

An Introduction to Special Issue: The Causes and Consequences of Secret Ballot Reform

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Abstract

This article introduces a collection of papers that explore two understudied but critical questions of enduring concern for the study of democratization. Was the secret ballot driven by the same forces that drove the rise of democracy more generally? Did the secret ballot end electoral fraud, or was its effect merely endogenous to economic modernization more generally? This article provides historical context for the rise of the secret ballot, systematizing some of the complexities and ambiguities of the concept of the “secret ballot” itself. Second, we summarize the approach and some of the main findings of the papers in the volume, offering an outline of the broader lessons that emerge from the papers. Finally, we reflect upon the significance of a historical study of the secret ballot for technological and institutional reforms for contemporary democracy.

Keywords

democratization and regime change, elections, public opinion, voting behavior

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In an age when new democracies remain fragile, authoritarian systems endure, and political systems often unpredictably cycle between regime types, the question of how the world's old democracies *themselves* democratized offers important lessons. The establishment of modern representative democracy involved major and often contentious institutional reforms over many domains in the 19th and 20th centuries (Huntington, 1991). This process was not only protracted but also *multidimensional* (Capocchia & Ziblatt, 2010; Mares, 2015; Markoff, 1996, 1999; Ziblatt, 2006), including fights over a wide range of institutional domains.

Although historical accounts privilege the study of the extension of suffrage rights, democratization also included struggles over the introduction of an elected legislature and the supremacy of elected over unelected bodies in the government. It involved the abolition of weighted voting systems, the acceptance of multiple political parties, and the establishment of voter autonomy and fairness in the tally of the vote (Dahl, 1971). The establishment of the secret ballot was also a key institutional reform, without which modern representative government is unthinkable. It is for this reason that Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the stipulation that “the will of the people” shall express itself “by [the] secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”

Yet very few accounts of the rise of representative or electoral democracy explicitly analyze the causes of the development of free and fair elections and the role of institutional reforms such as the secret ballot in that process (cf. Przeworski, 2015). Explaining why electoral bribery, voter intimidation, and other violations of voter autonomy declined and the role of institutional reforms such as the secret ballot in the development of old democracies should be at the center of our attention.

One reason for this relative lacuna is that the nature of the ballot in fact has historically held, and even today holds, an ambiguous relationship to the idea of representative government itself. Nineteenth-century liberals such as John Stuart Mill (1861/1991) even strongly opposed it (see Buchstein, 2015). “In any political election,” writes Mill (1861/1991),

even by universal suffrage . . . , the voter is under an absolute moral obligation to consider the interest of the public, not his private advantage, and give his vote, to the best of his judgment, exactly as he would be bound to do if he were the sole voter, and the election depended upon him alone. This being admitted, it is at least a *primâ facie* consequence that the duty of voting, like any other public duty, should be performed under the eye and criticism of the public. (p. 208)

Some contemporary critics echo Mill's critique of the secret ballot. They argue that it “privatizes politics,” that it reduces the transformative potential

of political democracy (Brennan & Pettit 1990; Engelen & Nys, 2013). Debates about the secret ballot are thus a struggle over the very definition of democracy itself.

The adoption of the secret ballot was not inevitable. Rather, it was and remains an important democratic conquest. What processes lie behind the push to require that casting votes be essentially a private act? And what effect did covering voters with a veil of secrecy have on the political systems that adopted the secret ballot? This issue addresses these questions from a cross-national and historical perspective. Answering these questions is important because ballot reform is thought to institutionalize electoral freedom and fairness in national elections, and thus continues to be a major challenge in newly democratizing political systems (Norris, 2014). The secret ballot's effect on politics—whether it protects individual autonomy or discourages public deliberation—remains a subject of contention among normative theorists of democracy (Brennan & Pettit 1990; Engelen & Nys, 2013).

Did the same forces that pushed democracy also enact the secret ballot? Did the secret ballot end electoral fraud or did it merely restrict and reduce turnout as others have argued? The importance and place of the secret ballot in the institutional architecture of democracy hinges on our answer to these questions. The papers in this issue analyze the political struggle over secret ballot in an intentionally diverse set of historical cases from two different world regions—North America and Europe—that can increase our confidence in the empirical reach of our claims. A large-*n* study in this collection covers 14 countries in Europe and overseas settler colonies (Aidt & Jensen, 2016). Case studies include the United States (Kuo & Teorell, forthcoming), Great Britain (Kam, 2016), and Great Britain and Germany (Kasara & Mares, forthcoming). Furthermore, the papers explore the causes (Aidt & Jensen, 2016; Kasara & Mares, forthcoming) and consequences (Kam, 2016; Kuo and Teorell) of the secret ballot, shedding insight on the classic and important debates about why the secret ballot was adopted and its relationship to democracy more generally.

