

MAPPING OF INTERNATIONAL ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE

A Study for the Swiss Development Co-operation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Electoral support is one of the most developed sectors, if not the lead sector, in the broader area of democracy support. Election support encompasses electoral assistance and electoral observation; the two have developed in tandem, but this study only covers electoral assistance.

Undertaken for more than 20 years by major donor organisations, electoral assistance is noteworthy for a number of developments:

- **Large scale:** The major donors invest significant funds in electoral support; for example the EU has spent on average around EUR 100mill. per year;
- **Professionalisation,** as witnessed in developed methodology, a myriad of manuals, policy documents, strategy papers, event and training resources;
- **Long-term approach:** Almost all funders and implementing organisations now refer to the need for a long-term approach based on the electoral cycle instead of a short-term approach focussed on election day; for example half of UNDP's election assistance projects this year take place in countries that have no elections in 2014;
- **Significant international co-ordination,** which is most evident in a close and systematic co-operation between UNDP and the EU, but also through other fora.

The three main players in electoral assistance are the EU, the UN and the US. Available data refer mainly to the first decade of the 2000s which included costly transitional elections (DR Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq). It is possible that the numbers are somewhat smaller now. In that decade, the EU invested on average EUR 100 million in election assistance every year. 70% of this was given to UNDP, mostly through country-specific basket funds. The EU and UNDP co-operate closely through a task force, which also develops methodology and holds events.

The US works pre-dominantly through US-based implementing organisations such as International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). In the field of other bi-lateral donors DFID has the most developed profile in electoral assistance and like the EU invested most of its funding, which averaged EUR 25 million per year, in UNDP.

All three major players have complex decision-making processes. While this is known for the UN and the EU, the process in the US has also become cumbersome after much public and congressional criticism of expenditure in Iraq and Afghanistan. The response time of the big three is generally considered to be lengthy.

In terms of target groups for electoral support, election management bodies (EMBs) continue to be most prominent. UNDP in particular is focused on these, but pushed by its donors to open up more to other stakeholders like civil society or the media. The US and the EU support other electoral stakeholders through different budget lines and institutional arrangements as well, including citizen/voters, parties, media, civil society and relevant state institutions.

As a central player in implementing electoral assistance financed by many countries, UNDP's performance is much discussed and its election assistance was evaluated by

DFID and UNDP in the last years. There is general recognition that UNDP has significant experience and expertise in the field, but there are many concerns as well, partly expressed by UNDP evaluations themselves, that its operations are in many cases not cost-effective, that in critical elections UNDP lacks political distance from governments and that despite significant investments in methodology and training, still a lot depends on the quality and attitude of the chief technical advisors on the ground and the UNDP resident representatives. Neither the EU nor DFID question UNDP's essential role, but they seek more changes in UNDP's approach and also want to diversify implementing partners.

Other donors have less explicit policies on electoral support and mostly no dedicated HQ personnel. They often contribute to UNDP basket funds, or invest funds in areas other than electoral management, such as support to civil society in elections. A number of international organisations play important roles in elections (OSCE, OAS, AU, ECOWAS, Commonwealth), but mostly they observe elections, with assistance being a corollary. International IDEA has a high profile on themes like electoral standards, conflict and elections and women representation.

In the last ten years conflict and election has become a major theme as highlighted by numerous studies, projects and more refined methodologies for assessment. There is also a clear trend of increasing importance of IT technology across the electoral cycle. Recently big IT corporations have entered the 'election business' (Google, Microsoft, Samsung).

It appears that the most complex question in election support is the political context. Significant investments are made in elections managed by governments (and sometimes opposition parties as well) that lack political will to carry out genuinely democratic elections – the end result in many cases may be funds wasted on elections that were never likely to be genuine. All organisations acknowledge the importance of the political context and most indicate that some minimum conditions must be met to consider electoral assistance. Yet, there is no widely agreed methodology to analyse, monitor and report on such political risks and it is very rare that needs assessment mission conclude that no support should be provided due to the political context.

