

Perceptions of Electoral Integrity and Election-Related (Non-)Compliance: Evidence from Germany

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Abstract

What if citizens feel that election outcomes are the result of electoral manipulation and fraud rather than the outcome of a genuinely democratic process? Do they still obey the laws and regulations of newly elected governments, or do they refuse to give governments their allegiance? Analyzing individual-level survey data from Germany, this study sheds light on the nexus between electoral integrity perceptions and compliance. It shows that citizens who perceive the integrity of elections as compromised are more likely to view election-related non-compliance justified. Moreover, citizens' views concerning the fairness of elections and the justifiability of election-related non-compliance matter for their law-abiding behavior in other domains: Those who consider the electoral process fraudulent and election-related non-compliance justifiable adhere less often to governmental regulations pertaining to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings entail important implications for effective democratic governance and questions of electoral backsliding and democratic erosion more generally.

Keywords

electoral integrity, electoral fraud, electoral backsliding, compliance, losers' consent, democratic erosion, procedural fairness, elections, Germany

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Introduction

“Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections” (Przeworski, 1991: 10). Hence, almost by definition, the viability and longevity of democratic systems build upon the voluntary acceptance of electoral defeat and compliance with electoral outcomes in the aftermath of elections. Only if political elites and the citizenry at large accept losing as an

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integral part of the electoral process, and consider newly elected governments as legitimate bearers of political power, can democracy develop its full potential without resorting to less efficient means such as coercion, threat, or force (cf. Grimes, 2006: 285; Tyler, 2006: 4; Van Deth, 2017: 212). But what if political elites and citizens feel that election outcomes are the result of electoral manipulation and fraud rather than the outcome of a genuinely democratic process? Should they still obey the laws and regulations of a newly elected government, or should they refuse to give said government their allegiance?

Evidently, these questions are not only of high normative importance. Rather, they also touch upon existing problems and challenges that many contemporary democracies are facing. The events revolving around the 2020 US presidential election that culminated in the storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021, as well as similar occurrences in other countries such as Brazil during which citizens protested the outcomes of elections, clarify that the ways in which political elites and citizens view the integrity and fairness of electoral contests come with far-reaching, and potentially detrimental, repercussions for the long-term viability of representative democracy (Bowler and Donovan, 2024; Norris, 2024).

When studying reactions to and compliance with electoral outcomes, extant research has been mostly concerned with the perspective of political elites, focusing on why and under what conditions political parties and candidates may refuse to comply with election results and which strategies they may employ to express their non-compliance (Chernykh, 2014; Lago and Martínez i Coma, 2017; Przeworski, 2003). At the same time, the perspective of ordinary citizens has been largely neglected. Consequently, only little is known about what citizens consider legitimate reactions and behaviors in the aftermath of an election that they feel to have been compromised. While previous research has highlighted that perceptions of electoral fraud (more than actual fraud) may induce citizens to protest election results (Daxecker et al., 2019), and that doubts about the proper conduct of elections go hand in hand with an increased inclination toward anti-incumbent voting (Fumarola, 2020; Schnaudt, 2023a) and elite-challenging political behavior more generally (Norris, 2014: 133–144; Williamson, 2021), we still lack an understanding of whether and how citizens' perceptions of election fairness are related to their (views about) compliance with governmental laws and regulations in the aftermath of an election. Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into “why people obey or disobey the law” (Tyler, 2006: 3), identifying factors and mechanisms that underlie citizens' compliance and non-compliance with the law in general (for an overview, see Yan et al., 2017: 65–68; Gofen et al., 2021: 985), thus far no research has explicitly dealt with election-related (non-)compliance among citizens and its consequences.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates (1) whether citizens deem non-compliance with the laws and regulations of a newly elected government a legitimate means to voice doubts about the integrity of elections; (2) to what extent citizens' views about the justifiability of election-related (non-)compliance depend on their own perceptions of electoral integrity; and (3) in what ways perceptions of electoral integrity and views about the justifiability of election-related (non-)compliance are related to actual manifestations of compliant and non-compliant behaviors. To answer these research questions, the study analyzes original survey data collected in the context of the 2021 German federal election. The German case is particularly interesting for studying citizens' views about election-related (non-)compliance: As a well-established democracy with a long-standing record of free and fair elections according to experts (cf. Garnett et al., 2022: 7; Norris and Grömping, 2019: 6; Schmitt-Beck and Faas, 2021: 140; but see also Breunig and Goerres, 2011; Schnaudt, 2023c: 5), Germany provides little objective incentives for election-related non-compliance. At the same time,

however, Germany exhibits a sizable proportion of citizens who are at least skeptical about the fairness of the electoral process (Schnaudt, 2023b: 5–6). As such, the German case makes for an ideal opportunity to study the possible ramifications of citizens' (unwarranted) doubts about the integrity of elections for the functioning and viability of modern democracies. More generally, the German case thus also establishes an expedient context for learning more about the potential repercussions of what Norris (2024: 5) has coined "cynical mistrust," that is, "irrationally gloomy and over-cautious expectations" about the trustworthiness of political actors and institutions despite their overall positive performance record in holding free and fair elections.

The empirical analysis of this study yields three important findings. First, about one-fifth of citizens in Germany consider non-compliance with the laws and regulations of a newly elected government a legitimate means to voice doubts about the integrity of the electoral process. Second, citizens who themselves evaluate the integrity and fairness of elections more negatively are more likely to view non-compliance a legitimate course of action. Third and last, citizens' views concerning the fairness of elections and the justifiability of election-related non-compliance matter for law-abiding behavior (in other domains): Those who perceive the electoral process as fraudulent and those who consider election-related non-compliance justifiable adhere less often to governmental rules and regulations pertaining to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, these findings provide new insights on how citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity shape their views about election-related (non-)compliance, and how such perceptions and views matter for law-abiding behavior more generally. In times of ill-founded assertions about "stolen elections," as well as increasing misinformation and "big little lies" about the integrity and fairness of elections (cf. Berlinski et al., 2023; Craig and Gainous, 2024; Eggers et al., 2021; Mauk and Grömping, 2024; Norris, 2024; Norris et al., 2020; Schnaudt 2024), these findings entail important implications for the ability of democratic systems to govern effectively, the role of elections in structuring political conflict, and questions of electoral backsliding and democratic erosion more generally.

The remainder of this study is structured as follows. Section "Theory and Hypotheses" elaborates on the relevance of law compliance for effective democratic governance, reviews extant research on the consequences of individual perceptions of electoral integrity, and develops theoretical expectations concerning the relationship between perceptions of electoral integrity and (election-related) law compliance. Section "Data, Operationalization, and Empirical Strategy" outlines the data and methods used in the empirical part of the study. Section "Findings" presents the main findings and discusses their implications in light of the hypotheses. Section "Conclusion" summarizes the study's most important insights, elaborates on their broader implications, and delineates avenues for future research.

Theory and Hypotheses

Law Compliance and Democratic Governance

Effective democratic governance rests on the "ability to be authoritative" (Tyler, 1998: 270), that is, the ability of governments and political authorities to regulate citizen behavior in such a way that it complies with the prevailing legal situation. Ultimately, laws and regulations are meaningless if they can be simply ignored or fail to regulate the behavior of citizens (and political elites) in the intended way (Tyler, 2003: 291, 2006). For that

reason, most political systems have installed enforcement and sanctioning mechanisms, such as the use of power, coercion, or control, to secure citizens' compliance with the law or punish non-compliant behaviors. Unsurprisingly, then, a classic theoretical explanation for why citizens usually even comply with unfavorable laws and regulations that run counter to their personal self-interest is the fear of sanctions that may arise from non-compliant behavior (Yan et al., 2017: 65). Following this perspective based on self-interest and instrumental considerations, what matters for compliance are credible deterrent threats of sanctions and appropriate control mechanisms that, in citizens' rational calculations, render the risks of non-compliant behavior outweighing any potential personal benefits (Im et al., 2014: 748; Jackson et al., 2012: 1051; Tyler, 2006: 4; Van Deth, 2017: 212).