While formal institutional features are more easily amenable to empirical analysis, the *practice* of democracy remains much tougher terrain for empirical analysis. Demonstrating how to study how citizens cast ballots, in fact, is a principal contribution of most of the papers of this special issue of *Comparative Political Studies*. Aidt and Jensen (2016) use a new cross-national and historical dataset to identify the socioeconomic correlates of the enactment of the secret ballot. Most of the papers analyze electoral petitions, the partisan and legal documents that (mostly loosing) parties filed with the authorities (Lehoucq, 2002, 2003). Kam (2016) examines information on bribe prices and campaign expenditures contained in electoral petitions sent to the British House of Commons between 1820 and 1906, which he analyzes in a database with

variables on electoral turnout and electoral outcomes. Kasara and Mares (forthcoming) use electoral petitions sent to the Commons and to the German Reichstag to control for the effects of electoral fraud in statistical models explaining why British and German parliamentarians supported or opposed a battery of measures to safeguard the privacy rights of voters during the final decades of the 19th century. Kuo and Teorell (forthcoming) construct a large database that combines allegations of fraud contained in the 465 petitions sent to the U.S. House of Representatives between 1860 and 1940 with information about the political and economic characteristics of congressional districts. It bears emphasizing that these papers require the painstaking construction of new datasets from archival sources and government documents.

This introductory essay provides a historical context for the development of the secret ballot, systematizing some of the complexities and ambiguities of the concept of the “secret ballot” itself. Second, we summarize the general approach to the study of the secret ballot outlined in the papers of the special issue and elaborate how some of their main findings push scholarship on this new agenda of research forward. Finally, we reflect upon the significance of a historical study of the secret ballot for technological and institutional reforms in democracy today.

The Multidimensionality of Secret Ballot Reform

What does “voting secrecy” mean exactly? At face value, we can define voting secrecy by what it is not. The opposite of voting secretly is voting openly: when not only the act of voting itself occurs publicly but the voter’s choice is public knowledge itself. The clearest example would be *viva voce* voting or voting by raising and lowering hands. Voting in secret, by contrast, requires privacy, and hence that the voter’s choice is unidentifiable because it is unobservable. In Rokkan’s (1961, p. 143) words, there are two distinct elements in the provisions ensuring this secrecy:

The first is to make it *possible* for the voter to keep his decision private and avoid sanctions from those he *does not* want to know; the second is to make it *impossible* for the voter to prove how he voted to those he *does* want to know. (cf. Rokkan, 1970)

A secure secret voting system thus not only entails that safeguards prevent the curious from observing the content of the vote but also that the voter himself (or herself) cannot prove how he or she voted. As long as no one witnesses for whom a voter casts his or her ballot, doubts about choices sustain the anonymity that modern elections require.

Although this theoretical definition of voting secrecy sets fairly clear and rigid standards, fully secured secret balloting requires a set of reforms in several dimensions, some of which might be in place but others that might be absent (Mares, 2015). Only thorough review of constitutional statutes and systematic research can uncover the reforms that privatized the act of voting. This is why we refrain from including, in fact, a table of the dates of the establishment of the secret ballot. Daniele Caramani (2000), for example, offers a list of dates when parliaments enacted the secret ballot in European countries, and others have drawn on this to code the introduction of a secret ballot as discrete events (e.g., Scheve & Stasavage, 2012).¹ But the secret ballot is itself, we suggest, much like democracy writ large; it is a bundle of institutions with several dimensions, the introduction of which need not coincide, and each about which we know little.

The first dimension concerns the transition from oral to written voting. To the extent that voting requires loudly proclaiming a preferred choice, the voter's preference is of course easily observable. When combined with a voting registry, where polling station officials record each voter's choice, public voting violates voting secrecy not only at the instance of voting but also over time, as the politically curious could identify the voter's choice in an archive at a later time point. Although other technical solutions exist and have existed, the introduction of *paper ballots* initially promised to breach this connection between the identity of the voter and his or her vote choice. Thus, research on the establishment of the secret ballot in, for example, Victorian Britain in 1872 or in Denmark in 1901 typically analyzes the abolition of viva voce voting and its replacement by paper ballots (Elklit, 1983). The prereform voting system in Britain displayed several aspects of publicity. To begin with, polling typically took place "in places of civic importance, commonly in front of or in the town hall, but sometimes in a church or marketplace." Moreover, the voter had to announce his or her preferred candidate in front of polling station officials, which included representatives of the returning officer, the poll clerk, and partisan poll watchers. Importantly, the poll clerk recorded the name, occupation, and address of the voter alongside his choices (Crook & Crook, 2007, p. 451).

With the adoption of the so-called 1872 "Ballot Act," Britain turned to a system of voting with paper ballots that citizens placed in ballot boxes at polling stations (O'Leary, 1962, pp. 82-85, 91-92). As Kasara and Mares (forthcoming) as well as Kam (2016) document, however, the paper ballot did not fully protect the privacy rights of all voters. The new written ballot was, in the event of a petition, subject to scrutiny, which meant that legal proceedings could reconnect a voter in principle with his ballot, and hence

his choice. Importantly, electoral laws allowed illiterate voters to communicate their vote choice to poll clerks orally, often in the presence of party agents or poll watchers (Crook & Crook, 2007, p. 466). But these reforms at least required voters to submit their votes in writing and submit them without public scrutiny.

