Helpdesk Research Report

Donor support for post-conflict elections

Edward Laws

University of Birmingham

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Question

What does recent literature tell us about lessons for donors in supporting elections in post-conflict developing countries when the precedent for a peaceful transition of power is either not well entrenched, or non-existent?

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1. Overview

In post-conflict environments, the international community has an important role to play in supporting the successful planning, delivery and embedding of elections within a wider context of support to political systems and democratisation. This rapid review provides an overview of lessons for donors in the field of electoral assistance in post-conflict societies in recent academic, policy and grey literature. Although well-timed elections can contribute to conflict resolution and help to consolidate a peace agreement or power-sharing deal between elites, they also have the potential to re-ignite hostilities. The evidence indicates that the content and inclusiveness of pre-election dialogue between former combatants; the timing and sequencing of elections; the strength of electoral and security institutions; the choice of electoral system; and the independence and conduct of the electoral administration and observers are key variables. The following sections of this report deal with each in turn, followed by three country case studies illustrating how some of these factors have played out in recent post-conflict elections in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Nepal.

Key findings

- In pre-election dialogue and negotiation, the importance of quickly securing a peace agreement has to be balanced with the need to ensure the talks are as comprehensive and inclusive as possible, in order to ensure smooth progress further down the line

- The impact of early elections on post-conflict stability is the subject of sharp debate. While some argue that early elections facilitate peace agreements, hasten democratisation, and ensure post-conflict stability, others suggest that they undermine genuine democracy and spark a renewal in fighting.

- Authors also disagree on the proper sequencing of post-conflict elections. Some argue that national elections should be carried out first on the grounds that they have a higher profile than sub-national elections and are more likely to attract international support. Others recommend in starting at the sub-national level to enable political parties time to organise themselves, build up a local support base, and gain political experience.

- The risk of elections resulting in tensions or renewed conflict is much greater in the absence of strong electoral and state institutions.

- The choice of electoral system is an important factor in the success or failure of post-conflict elections. Whilst there is no outright consensus on the most appropriate system for post-conflict environments, elections conducted under the auspices of the United Nations have almost always favoured proportional representation.

- There is a broad agreement that independent, non-partisan and permanent electoral management bodies represent best practice in terms of electoral administration in post-conflict environments.

- The presence of international observers can provide a conducive environment for independent, free and fair elections. However, it is better for international observers to refuse to participate than to be complicit in an observation process that tells less than the full truth about an election.

2. Initial conditions

In a USAID review, López-Pintor (2005) argues that there are three basic conditions which need to be met before elections should be undertaken in post-conflict countries:

- A sufficiently secure environment is regarded as an essential condition for organising and carrying out elections successfully. The majority of combatants and militias should therefore have been disarmed or pacified, and sufficient progress made in the building of new army and police forces[1].

- Administrative and communication infrastructure must have been re-established to a degree that allows for a sufficiently smooth conduct of the elections and related activities, including voter registration and civic education.

- The justice system and police must have reached a degree of functioning that enables them to deal with cases of fraud, abuse and other legal issues related to the proper conduct of elections, otherwise opposition parties and the population at large will have little confidence in the fairness of the elections.

Pre-election dialogue and negotiation

Ten Hoove and Scholtbach (2008) stress that the social capital needed to make political systems work peacefully in post-conflict environments can only be developed over time and requires sustained dialogue between former combatants; something that is often overlooked in the rush to pursue a peace agreement. Given that post-conflict political parties generally lack a solid basis of mutual trust, facilitating a dialogue between them should be a priority objective before elections take place. Outsiders can play an important facilitating role in these post-agreement dialogue processes, acting as co-guarantors for the political arrangements.

A briefing published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA 1998) draws a contrast between *slow-fast* and *fast-slow* approaches to pre-election dialogue and negotiation. The former is one where the initial stage of reaching an agreement is done as slowly as necessary, to ensure that the agreement is as comprehensive as possible. In a *fast-slow* mode, by contrast, pressure for results encourages the parties to rush through the negotiation phase and reach a less than optimum agreement, so that problems remain which slow down or obstruct the implementation phase. It is not suggested that these two approaches are necessarily exclusive, but that they need to be balanced as far as possible (Ibid).

