

Elections and Democracy Support

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The two main types of international elections support—technical aid for election administration and election monitoring—both got significantly underway in the second half of the 1980s and then mushroomed in the 1990s as democracy spread globally. Both remain active areas today though they are not, as many people in the developing world often think, the largest areas of donor spending on democracy support. Elections aid constitutes less than 10 percent of international democracy aid, less than either governance support or civil society assistance.

Aid for elections administration

Helping post-authoritarian countries hold national elections has become a well-developed domain of technical assistance with a well-settled body of knowledge that can be conveyed to newly established electoral management bodies. Several reliable, internationally credible providers of such assistance exist, capable of working almost anywhere. Nevertheless, several risks and challenges frequently accompany such assistance:

- The danger of supplying election administration aid to governments that lack a genuine commitment to holding free and fair elections—leading either to the wasting of aid or the legitimisation of bad electoral processes
- The danger of putting into place expensive, locally unsustainable technical systems (electoral white elephants, like state-of-the-art, costly voter registration systems) instead of ‘good enough’ systems that will be affordable locally over the long term
- The strong need for donors to coordinate closely when they make a big push to support first-time elections in a country just coming out of authoritarian rule. Lack of coordination can lead to significant overlap and waste.



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Election monitoring

Sponsoring international and domestic monitoring efforts has also become a well-developed area of assistance. The more serious organisations engaging in international election monitoring have moved beyond early, superficial, 'in-out' monitoring missions and now carry out long-term monitoring efforts that examine the electoral process from start to finish. Domestic monitoring efforts have also become more sophisticated in many places, with international support helping provide comparative experience and needed funding. But problems and issues remain with election monitoring:

- Some well-established Western observer groups still engage in superficial observation missions and go easy on favoured governments helpful on security issues
- Russia and a growing number of other non-democratic countries are increasingly sending international election observers to other countries, diluting the clarity and integrity of the overall pool of international observers
- Election observation carried out in isolation from a larger diplomatic policy of support for free and fair elections leads to observer reports of flawed elections ending up having little impact.

Key Readings

Political role of elections

Lindberg, S. (2006). The Surprising Significance of African Elections, *Journal of Democracy*, 17(1): 139-151. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1013670

Schedler, S. (2006). *The logic of electoral authoritarianism: The dynamic of unfree competition*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner. (Chapter 1).
http://www.ethiomeia.com/accent/ea_schedler.pdf

Electoral violence

Staniland, P. (2014). Violence and Democracy, *Comparative Politics*, 47(1).
<http://home.uchicago.edu/~paul/StanilandReviewElecViolNov13.pdf>

Mueller, S. (2011). Dying to win: Elections, political violence, and institutional decay in Kenya, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 29(1): 99-117.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2011.537056>

International election observation

Kelly, J. (2010). Election observers and their biases, *Journal of Democracy*, 21(3).
<http://sites.duke.edu/kelley/files/2012/03/JOD.pdf>

European Stability Initiative (2013). *Disgraced: Azerbaijan and the End of Election Observing as We Know It*. Berlin: European Stability Initiative.
http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_145.pdf

Questions to guide readings

1. Are donors guilty of pushing countries that are coming out of conflict too quickly into elections?
2. Should first-time elections in countries emerging from civil war or authoritarianism be viewed as a means of forging a political settlement or as a process that should occur only once a political settlement has been forged through other means, such as negotiations?
3. If a donor interested in supporting free and fair elections in a country must choose between funding a major international election observing mission or a major domestic monitoring campaign, which choice is likely to have a higher pro-democratic payoff? What factors about the local situation would be most relevant to answering this question?
4. How can electoral systems in highly divided societies be designed to diminish the risk of elections provoking conflict and violence?
5. When international election observers find an election to have clearly fallen short of international standards, what are the most common consequences for the government that organised the elections?
6. Is the overall number of groups engaging in international election observation increasing or decreasing? What accounts for the changed overall profile of observation groups?
7. Is donor coordination on elections assistance higher or lower on average than donor coordination in other areas of assistance? What aspects of electoral support make it more difficult or easier for donors to coordinate?