Evidently, the need for constant monitoring and enforcement is tantamount to a rise in transaction costs which, in turn, impairs the production of collective goods and the overall efficiency of governance (Grimes, 2017: 257). More importantly, however, what is characteristic of democratic political systems is their "reliance on consensus, peaceful settlements and respect for minority rights" (Van Deth, 2017: 212), and hence their overarching ambition to make use of power, coercion, or control not on a constant and comprehensive basis, but only if compliance cannot be secured otherwise. While monitoring, enforcement, and sanctioning mechanisms may thus be suitable for yielding compliance, it is first and foremost citizens' *voluntary* compliance that matters in democratic systems (Levi, 1988: 52–54; Tyler, 1998: 270–272, 2006: 22–23)—both for reasons of efficiency and out of a distinct democratic self-conception.

Given its significance for effective democratic governance, the underpinnings of citizens' voluntary compliance are of crucial importance. Following earlier research (Tyler, 2006), what matters for citizens to comply with the law on a voluntary basis is citizens' "normative commitment" to law-abiding behavior through either morality or legitimacy.¹ "Normative commitment through personal morality means obeying a law because one feels the law is just; normative commitment through legitimacy means obeying a law because one feels that the authority enforcing the law has the right to dictate behavior" (Tyler, 2006: 4). In representative democracies in which citizens delegate powers to elected politicians and thus make themselves vulnerable to laws and regulations they may not like (cf. Przeworski, 2010: 32), it is first and foremost the latter type of normative commitment through legitimacy that is informative for democratic well-being. If governments enact laws that align with citizens' moral standards, acting in accordance with such laws is not too demanding—irrespective of the government's perceived legitimacy. Yet if governments adopt laws and regulations that are at odds with citizens' moral convictions, whether citizens consider the government legitimate becomes a decisive yardstick for their decision to comply. In other words, in such circumstances the relevant question is whether citizens allow the government's proclaimed "right to dictate behavior" to override their own moral convictions (cf. Tyler, 2006: 28). Ultimately, then, citizens' voluntary compliance with laws and regulations, in particular those that run counter to citizens' self-interest or moral convictions (or both), depends on the perceived legitimacy of those enacting the law. In what follows, it will be argued that elections play an indispensable role in that regard.

Perceptions of Electoral Integrity and Their Implications for Democratic Well-Being

A simple but pivotal premise underlying the burgeoning research agenda on electoral integrity is that the quality of elections, as well as citizens' perceptions concerning the

fairness of the electoral process, matter for the legitimacy and general well-being of democratic systems (Birch, 2008; Norris, 2014). Only if the electoral process at all its various stages conforms to commonly accepted standards of electoral integrity (for an overview, see Norris, 2013: 567–568, 2014: 33–34),² can elections live up to their democratic purpose and perform a two-fold legitimizing role: granting legitimacy to newly elected governments on the one hand, and invigorating citizens' beliefs in the legitimacy of the political system and its institutions on the other (Banducci and Karp, 2003: 443; Birch, 2008: 305; Nohlen, 2014: 28; Schnaudt, 2023a: 82).

Following this line of reasoning, the ways in which citizens view and evaluate the quality and fairness of elections can be used as a diagnostic tool, being akin to a stethoscope that provides us with vital information on the health status of contemporary democracies. This diagnostic tool can be employed in two ways: First, by looking at the levels and distributions of electoral integrity perceptions among the population and inferring about the state of democracy from the proportion of citizens who perceive elections as rigged or fraudulent. Second, and probably more informative, by directly investigating the consequences of citizens' electoral integrity beliefs for a variety of civic virtues and behaviors that are desirable, if not indispensable, for the long-term viability of democratic systems (cf. Almond and Verba, 1963; Easton, 1975). Yet, their important diagnostic potential notwithstanding, scholarly interest in the possible consequences of citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity has hitherto been modest at best (see also Norris, 2018: 223).

Accordingly, only few empirical investigations have explicitly treated electoral integrity perceptions as antecedent of citizens' political attitudes and behaviors and thus been able to shed light on the extent to which citizens' views about the fairness of elections matter for democratic well-being. Concerning attitudinal implications, extant research provides evidence that more positive perceptions of electoral integrity go hand in hand with higher levels of democratic satisfaction, greater respect for human rights, and increased confidence in political institutions (Norris, 2014: 125). With regard to behavioral implications, previous studies highlight that citizens who feel that elections are rigged tend to abstain more often from elections (Birch, 2010; Carreras and İrepoğlu, 2013; McCann and Domínguez, 1998; Norris, 2014: 140; Schnaudt and Wolf, 2023); vote more often for opposition and populist parties or spoil their vote in case they do turn out (Fumarola, 2020; Schnaudt, 2023a); and are more inclined to use elite-challenging forms of political behavior, such as participation in demonstrations (Norris, 2014: 142; Williamson, 2021) or explicitly protesting against the outcome of elections (Daxecker et al., 2019). The available evidence thus suggests that citizens' views about the integrity of elections come with important implications for a number of political attitudes and behaviors that are essential for a democratic political culture and the democratic quality of political systems.

Perceptions of Electoral Integrity and Election-Related (Non-)Compliance

While extant research has generated important insights into the attitudinal and behavioral implications of citizens' electoral integrity perceptions, its consideration of theoretically relevant consequences has been incomplete. Specifically, previous studies have largely overlooked at least one crucial reaction to doubts about the fairness of elections and nascent misgivings about the legitimacy of the political system, namely, non-compliance with governmental laws and regulations (but see Moehler, 2009; Norris, 2014: 122–125).

Whereas taking to the streets establishes an immediate and straightforward way to protest the outcome of an election that one deems to have been fraudulent, the ultimate success of such collective action effort hinges on a multitude of factors and conditions whose absence may render any protest attempts short-lived and ineffective (Daxecker et al., 2019: 2102; Fearon, 2011; Harvey and Mukherjee, 2020; Little et al., 2015; but see Tucker, 2007). Similarly, waiting several years for the next election to voice one's doubts about the integrity of the electoral process by "voting the rascals out" does not seem to be a very effective route of action either: Exactly because citizens feel that the electoral process is rigged, it appears unlikely that they will consider elections a viable device for removing incumbent governments from power (Birch, 2010: 1603; Carreras and Irepoğlu, 2013: 611; McCann and Domínguez, 1998: 499). Protesting and anti-incumbent voting thus have their specific obstacles and limits when it comes to raising objections against the integrity of elections and the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

An additional, and hitherto understudied, way for citizens to act in line with their misgivings about the proper conduct of elections is to withhold their allegiance from a newly elected government by refusing to comply with its enacted laws and regulations. As argued by Przeworski, in today's representative democracies characterized by heterogeneous preferences among the citizenry, self-government as exercised through regular elections implies that "some people must live at least some of the time under laws they do not like" (Przeworski, 2010: 32)—rendering it even more important that electoral outcomes are seen as legitimate by as many citizens as possible. Yet, if (some) citizens perceive the electoral process to be fraudulent, widespread acceptance of laws and regulations will be considerably more difficult to achieve, particularly so when such laws and regulations are considered unpopular or unfavorable in view of individual preferences. As in the eyes of certain segments of the population elections then no longer fulfill their important legitimizing function that could equip governments with a leap of faith, citizens' obedience to the law and compliance with governmental regulations cannot simply be taken for granted anymore.