There is often a tension between the concept of national ownership and concerns about corruption and political will to have impartial, competitive elections. National ownership is often reduced to government ownership, which is particularly critical when government and ruling party are conflated. Ownership should have a wider definition, including other stakeholders, such as opposition.

While the consolidation of the sector is positive, there is a general risk of herd mentality towards elections, which can skew the proper analysis of challenges to democratisation: If your main tool is election support, every democracy problem may look like an election problem. Some, like USAID and the OECD are promoting an approach to democracy support that is rooted in higher level outcomes, such as inclusion and accountability. This implies that the forms of achieving these outcomes are flexible and adaptable to local context.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study is based on a document review, a mission to Brussels on 14-15 July to meet representatives of the EC/UNDP Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance, of EuropeAid and of the European External Action Service. Telephone interviews were held with the democracy advisor of USAID in Washington, the governance advisor/election focal point of DFID in London and an election specialist in UNDP's Democratic Governance Group, New York.

The study was written in July and August by Michael Meyer-Resende and Tim Bittiger from DRI and Alexander Knipperts, consultant.

2. THE PLAYERS

The “big three” in electoral assistance are the European Union, the United Nations and the United States. Together they cover the largest area in terms of geographical space, thematic scope and financial clout.

Their reach is global, the areas of involvement cover the entire electoral cycle and beyond, including peacekeeping and security. All three have the possibility to bring to bear their diplomatic clout.

To varying degrees, the big three share the burden of coordination and competition and all three have complicated internal decision-making mechanisms often hampering quick reactions and nimble interventions. While this is perhaps common knowledge for the UN and the EU, it has also become a feature of US electoral assistance. The financial and reputational costs of the Afghanistan and Iraq interventions have resulted in much strengthened Congressional oversight and a focus on cost control and efficiency.

Smaller players include:

Governments – Only some of them have articulated electoral support strategies (for example the UK). In some cases, national election commissions are lead actors of international electoral assistance by a government (Mexico, Australia, Canada). Generally national governments tend to be more limited in terms of geographical scope, type of intervention and in terms of the thematic area that is covered.

Intergovernmental organisations – Some of them have developed significant thematic expertise, such as the OSCE/ODIHR, the OAS, ECOWAS, SADEC or International IDEA. For most of these regional organisations electoral observation is their “core business” with assistance being a corollary.

Non-Governmental Organisations – IFES is the lead non-governmental organisation providing electoral support. Others include Electoral Reform International Services, Creative Associates as well as major business consultancies. The major IT firms are also moving into electoral issues.

As far as *co-ordination* is concerned, it takes places at two levels. In beneficiary countries with significant electoral assistance there tends to be regular co-ordination in specific fora (for example Election Support Group in Pakistan) or in more general fora dedicated to democracy support or good governance. Usually the big three play a major role here as well as lead implementers, such as IFES.

At the international level, an annual forum, which is nominally dedicated to election observation, is de-facto also used for big picture co-ordination of electoral assistance in particular by the major players.¹ In addition every 3-4 years a “Global Election Organizations” (‘GEO’) conference is held by major players to exchange knowledge, network and co-ordinate. In terms of methodology the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has been a forum for donors to exchange, resulting in draft guidelines for electoral support.

According to telephone interviews and meetings there appears to be little on-going co-ordination between USAID and the others at HQ levels and little co-ordination between the EU and DFID. The co-ordination between the EU and UNDP is very close, due to the Joint Task Force.

a.) United Nations

For the United Nations the most relevant actors in election assistance are the [Electoral Assistance Division](#) (EAD) in DPA and [UNDP](#) with DPA-EAD having the overall lead in assuring due process of engagement and coherence in implementation. The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and head of DPA serves as the UN Focal Point for electoral assistance, and is supported in that function by the EAD.

