—UN entities, regional organizations and NGOs—engage in election-related assistance and they shape electoral dynamics in important ways (Birch and Muchlinski 2018; Matanock 2017; von Borzyskowski 2016, 2019a). The empirical analyses account for these efforts. In contrast to all other international actors, however, PKOs do not only provide technical assistance to the organization of elections, but PKOs also include military and police personnel and they assist with electoral security arrangements. This study explores the previously under-explored mechanism underpinning peaceful elections in challenging environments.

Research design

I examine the influence of PKOs' election-related activities on election-related violence across *(i)* 630 electoral periods in conflict-affected countries holding elections in the 1989–2012 period and *(ii)* those 92 electoral periods that are accompanied by a PKO in the same period. The full sample includes all national-level legislative and presidential elections held during or at the most 20 years after minor or major intra-state armed conflict. Two elections on the same day

are counted as one. Appendix E shows that results are substantively the same for post-conflict elections within 10 years after the end of armed conflict. Election dates are recorded in the National Elections Across Democracies and Autocracies (NELDA) dataset version 4 (Hyde and Marinov 2011). Information on PKOs' deployment is taken from Kathman (2013). Conflict episodes are recorded in the UCDP-PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset version 4 (Themner 2013; Gleditsch et al. 2002; Themner and Wallensteen 2013).

The dependent variable is a binary indicator for whether there was significant violence involving civilian deaths immediately before, during, or after the election. Information comes from the NELDA dataset (NELDA33). For instance, deadly election-related violence recorded in NELDA occurred in the 1993 elections in Cambodia, where the Khmer Rouge murdered members of rival political parties. As the dependent variable is a binary indicator, I employ logistic regression. Cluster-robust standard errors account for potential non-independence of errors across elections within the same country.

Recently, scholars also collected events data on election-related violence, including the Electoral Violence And Contention dataset by Daxecker et al. (2019), the Countries at Risk of Electoral Violence dataset by Birch and Muchlinski (2020) and the Deadly Electoral Conflict Dataset. (DECO) dataset by Fjelde and Höglund (2020). I prefer the binary measure from NELDA because it captures significant and lethal election-related violence that severely hampers the electoral process. This is the type of violence that peacekeepers ought to address. Moreover, events datasets include different types of violent events and counts of these different events may lack comparability. For example, three violent demonstrations in country A might not be similarly severe as three murders of electoral candidates in country B. The NELDA measure draws on detailed qualitative information

to assess the severity of election-related violence and thus guarantees comparability at a more aggregate level.

Measuring peacekeeping activities

The analyses make use of my novel dataset on PKOs' activities during electoral periods. The dataset draws on information from UN Secretary-General reports that report on the activities that peacekeepers implement in their host countries. I rely on these Secretary-General reports rather than PKOs' mandates (e.g. the UN Security Council resolutions authorizing a PKO) for two reasons. First, relying on mandates alone would lead to a failure to capture peacekeepers' activities on the ground because the activities that PKOs do can diverge from the activities that are authorized in their mandates (Blair et al. 2019). Second, reports are published more regularly than mandates, usually four times a year and sometimes weekly (for example, in the case of UNPROFOR in Bosnia, 1992). Coding the reports before and after election day allows me to capture the election-related activities of peacekeepers during the electoral period.

The Secretary-General reports are not without limitations. They may emphasize those activities that best reflect the PKO's achievements (Clayton et al. 2017), though there is no systematic evidence for such a bias. Reports may exclude activities that are considered minor or routine. The bureaucratic language of the reports may obscure the nature or intensity of activities that a PKO pursued in the electoral period. Notwithstanding these limitations, the Secretary-General reports usually contain specific and detailed information on election-related activities. They are the most comprehensive, publicly available source of information on PKOs' activities in their host countries.

For example, the Secretary-General report before the 2006 elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo reports on activities pertaining to electoral security assistance: The PKO "will assist in security measures for the elections using its military and police assets. The military component's main effort during this period will be to deter armed challenges to the electoral process, contain spoilers and provide a safe environment for electoral workers and voters" (United Nations Security Council 2006b). An example of reported activities related to election organization assistance can be found in the Secretary-General report before the 2006 elections in Haiti. The report states that the PKO "will continue to provide operational assistance and policy advice to the Provisional Electoral Council to complete the current electoral cycle" (United Nations Security Council 2006a).

