

## **Domestic Election Observers and Electoral Fraud in Malawi's 2014 Elections**

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## Abstract

We present findings from a field experiment that estimates the causal effect of domestic election observers on election day malfeasance and downstream aggregation fraud in Malawi's 2014 general elections. Our analyses leverage the random assignment of election observers to 1,049 polling stations located in a nationally representative sample of 90 constituencies. Since these polling stations already had observers assigned by other domestic monitoring organizations, our results speak to the marginal impact on electoral fraud of having an additional observer. We find that polling stations to which an additional observer was deployed had systematically lower rates of turnout and overvoting, and fewer votes for the presidential candidate who ultimately won the election—all results consistent with the deterrence of electoral fraud by the presence of the additional observer. We also find that the presence of the additional observer increases the likelihood that election results are not publicly posted, and that the non-posting of results is associated with an increased likelihood of aggregation fraud on behalf of the winning party, which we measure by comparing polling station-level election tallies with the official results reported by the Malawi Electoral Commission. We interpret this finding as suggesting that the presence of the additional observers may have displaced fraud from election day to the aggregation phase, and that the non-posting of the results may have been part of a conscious strategy to mask these efforts.

Over the past thirty years, millions of citizens have participated in nonpartisan election observation efforts to safeguard the integrity of their countries' elections.<sup>1</sup> These efforts, which complement those of international monitors, have been shown to reduce electoral fraud in a variety of settings (Hyde, 2007 and 2010; Ichino and Shündeln, 2012; Kelley, 2012; Enikolopov et al, 2013; Asunka et al, 2013 and 2015). We study the impact of domestic election monitors on fraud in Malawi's 2014 elections.

Studying electoral fraud is challenging because its perpetrators have strong incentives to hide their actions and because the parties and candidates that lose the election have incentives to falsely accuse the victors of having won by fraudulent means. Hence basing one's analysis on reports of electoral malfeasance is problematic. Furthermore, even if one were able to reliably detect fraud when it has taken place, attempts to identify the factors responsible for it are often difficult. For example, an association between fraud and high levels of electoral competition could be due to a genuine causal effect of competition on incentives to rig the vote or, equally plausibly, to the greater likelihood that parties and candidates' agents will file complaints with election authorities to gain a marginal advantage in a tight race. Similarly, an association between fraud and urban location might be due a greater ability of parties to carry out election rigging in densely populated areas or because media coverage is better, and hence reports of fraudulent activities are more likely.

To overcome these key challenges, we leverage the power of randomization. In partnership with Malawi's prominent independent election observation group, the Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN), we randomly assigned election observers to polling stations. This permits us to take any difference we detect in average outcomes between the polling stations to which we sent observers (the "treated" units) and those to which

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.gndem.org/aboutgndem>, accessed January 3, 2015.

we did not (the “control units”) as evidence that the presence of the observers was responsible for those differences; the control units offer a counterfactual of *what we would have seen* had the observers not been present. Insofar as these differences are indicative of fraud, we can conclude both that there was fraud in the 2014 Malawian elections and that the presence of the observers reduced it.

Our use of the random assignment of observers to generate causal inferences about levels of electoral malfeasance, and about the effects of election monitoring on fraud, is in keeping with several other recent studies (Hyde, 2010; Ichino and Schündeln, 2012; Sjoberg, 2012; Asunka et al., 2013; Enikolopov et al., 2013; and Callen and Long, 2015). However, our study departs from earlier work in several important ways. First, like Asunka et al (2013) and Enikolopov et al (2013), we focus on domestic rather than international observers. Domestic election monitors are not only more numerous than international monitors but their ability to deploy to a significantly larger number of polling sites on election day, as well as their local knowledge of the political context in which they are working, places them in a unique position to detect and deter fraud (Carothers, 1997).

Second, unlike earlier studies in which the random assignment of observers transformed polling stations from “unobserved” to “observed,” we assigned MESN observers to polling stations that already had election monitors assigned to them by other organizations. In Malawi’s 2014 polls, the country’s National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) and the Malawi Election Information Center (MEIC) both deployed their observers to all the country’s 4,445 polling stations.<sup>2</sup> Our findings therefore speak to

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<sup>2</sup> NICE is a public institution in charge of civic and voter education. MEIC is a consortium of civil society group that was formed in 2014 to help with voter verification and organize the so-called Election Situation

the impact on fraud of having an additional election observer. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the marginal effect of an additional election observer on electoral fraud.

Third, we explore a different kind of spillover than that examined in prior work. Several recent studies investigate how the effect of an observer at one polling station may spill over to adjacent polling stations, either by displacing malfeasance from the observed to the unobserved units (Ichino and Schündeln, 2012) or by creating a sense of heightened scrutiny that deters fraud in nearby, unobserved polling stations (Enikolopov et al., 2013; Callen and Long, 2015). By contrast, we study spillover not across polling stations but *over time* across different stages of the election process. By combining our analysis of the effect of an additional observer on election day fraud with an analysis of irregularities at the aggregation stage—the stage that follows the end of voting when polling station-level returns are combined at the district and national levels to generate the final, official tallies—we provide evidence that the presence of an additional election day observer pushed the fraud from election day to the next phase of the electoral process. This is a novel finding, and it has implications for how we think about the equilibrium effect of election monitoring.

We conducted our study in a nationally representative sample of 90 out of Malawi's 193 electoral constituencies. Together, these constituencies contained a total of 2,044 polling stations. MESN deployed observers to a random sample of 1,049 of them (about 51%). We then randomly selected 806 of the remaining 995 polling stations to serve as our control units, bringing the total number of polling stations in our sample to 1,855. We used a standard instrument to collect both qualitative and quantitative

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Room on election day. The objectives of these two groups were to improve citizens' participation in the election process and to alert the election authority of potential threats to the integrity of the election process.

information about the election processes and the vote count in our sample of polling stations. This checklist was completed by the MESN observers in our treated units and by trained research assistants, who visited the polling stations and interviewed party agents and election officials after the close of polls, in our control units. A subset of our research assistants also visited both treated and control polling stations during the period between the close of counting and two days after to record whether election officials had publicly posted the election results at polling centers, as is required under section 93(3) of Malawi's Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act (1998).

We also gained access to the final polling station results submitted to Malawi's electoral authority by local election officials. In the absence of manipulation by local election officials during the transmission of results from polling stations to the national tally center, these results should match with those collected by our observers and research assistants at polling stations. Thus, access to these transmitted results allows us to investigate potential aggregation fraud in the presidential polls, and to explore possible mechanisms through which fraud occurs.

Our analyses employ three measures of election fraud. The first two measures, *overvoting* and *turnout*, are constructed by adding the number of valid and invalid votes cast at a polling station and dividing the total by the number of registered voters, as provided by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) prior to the polls. *Turnout* is simply this quotient. High (or low) turnout is, of course, not in itself a measure of electoral malfeasance. But if turnout is systematically higher in control polling stations than in treated polling stations then it strongly suggests that the presence of MESN observers reduced manipulations that took place in untreated units. It is the *comparison* of turnout levels across treated and control units, not the level of turnout in any individual polling station that provides the evidence of fraud. *Overvoting* is a dummy variable that

takes a value of one when the total number of votes cast exceeds the number of registered voters, and a zero otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

Our third measure of fraud is the *vote share of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate*. As explained in further detail below, while the DPP was not the ruling party at the time of the election, the ruling party, the PP, had been formed just two years earlier. As the party that had been in power for eight of the prior ten years, the DPP was the party with the deepest connections to the state's bureaucratic apparatus, the strongest grassroots organization, and hence the greatest capacity for vote rigging. It is therefore sensible to use DPP vote share as an indicator of electoral fraud. As with *turnout*, fraud is indicated not by the level of *DPP presidential vote share* in any particular constituency but by statistically significant differences between treated and control units.

In addition to these direct measures of fraud, we also test whether administrative irregularities occurred with different frequencies at treated and untreated polling stations. Although we collected information about multiple election day administrative processes, we focus in our main analyses on a dummy variable that takes a value of one if the presidential result sheet was publicly posted at the polling station and a zero otherwise. Unlike our other indicators of administrative irregularities, which were collected in different ways in treated and control units (by MESN observers in the former and by our research assistants, arriving a day later and asking retrospective questions of people who had been present during the polling, in the latter), this measure was collected the same

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<sup>3</sup> As it is constructed, this measure is highly conservative because it assumes that no fraud has occurred as long as turnout is below 100 percent. As a robustness check, we therefore adopt an alternative measure in which we define *overvoting* as an instance in which the turnout rate at a polling station is more than two standard deviations higher than the average turnout rate within the constituency. As we show in Appendix Table C.1, our results are robust to the use of this alternative measure.

way in all units, and thus can be compared across treated and untreated polling stations without fear of mistaking a treatment effect for discrepancies stemming from differences in our measurement strategies.<sup>4</sup>

Our results are threefold. First, we find that the presence of an additional election observer is associated with a significant reduction in election day fraud. Polling stations to which MESN observers were randomly assigned had rates of overvoting that were, on average, 3 percentage points lower than at other polling stations, turnout rates that were, on average, 3.6 percentage points lower, and levels of support for the DPP presidential candidate that were, on average, 2.8 percentage points lower. These are substantively large effects, and they are all consistent with the interpretation that the presence of the additional observer reduced fraud.<sup>5</sup>

Second, we find that the impact of an additional election observer varies across constituency types, with the greatest impact in polling stations located in urban constituencies and, for our turnout and overvoting measures, in polling stations located in constituencies that are dominated by a single political party. This latter finding is consistent with the interpretation that local dominance by a single party creates greater opportunities for that party to commit fraud. The impact of observers on DPP presidential vote share, by contrast, is greatest when local inter-party competitiveness is high. We speculate that this is because such competitiveness creates incentives for candidates competing at the parliamentary level to commit fraud, and such malfeasance leaks into

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<sup>4</sup> A comparison of means between treated and control stations for several of these other measures is provided in the Appendix Table D.1.

<sup>5</sup> We note that our research design does not allow us to explicitly estimate or correct for possible spillover effects to unobserved polling stations. If the presence of an observer displaces fraud to adjacent polling stations, then our estimates may be biased upward. On the other hand, if observers deter fraud at adjacent unobserved stations, our estimates may be too low. Since our study measures the impact of an *increase* in observer presence at polling stations, such spillovers may be of less concern because all stations are observed.

the results in the presidential polls, which are held concurrently.

