

Helpdesk Research Report: Impact of election assistance

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Query: Please summarise the number, type and headline findings from any impact evaluations completed in the last 10 years on election assistance (programme specific or broader). Restrict evaluations to those that have used rigorous evaluation processes, summarise impact evidence and not lessons learned, and try to identify planned evaluations as well as existing evaluations.

Enquirer: DFID

Author: Sumedh Rao (sumedh@gsdrc.org)

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1. Overview

There is a large body of evaluation literature relating to election assistance and it is difficult to accurately quantify the number of studies available. This report identifies a sample of impact evaluations undertaken in the last 10 years that apply a rigorous methodology. 'Rigour' is taken here to mean any approach that uses systematic, transparent and empirical research to investigate the impacts of an intervention. This includes a range of quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods designs.

Evaluations undertaken by, or for, bilateral and multilateral donors have primarily used rigorous qualitative or mixed methods designs. These evaluations suggest the following main impacts.

- **UK Department for International Development (DFID):** Electoral assistance through UNDP has contributed to successful elections and a reduction in conflict, though this assistance has been less successful in building sustainable capacity (ICAI 2012).

- **European Union (EU):** Perceptions in southern Africa are that the EU is particularly effective in terms of electoral assistance as they put pressure on authoritarian regimes, push for higher democratic standards, have improved a number of key organisations and institutions, and improved voter education (Chiroro 2010).
- **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):** UNDP has made significant contributions to strengthening electoral systems and, with the help of donors and partners, allowed elections to happen where they otherwise would not have been possible (UNDP 2012). The UNDP is strong at technical assistance, but has been inconsistent in promoting normative values which would have improved programme effectiveness.
- **USAID:** A quantitative analysis has shown a significant positive impact on democratic change of USAID assistance, and in particular of USAID electoral assistance (Sarles 2007). USAID programmes have had a number of positive impacts in Palestine (Reeves 2006), Croatia (Taylor 2000) and East Timor (Clark 2003).

A smaller number of evaluations of electoral interventions have applied an experimental or quasi-experimental methodology, some of them randomised-control trials. These demonstrate impacts in the following areas.

- **Informing voters about candidates:** Providing candidate information improved voter turnout, reduced vote buying and better use of candidate information (Banerjee et al. 2010). A campaign putting voters in touch with candidates with well-informed policy proposals went some way towards overcoming clientelistic preferences (Wantchekon 2009).
- **Informing voters about corruption:** Providing information about excessive corruption of incumbents put voters off voting altogether whereas information about how funds had been allocated increased the incumbent's vote share (Chong et al 2010). Releasing audits exposing corruption reduced incumbent's vote share with this effect strongest where local radio was present (Ferraz and Finan 2008).
- **Election-monitoring technology:** Election-monitoring technology reduced the theft of election materials and the votes for predictably corrupt candidates (Callen and Long 2011).
- **Social networks:** A social network anti-violence campaign reduced electoral violence with the effects strongest amongst those respondents most linked to other targeted respondents (Fafchamps and Vicente 2012).
- **Village committees:** The good governance component of the Tuungane community programme had no impact on electoral procedures or use of elections (Humphreys et al 2012).
- **International observers:** The presence of international observers improved election quality without reducing the incumbent's vote share (Hyde 2010).

- **Voting training:** Following training, women had more voting knowledge and exercised their voting rights more (Pang et al 2013).

No further planned or ongoing evaluations on the impact of election assistance were identified during the course of this query.

2. Impact evaluations

Evaluations undertaken by, or for, bilateral and multilateral donors

ICAI (2012). Evaluation of DFID's Electoral Support through UNDP, Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI)

<http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/UNDP-report-FINAL.pdf>

This evaluation assesses whether DFID funding for electoral support through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is being managed so as to be effective and deliver value for money. The evaluation notes that electoral assistance is a challenging area in which to demonstrate impact. Electoral support goes predominantly to high-risk cases and therefore frequent problems with internationally-supported elections are to be expected. It can be hard to demonstrate improvements over successive elections, as political conditions may be different from one election to the next. In many cases the main impact of international assistance will be preventative in nature, in the form of violence or political crises avoided. This is difficult to measure.