All requests for UN electoral assistance must be forwarded to the Under-Secretary-General, whose role is mainly two-fold: advising the Secretary-General on requests from Member States; and ensuring consistency in the delivery of UN electoral assistance. In addition to its broad coordination role in electoral assistance, DPA oversees field-based political missions that in many cases engage in electoral assistance activities as part of their conflict prevention or peace-building mandates.² UNDP is the main implementing organisation of the UN’s electoral assistance.

The relation between EAD and UNDP is structured by the 2010 Note of Guidance. Given the weight of UNDP and its technical experience in electoral support, the relationship between UNDP and EAD is not always easy. EAD is considered to be geared more towards short-term measures and responding to political situations, UNDP with its country offices tends to be more oriented towards long-term support.³

Electoral support by the UN requires a request by a member state or a resolution by the Security Council or General Assembly. Requests by member states are assessed by EAD,

¹ The “declaration of principles” meetings gather international election observation groups, which endorsed the UN-sponsored “Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation” of 2005. The last meeting was hosted by OSCE/ODIHR in 2013, see: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/104323>

² For a graphic overview of the UN’s process, see Evaluation of DFID’s Electoral Support through UNDP, p. 22

³ Evaluation of DFID’s Electoral Support through UNDP, page 7

usually on the basis of an assessment mission, sometimes on the basis of a desk review. UNDP as the leading implementer, as well as other UN agencies, is associated to needs assessments. Electoral support mandated by the Security Council or the General Assembly is usually led by respective peace-keeping missions (for example UNMIL in Liberia) or political UN missions (such as UNSMIL in Libya). In non-mission settings, electoral assistance is typically delivered by UNDP. Other UN actors channel election support through UNDP programmes, for example UN women, UN Volunteers (UNV), UN Population Fund (FPA) and UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

UNDP country offices are supported by the UNDP's Bureau for Development Policy in New York, which has an election department. UNDP manages on average 60 election support projects each year. From 1999 to 2011 its election budget was 2,9 billion USD, an average of 290 million USD per year, representing a range from 2-10% of total annual UNDP support.⁴ UNDP is the leading electoral assistance provider. There have been two major evaluations of and lessons learned by UNDP: '[Evaluation of UNDP contribution to Strengthening Electoral Systems and Processes](#)', 2012, by UNDP's Evaluation Office and '[Evaluation of DFID's Electoral Support through UNDP](#)', 2012, by the Independent Commission on Aid Impact. These evaluations are regularly referenced in this study.

The UN applies the election cycle approach, which it has fine-tuned in close cooperation with the EU, although evaluations found that UNDP's support often starts too close to election day, if only because the process of receiving an assistance request, assessment and programming support is slow and prone to delays.⁵

The lead role of UNDP in delivering election support is not questioned, but there is a lot of criticism – including UNDP self-criticism - about various aspects of UNDP's technical assistance, including: lack of cost control and choice of expensive technical solutions which are not adequate in certain contexts⁶, too little learning from past mistakes, an excessive focus on electoral bodies (EMBs) to the detriment of engaging more stakeholders⁷, cumbersome procedures leading to slow delivery⁸ and weaknesses in politically sensitive areas (such as dispute resolution, engagement of domestic observers, relationship with the opposition) in view of the UN's political constraints.⁹

The UN also operates [United Nations Democracy Fund](#) to provide direct funding for democracy projects world-wide, mainly carried out by NGOs.

⁴ Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Strengthening Electoral Systems and Processes by UNDP's evaluation office, page xi.

⁵ Evaluation of DFID's Electoral Support through UNDP, page 1 (summary) and page 7, Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Strengthening Electoral Systems and Processes, page xiv.

⁶ Evaluation of DFID's Electoral Support through UNDP, page 1 (summary), Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Strengthening Electoral Systems and Processes, page xiii.

⁷ Interview with EU officials.

⁸ Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Strengthening Electoral Systems and Processes, page xiv.