Third, contrary to expectations, we find that the presence of an additional observer is associated with lower compliance by election officials with administrative regulations meant to promote electoral transparency. In particular, we find that election officials are 6 percentage points less likely to post the presidential results sheets at polling stations to which an additional observer was deployed—a 13 percent decrease from the baseline rate of 46 percent. We also find that the non-posting of results was more likely in the DPP's southern region stronghold and in polling stations in which the MEC's official results award the DPP a higher share of the vote.

These somewhat puzzling findings begin to make sense when we examine discrepancies between the polling station-level tallies for the DPP collected by our observers and research assistants and the official results released by the government, which we interpret as evidence of possible aggregation fraud. Although the two sets of results diverge only roughly 20 percent of the time, most of these divergences result in higher vote totals for the DPP. Moreover, the divergences are especially likely to occur in polling stations where the election results were not publicly posted. Taken together, these patterns suggest that not posting the results may have been part of a strategy to mask the aggregation fraud, which, in turn, was a response to the presence of the additional MESN observer at the polling station. The implication is that the presence of the observer may have displaced the fraud from election day to the next (aggregation) phase of the electoral process.

### **The setting**

Several aspects of the Malawi case make it a likely environment for electoral fraud, and hence an advantageous setting for studying the impact of observers on

reducing such fraud. First, the country employs a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system for parliamentary contests, which is associated in the literature with higher levels of election malfeasance (Birch, 2007). The incentives for manipulation that arise from such a system at the parliamentary level are reinforced by the competitive nature of the country's presidential elections. Although Malawi's main political parties have traditionally had regional strongholds in which each party's dominance is assured, the closeness of national elections encourages them to do whatever they can—intimidation, ballot stuffing, multiple voting, etc.—to increase their vote share even in the areas where they can be assured of victory.

The country's constitution also grants the executive substantial powers that, in the past, have been used to tilt the electoral playing field in favor of the ruling party (Smiddy and Young, 2009). Especially important is the executive's power over the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), whose chairperson and members are appointed by the president.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the MEC relies on civil servants such as district commissioners and schoolteachers, also formally under the direct control of the executive, to act as returning officers and polling station staff. This makes the election processes susceptible to manipulation (Pastor, 1999).

Malawi is also one of the poorest countries in the world, with a GDP per capita of \$220 in 2013. According to Malawi's 2010/2011 Integrated Household Survey (IHS), more than half (50.7%) of the country's population is poor and more than 80 percent lives in rural areas. Scholars often find an association between these conditions and election manipulation tactics such as vote buying (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Stokes et al., 2013). Together, these political, institutional, and socio-economic factors make Malawi a likely place for electoral malfeasance, and thus a "hard test" for the impact of domestic

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<sup>6</sup> Cross-national studies show that a lack of independence of electoral bodies from the executive is associated with lower levels of electoral integrity (Hartlyn, McCoy and Mustillo, 2008).

election observation.

### *Malawi's 2014 general elections*

Malawi's 2014 general election was the country's fifth following its transition to multi-party politics in 1994. For the first time, voters simultaneously cast ballots for president, members of parliament, and local government councilors—hence the election's designation as the country's first tripartite elections.<sup>7</sup> Although twelve candidates contested the 2014 presidential elections, 98 percent of the presidential votes were divided among the candidates from just four parties: Peter Mutharika of the Democratic People's Party (DPP), Joyce Banda of the People's Party (PP), Lazarus Chakwera of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), and Atupele Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF).<sup>8</sup>

The elections took place against the backdrop of the death in office, two years earlier, of President Bingu wa Mutharika of sudden cardiac arrest. Mutharika was succeeded by his vice president, Joyce Banda, with whom he had publicly feuded over his attempts to promote his brother, Peter, as his successor. Banda had been briefly expelled from the party but was reinstated when the constitutional court ruled that her removal had been illegal. She subsequently started her own political party, the PP and remained deeply at odds with Mutharika until his death (Dionne and Dulani, 2013). Her succession as President was strongly (but unsuccessfully) opposed by Mutharika's

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<sup>7</sup> Previous general elections were held in 1994, 1999, 2004, and 2009. In these elections only the presidential and parliamentary elections were held on the same day. The only local government elections were held in 1999. The president, who until 2012 held the power to determine when local government elections were held, had postponed these elections several times, citing a lack of funds, the absence of a legal framework to guide the operation of the local government, and allegations of fraud against the national election authorities (Chirwa, 2014). Thus, the 2014 local government elections were the second such contest since 1994.

<sup>8</sup> See official results here: <http://www.mec.org.mw/Home/tabid/36/Default.aspx>, accessed January 25, 2015.

supporters.<sup>9</sup>

The 2014 election offered Banda the chance to retain the presidency through a popular election on her own party's ticket. A few months before the polls, however, her government was faced with a major corruption scandal that weakened her popularity and forced development partners to withhold their support (Chirwa, 2014; Logan, Bratton and Dulani, 2014). Combined with her new party's lack of grassroots organizational capacity, the scandal undermined many of the advantages that Banda would have enjoyed by virtue of her incumbency. The race with Chakwera's MCP and Mutharika's DPP—which had been the ruling party for most of the previous decade—was therefore highly competitive.

The elections took place on May 20, 2014. Despite of MEC's attempts to conduct clean elections, the 2014 contest was characterized by logistical bottlenecks, administrative breakdowns, and allegations of fraud.<sup>10</sup> For example, although the voters' list was revised ahead of the polls, it was made available to parties and civil society groups only a few days prior to the election.<sup>11</sup> On election day, there were delays in the delivery of election materials, late opening of polling stations, and the delivery of wrong ballots to some polling stations—the latter of which led to violent demonstrations in Blantyre and Lilongwe and the cancellation of the polls at some polling centers. In his announcement of the official election results, MEC's chairperson, Justice Maxon Mbendera, conceded that there were serious irregularities. Some parties and candidates even went so far as to seek court rulings to either annul the presidential elections or to obtain a recount of the ballots.

On May 24, 2014 President Banda issued an order to annul the presidential polls

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter VIII (83(4)) of Malawi's 1994 Constitution provides for the vice president to be sworn in as president following the death of the president (i.e., vacancy of the presidency).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: "MEC Suspends (Polling Station) Officials for Alleged Corruption," *Daily Nation*, May 18, 2014; "Lilongwe CEO Resigns as Elections Coordinator," *The Daily Times*, May 20, 2014. Further details of election-day irregularities are provided in MESN (2014).

<sup>11</sup> See "MESN to Deploy 7,000 Monitors on Election Day," *Sunday Times* (National), May 18, 2014.

alleging “serious irregularities” in the counting and announcement of results. She called for a fresh vote in which she would not contest.<sup>12</sup> MEC opposed the President’s directive and obtained a High Court order that declared it unconstitutional and allowed MEC to continue tabulating the poll results. However, other parties and candidates followed with fresh court petitions. Under Malawi’s law, MEC had eight days after the polls to declare the results. In a dramatic decision released just 90 minutes prior to the deadline, the High Court ruled that MEC could declare the presidential results. It did so on May 30. Peter Mutharika was named the winner with 36.4 percent of the votes, although his party, the DPP, failed to gain a majority in the national assembly. Lazarus Chakwera (MCP) came second with 27.8 percent of the votes, while Banda received 20.2 percent of the vote in the third place.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Domestic election observers in the 2014 tripartite election*

Although a handful of international observers were present during Malawi’s 2014 elections, the vast majority of election monitors were deployed by three different domestic organizations: NICE, a public institution, MEIC, an initiative by key civil society organizations and academics, and MESN, with whom we partnered. While NICE and MEIC deployed observers to monitor activities at every polling station in the country, MESN deployed observers to just 2,300 of the country’s 4,445 polling station. MEIC also set up an Election Situation Room at which they collected real-time information on possible threats to election integrity.

Our study examines the impact of MESN’s deployment of polling station observers in the subset of constituencies in which we controlled (and randomized) their

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.voanews.com/content/malawi-president-annuls-election-orders-fresh-vote-in-90-days/1921639.html>, accessed May 23, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> In the parliamentary race, the DPP won 50 seats, followed by the MCP with 48. The PP won 26 and the UDF won 14. Independent candidates won 52 seats. The remaining 3 went to other smaller parties.

placement. Since polling stations that received a MESN observer already had observers present from NICE and MEIC, our intervention introduced exogenous variation in the number of observers at each polling station. In our setting, this is important because polling stations were divided into streams (described further below) and the deployment of more observers ensured that either all streams were covered or, when a polling station contained more than three streams, covered a larger share of them, thus further increasing the chances that fraud was deterred.

### **Election observers and electoral malfeasance: theoretical expectations**

The core premise of election observation—both international and domestic—is that the presence of observers will promote democracy by detecting and deterring fraud, thus building citizens’ confidence in the electoral process (Carothers, 1997; Bjornlund, 2004). Election fraud is defined broadly to include all activities aimed at influencing the outcome of an election (Lehoucq, 2003). These include activities undertaken *before the election* (such as the illegal use of government media or other resources during the campaign; fraud in registration; vote buying; and the creation of other obstacles for opposition parties to compete freely), *on election day* (such as multiple voting, ballot stuffing, the intimidation of voters, and the late opening of polling centers in areas of opposition strength), and *at the aggregation stage* (involving the altering of polling station-level tallies after they have been submitted to the district, regional, or national counting center). We study the second and third of these stages, as well as the interaction between the two.

Regarding election-day fraud, scholars and practitioners believe that the physical presence of observers at polling stations may reduce fraud by decreasing the chances that party agents and co-opted election officials will openly manipulate the polls (Hyde,

2009). Since violations of election day procedures are criminal acts, the presence of neutral observers at polling sites for the entire duration of polls is likely to increase compliance with electoral regulations and reduce the level of fraud. Even if prosecution is unlikely, individuals have been shown to behave differently when being watched, especially when their actions are illegal or socially objectionable (Gerber, Green, and Larimer, 2008). Empirical studies—including a growing number, like ours, that employ the random deployment of observers to generate inferences about the causal effects of election monitoring—generally support these claims (see Hyde and Pallister 2014 for a recent review), and, today, domestic groups deploy observers to almost all polling stations during most national elections, sometimes duplicating efforts within the same country. As noted, Malawi is one such country where multiple domestic observation efforts overlap with one another. We therefore investigate whether increasing the intensity of observation at a polling station by assigning an additional observer further decreases the incidence of fraud. We also explore whether the presence of the additional observer makes election officials more likely to comply with election regulations such as checking voters’ names, inking their fingers, and publicly posting the election results—a practice designed to reduce the likelihood of rigging at the aggregation stage.

