Media and Attitudes about Electoral Malpractice: A Field Experiment in a New Democracy

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Abstract
What factors determine attitudes about electoral malpractice in new democracies? We draw on psychological theories of norms to posit that media could have the perverse effect of making cheating more socially acceptable. Media in post-liberalization settings often carry sensationalized reports of alleged malpractice. Such coverage may convey the descriptive norm that democratic rules are not being followed, thus normalizing cheating. Further, media tend to frame elections as hard-fought affairs, which could lead citizens to prioritize their narrow political goals over injunctive norms that proscribe cheating. We evaluate media effects on descriptive and injunctive norms about manipulation and violence with a field experiment conducted in Ghana during which passengers in *tro-tros* (commuter buses) were randomly exposed to live radio programs.

Keywords: voting, mass media, social norms, electoral malpractice, Africa

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Cheating is a common feature of elections, especially in new democracies. Most research on electoral malpractice focuses on incentives for elites to engage in it (Birch 2011; Ichino & Schündeln 2012; Lehoucq & Molina 2002; Magaloni 2010; Simpser 2013; Weidmann & Callen 2012; Wilkinson 2004; Ziblatt 2009). However, few scholars have studied the determinants of citizens' attitudes towards corrupt practices such as hate speech, ballot stuffing, vote buying, and violence. While norms generally favor free and fair elections, citizen attitudes range from unconditional rejection, to apathy, to conditional or full acceptance of corrupt practices.[1]

Social norms can enable or constrain elites' abilities to engage in certain types of malfeasance, for two reasons. First, citizens are often agents in misconduct, and greater acceptance of malpractice will increase elites' opportunities to find amenable accomplices. Furthermore, significant public rejection of fraud can manifest in mobilizations against perpetrators (Fearon 2011; Kulov 2008; Kuntz & Thompson 2009; Lindberg 2009; Magaloni 2010; Schedler 2013; Simpser 2013; Tucker 2007), while widespread acquiescence in the face of malpractice lessens constraints on actors to violate rules in the future.

What factors affect individuals' attitudes towards electoral malpractice in post-liberalization settings? Drawing from psychological research on norms, we theorize that the types of discussions that often occur in the media in such settings can affect citizens' perceptions and attitudes about malpractice in important ways. First, communications that highlight the prevalence of electoral misconduct affect perceptions of what is common behavior (i.e., descriptive norms).

[1] A handful of scholars have looked at attitudes toward vote buying exclusively (Gonzalez-Ocantos *et al.* 2014), while some have examined the role that perceived malpractice plays in determining popular evaluations of, and support for, democracy (Esaisson 2012; Moehler 2009; Norris 2014).

Second, communications during campaigns can cause individuals to place a higher emphasis on the importance of winning, and to deemphasize the salience of rules outlining proper behavior (i.e., injunctive norms).

We expect these effects to be particularly prominent in newly liberalized settings because of the nature of the mass media there. Partly due to the highly partisan nature of many media outlets in these environments, accusations of malpractice are repeated frequently, in a sensationalized manner, amidst campaign coverage that emphasizes the competitive nature of elections (Hyde & Marinov 2014). The incessant focus on alleged misconduct can suggest to citizens that the descriptive norm in their society is one of frequent malpractice, while the horserace frame of coverage can lead citizens to prioritize winning over injunctive norms proscribing malpractice. In short, we hypothesize that exposure to media during campaigns in newly liberalized settings will increase individuals' perceptions of the frequency of electoral malpractice, as well as their acceptance of it.

Our theory suggests that mass media can have perverse effects on democratic legitimacy. Media play important roles in democracies with regard to exposing malpractice by officials and generating enthusiasm amongst the population for upcoming elections. However, in carrying out these functions, the media may create negative—and presumably unintended—consequences by normalizing cheating and by making winning seem to be of paramount importance, even when it means violating injunctive norms supporting free and fair elections.

We test our theory with a field experiment conducted in Ghana, an emerging democracy in West Africa, in the run up to that country's 2012 general election. Subjects were exposed to different types of broadcasts, to measure the effects of these communications on attitudes about the frequency and acceptability of electoral malpractice. The external validity of the study benefits

from our use of actual, live radio broadcasts and the exposure of subjects to these treatments in a setting in which they would commonly encounter them: during their morning commutes in *tro-tros* (mini buses).[2] Working with these vehicles' drivers, who typically choose the radio stations to which their passengers will be exposed, we randomly assigned these captive audiences to one of four treatments: pro-government, pro-opposition, or neutral political talk radio, or the control (no radio). Upon completion of the ride, 1200 subjects from 228 *tro-tros* completed interviews about their political attitudes, on topics including electoral malpractice.

Norms and Electoral Malpractice

For democracy to survive, all relevant political actors must accept it as "the only game in town" (Di Palma 1990). Actors must agree to compete in periodic contests for office and accept the results thereafter even when they are unfavorable. Practices that confer unfair advantages will undermine losers' confidence that the next election will offer them fair opportunity for victory, and thereby threaten the democratic system (Przeworski 1991).

Public opinion has an important role here, in that popular support for democratic institutions can constrain actors who might otherwise seek to overthrow or subvert them (Linz & Stepan 1996). Elites considering electoral malpractice will find such activities more difficult if they cannot easily recruit members of the public who will sell their votes, vote multiple times, vote when not eligible, permit party agents to stuff ballot boxes, block electoral observers, or harass opponents. And elites might eschew malpractice outright if they conclude that misconduct, if discovered, is likely to lose votes or catalyze mass protests against them.

[2] *Tro-tros* are vans, usually with capacities of 15-20 people. They constitute the main form of transportation and, although private, function much like public transportation elsewhere.