It is noted that it is too soon to assess impact of the Electoral Cycle Approach (adopted in December 2010). This evaluation assesses the impact of DFID's assistance through UNDP primarily in terms of the operation of specific elections. In general, the evaluation finds that:

- DFID's electoral assistance through UNDP has contributed to the successful conduct of elections and the reduction of conflict.
- Sustainable national capacity to manage electoral processes has, however, been slow to emerge and impact on overall political development has been limited.

The quality of the management and conduct of elections would have been significantly lower without the support of DFID and UNDP. In each case, elections were conducted successfully despite a range of practical and political challenges. It is harder to conclude that UK electoral support has led to lasting improvements in the quality of democracy.

UK support through UNDP has led to the development of some national capacity to manage elections. Electoral laws have been improved, voter registration, voting and counting systems strengthened and new technology introduced. National staff have worked alongside international experts, picking up useful knowledge and skills. In most cases, however, these are islands of achievement, rather than visible improvements in overall capacity.

In all of the case studies, the late mobilisation of assistance led to a lack of sustained effort on capacity development. There is scope for significantly greater impact in this area.

There is evidence that any improvements in the capacity and integrity of electoral management bodies are vulnerable to reversal from one election to the next. This comes as a result of changes in the political environment or interference from the executive. These risks may to some extent be mitigated through wider political engagement strategies but are ultimately beyond the control of DFID or UNDP.

Chiroro, B. (2010). 'Perceptions of the Effects of European Union Electoral Assistance on Democracy Building in Southern Africa', International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Sweden

http://www.idea.int/resources/analysis/upload/Chiroro_low_2.pdf

This paper examines the negative and positive views from southern Africa relating to the flows of electoral assistance from the European Union (EU) and policy reform or policy change in some African states.

The funding of elections by the EU is perceived positively by many commentators and academics. The EU is regarded as an important development partner that puts political pressure on authoritarian regimes. EU policy on democracy and human rights brings about high standards, and there is a feeling that it is good to be associated with the EU. Some strongly believe that support for civil society organizations has helped strengthen their role as watchdogs. Electoral assistance has enhanced the capacity of relevant democratic institutions, election monitoring bodies, civil society organisations and political parties. In Zimbabwe there is clear recognition from some sections of civil society of the positive role that EU assistance has played in voter education and in supporting local observer groups during elections.

UNDP (2012). *Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Strengthening Electoral Systems and Processes*. UNDP

<http://web.undp.org/evaluation/thematic/election.shtml>

This evaluation examines the performance quality and added value of UNDP electoral assistance between 1990 and 2011, focusing primarily on the past 10 years. In relation to electoral assistance the key overall findings are:

- UNDP has made significant contributions and played a significant role in the strengthening of electoral systems.
- UNDP assistance was instrumental to the holding of credible elections in complex post-conflict environments and sensitive political transitions. In some cases, the elections simply would not have happened without UNDP support and that of its donors and partners.
- The UNDP contribution resulted in more professional electoral management, more inclusive processes, and more credible elections than would have been the case without its assistance.
- UNDP is uniquely placed to address the real, usually long-term, challenges faced in a democratisation process, to which credible electoral processes are indispensable.

The key strengths were:

- UNDP has been effective at providing technical assistance that strengthens the work of electoral management bodies and results in the holding of credible electoral events.
- UNDP has produced results predominately at the technical level.
- UNDP support has helped improve the legal frameworks for equal participation by all stakeholder groups. This has increased voter turnout for women and marginalised groups, as well as increased the number of elected female officials.
- UNDP programming has been able to mitigate or prevent some election-related violence.
- UNDP projects that built capacity rather than replaced it showed a clear progression of national ownership. Such ownership has reduced the need for continuing technical assistance over time.

The key weaknesses were:

- The UNDP has been inconsistent with proactively promoting the normative values of a free and fair process.
- The UNDP process-focused (electoral cycle) approach has not been systematically applied in practice, as most assistance still centres on events.
- Electoral management bodies and donors have expressed concern that UNDP reports lack adequate performance data (reporting against outcomes) and financial information needed to assess the cost-effectiveness of assistance.
- UNDP has been efficient at donor coordination and mobilisation of funds.

Sarles, M. (2007). Evaluating the impact and effectiveness of USAID's democracy and governance programmes. Chapter 2 in Burnell, P. (eds) *Evaluating Democracy Support: Methods and experiences*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) http://www.idea.int/publications/evaluating_democracy_support/upload/evaluating_democracy_support_cropped.pdf

This chapter describes the efforts of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to examine the impact and effectiveness of its democracy and governance (DG) programmes. The evaluation used rigorous comparative methods, including country case studies, large-scale quantitative studies, systematised expert interviews, democracy surveys and specialised comparisons of areas such as the rule of law.