The fast-slow approach was exemplified when Bosnian leaders endured intensive pressure from their US hosts during negotiations in Dayton, Ohio, in 1995. The US agenda included a strong desire for demonstrable negotiating success. This agenda, combined with the urgency of ending the war, meant that intense pressure was applied on the Bosnian leaders and their delegates to reach an agreement. The resulting Dayton Peace Accords were acclaimed as the framework for a comprehensive peace settlement. But the insistence on a fast result at the negotiation stage created problems which ultimately obstructed the implementation of the Accords. Elections were held nine months after the agreement was signed. Although the event was hailed as a triumph of democracy in some corners, the major parties campaigned almost exclusively on nationalist appeals to their own ethnic groups. Afterwards, the parties refused to

work together, common institutions failed to function in a meaningful manner, and the international community had to take on an increasing role in imposing solutions on recalcitrant Bosnian institutions (Ibid).

By contrast, the South African constitutional negotiations of the early 1990s stand as a successful example of a *slow-fast* approach. The negotiation process was drawn-out because of the wide range of participating groups and factions that were consulted, as well as the complexity of the issues. Although the extended and inclusive process of dialogue and the variety of issues addressed made the negotiation stage so slow, this paid off in the implementation phase. In particular, the multilateral nature of the talks helped to avoid breakdowns between the leaders who had engaged in the dialogue and their supporters, when the former had to 'sell' the outcome of the negotiations to constituents. When eventually signed, the legitimacy of the outcome was far stronger than a more exclusive version would have been, and laid the groundwork for a smoother transition to democracy (Ibid).

3. Timing of post-conflict elections

There is a broad consensus in the literature that the timing of post-conflict elections plays a key role in shaping whether they lead to a consolidation of peace or a return to violence. However, there is disagreement over whether elections should be held at early point in the peacebuilding process or whether it is beneficial to postpone them for a period of time.

According to some scholars, the promise of early elections is vital to peace and democracy because it facilitates peace settlements and convinces foreign countries to contribute peacekeeping forces to post-conflict settings by providing them with a clear end date for the mission (Lyons 2002). Others contend that early elections are important because they expedite the process of democratisation (Berman 2007; Carothers 2007; Lindberg 2003); offer the advantages of establishing a legitimate post-conflict government (Flores and Nooruddin 2012); and help post-conflict countries attract foreign aid (Kumar 1998; Lyons 2002). There is also a view that early post-conflict elections take place in a context more conducive to peace and democracy, since peacekeepers can help monitor the elections and maintain order on polling day (Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Fortna 2008).

In contrast, some authors argue that early elections can undermine peace and democracy because they are generally poorly run and hastily designed (Reilly 2002). There is also a commonly shared view in the literature that early elections tend to be dominated by former combatants who have not yet been demobilised and politicians who make nationalist, sectarian, and radical appeals at the expense of pro-democracy elements (de Zeeuw 2008; Mansfield and Snyder 2007; Paris 2004; Reilly 2002). As a result, early elections are more likely to be seen as illegitimate and politicians are more likely to inflame political tensions and undermine democratic reforms once in power (Brancati and Snyder 2011).

A case in point is Cambodia's transitional 1993 elections conducted by the United Nations Transitional Administration in Cambodia (UNTAC) - a large and ambitious peacekeeping and democratisation mission. Although the election itself was technically well-organised and peaceful, the incumbent Prime Minister Hun Sen's party had gained fewer seats than the opposition, leaving no party with a working majority. Amid threats of renewed civil war, a hastily-brokered deal saw a power sharing coalition featuring 'co-prime ministers' from the two parties installed. This arrangement proved highly unstable and fell apart in 1997 when Hun Sen routed his opponents to claim power alone. By then UNTAC had long-since departed, leaving Cambodia with a defective quasi-democracy (Reilly 2015).

Another concern with early elections is that former combatants that can easily return to fighting are more likely to reject the results. For example, In 1980 Milton Obote stole the Ugandan election from his former ally Yoweri Museveni. Museveni calculated correctly that he could out-organise and outfight Obote, prompting Museveni to launch a guerrilla struggle that eventually brought him to power (Brancati and Snyder 2012).