We would not, however, expect the degree of fraud and administrative irregularities (and thus the deterrent effect of election observers) to be the same at every polling station. To orchestrate fraud, parties need the complicity of both local party activists and local election officials. Party activists commit fraud by transporting voters to multiple polling stations to cast illegal ballots, by co-opting local election officials to allow illegal voting and/or ballot stuffing, or simply by convincing those officials to miscount the cast votes. Hence we would expect the degree of fraud to vary across locations with the success of such activities. This success, in turn, is likely related to the

density of the party's local social network as well as the presence of physical infrastructure such as road and telecommunication networks that facilitate the flow of information and the transportation of voters (Ziblatt, 2009; Weidmann and Callen, 2013; Asunka et al., 2015).

Levels of local political competition and urbanization may also affect the degree of election day fraud (and hence the effect of observers). On the one hand, more competitive areas (a consideration that, we note, only makes sense in a system, like Malawi's, with low district magnitudes) may generate stronger incentives for parties to commit fraud, since the marginal value of each additional vote is greater in a closer race. But this logic is only relevant for parliamentary races. In the presidential contest, where the winner is determined based on the total number of votes he/she wins across the country as a whole, a vote at one polling station is equally valuable as a vote in any other, so the motivation for committing fraud will not vary across constituencies that, at the parliamentary level, are more or less competitive. However, since less competitive areas are likely to be party strongholds, the *opportunity* to commit fraud in support of the presidential candidate may be greater. Local competitiveness therefore cuts both ways. Urbanization may also have opposing effects. On the one hand, urban areas will have a denser road and communications infrastructure and are likely to be more electorally competitive at the parliamentary level. Both of these characteristics will likely lead to greater incentives for committing fraud. On the other hand, urban areas are less likely to be party strongholds, which implies that the opportunity for electoral malfeasance may be more limited.

Electoral fraud may also occur after election day at the aggregation stage: between the time that election results are finalized at the polling station-level, in the presence of independent and party-affiliated observers, and the time they are combined

with other polling station-level results at the constituency and national levels to determine the winners of the parliamentary and presidential races. This type of fraud, which can be detected by comparing polling station-level tallies with the formal results announced by MEC, can only be committed by parties and candidates who have close relationships with electoral officials at the district, regional, or national counting centers. Hence we would expect aggregation fraud to be most likely to favor candidates running on the ticket of the party with the closest connections to the electoral bureaucracy.

### *Spillover*

One of the most interesting aspects of the recent literature on the impact of election observation is the analysis of spillover effects. Drawing on data from Ghana's 2008 voter registration exercise, Ichino and Schündeln (2012) find evidence that observers displaced fraud from observed to unobserved polling stations, likely because party agents intent on committing fraud at one polling station were dissuaded by the presence of the observer and moved on to a nearby polling station. The implication is that estimates of the effect of observers based on a comparison of fraud at observed and unobserved polling stations may be inflated, since the effect of the observation is simultaneously to drive down the levels of fraud at the observed units and to push up the levels of fraud, via displacement, at the (nearby) unobserved units.

But evidence for a different kind of spillover exists as well. Studies of electoral fraud in both the 2010 parliamentary election in Afghanistan (Callen and Long, 2015) and the 2011 parliamentary election in Russia (Enikolopov et al., 2013) find that the presence of observers at one polling station deterred fraud in nearby unobserved stations, likely because party agents or election officials interpreted the presence of the observer at the nearby station as indicating heightened oversight more generally. Such spillover

would lead to an underestimate of observers' effect on fraud by reducing fraud in both observed and unobserved units.<sup>14</sup>

Both our research design (which did not involve varying the saturation of observers in each constituency) and the setting we study (in which all polling stations had at least two observers) make it difficult to test directly for spillover effects in our study.<sup>15</sup> However, our data do put us in a position to investigate a different—and novel—form of spillover *across phases of the electoral process*. Specifically, we test whether aggregation fraud is more or less likely in polling stations that received an additional MESN observer. While the presence of the extra observer might deter fraud altogether (leading to an expectation of a negative association between the presence of a MESN observer and aggregation fraud), it might also displace the fraud to the next stage of the electoral process (in which case the association between the presence of the MESN observer and aggregation fraud would be positive).

## **Research design**

Our study leverages MESN's random assignment of observers to polling stations in a nationally representative sample of 90 electoral constituencies. These constituencies are distributed proportionally across the country's three regions and were selected so as to be representative in terms of levels of electoral competition (proxied by the average vote margins in the 1999 and 2004 legislative polls), population density, literacy, percentage of rural population, and unemployment rates.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> As with the effect of election observers more generally, these spillover effects may vary with local conditions. For example, Asunka et al. (2015) find suggestive (but not statistically significant) evidence that whether observers displace fraud to adjacent units or deter it may depend on factors such as the levels of local political competition and urbanization.

<sup>15</sup> Our original project design did call for varying the saturation of MESN observers across constituencies to generate estimates of spillover effects, as in Asunka et al. (2013). But MESN was, in the end, unwilling to adopt this aspect of our design.

<sup>16</sup> Tables A.1 and A.2 in the appendix provide descriptive statistics of our sampling frame and sample.

The 90 constituencies contain 2,044 of the country's 4,445 polling stations. MESN deployed observers to a random sample of 1,049 of the 2,044.<sup>17</sup> Each polling station is divided into streams—individual polling centers nested within stations with a separate queue, voter registration book, ballot box, and suite of polling station agents. For example, a primary school serving as a polling station might have a separate streams in each classroom. The number of streams per polling station in our sample ranges from 1 to 19, with an average of 2.6. MESN observers received formal training and accreditation from MEC, which they were required to confirm with the head polling station agent upon arrival at their assigned polling place on election day (the head polling station agent was provided with the observer's name in advance). This accreditation gave the observer the right to access information from election officials and to observe proceedings at the polling station. In instances where the polling station contained more than one stream, MESN observers were instructed to select one of the streams and to remain at that stream from the opening to the close of the polls, when the ballots were publicly counted. At the close of counting, MESN observers recorded the official presidential results for the entire polling station, not just the stream they personally observed. MESN observers wore uniforms that identified their status and affiliation. To measure the impact of their presence, we randomly selected 806 out of the 995 remaining stations to serve as our control units. Our final sample is therefore 1,855 polling stations.<sup>18</sup>

To measure the level of irregularities and fraud at the polling stations they observed, MESN asked its observers to complete a standardized instrument (i.e.,

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<sup>17</sup> MESN classified its observers into two main groups: PVT observers and short-term observers (STOs). For monitoring purposes, these two types of observers received the same training and, on election day, stayed at the polling station for the entire duration of the polls. The only difference between the two types is that PVT observers submitted their reports in real time using SMS technology while the STO used pen and paper to submit their reports. In our sample, 368 of the 1,049 observers were PVT observers.

<sup>18</sup> Treated and control polling stations are balanced on two key pre-treatment variables: the number registered voters and the number of polling streams. This provides confidence that our randomization worked. See Appendix Table B.1.

checklist) at each polling station. The checklist included both qualitative information on election day processes (for example, whether the polls opened on time, whether a voters' list was present and whether voters were verified on the list, and the availability of voting materials such as ballot papers, ballot boxes, ballot box seals, and indelible ink) and quantitative information such as the number of valid and invalid votes cast and the number of votes won by each candidate.<sup>19</sup> A copy of the checklist is provided in Appendix D.

A central dilemma in studying the impact of election observers stems from the fact that the observers play two roles: they are the treatment whose impact is being investigated and they are the agents who collect the data from which inferences about their impact can be made. How, then, to collect similar qualitative and quantitative information at the control stations, *where observers are not sent*? The approach employed by most researchers (with notable the exception of Asunka et al. (2015)) is to compare outcomes in treated and control units using polling station-level data from election management bodies. A problem with this strategy is that such data are not always available. More important, even if they are available, they are susceptible to manipulation between the time votes are tallied at the polling station and when they are recorded in the official results—a vulnerability that we demonstrate below. Also, such data are far less rich than the information that can be collected at the polling station itself by agents with a comprehensive checklist such as the one we employed.

To circumvent this challenge, we trained and deployed 200 research assistants to our control polling stations.<sup>20</sup> The research assistants were each instructed to complete

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<sup>19</sup> Currently, MESN has only provided us with access to the random set of stations where PVT observers were deployed, and our analyses are based on that sub-sample. However, since polling stations that received PVT observers and STOs were selected at random, our results can be considered to be based on a random sample of treated units. Future versions of this paper will fold in the results from the other polling stations.

<sup>20</sup> The research assistants were recruited from IPA-Malawi's regular pool of enumerators.

the MESN checklist in four pre-assigned polling stations by interviewing a minimum of two political party agents or election officials. To minimize the chance that the research assistants would be confused for MESN observers, and thus “treat” our control stations, they were instructed to visit their assigned polling stations only after the polls had closed and counting had been completed (in some cases, the interviews with party agents and election officials did not take place until the next morning). In addition, unlike MESN observers, our research assistants did not wear identifiable T-shirts; they only identified themselves through their MEC accreditation cards, and only when it was necessary to secure cooperation to conduct their interviews. Finally, we obtained our research assistants’ accreditation from the MEC’s national offices in Blantyre and distributed them through our regional coordinators. This ensured that, unlike MESN observers who obtained their accreditation on election day at their assigned polling centers, polling officials did not know our research assistants would visit their polling stations until after close of counting.

We also trained 60 of our 200 research assistants to visit polling stations after the polls had closed to note whether the election results had been posted. The research assistants undertook this task during the three days following the elections and were able to cover 1,271 polling stations (out of 1,855).

### **Estimating election day fraud and irregularities**

Our research design and data collection protocols allow us to estimate possible vote manipulation during voting on election day.<sup>21</sup> These manipulations may occur through, for example, multiple voting, ballot stuffing, or the casting of ballots by illegal voters. As explained earlier, we employ three principal measures to investigate the impact

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<sup>21</sup> Our data also permit us to examine aggregation fraud that may have taken place during the days that followed the election, but these analyses are non-experimental, and are therefore discussed separately.

of observers on such activities: overvoting, turnout, and DPP presidential vote share.<sup>22</sup>

We estimate the treatment effect of an additional MESN observer by comparing average outcomes in treated and control polling stations. To improve the precision of our estimates and to control for chance imbalances, we use a linear probability model and control for polling station sizes. Polling station size may be important insofar as it is correlated with the number of streams, and hence the number of ballot boxes that may be tampered with (and that observers must monitor).<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, we define outcomes for polling station  $i$  as  $Y_i$ .  $T_i = t$ ,  $t \in \{treated = 1, control = 0\}$  is our treatment variable. Thus, we estimate:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where  $X_i$  is the number of registered voters for polling station  $i$ , and  $\varepsilon_i$  is our unobserved random error term. Later, we also estimate possible heterogeneous effects of adding an additional observer by disaggregating our analysis by levels of constituency-level electoral competition and population density (our measure of the level of urbanization).