To place these propositions on a solid theoretical foundation, recourse to insights from procedural justice theory (Lind and Tyler, 1988; Thibaut and Walker, 1975; Tyler, 2006) seems expedient. The central premise underlying this strand of research is that how "collective decisions are made strongly informs citizens' willingness to defer to authoritative rules and rulings" (Grimes, 2017: 256). Specifically, the focus is on the (perceived) fairness of the procedures applied to reach a collective decision, and how such procedural fairness perceptions matter for citizens' views about the legitimacy of authorities and their propensity to voluntarily comply with the outcome of the decision-making process. In that regard, perceptions of fairness may refer to the quality of decision-making as well as the quality of treatment (Tyler, 2003: 283–285; Esaiasson, 2010: 351–353; Walters and Bolger, 2019: 342). Two insights from procedural justice theory are particularly relevant for this study. First, concerning the quality of decision-making, early theorizing on the relevance of procedural fairness (Thibaut and Walker, 1975) highlights that having their voices heard in the decision-making process "makes people feel better about the outcome of that process" (Ulbig, 2002: 794). If citizens feel that a process is organized in predictable ways, that they can exert a meaningful influence during decision-making, and that they have a realistic shot at shaping the final outcome in their own favor, they will consider a procedure fair. Conversely, if citizens perceive a lack of "decision control," that is, feel that a process is unpredictable and that they lack control over the outcome, the procedure will be judged unfair (Tyler, 2006: 7; Esaiasson, 2010: 356; Grimes, 2017: 259).

Second, regarding the quality of treatment, earlier research contends that citizens' fairness perceptions are not only based on instrumental considerations that relate the fairness of a procedure to the possibility of influencing outcomes, but also on normative considerations that pertain to how citizens want to be treated by authorities that enact authoritative decisions. Hence, even in situations in which citizens do not have a say in the decision-making process, they may still perceive said process to be fair if they feel they have been treated in line with normatively desirable standards, such as "neutrality, lack of bias, honesty, efforts to be fair, politeness, and respect for citizens' rights" (Tyler, 2006: 7; see also Ulbig, 2002: 795; Grimes, 2017: 259). Previous empirical studies provide evidence that more positive perceptions of procedural fairness—referring to both quality of decision-making and quality of treatment—go hand in hand with an increased inclination among citizens to accept and comply with authoritative decisions, rules, and regulations (Esaiaasson, 2010; Grimes, 2006, 2017: 262; Walters and Bolger, 2019: 342).

Extending these insights to the nexus between perceptions of electoral integrity and compliance, the way in which elections—as ultimate collective decision-making device for determining who gets to rule in representative democracies—are conducted, and how citizens perceive the electoral process to function, can be considered crucial parameters in shaping citizens' propensity to voluntarily comply with the laws and regulations of a newly elected government. Essentially, the argument is that procedural aspects related to the conduct of elections bear testimony to the *modus operandi* of the political system as a whole—"the state of the orchard rather than the apple" (Grimes, 2017: 259)—and hence provide citizens with informative cues on whether voluntary compliance is reasonable and justified. In this sense, views about the integrity of elections reflect the extent to which the electoral process, *according to how citizens perceive it*, adheres to (or violates) standards of procedural fairness. In that connection, it does not matter whether citizens' perceptions are accurate reflections of the actual integrity of elections in their country. Rather, what matters is that citizens—for whatever reasons—feel that the electoral process is fraudulent, and that these perceptions—whether accurate or not—come along with tangible implications for their (views about) compliance (cf. Daxecker et al., 2019).

If citizens perceive elections as free and fair, they believe that the electoral process grants them a meaningful opportunity to influence the electoral outcome (quality of decision-making) and that electoral management bodies organize elections in a neutral, unbiased, and honest manner (quality of treatment). In such situations, citizens have little reason to question the legitimacy of the resulting government and thus should be willing to voluntarily comply with its laws and regulations. By contrast, if citizens feel that elections are rigged, voluntary compliance becomes more intricate, as citizens discern a violation of procedural fairness with regard to both quality of decision-making and quality of treatment. First, perceiving elections as fraudulent is equivalent to feeling a lack of 'decision control': When elections do not abide by commonly accepted standards of electoral integrity, that is, reliable, consistent, and impartial procedures for the proper conduct of democratic elections, citizens are likely to regard the outcome of an electoral contest as merely a foregone conclusion. In the words of Birch (2010: 1603), "procedural certainty is a necessary requirement for the uncertainty in outcomes that defines democracy." Yet, if elections are rigged, neither procedural certainty nor uncertainty in outcomes can be taken for granted anymore. In line with this assessment, citizens who consider the integrity of elections impaired will also evaluate their own chances of having their voices heard in the electoral process and, by extension, their ability to influence electoral outcomes, as severely compromised. Second, perceiving elections as fraudulent is equivalent

to feeling unjustly treated. Whereas “fair procedures signal that one is respected by the party enacting the procedure” (Esaiasson, 2010: 353), fraudulent elections violate exactly those normative standards that are constitutive of the democratic quality of electoral contests, such as neutrality, lack of bias, and honesty, and therefore signify a lack of respect for citizens’ most fundamental democratic right to (s)elect their own leaders. As such, fraudulent elections do nothing less than disrespecting citizens’ right to self-government (cf. Przeworski, 2010). Accordingly, citizens who perceive the electoral process to be rigged will also see the resulting government as lacking the legitimate “right to dictate behavior” (Tyler, 2006: 4) that is so crucial for citizens’ voluntary compliance with the law.

Empirical tests of these propositions are largely absent. Existing studies have predominantly focused on the relationship between political trust—as a more abstract indicator of citizens’ diffuse support for the political system (Easton, 1975: 447–450; Marien and Hooghe, 2011: 267)—and law compliance. This body of research shows that a lack of confidence in political or legal institutions among citizens is accompanied by a lower propensity to accept authoritative decisions (Tyler and Huo, 2002); a reduced willingness to follow governmental regulations regarding tax compliance (Scholz and Lubell, 1998), the purchase of illegal alcohol (Lindström, 2008), and COVID-19 restrictions (Seyd and Bu, 2022); as well as a higher degree of legal permissiveness more generally (Marien and Hooghe, 2011). At the same time, more direct and explicit investigations into how perceptions of electoral integrity—as specific evaluations of the process that is supposed to bestow legitimacy on designated governments—relate to citizens’ voluntary compliance are thin on the ground. In her study on twelve hybrid and emerging democratic regimes from sub-Saharan Africa, Moehler (2009) shows that citizens who consider elections free and fair are more likely to believe that governments have the right to issue decisions that everyone has to comply with. Analyzing cross-national data from 18 countries, Norris (2014: 125) demonstrates that citizens who perceive the electoral process as fraudulent are more likely to deem certain illegal acts, such as cheating on taxes or accepting a bribe during office, justified.

While these studies have undoubtedly advanced our understanding of the nexus between electoral integrity perceptions and compliance, they have left critical issues unaddressed. First, by focusing only on citizens’ views about compliance, both studies have neglected the behavioral dimension of the concept. Although eliciting citizens’ views about the acceptance and justifiability of illegal behaviors is a standard procedure for inferring about the actual occurrence of compliant and non-compliant behaviors (Marien and Hooghe, 2011: 272), a simultaneous and explicit consideration of both aspects promises to deliver a more complete and more informative empirical picture on the relevance of election-related (non-)compliance. Second, both studies have focused on hybrid and emerging democratic regimes or conflated different political systems with varying levels of democratic development in pooled analyses. Yet, perceptions concerning the quality of elections do not only matter in the context of democratization. Rather, they are also crucial when it comes to counteracting democratic backsliding and preserving the stability of long-standing, established democratic systems (cf. Schnaudt and Wolf, 2023; Schnaudt 2024).