Given the transition from oral to written voting, a second dimension of reform refers to how paper ballots themselves were printed and distributed. Whereas the British *viva voce* voting system was still in place in a few parts of the United States by the end of the Civil War (Bourke & DeBats, 1978, p. 270), the bulk of the states conducted elections through paper ballots already by the end of the 19th century. As parties printed and distributed ballots, they varied them in size and color, so that partisan poll watchers could monitor the behavior of voters on election day. In his historically rich account of voting on the eve and during the Civil War, for example, Richard L. Bense (2004) explains how Americans or newly naturalized immigrants often waded through raucous crowds to deposit easily identifiable ballots before polling station officials and poll watchers. Similar problems plagued German elections in the 19th century (Mares, 2015; Ziblatt, 2009). In other words, the fact that an election uses paper ballots does not safeguard, in whole or in part, the secrecy of the vote. As a Costa Rican newspaper, *the Diario de Costa Rica* (cited in Lehoucq & Molina, 2002, p. 142) sardonically noted in 1925, the very year in which Congress had established the paper ballot, the country was “simply going to try a caricature of the secret ballot” because party-supplied ballots “will make it be known beforehand how each citizen will vote.”²

The reform that settled this issue in the United States goes under a common name: “the Australian ballot.” It was thus in Great Britain’s former penal colony, the self-governing colony of Australia, that reformers fixed upon the idea of centralizing ballot production to safeguard the privacy rights of voters. In 1856, the Legislative Council of Victoria passed the law that would allow voters to cast ballots in genuine secret; within 10 years, the legislative councils of the other provinces adopted the reform for which Australia is known (McKenna, 2001). The “Australian ballot” refers to a bundle of measures, the most important of which is the use of identical paper ballots, each of which lists the names of all candidates and/or parties. But when state legislatures began to create the Australian ballot in the United States in 1888 (Massachusetts’s legislature was the first to enact this reform statewide in 1888; Ware, 2002), its most widely discussed feature was, in fact, that states printed and supplied paper ballots, each of which was of uniform design and was only available at the time of voting. In Ware’s (2002) words, “The real significance of the Australian ballot was that it was an official (or state) ballot

as opposed to an unofficial ballot” (p. 32).³ The centralization of ballot production deprived parties and their agents of the ability to connect individual voters to a particular choice of party or candidate. Along with the “French-type” or “ballot and envelope” model—in which voters insert a ballot for each party or candidate into uniform envelopes—the Australian ballot became the most well-known way to prevent the world from monitoring a citizen’s vote (Massicotte, Blais, & Yoshinaka, 2004).

There is also a third dimension of secret ballot reform to consider, one that goes beyond the use of standardized paper ballots. Regardless of the type of paper ballot in use, the voter must somehow record his or her vote choice, either by ticking off a box next to the party or candidate on Australian ballots or by folding and placing the ballot paper from the preferred party or candidate into a uniform envelope with the French system. Next, this choice must somehow be securely stored together with the choices of all other voters until the tally starts, typically after the polling station has closed. Without a screen shielding voters, the use of a private room, or other similar arrangement, the “curious” may nevertheless figure out for whom a voter cast a ballot. Similarly, without a ballot box or “urn” that mixes all votes and stores them securely until opened, elaborate systems of backward identification might still allow polling station officials or poll watchers to decipher a voter’s choices.

Thus, the third dimension pertains to the physical organization of the polling station. These arrangements became a source of controversy in Imperial Germany and France during the Second (1848-1851) and Third Republics (1871-1940). In France, where new citizens began to use paper ballots during the revolution, the secret vote, which became part of the 1848 constitution, had a different stature than in Britain or the Americas. But polling day practices constantly violated the secrecy of the ballot. Among other illicit tactics, parties distributed ballots in colored envelopes, which voters had to rip open before placing them in ballot urns; ballot papers were also marked or numbered for future recognition (Crook & Crook, 2007, pp. 453-454; Seymour & Frary, 1915, p. 379).

The powerful also undermined the secrecy of the ballot in Imperial Germany. Although the Reichstag began to use paper ballots in 1871, it was “common knowledge” that voting privacy did not exist. As electoral law empowered the chairmen of election panels—and not voters—to deposit ballot in urns, experienced chairmen could avail themselves of a range of opportunities to discern the preferences of voters (Anderson, 2000; Mares, 2015; Ziblatt, 2009). In Germany, standardized envelopes and a more secure voting booth, which a 1903 law called for, curtailed this type of electoral malpractice. The 1913 requirement that polling stations use standardized urns further increased safeguards for voters (Anderson, 2000). In the same year, France

followed suit by introducing the “isoloir”—a shielded voting compartment within the polling station—and a secure envelop (Crook & Crook, 2007).

As these examples make clear, different aspects of voting secrecy have been the subject of different reform strategies in different countries, depending on the voting technology in use and the accusations of electoral malpractice that reformers were attacking. We emphasize that there is no preordained sequence to these three dimensions, even if reformers tend to convince legislatures to establish state-printed ballot papers and regulations about the organization of polling stations after they pass laws abandoning oral voting.