In other circumstances, early post-conflict elections may not immediately spark violence but rather sow the seeds of future conflict (Ibid). For example, a series of polarising post-conflict elections in Cyprus in the 1960s contributed to the gradual accumulation of tensions that resulted in a return to war in 1974. In another pattern, dictators may often use quick elections to lock in exploitative arrangements that lead to conflict later. For example, following the 1955 military revolt in Argentina against the labour-backed Peronist regime, elections helped to lock in a pattern of military dictatorship which led to another phase of anti-leftist violence in the late 1970s (Ibid).

Power-sharing

Power-sharing agreements can reduce the risk that early elections will provoke renewed warfare, by guaranteeing that the losing side will still retain meaningful representation in government, access to state resources, and/or some degree of autonomy. Examples include the power sharing deals in South Africa following violence at the end of the apartheid regime, in Mozambique following the long civil war between Frelimo and Renamo, and in Sudan at the end of the civil war between North and South (Brancati and Snyder 2012).

Power-sharing, however, can cause instability if it is not combined with other favorable conditions such as peacekeeping or strong governmental institutions (Ibid). In the short term, powerful groups that are accustomed to ruling outright may resist the implementation of such agreements. In Burundi in 1993, for example, international aid donors insisted that the military dictatorship led by the Tutsi minority hold elections. The elections were won by the majority ethnic Hutu candidate, Melchior Ndadaye. When the new president moved to institute power-sharing arrangements that would have integrated Hutus into the formerly all-Tutsi officer corps, the military assassinated him, plunging Burundi into another civil war. Power-sharing imposed by international donors also contributed to the onset of the Rwanda genocide by excluding from power the militant Hutu government faction that controlled armed security forces and machete-wielding militias (Ibid).

Power sharing can also increase the odds of a return to war in the long term by allowing leaders to govern in an arbitrary and exploitative manner with little risk of losing office – as was seen in Lebanon and Yugoslavia. By locking former combatants into positions of authority, there is a danger that power-sharing institutions provide group leaders with little incentive to broaden their support bases beyond old cleavage lines (Ibid).

4.   Sequencing of post-conflict elections

The sequencing of national and sub-national elections also impacts on the prospects for peaceful democratic transitions in the aftermath of conflict. Some authors argue for conducting national elections first on the grounds that they have a higher profile than sub-national elections and are therefore more likely to attract international support in the form of training, electoral observation and financial resources (Von Gienanth et al. 2008: 17). Others argue in favour of starting at the national level to generate incentives for the creation of national rather than regional political parties (Linz and Stepan 1996: 98–107; cited in Reilly 2015).

According to Brancati and Snyder (2012), subnational elections are more likely than national elections to spark renewed warfare when the previous civil war was fought over demands for regional autonomy or independence, and when control over the subnational legislature is paramount. Former combatants with a territorial base may be well positioned to win regional elections if they are held soon after wars end. Rebels may not even compete for office at the national level following separatist wars because competing at this level would legitimise the national government. Moreover, holding subnational elections before national elections may strengthen separatist parties with territorial bases, as occurred prior to the breakup of Yugoslavia (Ibid).

In contrast, some authors argue that sub-national elections should be conducted first in post-conflict contexts. According to Brahimi (2007: 11), national elections are politically and procedurally more sensitive and therefore require a longer preparation time Having sub-national elections first grants political parties time to organise themselves and build up a local support base, and gives candidates an opportunity to gain political experience before they take the step to national politics (Diamond 2006: 109). Still others contend that simultaneous national and local elections are the best option, as they can facilitate the mutual dependence of regional and national leaders. The more posts that are filled at the regional and local level the greater the incentive for regional politicians to coordinate their election activities by developing an integrated party system (Diamond 1999: 158). This was the approach used to good effect in Indonesia's transitional 1999 elections following the collapse of the Suharto regime, with identical party-list ballots being presented to voters at simultaneous elections for national, provincial, and local assemblies in an effort to strengthen the nascent party system (Reilly 2006).

Several prominent transitions have chosen to start with local elections as a trial run in the hope that candidates will focus on issues such as service delivery and development, rather than on more incendiary disputes over history or identity (Paris 2004). In Kosovo, local elections held soon after the conflict ended helped weaken the political power of the party associated with the Kosovo Liberation Army while strengthening moderates in Ibrahim Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo. Elsewhere, local consultation processes preceding national elections, such as the World Bank's Community Empowerment and Local Governance project in East Timor in 2000, moved the political focus onto more nuts-and-bolts issues of development (Brancati 2009).