There is significant variation within new democracies in the extent to which citizens support or reject certain forms of electoral malpractice. For example, an evaluation of a civic education campaign in Kenya (Finkel *et al.* 2012) found that nearly half (49%) of subjects in the control group said that vote-buying was either acceptable or, at least, "understandable." Gonzalez-Ocantos *et al.* (2014) report that the percentage of survey respondents who said vote-buying was acceptable or understandable was 20% in Nicaragua, 23% in Honduras, 30% in Peru, 31% in Uruguay, and 31% in Bolivia. Vicente (2014) found that 22% of respondents in a representative sample of São Tomé and Príncipe expressed support for vote-buying. And support for malpractice is not limited to vote-buying: data from the survey by Finkel *et al.* (2012) in Kenya show that nearly one-fifth (17%) of subjects in the control believed that violence was sometimes justified to achieve political ends. Social desirability bias means that these figures likely underestimate support for malpractice (Gonzalez-Ocantos *et al.* 2012).

In this paper we focus on two types of norms that affect democratic performance and durability: descriptive norms regarding malpractice (i.e. what is common behavior), and support for injunctive norms regarding malpractice (i.e. what is acceptable behavior) (Cialdini *et al.* 1990). The first type, descriptive norms, are important because if individuals perceive that fraud is common, they might conclude that any legal punishments or social sanctioning associated with their own violations would be limited.[3] Furthermore, if descriptive norms suggest that the electoral process was flawed, citizens will be more likely to question the legitimacy of the resulting

[3] Experimental studies show that individuals are less likely to adhere to norms regarding trash disposal (Cialdini *et al.* 1990), graffiti (Keizer *et al.* 2008), hotel towel use (Goldstein *et al.* 2008), and voting (Gerber & Rogers 2009) when shown cues suggesting that others violate the norms.

government and be less likely to comply with government rules and regulations.[4] The second type, support for injunctive norms, may have even greater consequences for democratic development than descriptive norms, because if citizens believe that malfeasance is acceptable, they are less likely to constrain corrupt leaders, more likely to engage in misconduct themselves, and perhaps even encourage others to participate in corrupt practices.

Despite the importance of these norms for democratic development, few scholars have examined their causal antecedents.[5] We theorize that media in newly liberalized polities are likely to affect both descriptive norms and support for injunctive norms. Certainly, media have essential roles to play in democratic systems in exposing malpractice and in highlighting the importance of election campaigns. However, we argue that these media messages could have perverse consequences, in that they could normalize corruption by promulgating a descriptive norm that it is widespread and weakening support for injunctive norms that bar cheating. We next describe relevant aspects of media in newly liberalized regimes and then present our theory about how media affects norms.

[4] A large literature on procedural justice finds that perceived legitimacy affects behaviors such as paying taxes and complying with court decisions (Gibson 1989; Levi 1988; Tyler 2006).

[5] Literature on support for malpractice is especially scarce. A handful of studies examine influences on support for injunctive norms against vote-buying and/or violence, but they do not include other outcomes such as using hateful language and stuffing of ballot boxes. Furthermore, these studies evaluate effects of only a few causal variables.

Media Coverage of Electoral Malpractice

Accusations of electoral malpractice in the media are particularly prominent in many new democracies (Hyde & Marinov 2014). Certainly, this might be the case because misconduct is actually common. However, it is also likely the result of the nature of the media there. Media personalities often report unsubstantiated allegations of rigging and violence due to lack of resources for fact-checking, poor training, and permissive professional standards. Sensational discussions of the hot topic of electoral violations prevail over tempered and accurate reporting. Even if program hosts do not themselves report rumors, invited guests and callers to broadcast programs often do so. Additionally, media are often consumed by the horse-race nature of the campaign and devote substantial attention to it. As a result, individuals frequently hear of misconduct, while they are primed to view the upcoming election as a zero-sum competition.

These effects are exacerbated by the heavily biased nature of media in many newly liberalized polities. Mass media are often owned by politicians or politically affiliated businesspeople (Lawson 2002; Nyamnjoh 2005; Snyder 2000; Snyder & Ballentine 1996). Such outlets are especially likely to highlight misconduct. Political discussions on these biased outlets sometimes denigrate opponents by accusing them of criminality, immorality, and other malfeasance. Accusations of cheating provide convenient excuses for electoral defeat or underperformance. These strategies are common in new democracies, with oppositions often threatening or actually launching boycotts and other protest actions against the incumbent's (real or exaggerated) cheating (Hyde & Marinov 2014; Lindberg 2005; Schedler 2002). In addition, these outlets often portray elections as exciting dramas that draw attention to and create excitement about politics.

Media Effects on Norms Regarding Electoral Malpractice

We theorize that media in newly liberalized polities are: 1) likely to affect descriptive norms with their frequent discussions of malpractice; and 2) likely to undermine support for the injunctive norm proscribing malpractice by increasing the salience of competing goals.

First, the media in such settings make electoral malpractice seem more common. The frequent mentions in the media of (real, exaggerated, and false) wrongdoings are likely to heighten perceptions that violations of democratic rules are widespread (Gerbner 1998). Repeated mentions of the same event may be misunderstood as reports of different incidents. Sensationalized discussions are also likely to grab the attention of audiences and increase focus on alleged incidents. Absent media, individuals are only exposed to corrupt practices through personal experience and interpersonal discussions, and thus may not be aware of actions that happen outside their immediate environment. Therefore, our first hypothesis is as follows:

H_1: Exposure to media will increase expectations of electoral malpractice.

Second, media in newly liberalized polities are likely to affect adherence to injunctive norms proscribing malpractice. Injunctive norms are less binding when individuals perceive violations to be widespread and when conflicting goals become more salient, and media can change both aspects.

Perceptions of the frequency with which injunctive norms are violated can affect support for those norms. Individuals often use descriptive norms as informational shortcuts when developing attitudes or planning behavior (Cialdini 1988; Levy Paluck 2009); they follow the more-treaded path, under the assumption that there is wisdom in numbers, and they draw conclusions about what is valued based on perceived behavior. Individuals also dislike being a 'sucker' by incurring the costs of norm compliance when others are not similarly contributing to a

public good (Levi 1988: 53). As a result, perceptions that others violate norms makes adherence to those norms seem less desirable. In the context of electoral malpractice, increased perceptions that cheating is common can increase the degree to which individuals will qualify their support for the injunctive norm against it. As mentioned previously, communications highlighting the frequency with which votes are bought, multiple ballots are marked, non-eligible registrations occur, and opponents are intimidated make such behaviors seem less deviant.