⁹ Evaluation of DFID's Electoral Support through UNDP, pages 8, 10. UNDP itself noted concerns regarding some country offices being too close to the government: Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Strengthening Electoral Systems and Processes, page xii.

b.) European Union

The European Union is a lead player with a long history of involvement in election assistance. Having started with ad-hoc election support to transitional elections in Russia (1993), South Africa (1994) and Mozambique (1994), the EU quickly developed a global profile in supporting elections. Its engagement in assistance is flanked by the deployment of selected EU Election Observation Missions to countries outside the OSCE area.

In terms of division of roles among the European institutions for programming electoral assistance, the [European External Action Service](#) has the lead role in election observation, [Europe Aid](#) covers the broader aspects of electoral assistance and integration with other thematic areas such as sustainable development, good governance and gender. EU Delegations negotiate electoral assistance with host governments and manage most of the EU projects in a decentralised approach.

Electoral assistance is usually anchored in multi-annual Country Strategy Papers, which are agreed with the host government. Strategy papers are translated into National Indicative Programmes, which include financial allocations, specific objectives and conditionality of election support (or support in other areas).

In the wider context of democracy building, the EU created the [European Endowment for Democracy](#), which is supposed to have a wider, more flexible mandate to intervene in the early stages and the politics of democratisation, giving grants directly to democracy groups in the European Neighbourhood.

The EU has developed a range of [legal and financial instruments](#) to support elections, going substantially beyond its initial „core” of EU election observation activities in the late 1990s. There is a variety of [EU financial instruments](#), depending on the nature of the intervention. The [EU Communication on EU Election Assistance and Observation](#) of 2000 sets out the main procedures, approaches and standards for EU electoral assistance.¹⁰ Electoral assistance policies and methods are described in detail in the [Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance](#) guide from 2006.

The Communication makes it clear that election assistance does not only consist of support to EMBs but also to NGOs and civic organisations engaged in civic and voter education, as well as flanking measures aimed at strengthening free media. It also highlights the need for electoral processes to include mechanisms of self-regulation, such as checks of all stages of the process by political parties, media and domestic election observers.

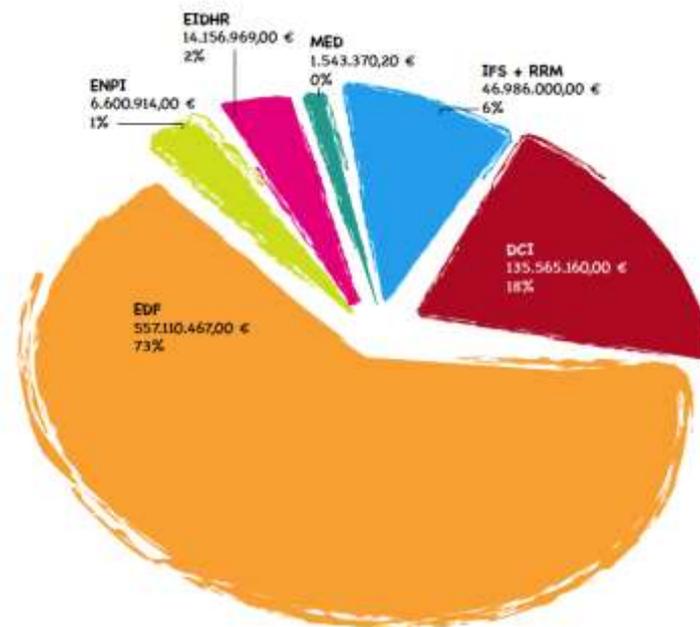
The Communication laid out the main parameters of electoral support, in particular:

- The need for a request by the host government
- The general agreement of the main political parties and other stakeholders to EU assistance

¹⁰ EC Communication on Election Assistance and Observation, COM (00)191, April 2000. The Communication was subsequently endorsed by the Council and the European Parliament. An EC staff working paper of 2003 (SEC (03)1472), reporting on the implementation of the communication, provided more details on policy.