5.   Electoral institutions

The strength of security and democratic institutions help determine the likelihood that post-conflict elections will promote peace and recovery (Flores and Nooruddin 2012; Ten Hoove and Scholtbach, 2008).

- ▪ First, security institutions - including civilian control over the military and police - help lower the probability that politicians can resort to violence before, during, or after elections and thus lend credibility to their promises to respect the peace.

- ▪ Second, a well-designed electoral infrastructure can help convince politicians and voters that the electoral process will be free and fair.

- ▪ Third, constraints on the executive - such as an independent judiciary and strong legislature - reduce election winners' ability to repress election losers and those they represent (Flores and Nooruddin 2012).

Liberia's experience with elections in 1997 illustrates the danger of holding elections when institutions are weak, whereas its 2005 election illustrates the stabilising role of elections in a more robust

institutional setting (Brancati and Snyder 2012). In 1997, two years after signing the Abuja peace agreement, Liberia held presidential and legislative elections supervised by a West African peacekeeping force. Former warlord Charles Taylor wielded advantages over his opponents due to his organisational network, his monopoly over the media, and his extensive military and financial resources. Pre-election disarmament efforts were marred by resistance from local warlords, and many voters supported Taylor because they expected renewed fighting if he lost. After his election, Taylor's exploitative, arbitrary rule provoked a renewed civil war in 1999 (Paris 2004).

In contrast, Liberia's 2005 elections were much more successful despite also being held two years after signing a peace treaty. With Taylor having fled the country, the 2005 elections were not dominated by a single candidate or party. Demobilisation occurred prior to the election, and the political institutions needed for democratic elections were better developed by this time. Prior to the election, Liberia's media was liberalised and some outlets offered reasonably balanced coverage of the election. An independent electoral commission maintained neutrality, and unlike in previous elections, political groupings were genuine parties rather than unreformed rebel groups. Ultimately, the disputes about the electoral process that did arise were settled in court rather than through fighting (Brancati and Snyder, 2012).

6. Choice of electoral system

The choice of electoral system is an important factor in the success or failure of post-conflict elections. It sets the rules by which candidates are elected into parliament, including the way votes are converted into seats and the structure of electoral districts. The electoral system can influence the root causes of ethno-political conflicts in two ways. First, by translating votes into seats the electoral formula determines the degree of representation of ethnic groups in parliament and thus their expected power share. Second, the electoral formula may either encourage ethnic outbidding or inter-ethnic accommodation (Wagner and Dreef 2014).

A proportional representation (PR) system aims to correlate the percentage of votes cast for groups of candidates with the percentage of legislative seats allocated. In contrast, a first-past-the-post or majoritarian voting system establishes a winner-take-all model.

Majoritarianism

By providing incentives for candidates to campaign for the votes of members of other ethnic groups, majoritarian electoral systems can encourage inter-ethnic bargaining and promote accommodating behaviour (Wagner and Dreef 2014). Papua New Guinea's pre-independence elections of 1964, 1968 and 1972 were held under the alternative vote (AV) majoritarian system. Proponents of the system point out that candidates showed more accommodating behaviour during these elections than during the subsequent elections in 2002 which were held under a single-member plurality (SMP) system (Reilly and Reynolds 1999, p. 34; cited in Wagner and Dreef 2014). However, other authors have downplayed the positive effects of AV on inter-ethnic relations in Papua New Guinea. They point out that the three AV elections took place under colonial rule and argue that the electoral campaigns were contested less fiercely because they did not offer a direct route to control government (Coakley & Fraenkel, 2012, p. 8).

There are at least two major disadvantages of using majoritarian systems in ethnically divided and conflict-prone societies. First, under this system the losing party has no role to play in the new government. Its constituents may therefore feel excluded from the political process, and the risk of post-election violence may therefore be higher (Ndulo and Lulo 2010; Kuhne 2010). Second, they strongly favor larger political parties, which can impede the representation of ethnic minorities.