Even when media do not affect descriptive norms, they may still affect support for injunctive norms. Individuals will be more likely to condition their acceptance of injunctive norms if adherence to those norms significantly harms their self-interest or conflicts with other injunctive norms, such as providing for dependents and social solidarity (Gonzalez-Ocantos *et al.* 2012). Individuals pursue goals that are hedonic- (i.e., doing what feels good), gain- (i.e., improving or maintaining resources), or norm- (i.e., doing what's right) oriented (Lindenberg 2001). However, these goals are not necessarily compatible, as pursuit of one can harm ability to achieve another. Individuals' choices at a given time can be impacted by frames that activate certain types of goals over others (Lindenberg & Steg 2007). For example, communications that frame topics in ways that stress the possibility of material gains if action A is taken could, in turn, decrease individuals' motivations to pursue normatively oriented goals that proscribe A. Individuals who privilege alternate goals may then revise their attitudes towards electoral fraud, so as to reduce any cognitive dissonance that might arise from supporting violation of an injunctive norm and to maintain a positive self-image (Festinger 1957).

The context in which electoral malpractice takes place can activate individuals' hedonic, gain, or conflicting normative goals. Electoral campaigns, particularly in the developing world, make heavy use of conflict frames, noting the material and security stakes involved in the outcome.

And priming of identity considerations increases potential psychological payoffs or costs, while also elevating the importance of norms regarding in-group loyalty. As a result, the normative goal of ensuring free and fair elections might be minimized by individuals pursuing gain- or hedonic-oriented goals. Cheating by one's own side, even if normatively wrong, serves the end of achieving all-important electoral victory. And opponents' cheating, if left unchallenged, could threaten the electoral prospects of one's political allies and, in turn, harm one's own psychological well-being, economic status, security, and social capital. If individuals conclude that a violator is unlikely to be punished in the legal system, cheating by their own side might be the only viable alternative to erasing whatever advantages the opponent has gained through impropriety. Ultimately, campaigns' conflict frames can result in individuals' qualifying normative goals against wrongdoing in order to maximize other gains.

In sum, we expect that exposure to media during campaigns will increase popular acceptance of election fraud, by fostering descriptive norms regarding the commonality of the practice, and by encouraging individuals to prioritize their other interests over injunctive norms regarding election fairness. Our second hypothesis is as follows:

H_2: Exposure to media should increase acceptance of electoral malpractice.

In the sections that follow, we discuss our case selection and experimental strategy for testing these expectations.

Case Background: Mass Media and Electoral Malpractice in Ghana

Ghana provides a good case for studying how exposure to mass media, including biased outlets, affects expectations about, and acceptance of, malpractice. Although quite new, Ghana's democracy is relatively well-established; since 2000, it has consistently received "free" ratings from Freedom House and experienced two electoral turnovers in both the presidency and

parliament. However, while its recent elections have received overall favorable assessments from domestic and international groups, they have not been without problems, such as potentially fraudulent registrations, abuse of state resources, incendiary rhetoric, and some instances of violence (Brierly & Ofosu 2014; Carter Center 2012; CODEO 2013; EU-EOM 2009; Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2008; Gyimah-Boadi 2009; Ichino & Schündeln 2012). Myriad factors, including institutional weakness and contests decided by thin margins, likely help explain the malpractice that does occur. We theorize that the country's mass media, with their tendency to focus attention on accusations of elite malfeasance and frame elections as intense, hard-fought battles, also affect citizens' attitudes about such practices, by increasing expectations that electoral malpractice is widespread and by weakening audiences' support for injunctive norms favoring free and fair elections.

Recent changes in Ghana's media landscape likely contribute to these effects, by affecting the frequency and nature of discussions about malpractice, and by focusing on the high stakes surrounding elections. While media were strictly controlled by the single-party or military governments that ruled for most of the post-independence period (Asante 1996; Hachten 1971: 167-70; Hasty 2005: 33-4), the transition to multiparty politics in 1992 ushered in an explosion of commercial FM stations, many of which are owned by politicians or their allies (Gadzekpo 2008a; Hasty 2005; Owusu 2012; Temin & Smith 2002). These outlets are often embroiled in the fierce competition between two evenly matched parties—the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Observers accuse them of propagating unsubstantiated allegations of electoral cheating and other infractions, sensationalizing stories of abuse, and directing inflammatory language and hate speech against opponents (Asah-Asante 2007; Carter Center 2012; Danso & Edu-Afful 2012; EU-EOM 2009; Gadzekpo 2008b; NMC 2012). Prior to the 2012

election, Former President Rawlings (1981-2001) criticized voices on talk radio for "throwing abuse and insults" ("JJ Blasts Media," Daily Guide, 2012), while the President of the Ghana Journalists Association implored his colleagues to "move away from the journalism of allegations" in order "to prove wrong to those Ghanaians expressing regrets for the endorsement of freedom and independence of the media" (quoted in Mensah 2011). Radio station hosts and guests made (usually unsubstantiated) allegations of electoral malpractice, including collusion between the presidency and the independent Electoral Commission (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2008); plans by the government to disrupt voting in opposition strongholds (EU-EOM 2009); and sacrifices of animals in order to curse political opponents (CODEO 2013).[6] These messages about malpractice, framed as responses to intense party competition, could inculcate descriptive norms that cheating is common and undermine support for injunctive norms against such practices.

Ghana is especially well suited for detecting media effects, because while electoral malfeasance is a problem, it is not ubiquitous. Again, observer reports note that elections are generally free and fair, and all citizens would not likely have observed illegal incidents personally or heard first-hand accounts from discussions with others. Media effects are most evident when individuals do not have relevant personal experiences. Furthermore, we hypothesize that media increase expectations about, and acceptance of, malpractice, and so we need a context where increases are measurable. We expected that not all individuals would perceive fraud to be "very

[6] Biased programming is viewed as so problematic that governmental and non-governmental organizations question whether political speech in mass media should be regulated (Carter Center 2012; CODEO 2013; EU-EOM 2009; NMC 2012; Obour 2013; Salihu & Aning 2013).

likely," or "justified," so ceiling effects would pose less of a threat than in locations where massive fraud already produced the most extreme answers from most individuals.