Analysis using quantitative methodology has shown a significant positive relationship between USAID DG assistance and some processes of democratic change, with the highest impact being found in civil society and electoral assistance, and in countries where initial levels of democracy were lowest. Time-series data from democracy surveys yield solid information on changes in democracy that are attributable to USAID programming.

Reeves, P. (2006). *Impact Assessment: Election Assistance to Palestinian Civil Society Organisations*. Report prepared for United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADI631.pdf

This study evaluates the impact of the 'Tamkeen' election-related programmes on the education of Palestinian voters and the impact on the conduct of free and fair elections. The key findings were the following.

- **Atmosphere:** Tamkeen programming improved the atmosphere in which the elections took place. The 90 per cent voter turnout and 2.86 per cent spoiled-ballots rate indicate the presence of informed voters who understood the voting process and were comfortable and confident about going to the polls to express their political choice. Tamkeen programmes were concluded to have contributed to this success.
- **Voter education:** The project conducted 2,834 voter education sessions that reached approximately 100,000 people. Though this represents a small percentage of the 1.3 million-person electorate, these efforts were concluded to have been effective and complemented other activities conducted by the electoral authorities, government, political parties and other civil society organisations.
- **Inclusiveness:** Tamkeen's programmes were seen to have successfully targeted women and marginalised or otherwise disadvantaged voters. This includes deaf and hearing-impaired voters, physically handicapped voters, illiterate voters and the youth. The project directly reached 28,016 women and 24,818 youths through voter education.
- **Election-day domestic observation:** Tamkeen programmes were responsible for the fielding of 2,842 domestic observers during four rounds of local elections.
- **Palestinian Code of Conduct for Political Parties:** The code produced by the Arab Thought Forum (ATF) with Tamkeen funding was an important demonstration of the political will of all parties to ensure transparency and good conduct in the electoral process. The ATF brought all of the parties, including Fatah and Hamas, to public agreement on the conduct of the process in a way that many observers had thought impossible.
- **Candidate fora:** These were sponsored by Tamkeen grantees to highlight candidate platforms and qualifications and to discourage voters to base leadership decisions on family ties or patronage.
- **A 'seal of approval':** Tamkeen effectively provided an international 'seal of approval' with the international donor community and other entities regarding Tamkeen-funded groups as competent organisations with integrity.

Taylor, M. (2000). Final Evaluation of OTI's Programs in Bosnia and Croatia. An Evaluation Prepared for the Office of Transition Initiatives. Bureau for Humanitarian Response. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnack165.pdf

This report evaluates the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) programmes in Bosnia and Croatia between 1996 and 2000. The study finds a positive impact from disseminating balanced information about elections in Croatia. OTI committed extensive human and financial resources to the parliamentary election campaign. One of OTI's strategic objectives was to support organizations, both NGOs and media outlets, in communicating information in the pre-election campaign. When asked about the availability of information concerning the elections, almost half of the respondents agreed that they had enough information during the

elections to make their decisions. This number shows that significant progress was made in opening up information about elections.

International partners, NGOs and media in Croatia have commented that without support from organisations such as OTI, many voters in Croatia would not have had enough objective information to participate in the elections. At the most basic level, these data suggest that the impact of OTI is that it has supported media that allow the public to recognise and appreciate the difference between state-controlled media and independent news and information.

Clark, J. (2003). *Final Evaluation: The OTI Program in East Timor*. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

http://transition.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/transition_initiatives/country/timor/etimor_eval.pdf

This report evaluates the contribution of the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) towards democratic development objectives pursued in East Timor. The report concludes that there is convincing evidence that the OTI leadership in East Timor successfully expanded the public's access to information. The report concludes that OTI correctly placed emphasis and priority attention on the objective of expanding the public's access to information and then implemented programmes that furthered the related objective of increasing citizen participation in nation building and in their governance. The OTI facilitated important community dialogues that contributed to the public's participation in the drafting of the constitution, the finalisation of the national development plan, and the successful conduct of two elections.

Experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations

Banerjee, A., Kumar, S., Pande, R. and Su, F. (2010). *Do Informed Voters Make Better Choices? Experimental Evidence from Urban India*.