Coakley and Fraenkel (2012) discuss the propriety of using AV in divided societies through the example of Fiji, where the system was introduced in 1997 with a view to moderating conflict between the indigenous Fijian and Indian populations. Fiji's first AV election was held in 1999, and was characterised by the emergence of two broad multi-ethnic coalitions. The government that came into office after the 1999 election was led by Fiji's first-ever Prime Minister of Indian descent, Mahendra Chaudhry of the Labour Party, and drew its support largely from Fiji Indian voters. Although the Labour Party obtained only 1.9% of the first preference ethnic Fijian vote, its strategic use of the new AV system enabled it to secure a 37-seat majority in the 71-member house. Exactly a year after the election, the Labour-led government was ousted in a coup by ethnic Fijian extremists. Although the new, predominantly indigenous Fijian government led at the SDL survived a full five-year term, it was characterised by confrontations with the main Fiji Indian party, Chaudhry's Labour Party, and with military commander Frank Bainimarama. In the aftermath of the 2006 elections, which returned the SDL to power, Bainimarama seized power and repealed the constitution. A new constitution in 2013 replaced AV with open-list proportional representation.

List proportional-representation

Post-conflict elections conducted under UN auspices have almost all favoured PR, usually in closed-list, large-district form. In this electoral system each political party presents a list of candidates to the electorate, who vote for the party rather than a candidate. Seats are distributed in proportion to the overall share of votes that the parties receive. List-PR thus facilitates ethnic minority representation in parliament in proportion to each community's share of the population as a whole and so creates the basis for an inclusive system of democratic governance (Wagner and Dreef 2014). The tendency of PR to produce multi-party systems and parliaments in which all significant segments of the population can be represented is seen as especially important in promoting consensual or post-conflict politics (Lijphart 1995). Major transitional elections in Namibia (1989), Nicaragua (1990), Cambodia (1993), South Africa (1994), Mozambique (1994), Liberia (1997), Bosnia (1996), Kosovo (2001), East Timor (2001), Iraq (2005), and Burundi (2005) have all been conducted under party-list PR, often with the entire country forming a single-electoral district (Reilly 2015).

However, list-PR systems also have disadvantages. First, critics argue that the system carries the risk of exacerbating ethnic tensions by encouraging political parties to adopt 'bonding' strategies, i.e. bringing together citizens who are homogeneous in certain important respects (Norris 2004, p. 10). In so doing, the system may reinforce ethnic divisions in society (Reilly, 2002, p. 156; Sisk, 2009, p. 221). There is also an argument that PR encourages voters to endorse parties that stand for the values of a particular ethnic group (Coakley and Fraenkel 2017).

Second, the success of list-PR is largely dependent on the attitude of political elites. In post-conflict societies there are no guarantees that group leaders will be willing to share power with each other. Even if elites agree to power-sharing mechanisms, they may be unable or unwilling to cooperate effectively in the coalition. If parties cannot create a stable coalition, list proportional representation thus risks party-system fragmentation and government instability (Wagner and Dreef 2014).

7. Electoral administration

Electoral administration includes such activities as determining voter eligibility, validating the nominations of parties and candidates, vote counting, etc. Elections can be administered by the government; by the government but under supervision of an independent authority; or by an

independent commission. Ensuring the integrity of elections can significantly reduce the likelihood of election-related violence.

In conflict-prone divided countries, government-based electoral administrations may face legitimacy issues and accusations of manipulation by the incumbent (Dreef and Wagner 2013). Several studies (López-Pintor 2000; Reilly 2015) find that independent, non-partisan and permanent electoral management bodies represent best practice in terms of electoral administration in post-conflict environments. Their perceived neutrality from political interference lends credibility and integrity to the electoral process. For example, in Cambodia a non-partisan electoral commission was widely seen as one of the outstanding elements of the entire UN mission. Non-partisan commissions were also a prominent and successful aspect of UN missions in Namibia and East Timor (Reilly 2015).

Sustainability of electoral technology

A number of internationally-financed and run elections have introduced a level of electoral technology that was unsustainable for the host country and could not be replicated in their second, locally-run elections. For example, the 1993 UNTAC mission in Cambodia spent tens of millions of dollars on introducing advanced electoral technology such as voter ID cards and on training Cambodians as electoral officials. Unfortunately, much of this initial investment and training was not maintained for future elections (Reilly 2015).