Experimental Design and Data Collection

We conducted a field experiment in Ghana to test the effects of exposure to media during a campaign on attitudes about electoral malfeasance. Our subjects were randomly assigned to one of four treatments. Three treatments involved exposure to live political-talk programs; one was broadcast on a pro-government radio station, one on a pro-opposition station, and one on a neutral station. A fourth category (the control) involved no radio exposure whatsoever.

Our study design maximizes external validity in two primary ways, one involving treatment content and the other treatment administration. First, content created or repurposed by researchers might seem unnatural to subjects, or it might deviate from the types of discussions to which audiences of media of various types are typically exposed during campaigns. Our use of actual live broadcasts of political discussions, on popular radio stations and during a campaign, reduces concerns that would arise from artificial or repurposed content. Second, the mode in which treatments are administered is particularly important in studies of media effects. Some research designs, such as laboratory studies, might artificially raise subjects' sensitivity to certain types of content (Jerit *et al.* 2013), thus limiting the generalizability of the findings to real-world settings. We therefore sought to administer our treatments in a natural setting, in order to estimate individual responses to political discussions over mass media more accurately.

Our subjects were exposed to treatments while traveling in *tro-tros*, which are small buses with capacities of between fifteen and twenty people. *Tro-tros* constitute the primary form of transportation for most Ghanaians, and they are ubiquitous in major urban centers (Abane 2011), such as Accra, where we conducted the study. Although the vehicles are privately owned, they

are analogous to public buses in the developed world, in that passengers board whichever vehicle happens to be available, generally do not know one another, and are unlikely to know their driver.

Our design took advantage of the fact that *tro-tro* passengers are typically exposed to the radio preferences of their driver's choosing. We recruited drivers to work as confederates, and paid them to play (or not play) certain stations on a particular day. Given that the randomization of treatment assignments took place at the level of the *tro-tro*, all passengers in a given vehicle were *de facto* assigned to the same condition. 1200 commuters, traveling in 228 *tro-tros*, were interviewed after their commutes, over a fifteen-day period several weeks before the December 2012 general elections.[7] We next discuss the process of selecting radio treatments, *tro-tro* routes and vehicles, and survey respondents, as well as checks on random assignment and manipulation.

Radio Treatment Selection

We selected three radio programs as treatments. Two were on stations widely accepted as having partisan biases, while one was on a neutral station.[8] Three criteria, in addition to station partisanship, guided our selection of stations. First, selected stations had to air political programming continuously during peak weekday morning commute hours (6-10 AM). Conducting the study during this time allowed us to maximize efficiency in respondent recruitment, given the high volume of commuters then. Political programming, which typically

[7] The research was conducted between 16 October and 7 November 2012.

[8] Although we hypothesize that political discussion on mass media during campaigns should generally increase acceptance of electoral malfeasance, our inclusion of these three different types of treatments will facilitate additional checks on whether effects are dependent on message type (i.e., partisan vs. non-partisan, cross-cutting vs. like-minded).

garners high ratings, is common during these hours, as broadcasters compete to reach the large audience of commuters. Second, we identified stations that are commonly played in *tro-tros*, to maximize external validity. Finally, we focused on stations that broadcast mainly in Twi, Accra's *lingua franca*, to facilitate comprehension by the broadest possible audience.

Our selected programs were *Gold Power Drive* on Radio Gold, *National Agenda* on Oman FM, and *Kokrokoo* on Peace FM; these stations are pro-government, pro-opposition, and neutral, respectively. All three programs focus on current events, with heavy emphases on politics during campaign season, and they include reading of news headlines; interviews with academics, political analysts, issue experts, candidates, and party agents; host commentary; and opportunities for listeners to react through calls, SMS, or Internet postings.

Tro-Tro Route Selection

Selection of *tro-tro* routes marked the first stage in our sampling process. *Tro-tros* typically follow establish routes, beginning and ending at major terminuses. Two criteria guided our selection of routes on which to conduct the study. First, in order to be included, expected terminus-to-terminus travel time during morning rush hour for a vehicle on the route had to be at least forty minutes, to ensure that passengers received adequate doses of the treatment. Second, selected routes had to be characterized by significant numbers of *tro-tros* plying it during our study hours, in order to facilitate an efficient distribution of research staff. Research assistants visited Accra's nine main terminuses and interviewed drivers and representatives of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union to conduct an enumeration of routes in the city, and to gather information about normal ridership patterns and trip durations on each route. The study was conducted on 58 distinct routes. Once a route had been included on a particular day, it was never used again in the

study, in order to minimize the probability that subjects would be included twice in the sample, or of spillover effects stemming from subjects informing others about their experiences.

Recruitment of Drivers, and Random Assignment of Treatments

We worked with 228 drivers, who received ten cedis (~$5.26 US) in return for playing their assigned station (or no station at all, for vehicles assigned to the control). Drivers were also instructed to play the station without interruption, at a volume that would make it clear to all passengers, and without any mention of the study or instructions. Finally, drivers never turned their sound systems on until the vehicle had left the departure point, in order to minimize the probability that individuals would select into or out of certain treatments as a result of what they had heard playing in a waiting vehicle. A staff member (the "recruiter"), posing as a commuter, boarded each study vehicle and rode with it for the duration of its journey in order to verify that these protocols were followed. No recruiters reported any significant violations of protocols.

Vehicles included in the study were randomly assigned to the treatments. 169 were assigned to a political-talk show (49 to the pro-government station, 65 to the pro-opposition station, and 55 to the neutral station), while 59 were assigned to a no-radio control.

Recruitment of Subjects

As *tro-tros* neared their destination, recruiters announced that passengers interested in taking a survey "about your experience with riding *tro-tros* in Accra, conditions faced by commuters in Accra, and what can be done to improve conditions for Ghanaians more generally"[9]

[9] The instrument (available in English, Ga, and Twi) included questions about public transport.

should wait at the destination, where they would be met by an interviewer.[10] Respondents were offered two cedis (~$1.05 US).