The history of the less well-known, but important, case of Sweden illustrates the protracted and multidimensional nature of reform. Although public voting was the normal practice in elections to the Diet of Estates during the 18th century, elections to the House of Clerics used so-called “sealed tickets” (Stavenow, 1895, p. 49). This practice also became established in some of the city elections to the House of Burghers.⁴ The 1810 Parliamentary Act ordained sealed tickets but only for the House of Burghers (Fahlbeck, 1934, p. 111), and it took a 1828 Royal decree to establish how this practice should be reconciled with the fact that votes were weighted by tax burdens (which meant that in particular the very rich’s vote could easily be identified).⁵ The 1866 Parliamentary Act (at the time of which the Diet of Estates was replaced by a bicameral parliament) established the paper ballot for direct elections and the second-order elections among electors. However, for first-order indirect elections, when electors to the second chamber (lower house) were appointed, whether secret ballots were required was a matter of ongoing dispute (G. Wallin, 1961, pp. 84–88). Although these indirect elections (which, in the rural districts, were voluntary) had almost fallen out of practice by the early 20th century (Lewin, Jansson, & Sörbom, 1972, p. 31), it was only with the introduction of proportional representation (PR) in 1911 that laws specified how to organize polling stations and required voting booths to have proper screens (Esaiasson, 1990, p. 110). Even then, however, the parties printed their own ballot papers. As late as 1948, responding to allegations that the thickness of the ballot envelopes might reveal the preferences of voters, the parties still failed to reach an agreement on a standardized format (Esaiasson, 1990, n. 44, p. 214). Not until the time of introducing a unicameral parliament in 1970 did the Swedish state start printing standardized ballot papers and envelopes (Esaiasson, 1990, p. 253).

So when did Sweden introduce the secret ballot? As this brief history makes clear, the answer to this question depends on what reform dimension we privilege. And even within these dimensions, change can be gradual. According to the first, written ballots were, by and large, introduced in 1866, although in practice *viva voce* voting in first-stage indirect elections could occur in rural districts until the early 20th century. In terms of the third

dimension, 1911 would seem an appropriate date of reform. But from the perspective of the second dimension, 1911 seems a debatable choice too, as the law did not mandate standardized ballot envelopes until 1970. Even today, the extent to which Swedes vote fully in secret is under debate. Parties are still allowed to distribute their ballot papers outside polling stations, and voters can select ballots openly inside polling stations (not behind screens, as is, for example, the case in Norway; see Overå, Dalbakk, & Pavestad, 1997). Although no one in Sweden today suspects that the authorities or parties attempt to violate voting secrecy on a systematic basis, the implication is that Sweden does flout Rokkan's (1961) second condition for voting secrecy. It is *not* the case that it is "impossible for the voter to prove how he voted to those he does want to know."

The Secret Ballot and Democratization: Theoretical Linkages

The papers in this issue outline a general approach to the study of the secret ballot. They provide empirical answers to two main types of puzzles connected to the study of democratization. The first is why privatizing the act of voting became a major feature of institutional reform in mid- to late-19th century. The second puzzle is what difference, if any, did the secret ballot actually make? Was it more than a *de jure* confirmation of *de facto* changes already taking place in society? Taken together, these papers generate important insights about the nature of the relationship between institutional reform and democratization, more generally.

Rethinking the Causes of the Secret Ballot

The causes of the adoption of the secret ballot itself remain something of a mystery in the study of comparative politics. The question is critical and worth exploring because the general literature on democratization—with some recent exceptions—is theoretically *silent* on the question of ballot reform. Both qualitative comparative historical analysis (Collier, 1999; Moore, 1966; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, & Stephens, 1992) and large-*n*, cross-national analysis (Boix, 2003, 2011; Lipset, 1959; Przeworski & Limongi, 1997) typically treat the emergence of democracy as a single "package" of institutions that are the outgrowth of economic development (cf. Ziblatt, 2006). We have, however, to date few, if any, theoretically anchored accounts linking economic modernization to the adoption of the narrow institution of the secret ballot (cf. Aidt & Jensen, 2016; Mares, 2015).

Substantial cross-national evidence (Boix, 2011; Przeworski & Limongi, 1997; Teorell, 2010) suggests that the consolidation of democracy is more likely at higher levels of per capita income, though a debate exists about the impact of development on democratization. At first glance, such an account is consistent with the timing of the adoption of the secret ballot across the globe (Aidt & Jensen, 2016). But whether the mechanisms presumably associating economic development to democratization more generally also link economic development to secret ballot remains an open question.

Recent and important works (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Ansell & Samuels, 2014; Rueschemeyer et al., 1992) suggest that a shift in economic power is the key mechanism between economic development and democracy. In this view, an expanding middle class or working class, buoyed by economic change, push for extending suffrage rights or parliamentary sovereignty, which increase their weight in authoritarian political systems. The institutional reforms of democratization lead to the pursuit of policy goals with specific distributional consequences: increased social spending, changed investment in public goods, protections from an overreaching state, and altered trade policies (Ansell & Samuels, 2014; Lizzeri & Persico, 2004).

Do these accounts provide an explanation for the establishment of the secret ballot?⁶ Is the secret ballot, like suffrage reform, an indirect fight over public goods and redistribution? While existing accounts are primarily mute on the secret ballot itself (cf. Baland & Robinson, 2007), as the secret ballot is one part of the “package” of democracy, one might suspect a similar logic would apply. Suffrage expansion to working-class males certainly alters the median voter of a political system by including lower-income voters in a political system’s electorate (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006). In the context of a restricted or expanded suffrage, so too might we expect the secret ballot to have a similar though less direct effect. In this view, voters are “liberated” from the pressures of employers and landlords, and can express their *real* preferences in the political system, which, in effect, lowers the income of the median voter. This claim seems to find indirect support in case studies of individual countries that finds, for example, that skill levels in the labor force and the absence of economic concentration generated more support for secret ballot reform in Imperial Germany (e.g., Mares, 2015).