8. Election observation

Reilly (2004) points out that, after large-scale investment in international electoral observation for most of the 1990s, there is now a greater emphasis amongst international actors on building domestic capacity in this area. In a post-conflict election where application of the rule of law is difficult, the presence of international observers provides a conducive environment for independent, free and fair elections. International election observation has the potential not only to ensure the integrity of the overall election process but also to promote democratic development, especially by monitoring the impartiality of elections, human rights standards and the rule of law (Dahal 2010). The presence of international electoral missions lowers the potential for election-day violence because domestic actors likely refrain from intimidating opposition candidates or voters before the eyes of international observers (Daxecker 2014).

The size of international observer missions varies from the thousands (Cambodia, Bosnia-Herzegovina) to a hundred (most observer missions since the late 1990s), and the scope may vary from coverage of the period around polling day to a more prolonged endeavor. However, according to a USAID review of best practice in this area (López-Pintor 2005), smaller, longer-term observation missions are more valuable than short-term missions in assessing the quality of an electoral event. Further, it is suggested that international observers can more effectively contribute to transparency and fairness by broadening the scope of observation, both in time (before, during, and after polling day) and in the realm of observation. They should assess the legal framework, the conduct of voter registration, campaign activities and expenditures, access to media, the polling operation, counting and announcement of results, and the system of complaints adjudication (López-Pintor 2005).

A report produced by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID 2011) recommends that international observers must be consistent in their use of international standards to judge local practice.

It is better for international observers to refuse to participate at all than to be complicit in a report that tells less than the full truth about an election. In Bangladesh, the decision to withdraw international monitors before the 2007 election signalled that the international community would be unlikely to endorse the legitimacy of the victor. The announcement of the withdrawal was followed almost immediately by the declaration of a State of Emergency, and the subsequent installation of a military-backed caretaker Government (Ibid).

9. Case studies

Mozambique

In Mozambique, donors with country experience, knowledge of domestic political actors and constraints, and a shared commitment to a successful outcome were indispensable to the success of the peace process after sixteen years of civil war (Manning and Malbrough 2010). After the 1992 signing of the General Peace Accord between the government of Mozambique and the rebel group Renamo, the peace process was formally overseen by UNOMOZ (United Nations Observation Mission in Mozambique). While UNOMOZ was crucial in overseeing the ceasefire and providing the overarching formal framework within which the peace process was carried out, the success of this process largely depended upon flexible and responsive interventions on the part of bilateral donors, who filled in critical gaps left by UNOMOZ. Bilateral donors stepped in at many points during the implementation and electoral processes to offer support where UNOMOZ could not. These bilateral actors not only achieved an unaccustomed degree of coordination among themselves with respect to important goals and activities in support of the political transition; they also succeeded in limiting the government's ability to 'divide and conquer' the donor community by allowing donors to speak with one voice on the most important issues of implementation (Ibid).

Elections were the cornerstone of a successful peace process in Mozambique, and were funded almost entirely by donors. The key donor coordinating mechanism for elections was the Group for Democracy Aid (GAD), a group of major bilateral and multilateral donors. GAD facilitated the work of donors in several ways. First, it gave the donors regular opportunities to discuss linkages, sequencing, and priorities within a complex, multifaceted peace operation. It also helped prevent or dispel misinformation. The regular channels of communication between donors enabled them able to reassure a suspicious and insecure Renamo leadership and to reduce tensions between Renamo and the government (Ibid).

Second, regular meetings bolstered by reports from UNDP election experts created a shared under-standing of the importance of the elections for the peace process as a whole. Close cooperation among external actors in Maputo helped the ambassadors of donor countries to secure the necessary resources for elections. Through regular meetings the group forged a sense of institutional identity and the members of GAD gained legitimacy and leverage with respect to UNOMOZ, the government, and Renamo (Ibid).

Finally, GAD was chaired by the resident representative of the UNDP, who was given the role of providing technical assistance to Mozambique's electoral authorities, working alongside the National Elections Commission (CNE) and the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration (STAE) as advisers. This provided UNDP with a privileged channel of information about technical and financial aspects of the electoral process (Ibid).

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's elections for a new president and parliament in 2007 were the most competitive since 1967, when the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) orchestrated a military coup after losing power in parliamentary elections. In the 2007 parliamentary election, the country used a first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system with single member districts. This was a change from the 2002 election during which a proportional electoral system was used. The return to a FPTP electoral system required new boundary delimitation and affected the distribution of seats. While generally a FPTP voting method tends to result in a greater disparity between the number of votes and the number of seats than proportional electoral systems, in this case the return to FPTP increased the correspondence between votes and seats because the proportional system it replaced had been so flawed (Rosset and Pfister 2013).