Against this background, this study aims to expand on earlier insights in two particular ways: First, by analyzing how perceptions of electoral integrity inform citizens’ views about the justifiability of election-related (non-)compliance, and how such perceptions and views are related to actual manifestations of compliant and non-compliant behaviors

(using governmental regulations pertaining to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic as one pertinent example). Second, by focusing on Germany as an established democratic system with high objective levels of election quality according to experts (cf. Norris and Grömping, 2019: 6; Schmitt-Beck and Faas, 2021: 140; Garnett et al., 2022: 7), and hence an empirical case that may provide us with vital information on how (mis-)perceptions of electoral integrity may strengthen or undermine effective democratic governance. To that end, and based on the preceding discussion of theoretical arguments and existing empirical findings, the following hypotheses will be tested in the remainder of this study:

H1: The more negative citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity, the more justifiable they consider election-related non-compliance.

H2a: The more negative citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity, the less likely they are to engage in compliant behaviors (with regard to governmental regulations on COVID-19 safety).

H2b: The more justifiable citizens consider election-related non-compliance, the less likely they are to engage in compliant behaviors (with regard to governmental regulations on COVID-19 safety).

Data, Operationalization, and Empirical Strategy

Data

For the empirical analysis, the study relies on individual-level survey data collected via the GESIS Panel, a probability-based mixed-mode panel representative of "all German-speaking persons aged between 18 and 70 residing in private households that are registered in Germany" (Bosnjak et al., 2018: 105). Since its inception in 2013, the GESIS Panel collected data on a bimonthly basis, yielding a total of six survey waves per year. Starting from 2021, data collection switched to a 3-month cycle, resulting in four waves a year. Survey participants were recruited using a two-stage sampling procedure including stratified random sampling of German municipalities in the first stage, followed by random sampling of individuals from population registers of the sampled municipalities in the second stage. Initial recruitment for the GESIS Panel took place via personal interviews; subsequent participation in each of the regular survey waves is possible online or via paper questionnaires. The response rate for the initial recruitment interviews was 35.5% (AAPOR RR1), completion rates for the regular survey waves are around 90% and 85% for the online and offline modes, respectively. Given its probability-based nature, GESIS Panel data allow for more accurate population estimates than data based on non-probabilistic (convenience) samples (cf. Cornesse et al., 2020; Jerit and Barabas, 2023). Analysis of sample composition shows that dissimilarities compared to the German Microcensus are in the same range as observed for other renowned German population surveys, such as the German General Social Survey ALLBUS or the German part of the European Social Survey, thus underlining the high quality of the data (for a complete overview of these aspects and the GESIS Panel more generally, see Bosnjak et al., 2018). This study's core items tapping into citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity and views about the justifiability of election-related (non-)compliance (see below) have been developed by the author in collaboration with Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck (University of Mannheim) and submitted for inclusion in the GESIS Panel (wave ic) as part of a competitive selection process.

Operationalization

The core concepts of this study are “perceptions of electoral integrity” and “compliance with laws and regulations.” For the operationalization of perceptions of electoral integrity, the study relies on two items capturing citizens’ beliefs about the free and fair conduct of the 2021 German federal election and the role of postal voting in guaranteeing fair electoral outcomes. For the first item, respondents were asked “how correct and fair do you think the federal election on September 26 will be?” Answer options ranged from 1 “not at all correct and fair” to 7 “completely correct and fair.” This item captures citizens’ general beliefs about the conduct of the 2021 German federal election, prompting respondents to consider whether the election will be conducted both in accordance with electoral laws and rules and in line with principles of fairness. For the second item, respondents were asked to evaluate the accuracy of the following statement with reference to the 2021 German federal election: “Postal voting leads to voter fraud and manipulation.” Answer options ranged from 1 “applies completely” to 5 “does not apply at all.” Over the last 25 years, the use of postal voting has become increasingly common among voters in Germany. Fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic, it reached an all-time high of 47.3% in the 2021 federal election. Concomitant with these developments, postal voting has also become a prime target of (populist) elite rhetoric aiming to discredit the integrity of this specific voting method—most notably by members of the AfD (cf. Schnaudt, 2023a, 2023b). For these reasons, citizens’ views about the integrity of postal voting are increasingly important for understanding the implications and democratic significance of perceptions of electoral integrity. Overall, this study’s operationalization thus captures perceptions related to the overall integrity of the 2021 election as well as perceptions related to the integrity of specific voting procedures applied. Both items have been used in previous studies on electoral integrity perceptions in Germany (cf. Schmitt-Beck and Faas, 2021; Schnaudt, 2023b) and thus contribute to the comparability of this study’s findings with those of extant research. In the empirical analysis, both items will be analyzed separately to shed light on their distinct relevance for compliance. In addition, for an encompassing empirical picture, the analysis will consider a third measurement that conflates both items ($r=0.6$) into an additive electoral integrity scale ranging from 0 to 10. In line with the formulation of the hypotheses, all three variables are coded in such a way that higher values reflect more negative perceptions of electoral integrity.

Concerning the operationalization of citizens’ compliance with laws and regulations, the study uses two measurements that capture the attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of the concept, respectively. With regard to the attitudinal dimension, the study follows the established strategy in survey research of inquiring about the acceptability or justifiability of non-compliant behavior rather than non-compliant behavior directly (cf. Marien and Hooghe, 2011: 272). Specifically, the following item is used: “How justified do you think it is for citizens to disobey the laws of a newly elected government if they doubt the correctness and fairness of the preceding election?” Respondents could answer on a four-point scale ranging from “completely justified” to 4 “not at all justified.” Importantly, this item does not include any reference to the 2021 German federal election but rather prompts respondents to consider whether it is generally justified not to comply with governmental laws because one feels that elections have been fraudulent. Conceptually, this item thus taps directly into citizens’ general views about the justifiability of election-related non-compliance, independent of their own perceptions about the integrity of German elections. In the analysis, this item will be reversed so that higher values reflect

an increased justifiability of non-compliance. For a more encompassing measurement of compliance including behavioral aspects, and especially for the purpose of inspecting how views about the justifiability of election-related non-compliance may translate into non-compliant behaviors, the study relies on three additional items that capture citizens' self-reported compliance with governmental regulations concerning the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.³ These items pertain to whether respondents in the last seven days followed any of the following three measures: "kept distance to other people," "reduced personal meetings and contacts," and "wore face masks." The final measurement of compliance with COVID-19 regulations is a sum variable of these three items ranging from 0 to 3, with 0 indicating "full non-compliance" and 3 "full compliance" (see also Seyd and Bu, 2022).⁴ It is important to reassert that the study's overall arguments are not restricted to compliance in any particular domain but rather apply to compliant behavior at large. Therefore, compliance in the domain of COVID-19 regulations is considered here as one possible (observable) indicator of citizens' (latent) propensity to engage in non-compliant behaviors more generally.

In addition to the aforementioned variables, the analysis considers further variables that serve to assess the robustness of the empirical findings and to control for any spurious relationships. In that connection, the most important goal is to control for possible common causes of both perceptions of electoral integrity and compliance. Following the preceding review of extant research, the most pertinent common explanation pertains to generalized feelings of political distrust and alienation that may induce citizens to consider both elections less trustworthy and non-compliance more acceptable or expedient. Accordingly, the following analysis considers a variable that captures citizens' political alienation, encompassing distrust in institutions, dissatisfaction with democracy and politics, and lack of external efficacy. Moreover, the statistical models control for additional variables related to respondents' socio-demographic background (i.e. age, sex, education, and income) and further political and ideological orientations (i.e. political interest, media use, internal efficacy, left-right placement, and vote intention) that are relevant for an explanation of both perceptions of electoral integrity and compliance.⁵ For the models using compliance with COVID-19 regulations as outcome variable (H2a/b), the analysis also controls for respondents' concerns about getting infected with the coronavirus. Based on these model specifications, this study allows for a strict and informative test of the three hypotheses specified above. In the empirical models, all continuous independent variables will be normalized to a range from 0 to 1. A complete overview of all model variables, their measurement and descriptive statistics can be found in Supplemental Tables S1 and S2 in the Supplemental material.