However, in contrast to suffrage reform, what has made the secret ballot so difficult to theorize in a *comparative* context is that the secret ballot, unlike suffrage reform, has two potential contradictory effects. On one hand, 19th-century European economic elites viewed the public ballot as a way of coercing voters (and their employees) to vote in ways consistent with employers’ interests (Kasara & Mares, forthcoming; Mares, 2015; Ziblatt, 2009). Given this, one would expect economic modernization,

increased labor mobility, and increased income to undermine the public ballot and traditional “deference communities” (Moore, 1976) in ways consistent with our broader theories of democratization. In this account, a shift in the balance of economic power results in a push to undo political institutions (i.e., the open ballot) that had benefited existing old regime and socio-economic elites, generating a new, and likely, *poorer* median voter in the political system.

On the other hand, if we believe elite critics of the open ballot in the U.S. system in the 1870s (Kuo & Teorell, forthcoming), a different account emerges. In the “progressive” criticism of the public ballot, it was “respectable” employers and landlords who were disadvantaged by the public ballot, and who wanted to “clean up” the vote by privatizing it. Conversely, political parties representing relatively poorer and often immigrant voters (e.g., European socialist parties and American urban machines) benefited from the open ballot by providing them with a means to inflate turnout.⁷ If this latter perspective is correct, the introduction of the secret ballot disenfranchises lower-income voters. It, too, changes the location of the median voter but in precisely the *opposite* direction: Voters located at higher levels in the income distribution become this new electorate’s pivotal voters.

Which account is correct? It is possible both are. Indeed, if both contradictory consequences of the secret ballot are, in fact, operating in any country, this would explain the difficulty analysts have faced in linking standard political economic theories of democratization to ballot reform; ballot reform works in two directions simultaneously. Why, then, would politicians ever champion the secret ballot?

The papers in this issue suggest that socioeconomic actors are not as important as conventional theories of democratization suppose they are (e.g., Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Ansell & Samuels, 2014). While economic modernization is correlated with the adoption of the secret ballot (see Aidt & Jensen, 2016), neither indirect fights over redistribution among socioeconomic groups (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Boix, 2003) nor efforts by rising middle classes seeking protection from an overreaching state (Ansell & Samuels, 2014) are the primary causal mechanisms linking modernization to ballot reform. Instead, these papers argue that actors at a *political* level of analysis, that is, the key actors in negotiating the secret ballot, are at best imperfect political “agents” of socioeconomic interests.⁸ It is the strategic calculations of politicians and political parties that determine when political systems establish institutional reforms like the secret ballot. The principal cleavage in struggles over the secret ballot and the causes of its adoption were located in an issue of immediate concern to politicians: the public ballot’s changing *electoral market for votes* between politicians and voters.

In this view, the traditional public-ballot system generates a political equilibrium in which politicians compete against each other for votes in part by offering bribes and intimidating voters in exchange for votes. The balance of intimidation and vote buying varies across national cases (Kasara & Mares, forthcoming). Yet, this public-ballot equilibrium, whichever form it takes, is vulnerable to several kinds of change. First, if the value of holding office declines or even remains the same, economic development brings with it increasing wages for voters, which raises the cost of bribes that politicians must pay. If the price of bribes becomes too high, politicians are not willing to pay them; if bribes are too low, however, voters are not willing to accept them, shrinking the volume of trade in an electoral market place. Similarly, if economic development increases labor mobility, the cost of intimidation by politicians working with employers increases, diminishing the viability of this second feature of an open electoral market place. This second mechanism is the central finding in Kasara and Mares (forthcoming) in which parliamentary supporters of the secret ballot in Imperial Germany were located in economically less-concentrated districts of Germany (also, see Mares, 2015). Finally, holding all else equal, suffrage expansion itself increases the costs of bribery and coercion. Taken together, a vibrant electoral market place of an open-ballot system might, in principle, begin to collapse in the face of key political and economic changes associated with modernization.

Given these vulnerabilities, Kam (2016) and Aidt and Jensen (2016) demonstrate that the socioeconomic changes of the mid-19th century undermined the equilibrium of political forces sustaining the public ballot. Simply put, politicians' willingness and ability to pay bribes that voters would accept declined because voters demanded higher bribes.⁹ Second, if socioeconomic change increased labor mobility, the costs of voter intimidation also increased, making this second feature of the open-ballot system less sustainable (Kasara & Mares, forthcoming). Finally, these weaknesses meant that political entrepreneurs could quite easily take up the issue of ballot reform in this environment, pushing for reform against politicians who have declining willingness or interest in defending the old system. Especially in systems marked by policy stalemate, the secret ballot becomes an issue of significant electoral appeal and value.¹⁰ The result is a strategic dynamic in which the balance of politicians' interests shifts toward a new equilibrium: The open system is harder and harder to sustain, and an alternative secret ballot system in which bribes and coercion are more difficult to enforce becomes more attractive.

For example, Kasara and Mares (forthcoming) extend the case study findings of Mares (2015). They use the parliamentary record to compare the political coalitions behind secret ballot reform in 19th-century Britain and

Germany. The authors use roll call data from Britain and data on signatories to proposed legislation in Germany to track the profile of electoral constituencies associated with the push for reform. Consistent with the account developed here, socioeconomic factors impinged on the calculus not only of socioeconomic actors but also *politicians*: In regions with high landholding inequality in Britain and high industrial concentration in Germany, for example, the costs of bribery and intimidation, respectively, were lower, leaving these politicians less interested in supporting ballot reform.