Checks on Random Assignment and Manipulation

In Table 1, we report on checks for statistical balance. Further details on balance checks and variables used are available in Appendix A. The paired comparisons between each radio treatment and the control, and the aggregate checks, suggest that the experimental groups are equivalent with respect to observables unlikely to have been affected by treatment conditions.

[Table 1 goes around here]

In order to check whether the assigned radio station was played, we asked subjects, near the end of the survey, to identify what, if any, radio station was playing over the *tro-tro*'s sound system. Most subjects in a radio group stated that a station was playing (79%), while most in the control stated that no station was playing (75%). Further, most respondents (76%) in a radio condition who named a station identified the one to which their vehicle had been assigned. Less than 1% of subjects incorrectly said they heard the pro-government station when they had actually heard the pro-opposition station, or vice versa.

While significant numbers of subjects did not give answers that matched their vehicle's assignment—21% of those in a radio treatment incorrectly said that no radio was playing in the *tro-tro*, while 31% did not identify the correct station—our design made perfect recall unlikely. Subjects had no contrived reasons to pay particularly close attention to the station being played, or to listen specifically for the station's name. They received no pre-treatment instructions, and

[10] Other eligibility criteria included being a Ghanaian citizen, at least eighteen years in age, who had been present in the *tro-tro* for at least forty minutes.

the data-collection process included no reference to a study of media effects. Failure to identify the treatment correctly in the post-commute interview also does not suggest that the subject was not affected by messages, although we cannot rule out the possibility that some subjects, including some of those who accurately named their treatment condition, ignored all or most of the broadcast. Again, the use of live broadcasts and the administration of treatments in a natural setting enhances external validity and minimizes the likelihood that subjects were abnormally sensitive to message biases and source cues. This increases our confidence that any significant effects we identify are operative in the real world, where individuals are typically exposed to similar media messages in environments with multiple stimuli competing for their attention.[11]

Measurement

We examine three outcome variables: two for descriptive norms and one for injunctive norms. The first indicator of descriptive norms measures subjects' overall assessments of whether the upcoming election will be *un*free and *un*fair. Scores range from 0 ("very confident" that they will be "mostly free and fair") to 3 ("very confident" that they will be "not very free and fair"). The second variable measures expectations that parties engage in undemocratic campaign activities. Subjects were asked six separate questions about whether, during the course of the campaign, actors were likely to: 1) use hateful language in the media; 2) give money for votes; 3) stuff ballot boxes; 4) try to intimidate people from turning out to vote; 5) spread lies about opposing

[11] A treatment-on-the-treated (TOT) analysis would require that we identify subjects who actually listened to the assigned station; given our data, this is impossible, and we would likely introduce serious bias in doing so, by eliminating individuals with poor recall or those inclined to listen more passively. We instead rely on a more conservative intention-to-treat (ITT) analysis.

parties; and 6) engage in violence.[12] Each question ranges from 0 to 3, with 0 representing "not likely at all," and 3 "very likely." The summed measure ranges from 0 to 18.[13]

The measure of injunctive norms parallels the second measure of descriptive norms, in that it records the extent to which individuals accept several specific forms of malpractice. Subjects were asked whether they thought it would be justified for their party to use hateful language in the media, buy votes, stuff ballot boxes, or engage in violence. For the former three activities, subjects were simply asked whether they believed that such activities by their own party would be acceptable or not. Subjects were asked a separate set of questions about whether violence was acceptable as a response to certain circumstances, including an unfair pre-election process, use of violence by opponents, mistrust of official results, election results that pose threats to the individual's livelihood, a desire to prevent opponents from voting, or any other reason. We create a scale measuring acceptability of malpractice by summing across these nine dichotomous measures, creating a single scale ranging from 0 (no malpractice acceptable) to 9 (all types

[12] Given that individuals' expectations about violence might be significantly different from their attitudes about other types of malpractice, we conduct separate robustness checks on a scale measuring expectations of non-violent malpractice and on a measure of expectations of violence.

[13] Throughout, we code missing values at the global mean. Later, we conduct robustness checks in which we drop cases with missing values from the analyses. We will also check the robustness of our results by clustering standard errors by *tro-tro*.

acceptable, under any circumstances).[14] English-language wordings for relevant questions are available in Appendix B and descriptive statistics in Appendix C. The three outcome variables have some face validity given that they are significantly related to each other and to other variables, including: media exposure, wealth, education, political knowledge, vote choice in 2008, support for NPP party, support for NDC party, and ethnicity (see Appendix I).[15]

In order to measure the effects of media on expectations about and support for malpractice, we regress our outcome of interest on an indicator for whether the subject was exposed to radio.[16]

Results

Table 2 shows the estimated effects of exposure to talk-radio on expectations of and acceptance of electoral malpractice. As shown in columns 1 and 2, there is no support for our hypothesis about descriptive norms. Exposure to partisan media did not increase expectations that the election would be unfree and unfair, nor did it increase expectations that parties would use hateful language in the media, buy votes, stuff ballot boxes, intimidate people, spread lies, and engage in violence. Column 3 provides the results for our hypothesis about injunctive norms. There is no support for our second hypothesis either. Subjects exposed to radio were no more accepting of electoral manipulation and violence than those not exposed.

[14] Following our practice with the scale measuring expectations of malpractice, we conduct robustness checks in which we create separate scales on support for malpractice: one measuring support for non-violent malpractice, and the other measuring support for violence.

[15] All the correlation coefficients are in the expected direction and thirty-six are significant.

[16] Those assigned to Radio Gold, Oman FM, or Peace FM are coded as one, while those in the no-radio control are coded as zero. In the discussion we examine effects by program type.

[Table 2 about here]

The null results are not dependent on coding or analytic decisions. We still get null results if we use listwise deletion of missing variables rather than coding them at their means (Appendix D), and if we cluster standard errors by *tro-tro* (Appendix E).

The null results are also not a function of how we grouped outcome or treatment variables. We thought that perhaps media affect perceptions and attitudes about campaign manipulation, but not violence, so we re-ran the analyses on disaggregated measures of the outcome variables (Appendix F). The results are null for each analysis: expectations of manipulation, expectations of violence, acceptance of manipulation, and acceptance of violence.

