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## Editors' Note: Winning an Election without Running

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# Editors' Note:

## Winning an Election without Running

*The SAIS Review Editorial Board*

Voting is more than just a way to tally opinion. Choosing whether to call a vote, and when and how to let people vote, is a decision with political effects. For example, an election may be called in an attempt to end violence. A party supported by the young and computer-literate may favor allowing people to vote online, while a party supported by older voters might oppose such a measure. Or, a country may hold elections mainly for the benefit of outward appearances to the international community, even while true political power is decided without elections or even formal offices. Besides those who decide when and how there will be a vote, other actors use elections as a chance to advance their political goals. The most famous example of this is the Russian interference in the 2016 US election. Armed groups can also use elections to make a point by physically attacking voting infrastructure in order to undermine the state.

When discussing elections, people tend to focus on the candidates and the outcome. When they ask, "Who won?" they mean which of the candidates got the most votes. In this issue of the *SAIS Review*, we change the focus to the other actors using elections. Through nine articles, we will see that voting can produce winners and losers who are not on the ballot: institutions, foreign countries, and the political system itself can all be strengthened or weakened depending on how the voting happens.

Volume 38, No. 1 of the *SAIS Review* has two sections of articles. The first section covers the vulnerabilities that voting creates for malicious activity and how states can defend against this. The second section explores the different ways that states and political parties make use of their power to decide when and how voting is done to advance their political goals. In these sections, we present nine articles examining a diverse set of uses and abuses for voting.

**Thomas Rid** and **Ben Buchanan** start off the first section of the issue with an article assessing the weaknesses of democracy to computer network operations. They show how the institutions, voting machines, and intelligence agencies of democratic countries are prime targets for hacking operations that can undermine the population's trust in its political system. The next article, by **Dina Smeltz** and **Lily Wojtowicz**, discusses how American public opinion of Russia has changed since the unveiling of Russian interference in the 2016

election, reversing an earlier trend in which Republicans favored a harsher stand against Russia than Democrats. **Asuka Matsumoto** writes next, comparing the United States and Japan to show how differences in the two countries' populations influence the effects of internet-based election campaigning. Fourth comes an article by **Staffan Darnolf** that discusses risks to election integrity in both emerging and established democracies. These risks can be from malicious actors, both foreign and domestic, or even natural disasters, such as an outbreak of a contagious disease around election day. Finishing the section, **Ursula Daxecker** and **Alexander Jung** explore violence before, during, and after elections around the world and under different electoral systems in order to assess what increases the likelihood of election-related violence.

Our second section covers the political motives behind and the effects of how and when an election is held. **Aleksander Lust** begins the section by discussing internet voting (i-voting) in Estonia and Switzerland. He describes how the introduction of i-voting can change voter demographics. Unsurprisingly, those parties that stand to gain from the new technology usually are most in favor of implementing it. Second, **Colin Cookman** writes about elections in Afghanistan, and how the various competing actors there—to include the international community and the Taliban, in addition to the various blocs competing for elected office—have shaped a complex and ineffectual electoral system. Writing about Colombia, **Steven Taylor** shows how elections have been used as a method of reconciliation between opposing forces. Finally, **Zoltan Barany** discusses how elections in Myanmar reserve true power for the military and thus help preclude the civilian side of the government from making significant progress in developing the country's economy or ending the brutal anti-Rohingya campaign.

The editors present this collection of essays examining voting as the *S AIS Review's* contribution to the ongoing discourse around the state of democracy in the world today. Even as more countries “democratize” each year, some established democracies are beginning to show authoritarian tendencies. Closely examining voting, the most essential component of democracy, provides insight into the present and future state of democracy in the world. Thus, this issue continues the *S AIS Review's* mission of advancing the debate on leading contemporary issues in world affairs. We hope you find *Voting: Uses & Abuses* informative and enjoy reading.

The Editorial Board