Similarly, Aidt and Jensen (2016) analyze 14 countries over time, conducting a survival analysis of the open-ballot system. The authors find a broad correlation between wealth and ballot reform adoption, appearing at first glance to confirm the modernization theory account. However, the authors propose a causal mechanism anchored in the shifting dynamics of the electoral market place that is very much rooted in the strategies of politicians. Once the costs of bribes become too high for existing politicians, their defense of the open ballot declines and advocates of ballot reform carry the day.

Taken together, these findings are important not only for historical but also theoretical reasons. While the findings generally support the notion that wealth and ballot reform went together historically, the channel through which wealth mattered was not by shifting the balance of power in society between labor, landed elites, and the middle class. Rather, wealth mattered because it transformed the structure of the electoral market place, by making intimidation and bribery more costly. As we think about efforts to “clean up the vote” today, it is important to remember the specific causal pathways linking economic development and democracy in discrete institutional domains that may interact with each other in subtle and not fully appreciated ways. This issue is a first step in that direction.

Did the Secret Ballot Matter? If so, How?

A puzzle emerges from the preceding arguments that the remaining papers in the volume address: if changing socioeconomic conditions made bribes less viable and intimidation more costly, why was a *de jure* institutional reform necessary at all if *de facto* changes had already occurred? Was not the public ballot in the last throes of its existence anyway? Did the secret ballot, as an institutional intervention, have any actual impact on politics, intended or unintended? By providing answers to these questions, the second shared empirical contribution of this issue is threefold. First, they furnish cross-national evidence that the secret ballot had *real* consequences, even if those consequences were multifaceted and occasionally unexpected. Second, these articles show that ballot reform did not erase “election fraud and corruption,”

but rather transformed it, leading to the substitution of one form of corruption for another. Finally, the papers demonstrate how careful and systematic historical work, often relying on a common source of data—election petitions to national parliaments—rarely before analyzed in comparative context (though, see, for example, Lehoucq & Molina, 2002; Ziblatt, 2009), can help scholars reconstruct transformation in the practice of elections historically.

In his paper on Victorian Britain, Kam (2016) constructs and analyzes a remarkable dataset based on election petitions filed in the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers between 1820 and 1906 to track bribe prices paid by candidates for the House of Commons. In an analysis of 500 elections, Kam demonstrates that the 1872 introduction of the secret ballot in Britain reduced the price of bribes by a full 50%, dropping below wage levels according to Kam's estimation (see Kam, 2016). However, Kam discovers evidence that suggests an increase in the share of campaign expenditures on turnout buying (i.e., paying potential supporters to show up to the polls) and treating (i.e., the provision of food and drink to voters). In short, the secret ballot's effect, as Kam teaches us, is also multidimensional, as one form of electoral corruption substituted for another.

Kuo and Teorell (forthcoming) make a similar point. They track a variety of factors that affect both the amount and types of accusations of fraud found in their massive original dataset of election petitions for U.S. Congressional elections between 1860 and 1940. Like Kam, Kuo and Teorell find that the gradual and state-level introduction of the Australian ballot in the 1890s did reduce accusations of outright bribery and intimidation. But confirming the worst suspicions of critics of the secret ballot and how it was implemented in the United States (see, for example, Keyssar, 2001; Kousser, 1974; Schaffer, 2008), the secret ballot, not unlike other ballot reforms introduced in the late-19th century in the United States under the cover of "cleaning up elections," in fact increased other types of illicit tactics, such as the padding of electoral rolls and ballot box stuffing. Like Kam, Kuo and Teorell analyze an extensive dataset on petitions and quantitative historical economic and political data to provide answers to questions that have been at the heart of debates in the study of American political development for generations.

These findings echo recent findings in the literature on the effect of the secret ballot, providing more solid foundation to a growing body of literature. For example, using municipal-level data, Daniel Gingerich (2014) demonstrates that the adoption of the Australian ballot in Brazil in 1955 (for presidential and vice-presidential elections and subsequently for other offices) increased the number of null and invalid votes, presumably because illiterates were effectively disenfranchised. Even if the centralization of ballot production and distribution deflated the legislative strength of the right in the

Brazilian national Congress, Gingerich points out, the effort to clean up elections led to the de facto disenfranchisement of thousands of poor and illiterate voters.

Likewise, Jean-Marie Baland and James A. Robinson (2008, 2012) demonstrate that the establishment of the Australian ballot in 1958 in Chile liberated rural voters from their landlords. As a result, the electoral strength of the Chilean right began to fall; the Australian ballot, they also demonstrate, moreover led to a decline in the price of land because the votes of sharecroppers and retainers were no longer assured. A rural estate, in other words, no longer generated economic (the market value of crops) and political rents (the electoral votes of clients).

Finally, a statistical model of more than 1,200 accusations of fraud from Costa Rica between 1901 and 1948 concludes that establishing the Australian ballot in 1927 eliminated the largely procedural violations of electoral law commonplace under the public ballot (Lehoucq, 2015). Parties, in other words, desisted from complaining about the late opening of polling stations or the inaccurate recording of a voter's choice on election day. After 1927, parties shifted to denouncing egregious types of frauds because the secret and Australian ballot left parties with few options but, for example, to threaten or to coerce voters.