Using this dataset on PKOs' activities, I construct two binary variables – one for the presence of a PKO without election-related activities and another one for the presence of a PKO with election-related activities. Thus, the first binary variable is 1 if a PKO without election-related activities is present during an electoral period, and 0 otherwise. The second categorical variable is 1 if a PKO with election-related activities is present during an electoral period, and 0 otherwise. Both variables are included in the analyses of all 630 electoral periods in conflict-affected countries. If both variables are 0, no PKO is present during an electoral period.

A second set of models differentiates between the two types of election-related activities – one model includes a binary variable for electoral security assistance and another model includes a binary variable for election organization assistance. Finally, a last set of models is estimated in the sample of only those 92 elections accompanied by a PKO. Thus, these models solely include the binary

variable for the presence of a PKO with election-related activities, using the electoral periods accompanied by a PKO without these activities as baseline category.

Figure 2 depicts the over-time variation in elections (grey bars), in which a PKO is present (black bars) and assists with electoral security (blue bars). Figure 3 reveals a similar over-time distribution for election organization assistance. Both Figures tentatively reveal an over-time increase in election-related activity by peacekeepers. Figure 4 depicts clearer time trends: The five-year mean proportion of elections accompanied by a PKO has remained fairly stable over time (black line), while the five-year mean proportion of elections with a PKO engaged in electoral security assistance (solid blue line) and/or election organisation assistance (dashed blue line) has increased since 2000. Figure 5 reveals a similar upward trend in PKO troop size in this period. Indeed, large PKOs with more troops are more likely to engage in election-related activities. Yet, there are also PKOs with many troops without election-related engagement, such as UNPROFOR in Croatia (1992) or UNIFIL in Lebanon (2009). The analyses control for PKO military troops using data from Kathman (2013).[7]

Figure 2. Electoral security assistance

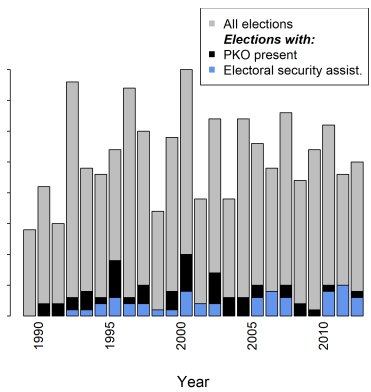


Figure 3. Election organization assistance

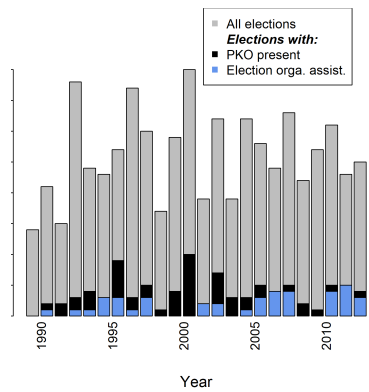


Figure 4. Trend in election-related activity

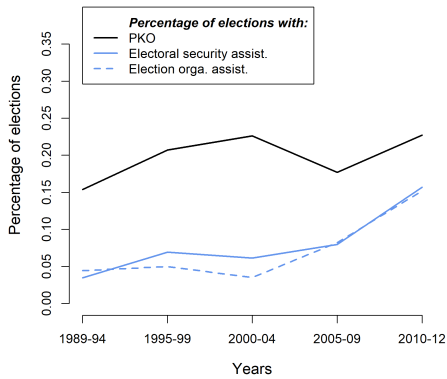
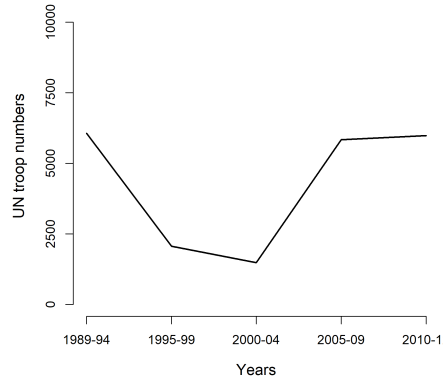