Next, we conducted additional tests on the effects of certain kinds of radio treatments. Though we have no a priori expectation about differential effects of the various types of media programming, it is possible that partisan and non-partisan media influence outcomes differently. Therefore, we re-ran the analyses, using indicators for assignment to: a) a partisan treatment (i.e., Radio Gold or Oman FM), and b) a non-partisan treatment (i.e., Peace FM). Appendix G shows that the results are still null. Finally, it is possible that individuals react differently to partisan radio depending on whether it agrees or disagrees with their partisan predispositions. We create indicators for whether the subject was exposed to a) like-minded radio (i.e., radio matching his or her pre-existing partisan biases), b) cross-cutting radio (i.e., radio countering his or her pre-existing partisan biases), and c) non-partisan media.[17] By necessity, we run these analyses on subjects we

[17] We code individuals' partisanship depending on how they reported voting in the 2008 presidential election (i.e., the presidential election prior to our experiment). See [Authors' publication] for a detailed description of and justification for this coding.

can identify as partisans of one of the two major parties. The results, shown in Appendix H, are null for these analyses as well.

Conclusion

Citizens can act as constraints on or enablers of elites who seek to use electoral malpractice to gain unfair advantages. Yet little is known about what affects citizens' attitudes towards electoral malpractice in post-liberalization settings. While an important function of the media is to expose corruption, we draw on psychological theories of norms to hypothesize that discussions about cheating could have perverse effects by actually increasing its social acceptability in these settings. Media in post-liberalization societies often carry repeated and sensationalized reports of alleged malpractice. These media could convey the descriptive norm that democratic rules are not being followed, thus normalizing cheating as a behavior. Further, media tend to frame elections as hard-fought affairs, which could lead citizens to prioritize their narrow political goals and downplay injunctive norms that proscribe cheating.

We evaluate media effects on descriptive and injunctive norms about manipulation and violence with a field experiment conducted in Ghana during which passengers in tro-tros (commuter buses) were randomly exposed to live radio programs. We find no significant effect of exposure to live talk-radio on either perceptions of what is common behavior (i.e., descriptive norms), or on expressions of what is proper behavior (i.e., injunctive norms). Why might this be the case? One possible explanation is that the discussions about malfeasance on radio were not novel. Perhaps the messages matched individuals' priors about the state of the world based on their previous experience, and/or the radio messages duplicated what people were hearing from other sources. If individuals already expected the kind of malfeasance that was reported on the radio, then they would have little reason to update their expectations and change their attitudes.

However, it is also possible that media coverage of campaigns in Ghana, including focuses on the horse-race nature of the contest and discussions of real or invented malpractice, have little effect on individuals' expectations about and orientations towards malpractice, regardless of those individuals' priors. This would have important policy implications, in that it would suggest that free and open discussions of malpractice, which are useful for exposing bad actors, do not by themselves create cynical citizens who accept such behavior as normal. Many actors in Ghana and in other new democracies have expressed grave concern about the corrosive influence of talk-radio on their fragile democracies, and some advocate sanctioning stations for making false and inflammatory claims. These findings suggest that censoring content on talk-shows might not change citizens' attitudes about the prevalence and acceptability of malpractice. Furthermore, our other research based on this experiment shows that exposure to talk-radio led to less extreme partisan attitudes on balance [authors' publication]. Taken together, the research suggests that even young democracies can benefit from vibrant discussions about what politicians are doing to win votes, even if much of what is reported are misdeeds.

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Table 1: Balance Checks

Variable	Range	Mean Value for Treatment Group				*p*
		No Radio	Oman	Gold	Peace	
Demographics						
Sex	0-1	.33	.38	.36	.36	.72
Age	18-84	33.16	33.36	33.21	31.77	.32
Education	1-10	5.65	5.59	5.68	5.67	.93
Wealth index	0-5	3.17	3.17	3.17	3.06 *	.18
Ethnicity						
Akan	0-1	.48	.44	.48	.52	.32
Ewe	0-1	.22	.27	.21	.19	.08
Ga	0-1	.16	.16	.17	.21	.34
Language Ability						
English	0-3	2.23	2.23	2.28	2.27	.97
Twi	0-3	2.39	2.44	2.51	2.48	.30
Ewe	0-3	.86	1.00	.80	.86	.26
Ga	0-3	1.40	1.52	1.44	1.58	.37
2008 vote						
Voted 2008	0-1	.75	.75	.75	.70	.55
Voted NDC	0-1	.39	.43	.40	.40	.77
Voted NPP	0-1	.33	.28	.33	.27	.37
Refused response	0-1	.11	.14	.12	.19	.59
Radio listening habits						
General frequency	0-3	2.40	2.35	2.34	2.41	.65
Peace morning show	0-3	1.17	1.10	1.11	1.20	.56
Gold morning show	0-3	.59	.68	.64	.62	.55
Oman morning show	0-3	.71	.72	.65	.75	.71
Journey details						
Seat proximity to rear	1-4	2.28	2.80	2.79	2.85	.85
Duration (minutes)	24-110	55.90	51.76	53.88	52.89	.62
Start time (30-min. slots)	1-8	3.86	4.45	3.86	4.38	.50
Interviews per van	1-14	5.53	5.31	5.29	4.91	.69

Notes: Statistically significant comparisons between the no-radio control and other treatments are marked as follows: * $p<.10$; ** $p<.05$; *** $p<.01$. T-tests are conducted for continuous variables, Chi-square tests for categorical and dummy variables, and Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney tests for ordinal variables. Right-hand column reports *p* values for tests of relationships between variables of interest and treatment categories.