External donors underwrote 70% of the costs of the elections. The United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) was instrumental in revamping the organisational structure of the commission and upgrading its administrative capacity and staff. Funded by USAID, the International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES) provided assistance in establishing NEC offices in the four regional capitals, and worked closely with the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) to develop a code of conduct for political parties, and organise district code of conduct monitoring committees in each of the country's fourteen districts. The United States-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) trained local NGOs to help with voter education and registration (Ibid).

The 2007 polls in Sierra Leone were the first post-conflict elections in Africa in which an incumbent party was defeated. The literature provides different readings of the relatively peaceful outcome of the 2007 elections in Sierra Leone, but there seems to be an agreement that high levels of perceived legitimacy of the elections played a crucial role in avoiding the conflict (Ohman 2008; Wyrod 2008). Key to this legitimacy was the fair organisation of the elections, which can be attributed to te involvement of several institutional actors. In particular, important roles were played by the NEC, the PPRC, and security forces. The NEC managed to organise the election efficiently and communicate about the election in a transparent and inclusive manner. Among the important achievements of the commission were drawing of new electoral boundaries, an efficient and relatively comprehensive voter registration, the good administration of the elections themselves and the transparent communication throughout the process (Rosset and Pfister 2013).

Another key factor was the tightly networked diplomatic and donor community in Sierra Leone. There was a Steering Committee for the UNDP basket project, composed of its donors and the Government of Sierra Leone, and a Stakeholders Meeting for all the actors concerned with the elections. The depth of this networking was apparent when the leadership of the incumbent party had to be persuaded that it had lost the 2007 elections and needed to surrender the presidency. Even the Chinese and Iranian ambassadors joined in the effort at persuasion, despite not providing electoral support (DFID 2011).

Nepal

A Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed between the government of Nepal and Maoist rebels in November 2006, and provided for elections a mere seven months later. Although the international community was keen to see the timeline respected as a guarantee that the peace process was on track, it was necessary to postpone the election to allow sufficient time to negotiate crucial aspects of the peace agreement and to put administrative arrangements in place. In the event, the election day itself was peaceful and the results were formally accepted by all parties (DFID 2010).

The election brought an end to the royal dictatorship dating from the 2005 coup, represented the culmination of the peace process with the Maoist insurgency, and re-conferred *de facto* legitimacy on the political parties. Seen within the context of the wider peace process, the election helped to transform the contestation of power from a violent conflict to a political process. A number of factors underpin this success. First, due in part to the adjustments made during the postponements of the election date, the contesting parties felt that the election arrangements were fair and legitimate. Second, with substantial help available from the international community, a competent and impartial Election Commission was able to administer a smooth election process (Ibid).

A number of challenges were encountered along the way. Irregularities, malpractices, voter intimidation, and rigging all took place in the run-up to polling day. These went unsanctioned, as the Election Commission was unwilling to punish those responsible for fear of losing key stakeholders' backing.

The UN was central to international donor involvement. The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was set up with a mandate to assist in the management of former combatants of both sides, to coordinate support for different UN agencies, to monitor the cease-fire agreements, and to support the Constituent Assembly electoral process. UNMIN set up two trust funds to which individual donor countries contributed, which funded activities including electoral monitoring and technical assistance. Countries also enhanced their involvement through independent electoral monitoring and electoral assistance programmes (Ibid).

The donor-supported programmes were largely Nepali-driven or demand-led. Support was timely, as electoral advisors were deployed by UNMIN immediately after the mission was established and money was made available to the two peace funds directly after their set-up. Broader programmes of support for human rights, the media, civic education, and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups were already designed or underway when the elections took place.

However, this examples also highlights a number of areas for improvement in donor support. First, the support for civic and voter education in Nepal was uncoordinated and inefficient in places. As a result, citizen knowledge of the Constituent Assembly's role, responsibilities, and workings was very limited. Furthermore, many voters did not sufficiently understand polling procedures. Second, donor support to the peace process and the election was not comprehensively mapped or evaluated. Third, there was a notable lack of international observers in more remote areas. Although there were 60,000 domestic observers at nearly 21,000 polling stations, many of these areas overlapped and left regions unmonitored (Ibid).

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