- Previous political monitoring or EU support in the country
- Free movement and access to information for the technical assistance team
- EU support should be complementary to national efforts and funding (exception possible in post-conflict/failed state situations)
- In volatile situations, assessment of impact on conflict
- Politically advisable (see below)

The EU spends almost EUR 100 million, indicating the dominance of election assistance if one considers that the EU's entire Human Rights and Democracy instrument includes approximately 160 million per year for a wide range of themes, including elections.¹¹ The EU uses different budget allocations: the largest part is financed from specific geographic allocations (regional instruments), but the rapid reaction mechanisms (and the human rights instrument) are also contributing. The bulk of the support has been for the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions (see EDF allocation in the graph).



EU Election Support 2003-2010.¹²

EDF – European Development Fund for ACP countries

DCI – Development Co-operation Instrument for Asia and Latin America

ENPI – European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument

EIDHR – European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights

IFS/RRM – Instrument for Stability/Rapid Reaction Mechanism

Around 70% of the EU's electoral assistance is provided to UNDP.¹³ The EU and UNDP have a close partnership in electoral assistance, which was formalised in 2006 through agreed "Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Electoral Assistance Projects and Programmes". The European Commission cooperates closely with the UN through

¹¹ The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights included EUR 1.104 million from 2007 – 2013.

¹² Source: Working Together in Electoral Assistance, UNDP/EU, page 39. The EU has no recent statistics, but EC staff indicated that the numbers and proportions have not significantly changed since 2010, except higher allocation in the European neighbourhood after the Arab rebellions. DRI interview with Olivier Louis, Brussels, 17 July 2014.

¹³ Percentage indicated by EC staff and UNDP staff alike, DRI interviews in Brussels, 17 July 2014.

the [EC-UNDP Partnership on Electoral-Assistance](#), centred on a joint task-force based in Brussels. This cooperation has been instrumental for developing the Election Cycle Approach and setting global standards for a comprehensive approach to electoral-assistance. While the EU's and the UN's bureaucratic processes involved in providing electoral assistance appear to be heavy, their co-operation is "fluid", according to interlocutors from both organisations.¹⁴

Recent EU electoral assistance that has not been channelled through UNDP include projects Tunisia (implemented by Electoral Reform International Services, ERIS), Yemen (ERIS/DRI) and Fiji (DRI).

c.) United States

The US provides electoral-assistance mainly through her development agency USAID and the institutions covered by the long term '[Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening](#)' (CEPPS) Agreement, namely the [National Democratic Institute for International Affairs \(NDI\)](#), the [International Republican Institute \(IRI\)](#) and the [International Foundation on Electoral Systems \(IFES\)](#). Over the 7 years period of CEPPS USD 600 million are invested on electoral support, but other aspects of democracy support as well, such as political party or legislative strengthening.

USAID has less policies and working documents on electoral support than the UN or the EU. Its 2000 manual on election support is not often referenced anymore.¹⁵ Its approach is mainly based on its 2013 overall strategy for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance. The strategy stressed the need to overcome too sectorial an approach and is instead built around two higher-level outcomes: 'Participation and inclusion' and 'accountable institutions and leaders'. This new structure means that sectorial policies are less emphasised and also that there is less statistical information on specific sub-sectors.¹⁶

Another actor is the [National Endowment for Democracy \(NED\)](#). While not strictly a government institution, NED is funded by Congress. It serves as the umbrella organisation in which half of NED's funding is allocated annually to four main US organisations: the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS), the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), and the International Republican Institute (IRI). The other half goes directly to non-profit organisations based abroad who apply for funding. NED does not engage in technical assistance to state bodies, but rather supports civil society organisations.

In addition, the State Department operates a quick-reaction Human Rights and Democracy Fund through its [Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor](#). Projects are typically smaller and shorter than those supported by USAID. The State Department has also engaged on electoral issues through its regional MENA fund.

¹⁴ Interviews in Brussels on 17 July 2014.

¹⁵ Telephone interview with Jeff Vanness, USAID, 21 August.