Empirical Strategy

While the GESIS Panel, in principle, provides individual-level panel data, not all items outlined above are available in every wave. Moreover, some of the key items for this study have only been fielded once. Accordingly, the data can only be analyzed in a cross-sectional fashion and do not provide conclusive evidence on the causal underpinnings of the relationships studied. Yet, wherever possible, factors that are treated as explanatory will be taken from a survey wave that is temporally prior to the respective wave in which the outcome variable was measured. With this strategy, possible issues of reversed causality can be alleviated.

Measurements for two key variables—perceptions of electoral integrity and views about election-related non-compliance—are only available in wave ic, fielded in the period from 25 August to 19 October, and thus in the context of the 2021 German federal election. The empirical test of H1 is thus strictly cross-sectional, with additional explanatory (control) variables measured in survey waves ia and ib fielded in the first half of 2021. For the test of H2a and H2b, the outcome variable on compliance with COVID-19 regulations will be analyzed at three different time points (i.e., by using data from survey waves ic, id, and ja fielded in the periods August–October 2021, November 2021–January 2022, and February–April 2022, respectively). With this strategy, the respective relationships between perceptions of electoral integrity (H2a) and views about election-related non-compliance (H2b) on the one hand and compliance with COVID-19 regulations on the other can be examined instantaneously (wave ic) and with a time lag between independent and outcome variables of up to six months (waves id and ja).⁶ As such, the empirical analysis will provide additional insights on how these relationships unfold or recede over time.

Given the ordinal nature of the outcome variables with four scale points each, the empirical analysis will rely on ordered logistic regression models. For each hypothesis, results will be presented for three types of models: (a) without control variables; (b) with socio-demographic control variables only; and (c) with socio-demographic and political control variables.⁷ Overall, the analysis comprises 2622 respondents with complete information on all model variables. For wave ic of the GESIS Panel which provides information on perceptions of electoral integrity and views about election-related non-compliance, almost all respondents (i.e., 2603) have been surveyed prior to the 2021 German federal election. For the sake of clarity, the following presentation of results will focus on the main variables of interest only (detailed results for all model specifications can be found in Supplemental Tables S3–S7 in the Supplemental material).

Findings

Figures 1 and 2 provide a cursory glance at the respective distributions of the study's key variables. As can be seen in panels (a)–(c) in Figure 1, citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity are overall positive, thus matching recent expert assessments of objective election quality in Germany (cf. Norris and Grömping, 2019: 6; Garnett et al., 2022: 7). At the same time, it is also evident that a small but noteworthy proportion of about 15%–20% of citizens are at least skeptical about the proper conduct of the 2021 German federal election as well as the suitability of postal voting for ensuring a fair electoral process. These figures are in line with previous research on citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity in Germany (Schmitt-Beck and Faas, 2021: 141; Schnaudt, 2023a: 92, 2023b: 6) and underline that a sizable proportion of the population may perceive elections as fraudulent even in contexts where elections are considered largely free and fair by experts. Furthermore, panel (d) in Figure 1 shows that about 20% of citizens in Germany consider non-compliance with the laws and regulations of a newly elected government a legitimate means to voice doubts about the integrity of the electoral process. Considering the crucial role of citizens' voluntary compliance for effective democratic governance, and the fact that the item stimulus did not include a reference to any actual violations of electoral integrity, this figure clearly is substantially important. Finally, Figure 2 gives an indication of citizens' self-reported compliance with COVID-19

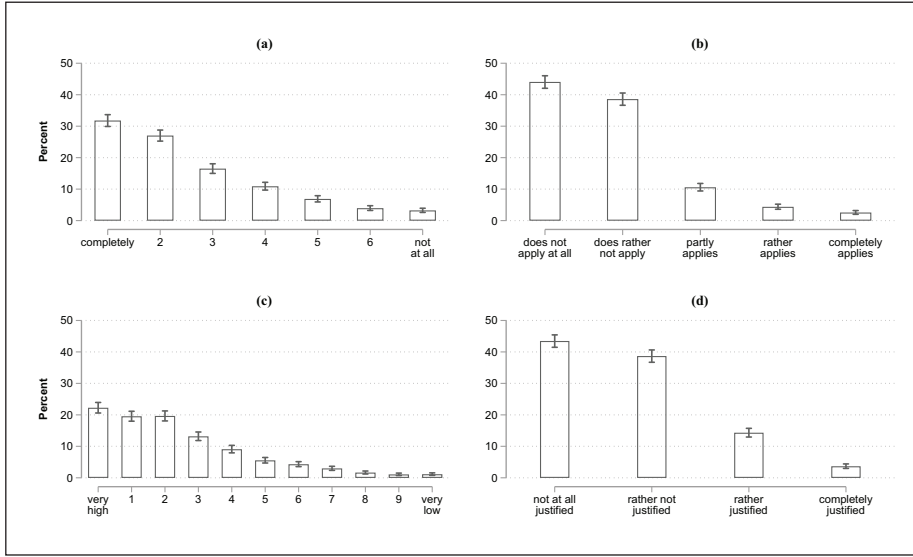


Figure 1. Perceptions of Electoral Integrity and Views about Election-Related Non-Compliance in Germany: (a) Elections Free and Fair (Reversed), (b) Postal Voting Rigs Elections, (c) Electoral Integrity Scale (Reversed) and (d) Justifiability of Election-Related Non-Compliance. Notes: Data weighted; N = 2622.

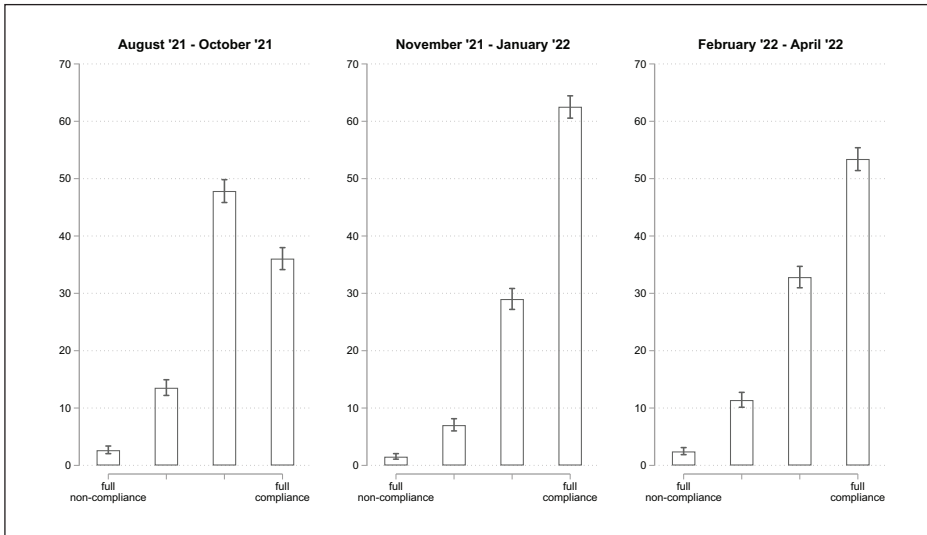


Figure 2. Compliance with COVID-19 Regulations in Germany. Notes: Data weighted; N = 2622.

regulations across three survey waves. Compliance is relatively high on average, with full compliance reaching its highest levels during winter (November '21–January '22) and its lowest levels in late summer and early autumn (August '21–October'21)—a pattern that

further underscores the plausibility of the data used. Despite the overall high levels of compliance with COVID-19 regulations, it is evident that across all three survey waves, non-compliance with at least two out of three measures ranges between 10% and 15%. Accordingly, there is a relevant and non-negligible number of citizens who doubt the integrity of the electoral process, who feel that election-related non-compliance with governmental laws and regulations is justified, and who report to disobey crucial regulations concerning COVID-19 safety in their daily lives. The following analysis examines the individual-level relationships between these attitudes and behaviors in more detail.