In sum, the introduction of the secret ballot was, on one hand, by no means a "silver bullet" that "cleaned-up" elections for good in the world's oldest democracies. On the other hand, the dismantling of the public ballot was not simply a de jure validation of processes already underway. While economic modernization may have reduced the size of the vote market on its own, the introduction of the Australian and secret ballots was the final blow that transformed electoral practice in the world's old democracies.

Implications and Concluding Remarks

This special issue empirically deals with a set of historical cases of ballot reform in established democracies. By extending and systematizing the findings of national case studies into a possibly more general framework, the papers are suggestive of broader implications. We end this introductory essay by identifying three such implications, both for the issue of democratization and democratic reform in the world today, and for normative political theory.

First and foremost, vote buying and political clientelism—through which citizen political support is exchanged for material inducements—are pervasive in the world today (e.g., Schaffer, 2007; Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno, & Brusco, 2013; Vicente & Wantchekon, 2009), even though viva voce voting, to the best of our knowledge, is no longer practiced in national elections.

Particularly for observers from the developed world, this poses a puzzle: How can the exchange of votes for cash or valuable goods occur if the vote is not observable? Or, put differently, how can the explicit or implicit contract between the buyer and seller of votes be enforced under the secret ballot?

The most obvious answer to this conundrum is the ballot is not fully secret. To recall from our previous section, the use of paper ballots rather than viva voce voting is not in itself a guarantee for voting secrecy; secret ballot regulations *de jure* is not a sufficient condition for *de facto* observance of the rule. Examples of this abound. In Argentina, for example, where the nominal secret ballot was adopted in 1912, 37% of a random sample of voters in 2003 responded that party operatives can find out how a person voted (Stokes et al., 2013). Part of the reason stems from the fact that Argentina does not use the Australian ballot; parties continue to print ballots that voters can bring to the polling station, even if citizens are free to choose which ballot to use in a secret room. What it takes is a cadre of cunning party brokers, typically embedded in tight-knit neighborhoods and skilled at inferring people's vote choices, to maximize the number of voters who deposit the party-supplied ballot on election day (Brusco, Nazareno, & Stokes, 2004). The workings of how ballot secrecy is violated in practice seem strikingly similar in a detailed case study of local Kuomintang campaign workers in Taiwan in the 1990s (Wang & Kurzman, 2007). Survey evidence even suggests that a quarter of U.S. respondents believe that voting secrecy is being violated (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, & Dowling, 2012)—and this reduces turnout (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, & Hill, 2013).

Although the inferences party brokers draw on vote choice are marred with uncertainty (Schaffer & Schedler, 2007), there is evidence from field experiments that vote buying works even under the nominally “secret” ballot: At least in Africa, it boosts the voting tally for (particularly incumbent) candidates and induces higher voter turnout (Vicente & Wantchekon, 2009). By implication, perfecting the secret ballot is still an issue on the reform agenda in democratizing countries. Potential lessons learned from the historical case studies presented in this special issue can here come into play. The British experience (Kam, 2016) seems to suggest an intricate interplay between ballot reform, bribe prices, and—as in Cox and Kousser's (1981) argument for the State of New York toward the turn of the 19th century—a potential switch from vote to turnout buying. Moreover, the American (Kuo & Teorell, forthcoming) and Costa Rican (Lehoucq & Molina, 2002) examples highlight the adaptability of parties and incumbents in the face of reform that threatens their grip on power. In the developing world today, there is also great potential for substituting some illicit electoral practices with others.

In sum, eradicating clientelism might not turn out as easy as it sounds. If Stokes et al. (2013) and Aidt and Jensen (2016) are proven correct, it might take more than just secret ballot reform to safeguard the autonomy of voters. It might require the eradication of poverty through socioeconomic modernization, more generally. Our framework provides analysts with the conceptual vocabulary to make sense of these sorts of important puzzles that have real-world consequences for contemporary citizens in new democracies.

Second, the establishment of the secret ballot also holds an important lesson for electronic voting in particular and online participation more generally (i.e., also in developed countries). One of the many discussed issues with respect to Internet polling conducted from people's private homes is that it makes it practically impossible to enforce voting secrecy (Birch & Watt, 2004). The most obvious reason for this may be stated in terms of Rokkan's (1961) aforementioned second condition for voting secrecy: Internet voting in private homes does not "make it *impossible* for the voter to prove how he voted to those he *does* want to know." In other words, regardless of the exact voting technique in use, no one can prevent private citizens from making a screen dump or some other printed copy of his or her electoral choice to display to the world after the election. For citizens wanting to sell their votes or for parties wanting to purchase them, electronic voting from home presents excellent but unforeseen opportunities. In fact, this problem may arise even when electronic voting occurs in polling stations (Alvarez, Levin, Pomares, & Leiras, 2013).