Figure 5. Trend in UN troop numbers



PKOs are not the only provider of election assistance. Other UN agencies (e.g. UNDP), international organizations, foreign states and non-governmental organizations also provide election assistance in PKO host countries and elsewhere. If these other forms of election assistance are systematically correlated with PKOs' election-related activities, omitting them from the models may bias the effect of election-related activities on election-related violence. Therefore, all analyses account for international election monitoring and democracy aid (Matanock 2017). An indicator records the presence of at least one credible election monitoring mission (Hyde and Marinov 2011). A continuous variable captures committed democracy aid in constant US dollars (Tierney et al. 2011). The variable is logged due to skewness. In Appendix D, the models also include a control variable for UN election assistance, using data from von Borzyskowski (2016) for the period 1990–2003 and Birch and Muchlinski (2018) for the period 2004–2012. The results for peacekeepers' election-specific activities remain substantively the same.

Strategy for identifying peacekeeping effects

Peacekeepers and their election-related activities are not randomly assigned to countries and electoral periods. The risk of election-related violence likely influences *(i)* where a PKO is sent and *(ii)* whether it assists with elections. Previous research shows that PKOs invest more resources in severe and intractable conflicts (Gilligan and Stedman 2003; Fortna 2004; Gilligan and Sergenti 2008; Beardsley and Schmidt 2012). Thus, PKOs might be more likely to deploy and conduct election-related activities in violence-prone elections in countries where conflict has been most severe and intractable. If this is the case, my analyses would underestimate the violence-reducing impact of peacekeeping deployment and election-related activities. However, the UN could also decide to refrain from assisting elections that are prone to violence, which would make it easier to find a violence-reducing effect of peacekeeping.

Therefore, all models include a wide variety of potentially confounding factors in order to account for important differences between the electoral periods in the sample. I first include armed conflict characteristics because they likely influence PKOs' deployment, their level of engagement (Beardsley and Schmidt 2012; Fortna 2008) and election-related violence (Daxecker and Jung 2018). These characteristics are the number of battle deaths and the number of war-related civilian casualties in the year before elections from the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset (Allansson et al. 2017) and the UCDP One-Sided Violence Dataset version 1.4. (Eck and Hultman 2007), respectively. The models also include the duration of the previous conflict in days. All three variables are logged due to high skewness. Furthermore, the models incorporate indicators for whether elections take place in major armed conflict (war) or after armed conflict (with minor armed conflict as baseline). Finally, days after

the end of armed conflict is included to capture the time for recovery before elections (Brancati and Snyder 2013). All these variables are constructed from the UCDP-PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset version 4 (Themner 2013; Gleditsch et al. 2002; Themner and Wallensteen 2013).

Variation in election characteristics may also confound the estimated effect of PKOs' involvement in elections. Specifically, PKOs may extend their stay and engage in election-related activities if elections pose a greater risk of violence. Using information from the NELDA dataset, the models include indicators for whether past elections experienced violence and whether elections were expected to be fraudulent (Hyde and Marinov 2011). I also include an indicator for whether the incumbent was confident of victory as a measure for the lack of electoral competitiveness. Finally, the models incorporate an indicator for founding elections, i.e. first multi-party elections after independence or a significant period of non-democratic rule, which tend to be both violence-prone and supported by PKOs. Regime characteristics and the quality of electoral institutions similarly determine the nature of elections and, thus, peacekeeping presence and characteristics. Therefore, the models include the Polity IV score (Marshall et al. 2014) and the capacity of electoral management bodies from the V-dem project version 7.1 (Coppedge et al. 2017), respectively. To measure opportunity costs for violent behaviour, the models include the country's GDP per capita measured in constant US dollars. Finally, the analyses include population size. More populous countries likely exhibit more violence and receive more assistance from PKOs. GDP and population data are logged due to skewness and data come from the World Bank (2014). Summary statistics for all variables are in Appendix A.

