

Review of: "Winner-takes-all Majoritarian System and Irregularities in Six Election Cycles in Nigeria, 1999 – 2019"

Francisco Cantu¹

¹ University of Houston

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The article argues that the first-past-the-post system in Nigeria is the leading cause of electoral irregularities in the country. To sustain this, the authors collect different sources of information from the last six election cycles in the country.

The authors discuss a relevant topic in a country that deserves more scholarly attention. On the other hand, the article requires several revisions to sustain the conclusions it suggests.

First, while I agree about the risks that some majoritarian systems might have on the incidence of electoral corruption, it is still being determined that this is the primary explanatory variable for what happens in Nigeria. Since the authors only provide evidence for elections with the first-past-the-post system (FPTP), it is hard to think about how Nigerian elections would be like under an alternative electoral system. Ideally, the authors could compare the irregularities in Nigeria with an electoral system other than FPTP. Since this is impossible, the authors could offer evidence of a country sharing similar characteristics but a different electoral system.

It is unclear how the underrepresentation generated in FPTP makes room “for the perpetration of fraudulent electoral acts like manipulation of election results” (p. 6). How are these two related?

The data that the authors use could be more explicit. They talk about the “information explosion” (p. 9), but I am not sure what they mean. To my understanding, the authors got data on petitions filed, election violence, and turnout from sources suggested by Google Scholar. Is it correct? If so, the paper should include those primary sources.

Figure 1 includes data in different units. While petitions and deaths are raw numbers, turnout is percentage points. As a result, the latter is always capped at 100, and the first two can get any number. This makes the graph hard to understand. (Also, the y-axis should say “Frequency”).

There needs to be a discussion on whether the number of petitions filed could be just a sign of more candidates unwilling to accept their defeat even when there were no irregularities in the election.

I invite the authors to revise the literature on majoritarian systems. First, not all majoritarian systems require the support of “the majority of the voters” (p. 4). Even FPTP can define result with only a plurality of voters. Second, not all majoritarian systems encourage “the development of political parties and party politics based on clan, ethnicity, or region on which campaigns and policy platforms of the parties are based” (p. 5). In fact, systems such as Plurality Run-off or Alternative Vote encourage candidates to make broader appeals outside their main constituencies.

It is unclear how electoral systems “inform the operations of election management authorities” (p. 1). Electoral systems regulate the patterns of competition between and among candidates and parties. EMBs are in charge of the logistics of the election.

It is also unclear why Mongolia is considered an established democracy (p. 1) when it is rated as a flawed democracy in multiple indexes.

The authors argue that “electoral irregularities may be a plausible reaction to poor electoral integrity” (p. 3). But actually, poor electoral integrity is reflected in the number of documented irregularities.