Table 2: Effect of Radio on Expectations of and Acceptance of Electoral Malpractice

	(1) Expect not free and fair			(2) Expect malpractice			(3) Accept malpractice		
	B	se		b	se		b	se	
Radio	-0.06	0.14		-0.05	0.25		0.07	0.13	
Constant				11.64	0.21	***	1.57	0.11	***
Cut Points	0.72	0.12	***						
	1.02	0.12	***						
	1.45	0.12	***						
R-squared				0.00			0.00		
N	1200			1200			1200		

Notes: Cell entries are ordered logistic regression coefficients and robust standard errors for Model 1 and OLS regression coefficients and robust standard errors for Models 2 and 3. Adjusted R-squares are reported for Models 2 and 3. Coefficients that can be distinguished from zero are marked as follows: * ≤ 0.10; ** ≤ 0.05; *** ≤ 0.01 (for two-tailed tests). The radio treatment includes subjects assigned to the pro-government, pro-opposition, or neutral radio talk shows. The excluded group includes subjects assigned to the no-radio condition. The outcome in Model 1 is based on a single question on whether elections are expected to be free and fair (reverse coded). The outcome in Model 2 is a scale based on questions about how likely candidates were to use hateful language in the media, buy votes, stuff ballot boxes, intimidate people, spread lies, and engage in violence. The outcome in Model 3 is a scale based on questions about whether it is justified for parties to use hateful language in the media, buy votes, stuff ballot boxes, or engage in violence. Missing responses on individual questions are coded at their means.

Media and Attitudes about Electoral Malpractice: A Field Experiment in a New Democracy

Online Appendices

Appendix A: Description of Balance Checks

In Table 1, we report on balance checks for nearly two dozen variables. Most of these variables are included because we did not expect that they would be affected by the treatments, while they might theoretically impact how individuals responded to the experimental treatments. These variables included demographic measures, such as sex, age, education, personal wealth, and ethnicity.

We also check for balance on variables that might have affected individuals' abilities to comprehend broadcasts, such as language ability (English, Twi, Ewe, and Ga), general frequency of radio listenership, and prior listenership to the morning shows included in the treatments. In addition, we include a variable measuring subjects' seating in the vehicle, in case individuals who were located closer to the rear were less able to hear the *tro-tro*'s sound system.

Other variables intended to measure *tro-tro* specific factors, such as the duration (in minutes) of the treatment application (as recorded by research staff who rode in the *tro-tros* included in the study), the starting time of the journey (in eight half-hour slots, running between 6 and 10 AM), and number of successful interviews conducted per contacted *tro-tro*, are also included.

Finally, we also check for balance on variables measuring participation in and preferences regarding the 2008 presidential election (i.e., turnout, vote for NDC candidate, vote for NPP candidate, refusal to report vote).

Question wordings for variables included in the survey are listed in Appendix B. All variables except start time, duration, and interviews per *tro-tro* are measured at the individual level; these three variables are measured at the *tro-tro* level.

Appendix B: English-Language Survey Question Wordings

Dependent Variables

Descriptive Norms: Expect election to be free & fair?
[37] "Do you think that the upcoming elections will be mostly free and fair, or do you think that they will not be very free and fair?" Follow up [37A]: "And how confident are you of that? Are you very confident, or only somewhat confident?"

Descriptive norms: Expected frequency of specific types of malpractice?

[38] "I'm going to read you a list of activities that some parties do during campaigns, and I'd like you to tell me whether you think that kind of activity is very likely, moderately likely, only a little likely, or not likely at all to happen during this campaign?" A) "Use hateful language in the media," B) "Give money for votes," C) "Stuff ballot boxes," D) "Try to intimidate people from turning out to vote," E) "Spread lies about opposing parties."

[40] "How likely do you think it is that there will be violence around the 2012 elections? Do you think violence is very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or not likely at all?"

Injunctive norms: Acceptability of specific types of malpractice?

[39] "Please tell me whether you think it would be justified for your party to do the following things: A) Use hateful language in the media, B) Give money for votes, C) Stuff ballot boxes."

[41] "I am now going to read you a list of scenarios in which some people say violence would be justified. Please tell me which of them you think would justify violence. A) The pre-election process was not fair, B) Your political opponents have used violence, C) You do not trust the official results, D) The election results threaten your livelihood, E) You want to prevent your opponents from voting, F) Anything else"

Manipulation Checks

[59] Was the radio playing in the *tro-tro*?

[61] Can you tell me which radio station was playing in the *tro-tro*? *[Options not read. Only asked of those who reported in Question 59 that the radio was playing.]*

[62] From what you know about radio in Accra, would you say that the presenters on the stations I'm going to read to you are more in favor of the government or the opposition, or are they neutral? A) Radio Gold? B) Peace FM? C) Oman FM?

Balance Checks

Age
[46] How old are you?

Education
[47] What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
Wealth

[56] I am going to read you a list of items. Please tell me which ones your household has. A) Piped water in your home? B) DVD player? C) Personal computer? D) Refrigerator? E) Motor vehicle?

Ethnic Group
[48] What is your ethnic group or tribe? *[Options not read.]*

Languages
[57] I'm going to read you a list of languages. Can you please tell me whether or not you could understand someone speaking in each one. Could you understand them extremely well; fairly well, with just a few problems; a little, but with many problems; or not at all? A) English? B) Twi? C) Fante? D) Ewe? E) Ga?

2008 Vote
[22] For which candidate did you vote in the first round of the 2008 presidential election? *[Candidates' names not read. If subject could not remember candidate's name, follow up]:* Do you remember of what party the candidate was a member? *[Question only asked of those who had previously reported having voted in 2008, in Question 21: Let's talk about political participation in the past. We know that many Ghanaians did not go to the polls in the last general elections, in 2008. Did you go to the polls to vote in the first round of the 2008 elections, when this country elected a president and parliament?]*

Media consumption
[53] In the last week, how often would you say that you listen to the following morning shows? Every day, most days, a few days, or not at all? A) "Kokrokoo" on Peace FM? B) "Gold Power Drive" on Gold FM? C) "National Agenda" on Oman FM? *[Only asked of those who previously reported listening to radio, in Question 52: For each of these sources, please tell me how often you think you got your news from them in the last week. Every day, most days, a few days, or not at all? Radio?]*

Tro-tro *Seating*
[1] Where were you seated in the *tro-tro*? Were you seated in the front row with the driver; near the front; towards the middle; or towards the back of the *tro-tro*?