### *Results*

Table 1 shows the summary statistics of our outcome variables at the polling station level. We estimate the mean of reported turnout rates to be about 73 percent, and find that 3 percent of polling stations exhibit overvoting. The DPP received 32 percent of the valid votes cast.

[Table 1 Here]

Comparing outcomes in treatment and control stations, we find that turnout was four percentage points higher in control stations than in stations where the NICE and

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<sup>22</sup> Analogous measures are used in other studies of electoral fraud (e.g., Beber and Scacco, 2008; Myagkov, Ordeshook and Shakin, 2009; Herron, 2010; Hyde, 2007; Sjoberg, 2012; Asunka et al., 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Our substantive results are unchanged if we drop the control for polling station size, although some of our estimates become less precise.

MEIC observers were supplemented by a MESN observer. Similarly, the proportion of stations recording overvoting was three percentage points lower in polling stations in which the additional MESN observer was present. The DPP's vote share was also three percentage points lower, on average, in polling stations to which MESN observers were sent. These results provide preliminary evidence that the presence of the MESN observers reduced the incidence of electoral fraud.

Our measure of administrative irregularities points in the other direction, however. Although results were posted in 42 percent of the 1,271 polling stations that our research assistants visited—a somewhat surprising finding given that posting results was mandatory—they were less likely to be posted in polling stations to which MESN observers had been sent (40 percent) than in polling stations to which they were not sent (46 percent).<sup>24</sup>

Table 2 presents our results on the effect of MESN observers on our three measures of fraud at polling stations: overvoting, turnout rates, and DPP vote shares. In our regressions, we control for the number of registered voters (logged) because in our case the size of the polling station (proxied by the number of voters) shapes the number of streams at a polling station, and hence may affect both the level of fraud and the impact of observers.

[Table 2 Here]

The results indicate that the addition of a MESN observer is indeed associated with a reduction in fraud. In column 1, the coefficient on the treatment variable shows that an additional observer reduces the rates of overvoting by 3 percentage points, a fourfold decrease. Similarly, an additional observer reduces reported turnout rates by 3.6

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<sup>24</sup> The 42 percent baseline rate of posting compares favorably to Uganda, however, where Callen et al (forthcoming) report that 77.5 percent of voting tallies (which, as in Malawi, are required to be posted under local election law) were missing.

percentage points (column 2), a nearly 5 percent decrease off the base rate of 75 percent.<sup>25</sup> Finally, in column 3, the presence of an additional observer at the polling station reduces the reported DPP vote share by roughly 3 percentage points, an 8.5 percent decrease.<sup>26</sup>

Next, in line with our theoretical discussion earlier, we consider whether the impact of an additional observer varies across different types of polling stations. Specifically, we test whether there are differences across polling stations in urban and rural constituencies and in constituencies with different levels of electoral competition. We proxy for the level of urbanization by using a measure of population density. We measure electoral competition by average margins of victory in two prior legislative elections. We divide these variables into terciles to capture any non-linearity in effects.

The upper panel of Table 3 displays the effects of treatment across different levels of population density. First, we consider the effect of an additional observer on overvoting. The coefficients on the treatment variable in columns 1, 4 and 7 display these results. The coefficient in column 7 (6.3 percentage points) is roughly three times larger than the coefficients in columns 1 (2.5 percentage points) and 4 (1.3 percentage points), and neither of the latter are statistically different from zero. This suggests that an increase in the number of observers at a polling station had a much greater impact on reducing overvoting in more urban compared to more rural constituencies. We find similar effects with respect to turnout: the coefficients in columns 5 (5.8 percentage points) and 8 (4.7 percentage points) suggest that adding an observer has roughly the same effect on reducing turnout in medium to high urban constituencies, but lower effects in rural constituencies (1.1 percentage points, but statistically indistinguishable from zero, in

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<sup>25</sup> As noted, our results are also robust to analysis using the alternative approaches to coding overvoting, as described above (see Table C.1 in the appendix).

<sup>26</sup> This coefficient is significant only at the  $p < .1$  level.

column 2). Finally, the impact of observers on DPP vote share across different levels of urbanization is shown by the treatment coefficients in columns 3, 6 and 9. Again, the coefficient in column 9 (7.6 percentage points) is more than three times higher than those in columns 3 (2.1 percentage points) and 6 (0.1 percentage points), and neither of the latter are statistically different from zero. This suggests, again, that an additional observer has a greater impact on reducing fraud in more urban constituencies. As suggested earlier, this tendency may stem from the enhanced ability of parties to carry out fraud in environments with well developed transport and communications infrastructure.

[Table 3 Here]

Next, we consider the effect of our treatment on markers of fraud across different levels of electoral competition (lower panel of Table 3). First, we consider the effect of an additional observer on overvoting and turnout. The coefficients on the treatment variable in columns 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, and 8 show these results. The estimated size of the treatment effects where competitiveness is low (columns 7 and 8; 4.0 and 5.8 percentage points, respectively) are much larger and more statistically significant than those where competitiveness is high or medium (columns 1, 2, 4 and 5). This suggests that an increase in observer intensity is more effective in reducing overvoting and turnout in constituencies with low levels of competition. This pattern is consistent with a tendency for parties to engage in fraud in areas where they are electorally dominant—and where they presumably have strong social connections to local officials who serve as election agents.

Something interesting emerges, however, when we consider the impact of an additional observer on our third measure of fraud, DPP presidential vote share. Our estimates show that the presence of observers reduces DPP vote share by 5.6 percentage points in highly competitive constituencies (column 3) but has no statistically significant

effect in constituencies with low or medium levels of political competition (columns 6 and 9). This result, which is the opposite of what we see with respect to turnout and overvoting, is in keeping with the logic of political competition at the parliamentary level, where greater competitiveness creates stronger incentives for the dominant party to commit fraud so as to win the seat and thereby bolster its dominance of the legislature. The estimates on DPP presidential vote share, then, may be the up-ticket effect of fraud conducted on behalf of candidates competing in the parliamentary races.

The logic of electoral fraud also has implications for the impact of election observers on administrative irregularities at the polling station. As noted, our main measure of administrative irregularities is whether or not election workers publicly posted the polling station-level results from the presidential election immediately after the conclusion of the counting. To test whether the assignment of an additional observer affected the likelihood that the results were posted, we compare posting rates at polling stations with only NICE and MEIC observers to those at polling stations in which the NICE and MEIC observers were joined by a randomly assigned election monitor from MESN. Column 1 in Table 4 displays our results in the full sample. At control stations, the results were posted 46 percent of the time, whereas at treated polling stations they were posted just 40 percent of the time. The interpretation is that the presence of the extra observer systematically, and somewhat puzzlingly, drove down the likelihood that the election results would be posted.

[Table 4 Here]

Columns 2-4, which break the results by region, reveal additional interesting patterns that begin to shed light on why the presence of the additional observers would be

associated with higher rates of (at least this measure of) administrative irregularity.<sup>27</sup> First, they make clear that the general effect of the additional election observer is driven by the outcomes in the Central and Northern regions, where the presence of the MESN monitor is associated with 9 percent (column 2) and 11 percent (column 3) reductions in the public posting of results, respectively. In the Southern region, the presence of the additional observer is associated with no difference in the likelihood that the results are posted.

Second, the regional breakdown indicates that rates of posting of results are systematically lower in the South (36 percent versus 48 percent in the rest of the country). Since the South is the DPP stronghold, this result suggests that the DPP may have been behind the strategy of not posting the results. Further evidence for this conjecture comes from Figure 1, which plots the predicted probability that election officials will post the results at different levels of DPP candidate's vote share.<sup>28</sup> The results show clearly that polling stations with higher DPP vote shares were less likely to post their results. But why would the non-posting of the presidential election results be in the DPP's interest? The answer may lie in the patterns of fraud that are evident at the aggregation stage.

[Figure 1 Here]

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<sup>27</sup> As Appendix table D.1 makes clear, several other measures of administrative irregularities that we do not highlight in our main analyses for reasons described earlier are also positively associated with the presence of the additional MESN observer. Ofosu (2014) suggests that, when faced with an election observer who makes outright ballot stuffing less feasible, election officials seeking to commit fraud may shift their strategy to seemingly innocuous administrative irregularities that achieve the same ends. For example, to facilitate multiple voting by supporters of a desired party, election officials can neglect to apply ink to a voter's finger, permit voters with inked fingers to vote again, permit voters to cast ballots even if their name is not in the voting register or if they lack a voter certificate, or even hide the voter register itself. To discourage voting by supporters of an opposing party, officials can force the elderly or people with disabilities to queue, not permit voters present at the close of polls to vote, hide ballots, or configure the polling station so as not to insure ballot secrecy. Such strategies often go undetected because party agents or observers may not immediately know their intent (Hyde, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> The results are based on a logistic regression in which we also control for the level of electoral competition and the number of registered voters. We control for electoral competition because it may influence the incidents of fraud. We control for the number of registered voters because one may argue that higher number of register voters will place an undue pressure on election officials at the polling station and may lead them to make genuine administrative errors.

## Estimating fraud at the aggregation stage

To estimate fraud at the aggregation stage, we compare presidential vote shares for the DPP collected by observers at polling stations before the results were transmitted to the district and national tally centers with the official results released by the MEC.<sup>29</sup> In theory, these results should be the same, and in a simple scatterplot the values for each polling station should line up on a 45-degree line with a perfect correlation of one. Significant departures from such a pattern therefore suggest potential fraud—especially if those departures are above the 45-degree line (indicating that the MEC results awarded the party more votes than the polling station-level count suggests they should have received).<sup>30</sup> As in our earlier analyses, we focus on the DPP, since it was the party with the strongest connection to the Malawian electoral bureaucracy and thus the party that possessed the greatest opportunity to orchestrate fraud at the aggregation stage.

As shown in Figure 2, which plots DPP presidential vote share as recorded by our observers and by the MEC, the vast majority of polling station-level results do appear to be reflected correctly in the official tallies.<sup>31</sup> The overall correlation is 0.94. MEC's official results report stronger results for the DPP candidate in 10.9 percent of polling stations, and weaker results for the DPP candidate in 8.8 percent of polling stations, a difference that is not statistically significant at conventional levels.<sup>32</sup> This said, it is worth noting that a curiously large number of the polling stations in which the official results favored the DPP are located right on the  $x=0$  line—that is, in constituencies in which the observers recorded almost no votes for the DPP (and in which the DPP would

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<sup>29</sup> This method is analogous to that employed in Callen and Long (2015) and Callen et al (forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup> Of course, unintentional errors in the recording of polling station-level tallies or in the aggregation of tallies at the district or regional level may also lead to discrepancies—and the Malawian media did in fact report on some such errors in the aftermath of the election. But if these errors are truly unintentional, then they should be randomly distributed, not skewed in favor of one party.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the frequency of discrepancies is just *one seventh* that reported by Callen and Long (2015) in Afghanistan's 2010 parliamentary elections.