To further address the endogenity concern, I use matching. In the absence of convincing instruments for peacekeeping deployment and election-related activities, matching is the best solution (Gilligan and Sergenti 2008). Matching pre-processes the original sample with weights and by pruning observations to create a quasi-experimental sample where elections with the "treatment" (e.g. the presence of a PKO active in election-related activities) are similar in terms of influential observable factors (matching covariates) compared to elections without the "treatment". I create two post-matching samples—(i) one sample in which matching covariates are similarly distributed across electoral periods with and without a PKO and (ii) another one in which matching covariates are similarly distributed across periods with and without PKOs' election-related activities. In the second post-matching sample, the "control group" thus includes electoral periods with a PKO not engaged in election-related activities and electoral periods without a PKO. Across all models, I expect the coefficient on PKOs' election-related activities to be consistently negative. If PKOs indeed choose to deploy and assist with elections in the violence-prone electoral periods, then the negative coefficient should be larger in the more balanced, post-matching samples.

Given the moderate number of electoral periods in the analyses, I only choose matching covariates that were significant predictors of election-related violence in the pre-matching models using the original sample. These are civilian deaths, past election-related violence, fraud, competitiveness, founding elections, the capacity of electoral management institutions, democracy aid and election monitoring. Matching makes the post-matching analyses less sensitive to modelling assumptions. From the many available matching methods, I choose coarsened exact matching (CEM) and present the results after "optimal" propensity score (PS) matching in Appendix

F. CEM is used in the main analyses because it provides the best balance between "treated" and "control" electoral periods. Moreover, CEM does not require assumptions about the functional form of the data-generating process underlying PKOs' election-related activities and it reduces not only the overall imbalance but also the imbalances on specific covariates. The balance statistics for the two post-matching samples have improved considerably on most matching covariates (see Tables A2 and A3 in Appendix A) (Ho et al. 2011, 7). Yet, even after matching, "treated" electoral periods may still differ from "control" electoral periods. Therefore, matching better approximates but does not recover the true effect of peacekeeping on election-related violence.

Results and discussion

The analyses of all 630 elections in war-torn countries summarized in Table 1 yield results consistent with the argument: The presence of a PKO is associated with a lower risk of election-related violence only if peacekeepers engage in election-related activities (for regression tables with all controls, see Appendix B). The coefficient on the presence of a PKO with election-related activities is consistently negative and statistically significant. In contrast, the coefficient on the presence of a PKO without election-related activities is positive and not consistently significant.

Figure 6 illustrates the predicted effects of peacekeepers with and without election-related functions on the risk of election-related violence. Based on Model 1, election-related activities are associated with a 32.3 percentage points–decrease in the average risk of election-related violence compared to electoral periods without a PKO. Models 2 and 3 are estimated using the post-matching samples. The predicted effects of election-related activities remain consistently negative. Their larger effect size implies that PKOs tend to engage in

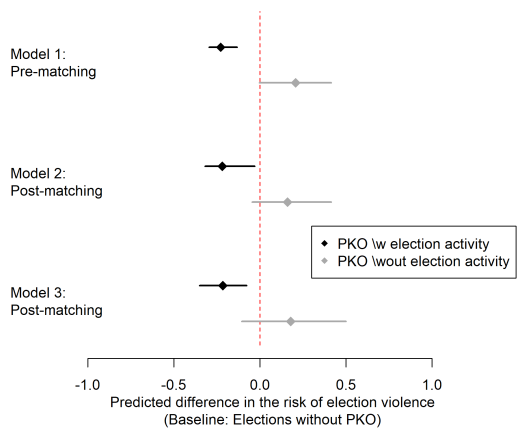
Table 1. Logit regression of election violence on election-related activity

Matching on:	Model 1: No matching	Model 2: PKO presence	Model3: PKO activity
PKO with election-related activities	-2.088***	-2.368**	-2.490***
	(0.700)	(1.087)	(0.932)
PKO without election-related activities	0.913*	0.894*	0.940
	(0.479)	(0.516)	(0.603)
Constant	-4.845***	-13.853***	-9.436**
	(1.516)	(3.363)	(4.008)
Observations	630	363	280
Log Likelihood	-286.181	-149.726	-105.868
Akaike Inf. Crit.	612.362	339.451	251.737