One could even argue, more generally, that if not online voting so at least other forms of online participation also risk not meeting the standard of Rokkan's (1961) *first* condition: "To make it *possible* for the voter to keep his decision private and avoid sanctions from those he *does not* want to know." This would importantly be the case in authoritarian settings where Internet surveillance is well developed and perceived as highly effective. In a field experiment in China, for example, students whose identities were hidden when interacting with a government online forum did not behave differently from students whose identities were known (P. Wallin, 2014). One interpretation of this finding is that, at least in government-run online fora in China, no one feels anonymous. Taking the allegations of Edward Snowden on the expansive surveillance activities performed by the American National Security Agency into consideration, for example, this *perception* of non-anonymity on the Internet may also be quite extensive in the developed world. In an age where the borders between the online and the offline world are being blurred continuously, and where larger parts of people's lives and activities take place in the cyber realm, this might have important repercussions for the privacy of individual political preferences more generally.

Again, reflecting on the historical importance of secret ballot reform puts these recent trends and phenomena in critical perspective. Sometimes, the original motivations behind hard-fought reforms in the distant past might be easily forgotten. As all the contributions to this special issue make clear, organized interests fought over secret ballot reforms undertaken in the late-19th and early 20th centuries. Once enacted, this reform did protect individual voters from violence and intimidation. These experiences should not be forgotten when reflecting on the pros and cons of making the act of voting, or of political participation more generally, more available with Internet or online tools.

This brings us, third and finally, to the normative argument about secret voting. Although contemporary democratic theorists, for the most part, think of the secret ballot as an inherent and desirable property of democracy, this has not always been the case—and the arguments both for and against the secret ballot may deserve revisiting. The most well-known critique against secret voting is no doubt the argument by John Stuart Mill that publicity promotes responsible voting; that public voting forces citizens, at least implicitly, to defend their vote choices before their peers. Under the shadow of this public scrutiny, each voter will vote more genuinely for the public rather than his own private interest.

Proponents of deliberative models of democracy make a similar argument. Brennan and Pettit (1990) argue that secret voting encourages whimsical and malicious voting because it shields the act of voting from public scrutiny. While they thus agree with John Stuart Mill on the ills of secret voting in principle, they do concede that in practice these ills must be weighed against the potential harm incurred by unveiling the vote: the risk of bribery and voter intimidation. According to another proposal, a modest form of ballot publicity might have the effect of devising “a system that is both open enough to avoid the disadvantages of the secret ballot (less deliberation, increased isolation and selfishness) and closed enough to retain its advantages (impossibility of bribery, corruption and intimidation)” (Engelen & Nys, 2013, p. 503). The idea would be to retain voting secrecy under its current forms on election day but combine it with public deliberation by a subset of voters. Each voter will face

a 1 percent chance of participating in small assemblies of randomly selected citizens, in which their votes will be truth-fully revealed to each other and in which they will be asked to discuss the reasons for and against their votes. (p. 504)

Such a system, could it be realized, would both encourage responsible voting due to the perceived threat of potential public scrutiny, as it were, but at the

same time make large-scale schemes for vote buying or voter intimidation highly intractable (cf. Manin, 2015).

Although we agree in principle on the desirability of such a system, we have serious doubts about whether it would work in practice, again drawing on the experiences of the hard-fought reform to install ballot secrecy historically. In this respect, we share the personal doubts even John Stuart Mill seems to have entertained vis-à-vis his own arguments against ballot reform. In a letter to Harriet Taylor in 1854, Mill related a dream in which he argued about the secret ballot with one of its proponents, who succinctly summarized the matter as such: “It will not be necessary in heaven, but it will always be necessary on earth” (cited in Buchstein, 2015, p. 39).

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Notes

1. Przeworski (2015) also adopts a binary coding for the introduction of the secret ballot, admitting however that the information on which this is based is “purely legalistic.”
2. It was not until 2 years later—and after an intense struggle—that the Costa Rican Congress enacted a new law that stripped parties of the right to supply ballots to voters (Lehoucq & Molina, 2002).
3. The 1872 British Ballot Act—which was also an Australian ballot, although not referred to under that name (Fredman, 1968)—simultaneously introduced the first two dimensions of voting secrecy, that is, voting on paper with state-printed standardized ballots.
4. The introduction of written ballots, however, was not uncontroversial. In the city of Västerås, among the first of cities to ordain “sealed tickets” in the Burghers’ elections, a petition was filed against the use of written ballots in the 1755 election. The petitioner complained, among other things, that the relatively rich winner could vote for himself without anyone knowing it (Johansson, 1973, p. 506).
5. The ordained method, which was established through the ruling on a petition from the city of Gothenburg, was to distribute to each elector as many ballot

- papers as his number of votes. These votes, with the written name of the preferred candidate(s), could then be submitted without revealing the identity of the elector.
6. In line with the contributions to this special issue, we concentrate our discussion on redistributive conflict over ballot reform, as that has been the most salient issue in the recent literature on democratization. We acknowledge, however, that under certain circumstances, the secret ballot could be a pareto-optimal reform that makes everyone better off. We wish to thank one anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.
 7. For contemporary applications of this same line of critique, see Schaffer (2007).
 8. This insight builds on several existing accounts, including Lehoucq and Molina (2002) and Mares (2015).
 9. Kam (2016) notes that voting in 19th century required, in many instances, losing a day of labor, which is a viable proposition if bribe prices are greater than lost wages.
 10. This has also been demonstrated in other contexts, including in Latin America. See Lehoucq and Molina (2002).

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