<sup>32</sup> All such calculations exclude deviations less than 0.01 percentage points, since these are most likely to be due to inadvertent clerical errors and almost certainly do not constitute fraud.

presumably have a strong interest in registering at least some support).

[Figure 2 Here]

When we break down these results into polling stations in which the presidential election results were publicly posted (Figure 3, top panel) and in which they were not (Figure 3, bottom panel), we find interesting differences. In the former, the correlation between the MEC and observer tallies is 0.96 and the share of polling stations in which the observers' recording of DPP presidential vote share exceeds the official MEC figure is actually greater than the share where the reverse is true (10 percent versus 5.6 percent). But in the polling stations where the results were not publicly posted, the official results and the observers' tallies diverge significantly—and overwhelmingly in favor of the DPP. The overall correlation slips to 0.93, and now the official results give the DPP candidate an advantage over the observers' results 15 percent of the time, whereas the MEC results disadvantage the DPP just 7.8 percent of the time. Here the tendency for the deviations from the 45-degree line to be located in polling stations in which the observers recorded a value of zero (or very close to it) is even more apparent. Such polling stations are ones in which the DPP received no electoral support at all in the presidential election but the official results nonetheless accorded the DPP candidate a large number of votes.

[Figure 3 Here]

The results thus far suggest that at least some aggregation errors took place during Malawi's 2014 presidential elections, that the DPP benefited from the errors, and that the errors were more likely to take place in polling stations in which, contrary to the law, the presidential election results were not publicly posted. Taken together, these findings look suspiciously like fraud perpetrated on behalf of the DPP, facilitated by the non-posting of the polling station-level election results.

Earlier, we noted that the non-posting of results was more likely to occur at

polling stations that had been randomly selected to receive an additional election observer. It turns out that these polling stations are also more likely to have discrepancies between the official MEC results and the results collected by our observers. The top panel in Figure 4 compares the MEC and observer results in polling stations to which MESN observers were not sent, and the bottom panel reproduces the figure for the polling stations that received the extra observer. In the former, the correlation is 0.96, and the share of polling stations whose values lie above the 45-degree line (9.3 percent) is almost exactly the same as the share whose values lie below it (8.7 percent). In the treated polling stations, by contrast, the correlation falls to 0.92 and the share of units in which the MEC tally exceeds the observers' tally is now significantly higher (13.2 percent versus 8.8 percent). The presence of the additional observer is associated with a greater likelihood of "errors" at the aggregation stage that favor the DPP. If we interpret these "errors" as fraud, then the randomized deployment of the observers permits us to interpret the association between the presence of the observer and the greater likelihood of fraud as a causal effect. Combined with the findings summarized earlier regarding the non-posting of results, the implication would appear to be that the presence of the MESN observers caused the fraud to be displaced to the aggregation phase. The fact that, once again, the preponderance of the off-diagonal cases in the bottom panel are all polling stations in which the observers recorded DPP vote shares of zero is consistent with this account. Not able to perpetrate fraud on election day due to the presence of the additional observer, the DPP was forced to compensate by doubling down on fraud at the aggregation stage.

[Figure 4 Here]

## **Discussion**

Our findings corroborate and extend recent empirical work that suggests that

domestic election observers can reduce the incidence of fraud at the polling stations to which they are deployed. Yet our results add a new wrinkle to this literature by demonstrating an effect of deploying observers in a setting where other domestic monitors are already present. One would think that the marginal effect of an additional—in the setting we study, a third—observer would be quite small. Yet we find substantively significant effects.

One possible explanation for this surprising finding is that the MESN observers were better trained, more visible, more independent, or perhaps less likely to be recruited from the local community (and hence less susceptible to local political pressure) than the observers sent by NICE or MEIC. Although we cannot completely rule out these possibilities, our investigations into the recruitment, training, and conduct of the observers deployed by these other domestic monitoring organizations provides little support for these hypotheses.

An alternative explanation lies instead in the opportunities afforded to would-be perpetrators of fraud by the fact that many polling stations contained multiple streams and that observers were each assigned to just one of them. In polling stations with more than two streams, the presence of NICE and MEIC observers may simply have displaced the fraud to other, unmonitored streams. In polling stations with two or fewer streams, the NICE and MEIC observers should have already covered all of them, so the addition of the MESN observer should have had little effect. In polling stations with three streams, the additional observer would have completed the coverage and should have led to a large reduction in fraud. And in polling stations with four or more streams, the addition of the MESN observer would have increased the level of monitoring but still left at least one stream unobserved, so we would expect the effect to be somewhere between these two extremes.

We test these expectations in Table 5 and find only weak support for these conjectures.<sup>33</sup> The effect of the additional observer is, in fact, weakest in three-stream polling stations, where that observer would have completed the coverage, and strongest in polling stations with one stream or with four or more.

[Table 5 Here]

## Conclusion

Our findings suggest that there was indeed fraud in Malawi’s 2014 elections, though not nearly enough to account for the results of (at least) the presidential contest, which DPP candidate Peter Mutharika won by more than eight percentage points. Our results also suggest that the presence of election observers reduces fraud: turnout, overvoting, and the vote share for Mutharika—the presidential candidate with the closest ties to the electoral bureaucracy, the most developed grassroots organization and the greatest capacity for rigging—were all significantly lower in polling stations to which we randomly assigned a MESN observer. Our study thus joins several others in showing that election monitors matter and that randomizing their deployment, and then comparing outcomes in observed and unobserved polling stations, provides a means of estimating electoral fraud.

Our research also goes beyond existing work in at least three important ways. First, we show that the effects of deploying election observers hold even in contexts where polling stations are already being monitored. The MESN observers that we assigned to polling stations did not transform them from “unobserved” to “observed,” as in other studies, but rather *augmented* the observation teams that had already been deployed by NICE and MEIC. Our study therefore puts us in a position to ascertain

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<sup>33</sup> Since the number of streams at a polling station is not randomly assigned, these findings can be regarded only as suggestive.

whether adding an additional observer to a polling station has a marginal effect of further reducing incidents of fraud or irregularities. We show unambiguously that it does.

Second, we provide evidence that the presence of the additional observer may have displaced fraud from election day to the aggregation phase of the electoral process, and that the non-posting of the presidential election results at the polling station, as required by law, may have been part of the strategy to make the aggregation fraud more difficult to detect. This finding suggests that researchers interested in the spillover effects of election monitoring should be equally attuned to spillovers across time as across space.

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Table 1: Summary Statistics of Measures of Fraud and Irregularities

	Full Sample (N=896)	Treated (N=349)	Control (N=547)
Turnout	0.73 (0.19)	0.71 (0.15)	0.75 (0.21)
Overvoting	0.03 (0.17)	0.01 (0.11)	0.04 (0.20)
DPP vote share	0.32 (0.29)	0.30 (0.29)	0.33 (0.29)
Posting results	0.421 (0.494)	0.396 (0.489)	0.456 (0.498)

Note: Table 1 shows the summary statistics of our outcome variables. We present the mean and standard deviation (in parentheses) in the full sample and for treatment and control stations. Turnout is calculated by dividing reported total votes cast by the number of registered voters provided by the election authority ahead of the polls. Polling stations that record turnout rates over 100 percent are coded as exhibiting overvoting (=1). DPP represents the Democratic Peoples' Party. Lastly, Posting of results is binary variable which codes whether the presidential result sheet was posted when our enumerators visited the polling station after counting was closed.

Table 2: Treatment effect of an additional observer on measures of fraud

	<i>Dependent variable</i>		
	Overvoting (1)	Turnout (2)	DPP vote share (3)
Treatment (observer present)	-0.030*** (0.011)	-0.036*** (0.011)	-0.028* (0.015)
Log(registered voters)	-0.020* (0.011)	-0.053*** (0.013)	0.054* (0.028)
Constant	0.183** (0.083)	1.134*** (0.094)	-0.059 (0.196)
Observations	896	896	896
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.010	0.038	0.012

Note: Table 2 reports the estimated treatment effect on our three measures of fraud. We control for the log of registered voters at the polling station to account for the varying sizes of polling stations. Our unit of analysis is the polling station. We cluster the standard errors of our estimates by constituency. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

Table 3: Heterogeneous effects of an additional observer: population density and degree of political competition

Panel A

	<i>Population density</i>								
	Low			Medium			High		
	Overvoting (1)	Turnout (2)	DPP vote (3)	Overvoting (4)	Turnout (5)	DPP vote (6)	Overvoting (7)	Turnout (8)	DPP vote (9)
Treatment	-0.025 (0.017)	-0.011 (0.016)	-0.021 (0.017)	-0.013 (0.019)	-0.058*** (0.017)	-0.001 (0.024)	-0.063*** (0.024)	-0.047* (0.026)	-0.076* (0.042)
Log(registered voters)	-0.031** (0.014)	-0.062*** (0.016)	-0.001 (0.043)	-0.022 (0.027)	-0.046 (0.030)	-0.012 (0.040)	-0.012 (0.021)	-0.028 (0.025)	0.175** (0.073)
Constant	0.256** (0.105)	1.201*** (0.112)	0.306 (0.296)	0.188 (0.200)	1.068*** (0.220)	0.377 (0.289)	0.156 (0.169)	0.946*** (0.195)	-0.870 (0.566)
Observations	375	375	375	304	304	304	217	217	217
R <sup>2</sup>	0.017	0.044	0.002	0.008	0.062	0.001	0.029	0.015	0.089
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.011	0.038	0.004	0.001	0.055	0.006	0.019	0.006	0.081

Panel B

	<i>Political competitiveness</i>								
	High			Medium			Low		
	Overvoting (1)	Turnout (2)	DPP vote (3)	Overvoting (4)	Turnout (5)	DPP vote (6)	Overvoting (7)	Turnout (8)	DPP vote (9)
Treatment	-0.031* (0.018)	-0.007 (0.021)	-0.056** (0.023)	-0.021 (0.023)	-0.039* (0.021)	-0.025 (0.026)	-0.040** (0.019)	-0.058*** (0.016)	-0.031 (0.022)
Log(registered voters)	-0.003 (0.015)	-0.044** (0.017)	0.022 (0.035)	-0.005 (0.017)	-0.050* (0.026)	0.077* (0.044)	-0.060** (0.026)	-0.076*** (0.025)	0.110 (0.068)
Constant	0.063 (0.108)	1.043 (0.118)	0.276 (0.252)	0.074 (0.122)	1.138 (0.199)	-0.221 (0.319)	0.479 (0.197)	1.292 (0.190)	-0.550 (0.473)
Observations	267	267	267	282	282	282	347	347	347
R <sup>2</sup>	0.010	0.031	0.013	0.004	0.037	0.023	0.043	0.065	0.049
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.002	0.024	0.005	0.003	0.031	0.016	0.037	0.060	0.043

Note: The unit of analysis is the polling station. The table reports the estimated treatment effect on our measures of fraud across different level of population density (i.e., urbanization) in Panel A and electoral competition in Panel B. We measure the level of electoral competition at the constituency level by taking the average of the legislative elections in 1999 and 2004. We then divide the distribution into terciles. Population density is the population per square kilometer in the constituency. We also tercile this distribution to account for possible non-linearity. We control for the log of registered voters at the polling station to account for the varying sizes of polling stations. We cluster the standard errors at the constituency level. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01.