Appendix C: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Dependent Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Expect not free and fair	1200	0.47	0.78	0	2
Expect malpractice	1200	11.60	3.96	0	18
use hateful language in the media	1200	2.32	0.89	0	3
buy votes	1200	2.30	0.88	0	3
stuff ballot boxes	1200	1.90	1.01	0	3
intimidate	1200	2.01	1.01	0	3
spread lies	1200	2.43	0.82	0	3
engage in violence	1200	0.64	0.96	0	3
Accept malpractice	1200	1.62	2.03	0	8
use hateful language in the media	1200	0.04	0.19	0	1
buy votes	1200	0.04	0.19	0	1
stuff ballot boxes	1200	0.02	0.15	0	1
violence if process is unfair	1200	0.31	0.45	0	1
violence if opponents are violent	1200	0.35	0.47	0	1
violence if mistrust results	1200	0.31	0.45	0	1
violence if livelihood threatened	1200	0.20	0.39	0	1
violence to prevent opponents	1200	0.33	0.46	0	1
violence for other reasons	1200	0.02	0.14	0	1

For Control Treatment Group

Dependent Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Expect not free and fair	326	0.48	0.78	0	2
Expect malpractice	326	11.64	3.81	0	18
Accept malpractice	326	1.57	1.99	0	8

For Radio Treatment Group

Dependent Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Expect not free and fair	874	0.46	0.78	0	2
Expect malpractice	874	11.59	4.02	0	18
Accept malpractice	874	1.64	2.05	0	8

Appendix D: Robustness Check – Listwise Deletion of Missing Values

	(1) Expect not free and fair			(2) Expect malpractice			(3) Accept malpractice		
	b	se		b	se		b	se	
Radio	-0.07	0.15		-0.27	0.34		0.11	0.15	
Constant				11.87	0.28	***	1.50	0.13	***
Cut Points	0.93	0.12	***						
	1.36	0.13	***						
R-squared				0.00			0.00		
N	1126			855			1018		

Appendix E: Robustness Check – Clustering Standard Errors by *Tro-Tros*

	(1) Expect not free and fair			(2) Expect malpractice			(3) Accept malpractice		
	b	se		b	se		b	se	
Radio	-0.06	0.14		-0.05	0.23		0.07	0.12	
Constant				11.64	0.19	***	1.57	0.10	***
Cut Points	0.72	0.12	***						
	1.02	0.13	***						
	1.45	0.13	***						
R-squared				0.00			0.00		
N	1200			1200			1200		

Appendix F: Disaggregation of Outcome Measures

	(1) Expect manipulation			(2) Expect violence			(3) Accept manipulation			(4) Accept violence		
	b	se		b	se		b	se		b	se	
Radio	-0.02	0.24		-0.01	0.13		0.02	0.03		0.05	0.13	
Constant	10.97	0.20	***				0.09	0.02	***	1.49	0.11	***
Cut Points				0.53	0.11	***						
				0.70	0.12	***						
				1.23	0.12	***						
				2.69	0.16	***						
R-squared	0.00						0.00			0.00		
N	1200			1200			1200			1200		

Appendix G: Alternate Conceptualizations of Treatments – Effects of Partisan and Non-Partisan Radio

	(1) Expect not free and fair			(2) Expect malpractice			(3) Accept malpractice		
	b	se		b	se		b	se	
Partisan Radio	-0.05	0.14		0.01	0.27		-0.01	0.14	
Neutral Radio	-0.08	0.17		-0.18	0.32		0.27	0.17	
Constant				11.64	0.21	***	1.57	0.11	***
Cut Points	0.72	0.12	***						
	1.02	0.12	***						
	1.45	0.12	***						
R-squared				0.00			0.00		
N	1200			1200			1200		

Appendix H: Alternate Conceptualizations of Treatments – Effects of Like-minded, Cross-cutting and Neutral Radio, among only Partisan Respondents

	(1) Expect not free and fair			(2) Expect malpractice			(3) Accept malpractice		
	b	se		b	se		b	se	
Like-minded	-0.09	0.22		-0.46	0.38		0.13	0.21	
Cross-cutting	-0.30	0.22		-0.03	0.38		0.05	0.20	
Neutral Radio	-0.15	0.23		-0.64	0.40		0.25	0.23	
Constant				12.03	0.25	***	1.62	0.14	***
Cut Points	0.83	0.15	***						
	1.02	0.15	***						
	1.40	0.15	***						
R-squared				0.00			0.00		
N	752			752			752		

Appendix I: Correlations between outcome variables and other variables

	Expect not free and fair	Expect malpractice	Accept malpractice
Expect malpractice	0.14*** (0.00)		
Accept malpractice	0.09*** (0.00)	0.15*** (0.00)	
Media exposure	0.05*** (0.00)	0.09* (0.07)	0.15*** (0.00)
Female	0.03 (0.25)	– 0.03 (0.25)	0.03 (0.36)
Age	– 0.02 (0.43)	– 0.01 (0.68)	– 0.03 (0.27)
Wealth	0.09*** (0.00)	0.06** (0.03)	0.05* (0.09)
Education	0.13*** (0.00)	0.05* (0.09)	0.05* (0.07)
Political Knowledge	0.10*** (0.00)	0.06** (0.04)	0.08*** (0.01)
Voted 2008 for NDC (government party)	– 0.31*** (0.00)	– 0.04 (0.27)	– 0.08** (0.02)
Support NDC candidates (government party)	– 0.32*** (0.00)	– 0.05* (0.09)	– 0.07** (0.01)
Support NPP candidates (opposition party)	0.16*** (0.00)	0.07** (0.02)	0.04 (0.21)
Ewe ethnicity (associated with government party)	– 0.11*** (0.00)	– 0.02 (0.51)	– 0.02 (0.60)
Ga ethnicity (associated with government party)	– 0.06** (0.04)	– 0.01 (0.83)	– 0.06** (0.05)
Akan ethnicity (associate with opposition party)	0.16*** (0.00)	0.04 (0.19)	0.08*** (0.01)

Notes: Cell entries are correlation coefficients with p-values in parentheses and statistically significant comparisons marked as follows: * $p<.10$; ** $p<.05$; *** $p<.01$.