<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/rpande/papers/Do%20Informed%20Voters%20Make%20Better%20Choices.pdf>

The study examines whether providing information about politicians' performance and qualifications influences citizens' electoral behaviour. It used a randomised control trial in the run up to the 2008 elections in Delhi. Slum dwellers were given report cards providing information on candidate qualifications and legislator performance (obtained under India's disclosure laws). The authors found that access to report cards increased voter turnout. This effect was larger when incumbent performance was worse. The authors also noted reductions in the incidence of cash-based vote buying and electoral gains for better performing incumbents and observed significant improvements in voters' use of information to make comparisons between candidates.

Callen, M. and Long, J. (2011). *Institutional Corruption and Election Fraud: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan*.

http://www.yale.edu/leitner/resources/papers/em_eday_final.pdf

This study evaluates the effect of election-monitoring technology designed to combat election fraud (collusion between candidates and election officials). The study found that technology

reduced theft of election materials by about 60 per cent and vote counts for predictably corrupt candidates by about 25 per cent.

Chong, A, De La O, A., Karlan, D. and Wantchekron, L. (2010) *Information Dissemination and Local Governments' Electoral Returns, Evidence from a Field Experiment in Mexico.*

<http://www.povertyactionlab.org/publication/information-dissemination-and-local-governments%E2%80%99-electoral-returns-evidence-field-experi>

This study evaluates the impact of information on voter turnout and the incumbent party's vote share in the 2009 municipal elections in Mexico, through a randomised trial. Precincts that received information about corruption were not more likely than control areas to vote. However, when controlling for the level of corruption, the authors found that the information campaign led to a statistically significant decrease in turnout (by six percentage points). Information about the average percentage of total municipal funds spent had no statistically significant impact on voter turnout, even when controlling for the level of spending. Similarly, information about the resources allocated to the poor led to an insignificant two percentage-point increase in turnout.

Information about corruption had no statistically significant effect on incumbent's vote share overall except where corruption levels were very high. Corruption information led to a 17-percentage-point decrease in incumbent's vote share where corruption was at the highest level. Information about total municipal expenditures led to a 12 percentage point rise in incumbent's vote share in precincts that spent all the allocated funds, but this effect was not statistically significant.

The authors conclude that the results demonstrate that voters respond to information about excessive corruption by staying away from the voting booth. This drop in participation translates into losses for the incumbent party. Conversely, information about overall expenditure increases turnout and incumbent parties' vote share.

Fafchamps, M. and Vicente, P. (2012). *Political Violence and Social Networks: Experimental Evidence from a Nigerian Election.*

<http://www.pedrovicente.org/violnet.pdf>

This study examines the impact of social networks in transmitting the message of an anti-electoral-violence campaign in Nigeria before the 2007 national elections, using a randomised control trial. The results suggest that social networks played an important role in transmitting the messages against electoral violence. The campaign was associated with significant reductions in perceptions of political violence and increased voter turnout among targeted respondents. The campaign's effects were significantly stronger among targeted respondents with closer social and geographic links to other targeted respondents.

Ferraz, C. and Finan, F. (2008). Exposing Corrupt Politicians: The Effects of Brazil's Publicly Released Audits on Electoral Outcomes. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123 (2): 703-745.

<http://qje.oxfordjournals.org/content/123/2/703.short>

This paper studied the effect of a 2003 anticorruption programme, where Brazil's federal government began to select municipalities at random to audit their expenditures of federally transferred funds. The findings of these audits were then made publicly available and disseminated to media sources. The authors compare the electoral outcomes of municipalities audited before, versus those audited after the 2004 elections, with the same levels of reported corruption. The study finds that the release of the audit outcomes had a significant impact on incumbents' electoral performance, and that these effects were more pronounced in municipalities where local radio was present to divulge the information. The authors conclude that their study highlights the value of having a more informed electorate and the role played by local media in enhancing political selection.

Humphreys, M., de la Sierra, R., van der Windt, P. (2012). Social and Economic Impacts of Tuungane. Final Report on the Effects of a Community Driven Reconstruction Program in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Columbia University

<http://cu-csds.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/20120622-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

Tuungane is a community-driven reconstruction programme that provides development aid in a manner designed to improve government accountability and promote development simultaneously. The Tuungane programme organised the election of village committees in all of these villages, as well as training in leadership, good governance and social inclusion. The elected committees then worked with populations to select development projects and oversee the implementation of these projects.