Note: Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.
Full model includes all controls and is summarized in Appendix B.

election-related activities in more violence-prone elections and that matching reduces the bias due to non-random selection. Interestingly, the presence of a PKO without election-related activities is associated with an increased risk of election-related violence. But this change is not consistently significant and likely due to the fact that the mere presence of a PKO cannot offset the selection bias resulting from deployment to more violence-prone elections.

Figure 6. Predicted effects (Models 1–3)

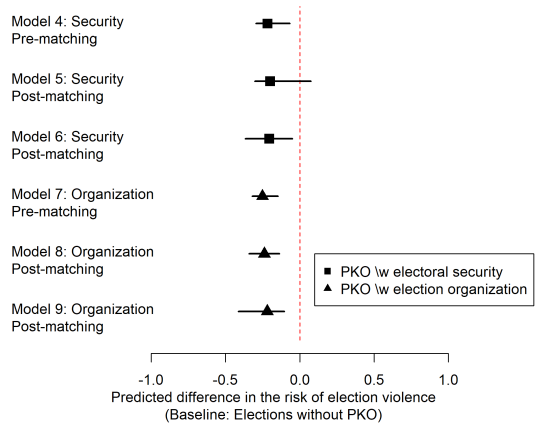


In terms of predictive performance, the addition of the variables for PKO presence with and without election-related activities makes a substantive difference. False negatives – violent electoral periods predicted as peaceful ones – are reduced from 99 to 86 cases in the pre-matching model 1, from 29 to 20 in the post-matching model 2 and from 21 to 17 in the post-matching model 3. Moreover, the addition of PKO-related variables reduces the number of false positives – peaceful electoral periods predicted as violent ones – from 50 to 48 in model 1, from 55 to 50 in model 2 and from 37 to 30 in model 3. Appendix G provides separation plots for the graphical examination of predictive performance.

PKOs' election-related activities include assistance with *electoral security arrangements* and the *election organization*. Are both activities equally important for reducing election-related violence? While existing studies support the effectiveness of peacekeepers' security-related functions more generally (Beardsley 2011; Hultman et al. 2013, 2016), peacekeepers' civilian activities (here: election organization assistance) deserve more attention in cross-national empirical research. Yet, only nine elections solely receive electoral security assistance and only seven elections solely receive assistance with the election organization in the 1989–2012 period. Thus, the results for the estimated differential effects should be interpreted with caution. Figure 7 illustrates the predicted reduction in the risk of election-related violence associated with PKOs' electoral security assistance and election organization assistance (for regression tables, see Appendix B). All effects are negative and significant.[8] What these analyses show is that peacekeepers help reduce the risk of election-related violence through both security-related and civilian functions.

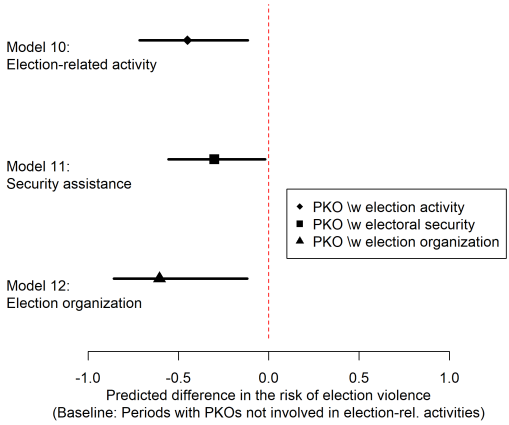
Elections accompanied by a PKO may differ in unobserved ways from those without a PKO, for example, because peacekeepers

Figure 7. Predicted effects (Models 4–9)



influenced the trajectory of the previous armed conflict. Therefore, the last set of regressions tests whether the negative effect of PKOs' election-related activities holds in a reduced sample which only includes the 92 PKO-accompanied elections. As Figure 8 illustrates, the predicted effects of election-related activities are still consistently negative and statistically significant within a 90 percent confidence interval.

