Electoral Observation and Conflict Prevention

Tematic Workshop on Elections, Violence and Conflict Prevention
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Domenico Tuccinardi, NEEDS Project Director
“One month of international election observation costs us far less than one day of international peacekeeping”

Chris Patten, 2000
Election Observation: Definitions

- “Electoral observation is the “purposeful gathering of information regarding an electoral process, and the making of informed judgments on the conduct of such a process on the basis of the information collected” *(International IDEA Code of Conduct 1997)*

- “Election observation is the political complement to electoral assistance” *(Ibidem)*

- “Observation involves the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of an electoral process and the presentation of recommendations. This provides an important basis for deciding on further assistance” *(EC WP on the Implementation of COM 2000/191, SEC 03/1472)*

- “Election observation and electoral assistance are two separate but complementary pillars of the EU Support to Electoral processes” *(EC Methodological Guide)*
Another definition

- Snapshot evaluation of the state of democracy in the partner country in a very specific moment

- Two tiered evaluation:

  1) Assessing how the host country meets its own obligations for democratic elections enshrined in international instruments

  2) Assessing the eventual gap between the observed practice on the ground and the host country legislation
What are the aims of election observation?

- Provide independent, neutral and professional assessment of the election process
- Enhance public confidence
- Deter fraud, irregularities and intimidation
- Contribute to conflict prevention and resolution
- Assess the extent to which international commitment are adhered to by the host country
What are the aims of election observation?

- It’s not about standards!!!
What observation does not do

- Interferes with the election process while it is ongoing
- Certifies or validates the process
- Produce immediate changes in the electoral framework
- Indicate specific solution to identified shortcomings
In highly polarised settings, it can be crucial for the results to be accepted both internally and externally.

 Provides balanced assessment without playing down the flaws of the process.

 Calls on stakeholders to channel grievances through complaint and appeal mechanisms.

 The PRESENCE of international observers in itself may deter violence or electoral fraud.
Violence Inhibitors

- Increases the electorate’s confidence in the process by adding transparency to an election;

- Places pressures on the stakeholders to behave according to the rules of the game;

- Defuses tensions between parties by encouraging parties and candidates to accept the election results (if not rigged);
In highly polarised contexts, maintaining neutrality might prove extremely difficult.

- Observers can be easily manipulated

- Impartiality is NOT neutrality

- The recognition that an electoral process is flawed runs the risk of instigating conflict rather than defusing it

- BUT, playing down flaws for the sake of stability can lead to long-term tension and conflict
“The April elections were heralded as among the fairest in Nigeria's history, but they also were among the bloodiest”

Corinne Dufka
Senior West Africa researcher
Human Rights Watch
“Time to stop this Franco-American combine and let Ivorians be ruled by their legitimately elected president”

Laurent Gbagbo
Abidjan, January 2011
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Candidate</th>
<th>No. Of valid votes cast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RAILA AMALLO IDINWA</strong></td>
<td>238 votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MWAI KIBAKI</strong></td>
<td>790 votes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mexico 2006
Presidential Elections