On most measures the authors failed to find evidence that positive experiences with the Tuungane intervention led to longer-term behavioural changes. In general, for many local governance measures the outcomes were relatively strong in both treatment areas and a control group. For example, close to half of all committees were selected through electoral procedures; yet the likelihood of using elections was nearly as great (and statistically no different) in non-Tuungane as in Tuungane areas. Levels of transparency were also similar in both groups.

Hyde, S. (2010). Experimenting in Democracy Promotion: International Observers and the 2004 Presidential Elections in Indonesia. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8, pp 511-527.

<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=7804320>

This study evaluates a randomised field experiment examining the impact of international election monitoring in the 2004 presidential elections in Indonesia. The study finds that following the random assignment of international election observers, even though the election was widely regarded as democratic, the presence of observers had a measurable effect on votes cast for the incumbent candidate. Contrary to expectation, the field experiment showed that the incumbent candidate performed better in villages and neighbourhoods assigned to be monitored by election observers. The authors conclude that such democracy assistance can influence election quality even in the absence of blatant election-day fraud.

Pang, X., Zeng, J., and Rozelle, S. (2013) *Does women's knowledge of voting rights affect their voting behavior in village elections? Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial in China.*

http://reap.stanford.edu/publications/does_womens_knowledge_of_voting_rights_affect_their_voting_behavior_in_village_elections_evidence_from_a_randomized_controlled_trial_in_china/

This study looked to test whether women and village leaders' knowledge about women's voting rights affects women's voting behaviour through a randomised controlled trial involving 700 women in China's Fujian and Liaoning provinces. The data show that after women received training, their scores on a test of voting knowledge increased and they more fully exercised their voting rights. When only village leaders were trained, test scores and voting behaviours were not statistically different from the control villages.

Wantchekon, L. (2009). *Can Informed Public Deliberation Overcome Clientelism? Experimental Evidence from Benin.*

<http://as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/2807/expertinformationjuly.pdf>

This paper aims to test the premise that even though clientelism is electorally effective (in spite of disregarding public interest), it can be replaced by a public-goods agenda. This was tested through a campaign strategy based exclusively on town hall meetings during which policy proposals made by candidates are specific and informed by empirical research. This study employed a randomised experimental design during the 2006 presidential elections in Benin.

The authors conclude that the campaign had a positive effect on voters' knowledge about policies and candidates. There was a positive effect of the campaign on turnout and electoral support for the candidates participating in the experiment. The authors determine that new democracies may contain electoral clientelism by institutionalising the use of both town hall meetings in electoral campaigns and policy expertise in the design of electoral platforms.

3. Unavailable evaluations

During the course of this query a number of references were identified but it was not possible to obtain copies of these studies. This may be as these references were not published.

- *Carothers, Thomas (2008) Current questions about the roles of elections and international elections assistance in developing and transitional countries, Paper for DFID, August 2008.*
- *Duncan, A, Loughhead, S and Eckstein, J (2009) Good election, bad politics: a case study of elections and the role of the international community in Bangladesh.*
- *Duncan, C. (2009). The technical and financial support of donors.*
- *Egwu, S, Leonard, DK, Matlosa, K, Smith, M (2008) Nigerian Elections since 1999 and the Future of Donor Support.*
- *Owen, P, Slavu, C and Hachhethu, K (2008) Nepal: A Case Study on Elections and the Role of the International Community.*

- Sharma, B. and Wilson, R. (2008) 'Review of UK Electoral Assistance in the context of lessons learning from best practice in international experience', report prepared for DFID (unpublished).
- Waseem, M., Yazdani, F. and Loughhead, S (2008) *Elections in Pakistan: The Role of The UK and the International Community 2000-2008*.

4. Additional information

Selected websites visited

African Impact Evaluation Initiative, Asian Development Bank: Operations Evaluation Department, DAC Evaluation Resource Centre (DEReC), Inter-American Development Bank: Office of Evaluation and Oversight, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Inter Parliamentary Union, JICA, UNDP: Evaluation Office (EO), 3ie, UNDP Evaluation Resource Centre, USAID, World Bank Independent Evaluation Group (IEG)

Contributors

Ben Reilly (Australian National University)

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About Helpdesk research reports: Helpdesk reports are based on 3 days of desk-based research. They are designed to provide a brief overview of the key issues; and a summary of some of the best literature available. Experts are contacted during the course of the research, and those able to provide input within the short time-frame are acknowledged.