Figure 3 presents the coefficients of interest from a total of nine ordered logistic regression models (3 independent variables \times 3 control conditions) assessing the relationship between citizens' electoral integrity perceptions and their views about the justifiability of election-related non-compliance (H1). Overall, the results are consistent for all three measurements of electoral integrity perceptions and robust to the inclusion of both socio-demographic and political control variables: Those who rate the integrity of the 2021 German federal election more negatively, who believe that postal voting undermines the fairness and integrity of election outcomes, and who score lower on the composite electoral integrity scale are more likely to view election-related non-compliance with governmental laws and regulations justified. While the strength of the observed relationships decreases with the breadth of control variables considered (see panels a–c), all relationships reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Therefore, the results presented in Figure 3 correspond with H1.

To shed some light on the substantive relevance of these relationships, Figure 4 shows predicted probabilities concerning the justifiability of election-related non-compliance as a function of citizens' electoral integrity perceptions. Looking at panel (a), it is evident that citizens who feel that elections in Germany are completely free and fair exhibit a probability of 55% to consider election-related non-compliance "not at all justified." For the very same citizens (i.e., when holding all other model covariates at their observed values), this probability drops to only 7% if they feel that elections are not at all free and fair. At the same time, the respective probability to consider election-related non-compliance "completely justified" increases from 0.5% to 6% when moving from evaluations as completely free and fair to not at all free and fair. The same pattern concerning the change in predicted probabilities is also evident for perceptions of postal voting (panel b) as well as the composite electoral integrity scale (panel c). Overall, the differences in predicted probabilities across the continuums of the three integrity measures are substantially important and amount to 45–55 percentage points for considering non-compliance "not at all justified" and 5–10 percentage points for considering non-compliance "completely justified."

Turning to the empirical test of H2a and H2b, Figure 5 presents the coefficients of interest from a total of 36 ordered logistic regression models (4 independent variables \times 3 control conditions \times 3 time points) investigating the respective relationships between perceptions of electoral integrity (upper panel) and views about the justifiability of election-related non-compliance (lower panel) on the one hand, and compliance with COVID-19 regulations as outcome variable on the other. At a cursory glance, the overall pattern of coefficients is consistent across the four independent variables, robust to the inclusion of socio-demographic and political controls, and largely stable across the three survey waves considered. Specifically, the results indicate that those who doubt the integrity of the 2021 German federal election, who feel that postal voting threatens the fairness of the electoral process, and who exhibit lower scores on the electoral integrity scale are generally less likely to comply with governmental regulations regarding COVID-19 safety. What is more,

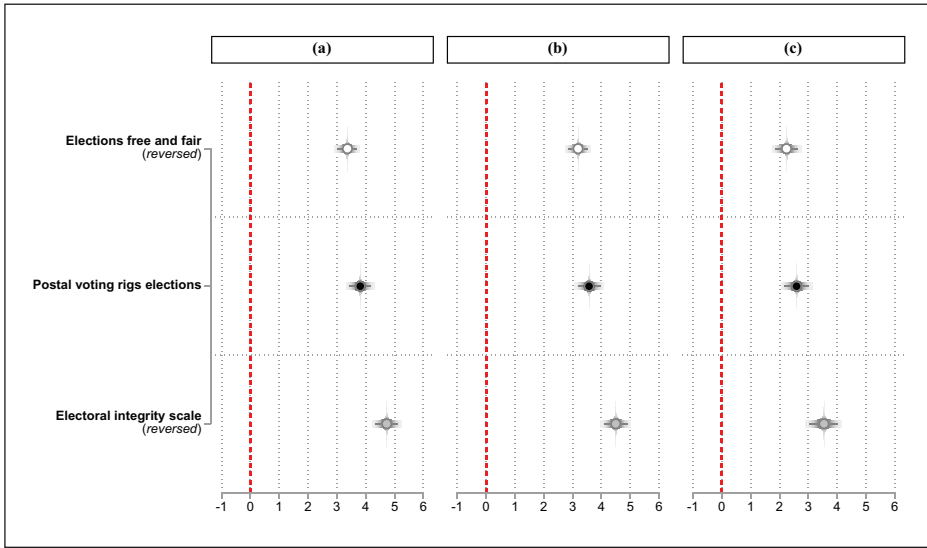


Figure 3. The Nexus between Electoral Integrity Perceptions and Views about Election-Related Non-Compliance: (a) w/o Controls, (b) w/ Socio-Demographic Controls and (c) w/ Full Controls.

Notes: Ordered logistic regression; logit coefficients with 95% (solid lines) and 99% (smoothed) confidence intervals. Results are based on Models 1–9 in Supplemental Table S3 in the Supplemental material. Data weighted; N = 2622.

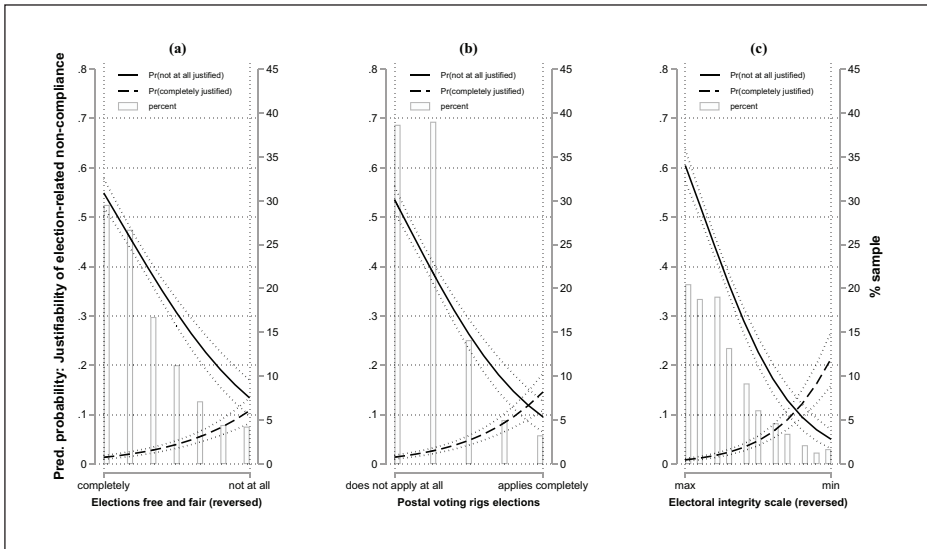


Figure 4. Predicted Probabilities of Views about Election-Related Non-Compliance Conditional on Electoral Integrity Perceptions.

Notes: Average adjusted predictions with model covariates held at observed values. Predictions based on Models 3, 6, and 9 in Supplemental Table S3 in the Supplemental material. Data weighted; N = 2622.

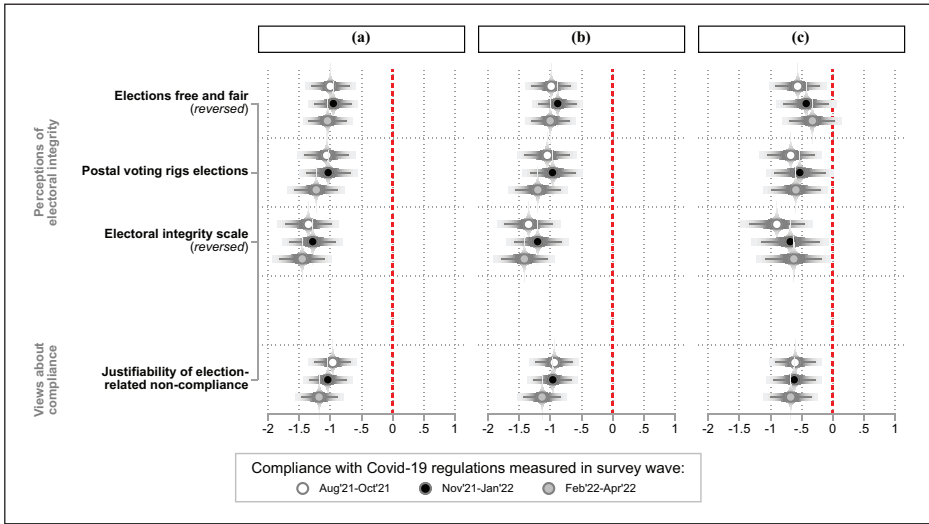


Figure 5. The Nexus between Electoral Integrity Perceptions, Views about Election-Related Non-Compliance, and Compliance with COVID-19 Regulations: (a) w/o Controls, (b) w/ Socio-Demographic Controls and (c) w/ Full Controls.