Table 4: Effect of observers on the posting of presidential results, by region

	National (1)	Central (2)	Northern (3)	Southern (4)
Treatment (observer present)	0.40 (0.02)	0.42 (0.03)	0.42 (0.03)	0.36 (0.03)
Control (no observer)	0.46 (0.02)	0.51 (0.03)	0.54 (0.04)	0.36 (0.03)
ATE	-0.059 (0.028)	-0.092 (0.047)	-0.111 (0.059)	-0.001 (0.043)

Note: Table 4 shows the mean outcome for the posting of presidential results sheets in treated and control stations in the full sample (national) and by region. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Table 4 also shows the treatment effect of MESN observers on the posting of results in the full sample and by region.

Table 5: Effect of an additional observer on measures of fraud, disaggregated by the number of streams

	<i>One stream</i>			<i>Two streams</i>			<i>Three streams</i>			<i>Four or more streams</i>		
	Overvoting (1)	Turnout (2)	DPP vote (3)	Overvoting (4)	Turnout (5)	DPP vote (6)	Overvoting (7)	Turnout (8)	DPP vote (9)	Overvoting (10)	Turnout (11)	DPP vote (12)
Treatment	-0.061** (0.024)	-0.053* (0.030)	-0.045 (0.052)	-0.036** (0.017)	-0.035** (0.018)	-0.034* (0.020)	-0.003 (0.021)	-0.016 (0.025)	-0.028 (0.038)	-0.044** (0.021)	-0.057** (0.028)	0.005 (0.048)
Log(voters)	-0.074 (0.086)	-0.075 (0.086)	-0.145** (0.071)	-0.070 (0.068)	-0.113* (0.065)	0.014 (0.068)	-0.266* (0.154)	-0.200 (0.124)	0.028 (0.131)	-0.001 (0.017)	-0.065* (0.035)	0.084 (0.064)
Constant	0.529 (0.552)	1.285* (0.538)	1.229*** (0.453)	0.541 (0.482)	1.544*** (0.459)	0.205 (0.478)	2.028* (1.169)	2.224** (0.940)	0.102 (0.995)	0.050 (0.137)	1.262*** (0.289)	-0.265 (0.547)
Observations	139	139	139	411	411	411	191	191	191	155	155	155
R <sup>2</sup>	0.035	0.022	0.040	0.017	0.031	0.004	0.084	0.036	0.002	0.019	0.031	0.007
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.008	0.026	0.012	0.026	-0.001	0.074	0.026	-0.008	0.006	0.018	-0.006

Note: Table 5 reports the estimated treatment effect on our three measures of fraud for polling stations with different numbers of streams. We control for the log of registered voters at the polling station to account for the varying sizes of polling stations. Our unit of analysis is the polling station. We cluster the standard errors of our estimates by constituency. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Figure 1: Relationship between DPP presidential vote share and the public posting of resu

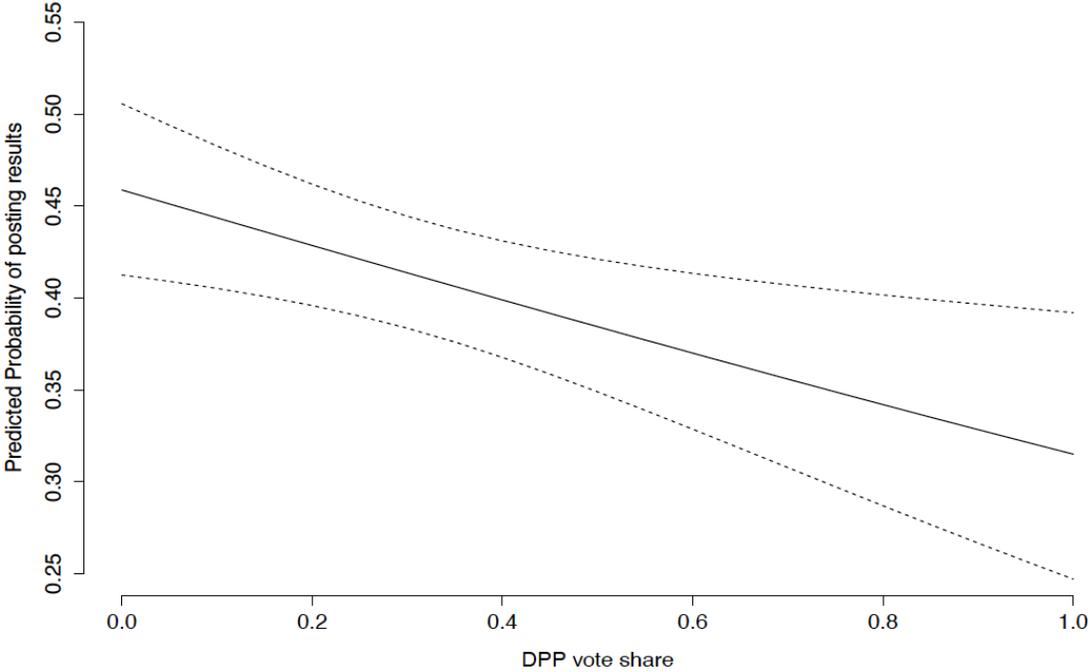


Figure 2: DPP presidential vote share, as recorded by our observers and officially released by the MEC

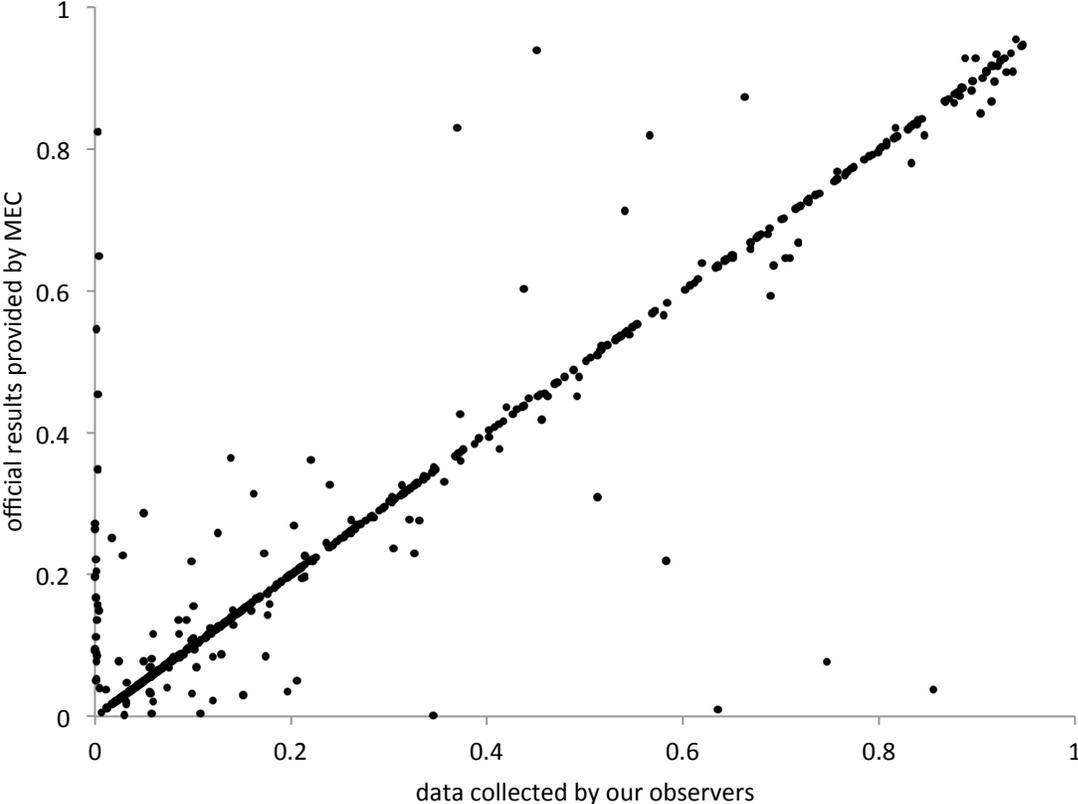


Figure 3: DPP presidential vote share, as recorded by our observers and officially released by the MEC, where presidential election results were and were not posted