Figure 8. Predicted effects (Models 10-12)



Tests for alternative explanations Election-related activities tend to be part of PKOs' multidimensional mandates (Paris 2004). Thus, peacekeepers' multidimensional responsibilities rather than their *election-specific* tasks may explain the negative effect coefficient. Appendix C examines this possibility by controlling for whether a PKO has a multidimensional mandate. Yet, the effect coefficient on election-related activities remains negative and significant. Moreover, Appendix D shows that the impact of PKOs' election-related activities is not driven by other UN agencies' technical election assistance. The analyses include a binary measure for any UN election assistance, using data from von Borzyskowski (2016) and Birch and Muchlinski (2018). Nevertheless, PKOs' involvement in securing and organizing elections remains a significant predictor of electoral peace.

Conclusion

The article shows that peacekeepers' activities are fundamentally important for whether PKOs help keep electoral peace. PKOs' election-related activities, their assistance with electoral security

arrangements and the organization of elections, are associated with a reduction in the risk of election-related violence. If PKOs do not engage in election-related activities, their presence does not affect electoral security.

Complementing existing research on peacekeeping policies (Hultman 2010; Murdie and Davis 2010; Heldt 2011; Dorussen and Gizelis 2013), my findings underline the importance of differentiating between different activities in complex multidimensional PKOs. Specifically, investigating election-related activities helps us to understand how PKOs can secure political transitions after war and nuances general critiques of liberal peacekeeping (for an overview, see Paris 2010). Moreover, the findings add to the growing research on the impact of PKOs on violence that is often below the threshold of war and may not directly mimic the wartime cleavage (Autesserre 2014; Di Salvatore 2019; Bara 2020; Fjelde and Smidt 2020).

The optimistic findings should not deflect from the fact that PKO deployment is expensive and thus limited to a relatively short time period (Matanock 2017). Future research should evaluate whether PKOs' election-related activities have long-lasting benefits even after the exit of peacekeepers (Gledhill 2020). Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate whether the effects extend to elections at the sub-national level or whether PKOs' concurrent non-election-related activities make a difference for electoral security, too.

A final word on the scope of the findings: UN peacekeepers are deployed to countries affected by armed conflict. The findings and their policy implications pertain to these contexts. Policy-makers designing international election violence prevention strategies for conflict-affected environments should not expect all PKOs to help secure elections, but they may add PKOs with electoral security and

election organization-related functions to their tool box for designing a context-specific electoral security strategy.

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Notes

1. Calculation is based on information from the National Elections Across Democracies and Autocracies Dataset (Hyde and Marinov 2011).
2. UCDP defines armed conflict as an incompatibility between government and non-state armed groups that causes more than 25 battle-related deaths per year.
3. Both international election monitoring and technical election assistance cannot only prevent election-related violence in the short-run but also enable post-war peace in the long-run because these forms of regular international scrutiny enable local actors' commitment to peace deals (Matanock 2017).
4. Scholars criticize liberal peacebuilding and warn against its contradictions, including the risk of exacerbating insecurity by supporting competitive elections in war-torn environments (Paris 2010).
5. In a few countries, armed groups are principally opposed to elections. This opposition is expressed in non-participation and violent attacks against the holding of elections itself, e.g. Al Qaeda in Iraq (Matanock and Staniland 2018). Violence implementation costs, which are shaped by peacekeepers, may help explain variation in such election-related "spoiler violence".
6. Beyond shaping implementation costs for fraud, logistical support also prevents unintended shortcomings that could trigger violence. For example, when electronic

voter tablets did not properly function in some polling stations in Côte d'Ivoire, some voters suspected fraud. The PKO promptly delivered paper ballots and thus de-escalated the tensions (author interview in Oct. 2015).

7. Missing values for 2012 are replaced with information from `https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors`.
8. When both types of election-related activities are included in the same model, only the coefficient of election organization assistance maintains its significance. This null effect likely results from multicollinearity.

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