Notes: Ordered logistic regression; logit coefficients with 95% (solid lines) and 99% (smoothed) confidence intervals. Results are based on Models 1–9 in Supplemental Tables S4–S7 in the Supplemental material. Data weighted; N = 2622.

the strength of the observed relationships is relatively stable over the course of the three survey waves for which compliance with COVID-19 regulations is measured: Those with more negative perceptions of electoral integrity in August–October 2021 exhibit lower compliance in the same period (white dots), in the period November ’21 to January ’22 (black dots), and in the period February to April ’22 (gray dots). When only considering the fully specified models depicted in panel (c), there is tentative evidence that the strength of the relationships slightly decreases over time. Yet, except for the relationship between perceptions of the German federal election as free and fair and compliance with COVID-19 regulations in the period February to April ’22, all coefficients are statistically significant at the 95% level. Overall, the results are thus in line with H2a.

Looking at the lower panel in Figure 5, consistently negative coefficients are also evident for the nexus between citizens’ views about the justifiability of election-related non-compliance and their actual compliance with COVID-19 regulations. This observation holds across different control conditions (see panels a–c) and three consecutive measurements of compliance with COVID-19 regulations. In other words, those who consider non-compliance with the laws and regulations of a newly elected government a legitimate means to voice doubts about the integrity of elections are (subsequently) also less likely to report compliant behaviors concerning COVID-19 safety. This finding indicates that citizens’ views about the justifiability of non-compliance with regard to the electoral domain are systematically and negatively related to their compliant behaviors concerning governmental regulations in other domains, a finding that conforms with H2b.⁸

To illustrate the substantive importance of the above findings, Figure 6 displays predicted probabilities of compliance with COVID-19 regulations as a function of citizens’ electoral integrity perceptions (panels a–c) and views about election-related non-compliance (panel d). In line with the earlier descriptive findings (see Figure 2), the overall

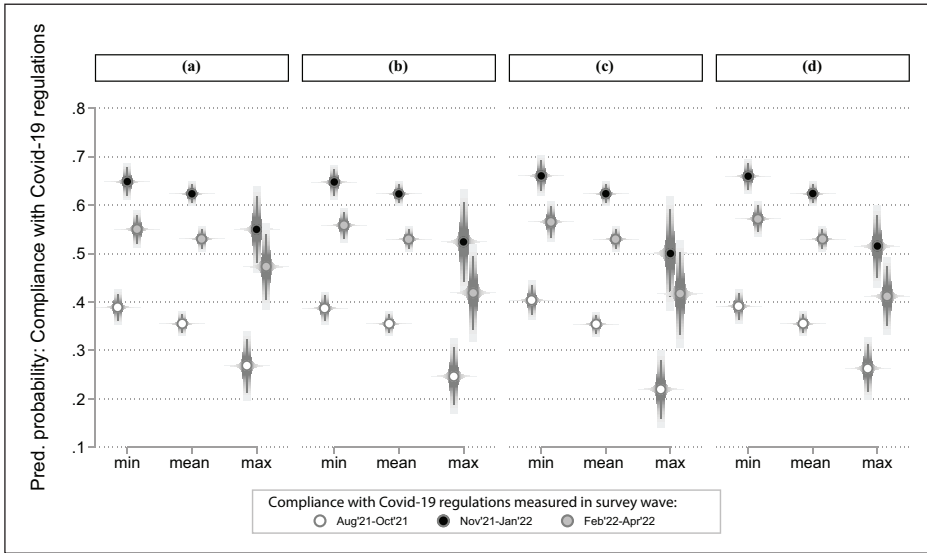


Figure 6. Predicted Probabilities of Compliance with COVID-19 Regulations Conditional on Electoral Integrity Perceptions and Views about Election-Related Non-Compliance: (a) Elections Free and Fair (Reversed), (b) Postal Voting Rigs Elections, (c) Electoral Integrity Scale (Reversed) and (d) Justifiability of Election-Related Non-Compliance.

Notes: Average adjusted predictions with model covariates held at observed values. Predicted category: full compliance. Predictions based on Models 3, 6, and 9 in Supplemental Tables S4–S7 in the Supplemental material. Data weighted; N = 2622.

probability of compliant behavior is highest in the period November '21 to January '22 (black dots) and lowest in the period August to October '21 (white dots). More important, however, are the observed differences in predicted probabilities when moving along the underlying continuums of the four independent variables. Considering panel (a) and the period November '21 to January '22, citizens who consider the German election as completely free and fair (minimum score on the reversed item) have a probability of about 65% to fully comply with all three COVID-19 measures. For the very same citizens (i.e., when holding all other model covariates at their observed values), the predicted probability drops to about 55% if they feel that elections are not at all free and fair (maximum score on the reversed item). In comparison, the respective predicted probabilities in the period February to April '22 amount to 55% and 48% (gray dots), and in the period August to October '21 to 39% and 26% (white dots). The observed differences in predicted probabilities when moving from most positive to most negative perceptions of the 2021 German federal election thus range between 7 and 13 percentage points across the three survey waves studied. The changes and resulting differences in predicted probabilities for the two remaining measurements of electoral integrity perceptions follow the same pattern and exhibit a similar range and magnitude (see panels b and c). Finally, panel (d) displays predicted probabilities of compliance with COVID-19 regulations as a function of citizens' views about the justifiability of election-related non-compliance. In the period November '21 to January '22 (black dots), citizens who deem election-related non-compliance not justified at all (minimum score) have a probability of 66% to fully comply with all three COVID-19 measures. This probability drops to 51% if citizens consider election-related non-compliance completely justified, amounting to a difference

of 15 percentage points. The corresponding differences in predicted probabilities in the periods February to April '22 (gray dots) and August to October '21 (white dots) account for 16 and 13 percentage points, respectively.

Conclusion

Citizens' reactions to electoral outcomes are crucial for the long-term viability of democratic systems. Only if citizens accept newly elected governments as legitimate bearers of political power and voluntarily comply with governmental laws and regulations, can representative democracy live up to its full potential without resorting to less efficient means such as coercion or force. Relying on theoretical arguments and empirical insights informed by social-psychological perspectives on compliance as well as procedural justice theory, this study has argued and shown that citizens' views about the justifiability of non-compliance in the aftermath of an election, as well as their self-reported compliant behavior with governmental regulations, respond in systematic ways to how citizens perceive the quality and integrity of the electoral process. Analyzing individual-level (panel) survey data from Germany, the empirical investigation has brought to light three key findings. First, about 20% of citizens in Germany consider it justified to disobey the laws and regulations of a newly elected government if one feels that the preceding election has been compromised. Second, whether citizens consider election-related non-compliance justified depends on their perceptions of electoral integrity. Those who perceive the fairness of the 2021 German federal election impaired and those who feel that postal voting compromises the fairness of electoral outcomes are more likely to view non-compliance with governmental laws and regulations a legitimate course of action. Third and last, citizens' views about the integrity of elections and the justifiability of election-related non-compliance matter for their compliant behaviors more generally. Those who doubt the integrity of the electoral process and consider election-related non-compliance justified (subsequently) comply less often with governmental regulations concerning the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, citizens remain committed to the rules of the democratic game and accept the government's right to dictate behavior if they feel that the electoral process was free and fair.