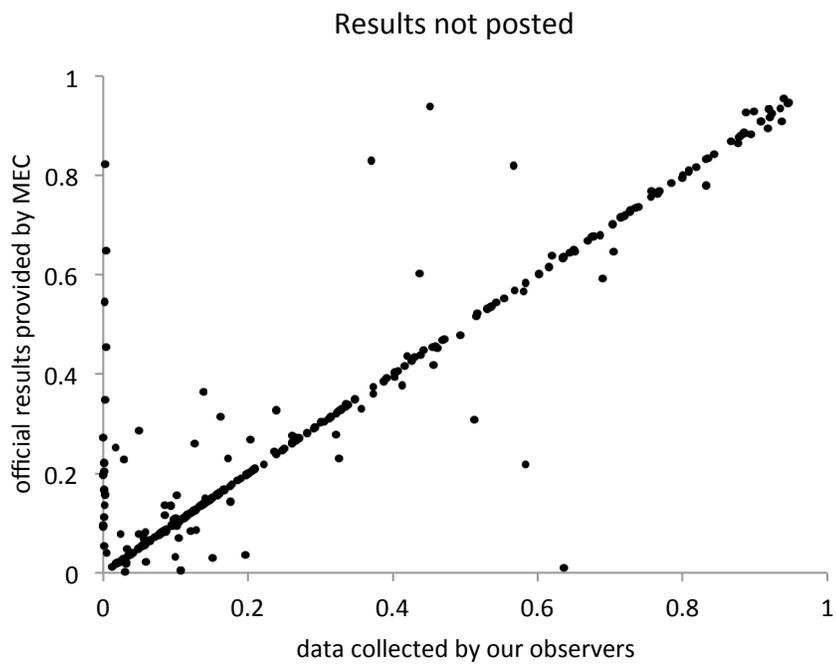
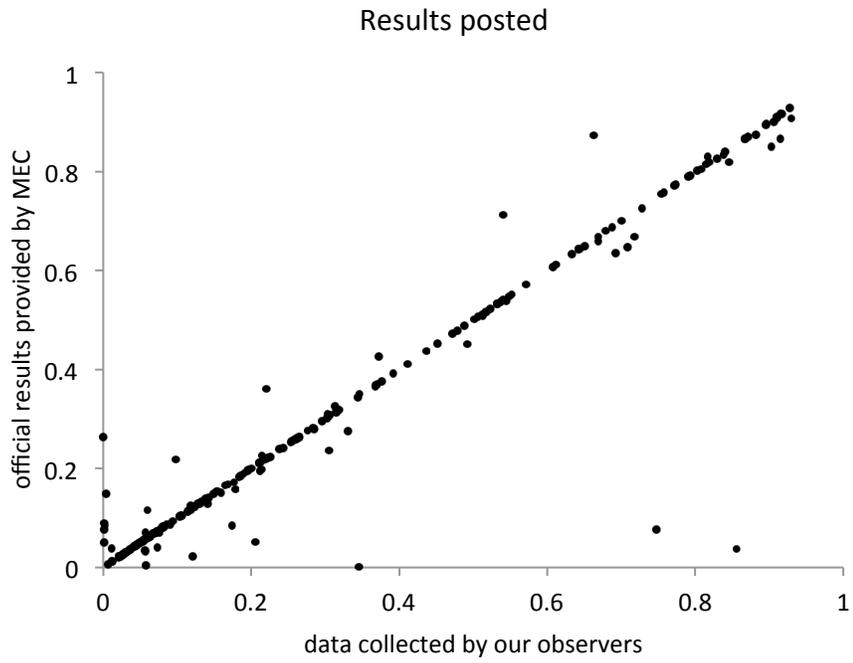
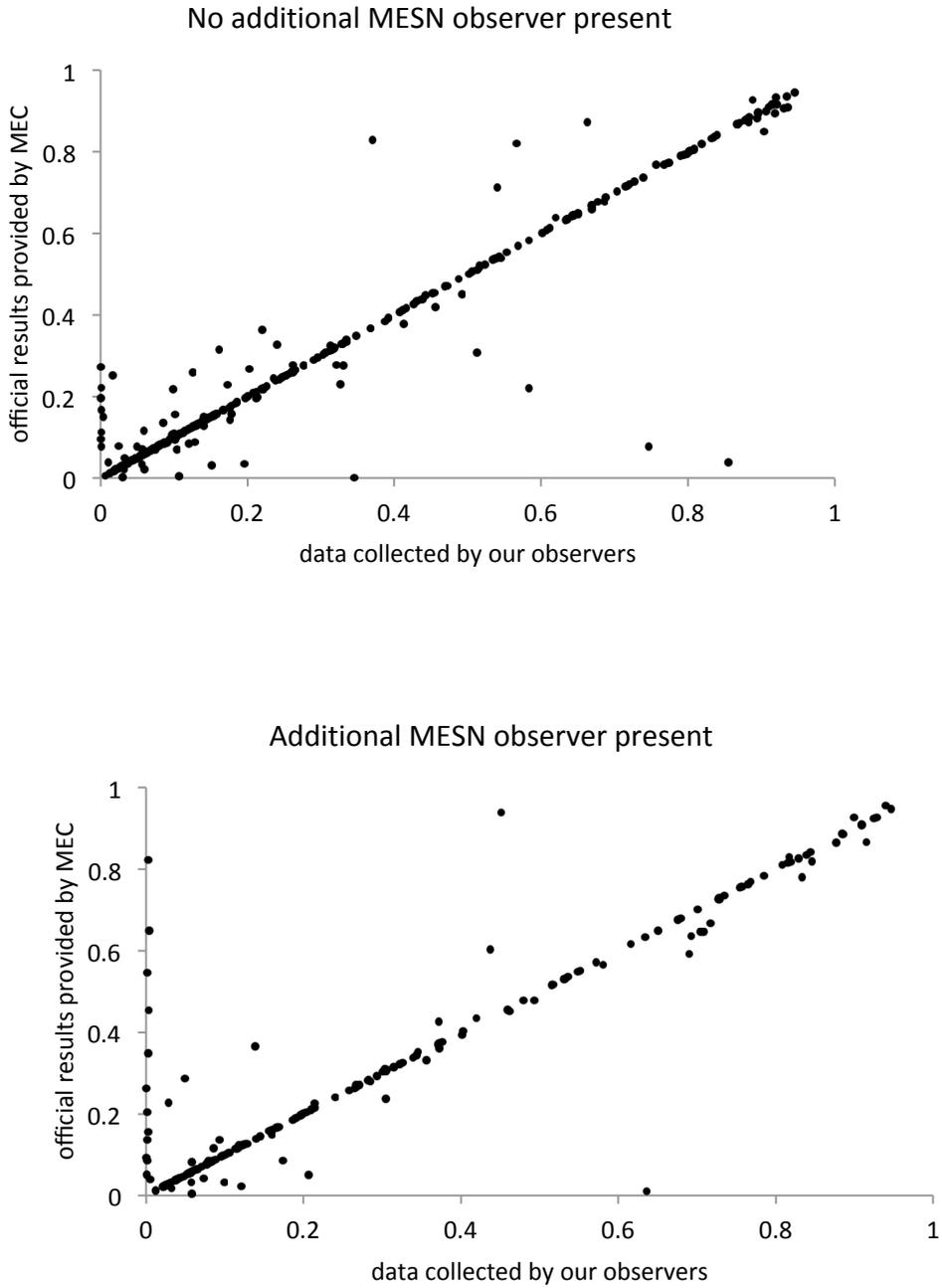


Figure 4: DPP presidential vote share, as recorded by our observers and officially released by the MEC, where an additional MESN observer was and was not present



## Appendix

### A Sampling of constituencies

Table A.1: Distribution of constituencies

Region	National (%)	Sample (%)
	(n)	(n)
Northern	17 (33)	16 (14)
Central	38 (73)	37 (33)
Southern	45 (87)	48 (43)
Total	100 (193)	100 (90)

*Notes:* This table shows the distribution of constituencies across Malawi's three regions and in our sample. It reports the proportion of constituencies in each region at the national level and in our sample. There are 193 constituencies across the three regions and we select 90 as our study sample. To select our constituencies, we stratified on literacy rates, unemployment rates, population density, urbanization, and electoral competition. In our stratified sampling, the probability of inclusion for constituencies is equal to the probability of sampling within each region.

Table A.2: Summary statistics of constituencies

Variable	National		Sample	
	Average	SD	Average	SD
Registered voters	39090.2	17703.2	39050.3	19557.2
# Polling stations	23.0	9.3	22.8	9.3
#Polling streams	60.2	24.5	60.1	26.7
Males with primary education (%)	72.2	7.4	72.2	7.5
Percentage of rural pop.	96.1	3.7	96.1	3.8
Male literacy	67.1	7.2	67.1	7.1
Female literacy	57.1	9.9	57.0	9.6
Population density(pop per 1KM <sup>2</sup> )	160.2	85.7	160.4	82.9
Male unemployment	12.6	8.9	13.1	9.1
Female Unemployment	16.4	10.9	16.3	10.9
Legislative vote margin (2004)	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Legislative vote margin (1999)	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.2
Average Vote Margin(99&04)	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2

*Notes:* Table shows the summary statistics of constituencies in the population and in our sample. We use electoral data collected from the MEC. Demographic data was obtained from Malawi's National Statistics Office website (<http://www.nsomalawi.mw/>). The summary statistic shows we have a representative sample of constituencies.

Table A.3: Summary statistics of constituency level variables

	Mean	SD
<i>Competition</i>		
High(competition)	0.139	0.068
Medium (competition)	0.334	0.043
Low (competitive)	0.525	0.086
<i>Population Density (PD)</i>		
High(PD)	260.31	61.38
Medium (PD)	163.43	29.13
Low (PD)	81.41	29.13

*Note:* The unit of analysis is the constituency. Table shows summary statistics of the levels of competition, population density and observer intensity that we use in our analysis.

## B Balance Table

Table B.1: Verification of randomization

	Control	Treated	Mean difference	P-value
Number of Voters	1699.69	1694.30	-5.39	0.928
Number of polling streams	2.63	2.63	0.01	0.905

*Notes:* Table shows the balance balance between treated and control stations on our pre-treatment variables (i.e., number of registered voters and the number of polling streams). Data was collected from the Malawi Electoral Commission.

## C Effect of election observers our alternative measure of suspicious turnout

Table C.1: Effects of observers on turnout (alternative measure)

<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
<i>Suspicious turnout</i>	
Treatment	-0.029*** (0.011)
Log(Reg. Voters)	-0.024** (0.012)
Constant	0.218** (0.089)
Observations	896
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.011

*Note:* \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

*Notes:* Table C.1 shows the treatment effect of observers on our alternative measure of fraud. We code a station as recording a suspicious turnout if its reported turnout is more than two standard deviation away from the constituency mean turnout. We find that the turnout rates of 3.2% stations to be suspicious using this measure in our sample.

## D Election administrative irregularities: difference between control and treated stations

Table D.1 presents result of our analysis of other administrative malpractices at the polling station. Consistent with our finding using the posting of presidential election results, we find that the presence observers seems to reduce election officials compliance with transparency enhancing administrative procedures at the polls.