With these findings, this study contributes important insights to the burgeoning literature on electoral integrity, specifically with regard to the (behavioral) consequences of citizens' electoral integrity beliefs. While previous research has shown that doubts about the proper conduct of elections may induce citizens to protest election outcomes or to engage in anti-incumbent and elite-challenging political behaviors (Daxecker et al., 2019; Fumarola, 2020; Norris, 2014), this study extends these insights by highlighting the role of electoral integrity perceptions for one crucial—and hitherto largely neglected—pillar of effective democratic governance: citizens' voluntary compliance with laws and regulations. What is more, by studying the German case—an established democracy with a long-standing record of free and fair elections according to experts and, hence, a context that provides little objective reasons for election-related non-compliance among citizens—the analysis also sheds light on the empirical repercussions of what Norris (2024) has recently coined “cynical mistrust,” that is, excessively negative and condemnatory views among citizens about the quality of elections despite their overall proper conduct.

As such, the findings on the nexus between electoral integrity perceptions and compliance also entail important implications for the long-term functioning and stability of modern democratic systems. For one thing, it can be seen as indicative of a healthy democracy that some citizens consider it justified to disobey the laws and regulations of

a government that, according to citizens' perceptions, has come to power through a fraudulent electoral process. In this sense, views about the justifiability of election-related non-compliance may reflect citizens' vigilance against violations of core democratic principles and a willingness to defend democratic processes against the abuse by political actors. However, for non-compliance with governmental laws and regulations to work as a safeguard against electoral backsliding and democratic erosion, a crucial precondition is that citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity are an accurate reflection of elections' actual democratic quality. At least for the German case studied here, wide-ranging doubts about the proper conduct of elections among citizens do not seem warranted in light of the *de facto* integrity of German elections. Therefore, by putting a strain on democratic governments' ability to govern efficiently, the observed positive relationship between (largely unwarranted) doubts about the integrity of elections and non-compliance may in fact pose a serious challenge to the long-term functioning of democratic systems. If citizens disobey laws and regulations because, for whatever reasons, they believe that the electoral process failed in bestowing legitimacy upon newly elected governments, this creates a situation in which governments will be required to invest more efforts and resources in monitoring compliance and sanctioning non-compliant behaviors—resources that in turn will be missing for meeting other pressing challenges and problems of contemporary democracies (e.g., climate change, social inequality, and international conflicts).

In light of this study's findings and broader implications, the following aspects and questions suggest themselves as promising avenues for future research. First, prospective studies should aim to extend the scope of their analysis by considering citizens' election-related (non-)compliance in domains other than COVID-19 safety. Ideally, such analyses would investigate non-compliant behaviors ranging from minor misdemeanors (e.g., running a red light) up to more serious civic misconduct (e.g., tax fraud) and illegal actions (e.g., unsanctioned protests or riots). Investigating to what extent citizens' perceptions of electoral integrity are relevant for such different "degrees" of non-compliance promises to deliver further important insights on the significance of electoral integrity for the viability of democratic systems. Second, future research should explore whether this study's findings based on Germany travel to other contexts, thus assessing more explicitly the context dependency of the relationship between citizens' electoral integrity perceptions and non-compliance as a function of political systems' *de facto* quality of elections (cf. Schnaudt and Wolf, 2023; Schnaudt 2024). Such an analysis could shed light on the conditions under which doubts about the integrity of elections are conducive or detrimental to democratic development and well-being. Third, future studies should examine the causal underpinnings and underlying mechanisms of the nexus between electoral integrity perceptions and compliance in more detail. While this study has been able to analyze how perceptions of electoral integrity are related to compliant behaviors measured at subsequent points in time, additional experimental studies that manipulate the violation of specific principles of electoral integrity and assess how such violations result in (an increased permissiveness of) varying non-compliant behaviors may place this study's findings on a more comprehensive causal foundation. In doing so, future studies should also strive to shed light on the mechanisms that connect perceptions of electoral integrity with compliance. This study has argued that negative views about the integrity of elections imply (perceived) violations of principles related to the "quality of decision making" and the "quality of treatment." In line with this reasoning, future studies could assess to what extent the connection between perceptions of electoral integrity and compliance is mediated by how citizens evaluate their influence in the electoral process, how

responsive they perceive the electoral process to their demands, and how fairly they feel treated in that process. Fourth and last, considering that even in Germany's established democratic system with a lasting record of free and fair elections some citizens consider electoral integrity compromised, future studies should delve more deeply into the factors that shape the accuracy of citizens' electoral integrity perceptions. That negative views about the quality of elections go hand in hand with a lower inclination to engage in essential civic behaviors such as law compliance renders a more informed understanding of why citizens perceive elections as fraudulent—especially in contexts where there seems little objective reason to do so—indispensable for counteracting tendencies of electoral backsliding and democratic erosion.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. The normative underpinnings of compliance and the focus on citizens' normative commitment to law-abiding behavior are also evident in research on so-called norms of good citizenship (Dalton, 2008; Denters et al., 2007; Van Deth, 2007). Among the manifold normatively desirable characteristics of a "good citizen," loyalty toward the state and its institutions as well as compliance with governmental laws and regulations are key to provide political authorities with the discretion necessary "to perform their task of making and implementing authoritative decisions in an effective way" (Denters et al., 2007: 90). Empirically, these studies show that support for law-abidingness establishes a distinct dimension of good citizenship (Denters et al., 2007: 92–95; Schnaudt et al., 2024: 363).
2. Electoral integrity "refers to agreed upon international conventions and universal standards about elections reflecting global norms applying to all countries worldwide throughout the electoral cycle, including during the pre-electoral period, the campaign, on polling day, and its aftermath" (Norris, 2014: 21). As such, it pertains to reliable, consistent, and impartial procedures for

"the recruitment and training of electoral staff, electoral planning, voter registration, the registration of political parties, the nomination of parties and candidates, the electoral campaign, polling, counting, the tabulation of results, the declaration of results, the resolution of electoral disputes, reporting, auditing and archiving" (Norris, 2013: 567).

3. Evidently, self-reported compliance in surveys does not necessarily reflect actual compliant behavior. Yet, the mixed-mode data collection of the GESIS Panel via self-administered web or mail surveys renders the

- occurrence of social-desirability effects (e.g., through the presence of an interviewer) less likely.
4. While compliance with all three measures was generally recommended throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the enforcement of each measure varied with the severity of the pandemic (across German Länder). To assess the robustness of the empirical findings presented, further sensitivity checks assess compliance with each measure separately while also controlling for residence in the East or West German Länder. Overall, these models lead to the same substantive findings and conclusions as those presented in section “Findings” (see Supplemental Tables S9–S20 in the Supplemental material).
 5. Additional models also control for citizens’ status as electoral winner or loser (cf. Goldberg and Plescia, 2024; Mauk and Grömping, 2024; Schnaudt, 2023b; Sinclair et al., 2018) based on reported voting behavior in the 2017 German federal election. As these models lead to the same substantive findings and conclusions as those presented in section “Findings” but exhibit a substantially lower number of valid cases, they are presented separately (see Supplemental Tables S21–S24 in the Supplemental material).
 6. Complementary conditional change models that directly assess changes in compliance over survey waves yield results that largely correspond with the cross-sectional findings and conclusions presented in section “Findings” (see Supplemental Tables S25–S28 in the Supplemental material).
 7. With all variance inflation factors exhibiting values of <2 , multi-collinearity among independent variables is of no concern in the statistical analysis.
 8. Conclusions remain the same when modeling views about election-related non-compliance as ordinal rather than continuous (see Supplemental Table S8 in the Supplemental material).

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