Table D.1: Effect of observers on administrative irregularities

Variable (1)	Coding (2)	Control (3)	Treated (4)	Treatment Effect (5)	T-Value (6)	P-Value (7)
Polling officials did not arrive by 5:30am	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.042	0.030	-0.011	1.174	0.241
Station opened late	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.189	0.238	0.048	-0.446	0.656
Number of polling streams	integer	2.773	3.080	0.307	-1.149	0.251
Number of officials at stream	integer	8.389	7.950	-0.438	0.836	0.403
Number of women officials	integer	3.439	3.238	-0.201	0.494	0.621
Number of party agents	integer	7.998	9.514	1.516	-2.198	0.028*
Set up of station did not allow for ballot secrecy	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.010	0.022	0.012	-0.289	0.773
Station not easily accessible to PWD	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.019	0.039	0.020	-1.962	0.050*
Station did not have a voters' list	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.017	0.041	0.025	-2.427	0.016*
Number of ballot boxes	integer	3.603	3.102	-0.501	1.748	0.081*
Ballot box not shown to be empty	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.006	0.017	0.010	-1.735	0.083+
Station did not have ballots for presidential election	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.002	0.008	0.006	-1.062	0.289
Station did not have ballots for parliamentary election	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.029	0.030	0.001	-0.629	0.530
Station did not have ballots for council election	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.046	0.058	0.012	-1.332	0.183
PWD and elderly were made to queue	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.012	0.064	0.051	-3.863	0.000*
Number of voters whose name were not on list (not allowed to vote)	ordinal	1.389	1.345	-0.043	0.454	0.650
Voters allowed to vote but name not in register	ordinal	1.453	1.655	0.201	-4.511	0.000*
No voters certificate but allowed to vote	ordinal	1.441	1.552	0.112	-3.094	0.002*
Voter inked but allowed to vote	ordinal	1.085	1.210	0.125	-3.281	0.001*
Ink applied to all voters	ordinal	2.931	2.923	-0.009	0.052	0.958
Number assisted to vote	ordinal	2.470	2.517	0.047	-0.927	0.354
Voters given three ballots	Yes = 1, No = 2	1.958	1.961	0.003	-0.001	0.999
Voting process disrupted at stream	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.044	0.036	-0.008	0.793	0.428
Voters intimidated at stream	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.023	0.036	0.013	-0.380	0.704
Attempted influence of polling official at stream	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.025	0.039	0.014	-0.725	0.469
Voters present at close of polls not allowed to vote	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.083	0.133	0.05	-2.401	0.017*
Counting not done openly	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.008	0.014	0.005	-1.116	0.265
Presidential ballots not sorted accurately	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.027	0.036	0.009	-0.958	0.338
Attempted disruption of counting	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.077	0.039	-0.038	2.112	0.035*
Attempted influence of PO during counting	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.071	0.052	-0.018	0.506	0.613
Observer/Interviewee agree with count	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.929	0.948	0.018	-0.506	0.613
NICE observer present	Yes = 1, No = 0	0.971	0.978	0.007	-1.000	0.318

Note: Table D.1 present the results of the difference in means in control and treated stations on various measures of election administrative irregularities. Column (1) describes the variables. Column (2) describe the coding of the variables. Columns (3) and (4) present the means in the control and treated stations, respectively. Columns (5) displays the difference in mean between treated and control stations. Columns (6) and (7) show the t-value of the test statistics and the corresponding p-value, respectively. Data for the treated stations were collected by observers who were station at the polling stream (station) during the entire day while those for control stations were collected through interviews with party agents. The mode of collection for control station was necessary because we did not want to contaminate our control station during the day.



**UCLA- MESN CHECKLIST – 2014 Tripartite Elections**

Emumerator	
Constituency/Ward	
Polling Station	

**ARRIVAL**

Upon arrival answer Question 1

1	Had the polling officials arrived at the polling station by 5:30am? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
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**SETUP**

2	What time did the polling stream open? (tick one)	By 6:00 (1)	6:01 to 6:30 (2)	6:31 to 8:00 (3)	Not Open by 8:00 (4)
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3	What was the code for the entire polling station? (write in number – five digits – may start with a zero)				
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4	How many polling streams were there in total at the polling station? (write in number)	
---	--	--

5	How many polling officials were at the polling stream? (write in number)	
---	--	--

6	How many polling officials at the polling stream were women? (write in number)	
---	--	--

7	How many party agents were at the polling stream? (write in number)	
---	---	--

8	Was the polling stream set up so that voters could mark their ballot in secret? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
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9	Was the polling stream located in a place easily accessible to persons with disabilities? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
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10	Did the polling stream have a voters' register? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
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11	How many ballot boxes were at the polling stream? (write in number)	
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12	Was the presidential ballot box at the polling stream shown to be empty before being sealed closed and placed in public view? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
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13	Did the polling stream have presidential ballot papers? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
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14	Did the polling stream have parliamentary ballot papers? (tick one)	No (1)	Yes, but Wrong Ones (2)	Yes, and Correct Ones (3)
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15	Did the polling stream have councillor ballot papers? (tick one)	No (1)	Yes, but Wrong Ones (2)	Yes, and Correct Ones (3)
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**VOTING**

At 6:00pm answer Questions 16 to 28 (not before)

16	Were persons with disabilities, the elderly and nursing mothers allowed to come to the front of the queue and vote without waiting at the polling stream? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
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17	How many people at the polling stream could not find their name on the voters' register and were not able to vote? (tick one)	None (0) (1)	Few (1 - 10) (2)	Some (11 - 50) (3)	Many (51+) (4)
----	---	--------------	------------------	--------------------	----------------

18	How many people at the polling stream were allowed to vote even though their name was not in the voters' register? (tick one)	None (0) (1)	Few (1 - 10) (2)	Some (11 - 50) (3)	Many (51+) (4)
----	---	--------------	------------------	--------------------	----------------

19	How many people at the polling stream were allowed to vote even though they did not have their Voter ID Card? (tick one)	None (0) (1)	Few (1 - 10) (2)	Some (11 - 50) (3)	Many (51+) (4)
----	--	--------------	------------------	--------------------	----------------

20	How many people at the polling stream were allowed to vote even though they had indelible ink on their finger? (tick one)	None (0) (1)	Few (1 - 10) (2)	Some (11 - 50) (3)	Many (51+) (4)
----	---	--------------	------------------	--------------------	----------------

21	Was indelible ink applied to a finger of every voter at the polling stream before he/she voted? (tick one)	No Indelible Ink (1)	No, Not Applied (2)	Yes, Applied (3)
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22	How many people were assisted to vote at the polling stream? (tick one)	None (0) (1)	Few (1 - 10) (2)	Some (11 - 50) (3)	Many (51+) (4)
----	---	--------------	------------------	--------------------	----------------

23	Were assisted voters at the polling stream allowed to select someone of their own choosing to assist them to vote? (tick one)	No Assisted Voters (1)	Yes (2)	No (3)
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24	Was every voter at the polling stream issued three ballot papers (presidential, parliamentary and local councillor)? (tick one)	No, Fewer Ballots (1)	Yes, Three Ballots (2)
----	---	-----------------------	------------------------

25	Did anyone attempt to disrupt the voting process at the polling stream? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
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26	Did anyone attempt to intimidate voters at the polling stream? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
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27	Did anyone attempt to influence the polling officials at the polling stream? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
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28	Was everyone in the queue at 6:00pm given an opportunity to vote? (tick one)	No One in Queue (1)	Not Allowed to Vote (2)	Allowed to Vote (3)
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**COUNTING**

29	Where were the presidential ballot papers for the polling stream counted? (tick one)	Presidential ballot papers counted at the polling stream	Ballot box moved to a central location and ballot papers for each polling stream counted separately (ballot papers not mixed together)	Ballot box moved to a central location and ballot papers for all polling stream counted together (ballot papers mixed together)
----	--	--	--	---

30	Did the polling official count the presidential ballot papers so that any polling agents and observers present could see how each ballot paper was marked? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
31	Were the presidential ballots correctly sorted into different piles by candidate? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
32	Did anyone attempt to disrupt the counting of the presidential ballots? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
33	Did anyone attempt to influence the polling officials during the counting of the presidential ballots? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)
34	Did you agree with the announced results for the presidential election? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)

**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS FOR ENTIRE POLLING STATION – These are the official posted results.**

Record the official presidential election results FOR THE ENTIRE POLLING STATION (not for a single polling stream) as announced by the Presiding Officer. Answers Questions 35 to 60.

35	Polling Station Code? (write in number – five digits – may start with a zero)					
36	Votes for Dr. Joyce Hilda <b>BANDA (PP)</b> ? (write in number)					
37	Votes for Dr. Lazarus McCarthy <b>CHAKWERA (MCP)</b> ? (write in number)					
38	Votes for Kamuzu Walter <b>CHIBAMBO (PETRA)</b> ? (write in number)					
39	Votes for Prof. John <b>CHISI (UP)</b> ? (write in number)					
40	Votes for Friday Anderson <b>JUMBE (NLP)</b> ? (write in number)					
41	Votes for Aaron Davies Chester <b>KATSONGA (CCP)</b> ? (write in number)					
42	Votes for Mark <b>KATSONGA PHIRI (PPM)</b> ? (write in number)					
43	Votes for Atupele <b>MULUZI (UDF)</b> ? (write in number)					
44	Votes for Prof. Peter <b>MUTHARIKA (DPP)</b> ? (write in number)					
45	Votes for George <b>NNEKA (MAFUNDE)</b> ? (write in number)					
46	Votes for James Mbowe <b>NYONDO (NASAF)</b> ? (write in number)					
47	Votes for Abusa Helen <b>SINGH (UIP)</b> ? (write in number)					
48	Total Valid Votes? (write in number)					
49	Null and Void Ballots? (write in number)					
50	Total Votes? (write in number)					
51	Total number of Register Voters for the <u>polling station</u> ? (write in number)					
52	Did a DPP Agent sign the official results form for the presidential count for the <u>polling station</u> ? (tick one)	No DPP Agent Present (1)	DPP Agent Present, but did not Sign Form (2)	DPP Agent Present and Signed Form (3)		
53	Did a MCP Agent sign the official results form for the presidential count for the <u>polling station</u> ? (tick one)	No MCP Agent Present (1)	MCP Agent Present, but did not Sign Form (2)	MCP Agent Present and Signed Form (3)		
54	Did a PP Agent sign the official results form for the presidential count for the <u>polling station</u> ? (tick one)	No PP Agent Present (1)	PP Agent Present, but did not Sign Form (2)	PP Agent Present and Signed Form (3)		
55	Did a UDF Agent sign the official results form for the presidential count for the <u>polling station</u> ? (tick one)	No UDF Agent Present (1)	UDF Agent Present, but did not Sign Form (2)	UDF Agent Present and Signed Form (3)		
56	Do you believe the announced presidential results for the <u>polling station</u> were accurate? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)			
57	Were there any other MESN observers present at the <u>polling station</u> ? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)			
58	Was there a NICE observer present at the <u>polling station</u> ? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)			
59	Were there any other observers (not from MESN or NICE) present at the <u>polling station</u> ? (tick one)	Yes (1)	No (2)			
60	What gender was the Presiding Officer for the entire <u>polling station</u> ? (tick one)	Male (1)	Female (2)			

61	Which political party do you represent?	DPP	MCP	PP	UDF	INDP
62	How long were you at the polling stream?	Only for opening	Only for voting	Only for Counting	All Day	