¹⁶ Ibid.

d.) Bi-lateral Government Support

United Kingdom

The Department for International Development (DFID) is the UK's main player in electoral assistance. Between 2001 and 2011 it spent some 250 million Euros on electoral assistance, approximately 25 million each year.¹⁷ The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) also plays a role either through smaller more politically-oriented projects or through programmes managed jointly with DFID, such as the Arab Partnership Programme or the Conflict Pool.

Of the bi-lateral assistance providers, DFID has the most developed policy of election support as documented in established policies and publications, as well as an election focal point within DFID. The majority of DFID's support – some 60% - goes to countries emerging from or at risk of conflict. They are part of (currently 28) countries identified as priorities for development. Since 2011 DFID supported elections in: Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, Nigeria, Zambia, Yemen, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Nepal, Malawi, Afghanistan, DRC and Bangladesh.¹⁸ In 2014/2015 DFID plans to support elections in 13 countries.

DFID spent some 70% of its electoral funds between 2001 and 2011 through UNDP, but the 2012 evaluation of that support recommended identifying additional or alternative delivery partners to complement the UNDP channel and to have more independent third-party monitoring of electoral processes and assistance. DFID's main policy document is a '[How to Note](#)' on electoral assistance from 2010, which is currently being updated.

Germany

Most interlocutors assume that Germany is a significant funder of electoral assistance, but there is no focal point on election support in Germany's government.

According to the German *Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung* (BMZ)¹⁹ its internal statistic showed only limited support for elections (EURO 14 million over ten years for countries like DRC, Somalia and countries in Eastern Europe), but in reality electoral support will be more significant: On the one hand geographical desks may support UNDP basket funding without this being registered by a focal point in the ministry and on the other hand election assistance may be one aspect of wider projects, for example in the area of civil society support. Generally the BMZ considers the German party foundations to be the lead agencies for democracy support activities. In the ministry's HQ elections are not an issue of specific attention. The most relevant recent policy document by the BMZ is a 2010 Strategy Paper *[Die Förderung konstruktiver Staats-Gesellschaftsbeziehungen – Legitimität, Transparenz, Rechenschaft](#)*. The low significance of elections in BMZ's conceptual approach is illustrated by the fact that elections are not mentioned at all in the Strategy Paper. BMZ contributes EURO 400,000 per year to international IDEA. The German Foreign Office established Zentrum für International Friedenseinsätze (ZIF), which trains and selects German election observers.

¹⁷ Evaluation of DFID's Electoral Support through UNDP, page 1.

¹⁸ Information by Aislin Baker, DFID, telephone interview on 21 August.

¹⁹ Ms. Astrid Kaiser, Governance Unit.

Japan

Japan provides funding for electoral assistance through the “[Human Security Fund](#)” run by the government’s [Official Development Assistance \(ODA\)](#), and under its broader Emergency Assistance funding framework. Interventions are mainly directed at Asia and the Middle East. Japanese development priorities are outlined in the ODA Charter and Medium Term Policy, and broadly define the importance of expediting the “self-help” of partner states, the importance of local infrastructure, economic growth and human security.

Japanese election support builds on peacekeeping processes, whereby electoral assistance is meant to consolidate stability, following initial steps for conflict prevention and poverty reduction. ODA’s electoral assistance is both regional and national in scope, and focuses on electoral commissions and election observation, which are often run in [collaboration with UNDP and OSCE](#). More generally, Japan tends to provide democratisation aid directly to institutions instead of CSOs.

ODA funding mechanism were reformed in 2010 from an ad-hoc request approach from partners, to a [general programme](#) approach based on discussions with possible partners (2010 ODA white paper).

The Netherlands

Electoral assistance is a rule of law concern to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs within its wider [development policy](#). The Netherlands aim to help ensure international security and foreign policy objectives through the promotion of human rights and democratic elections abroad.

The focus areas and countries development assistance are based on three criteria: “Aid Relationships” (Afghanistan, Burundi, Mali, the Palestinian Territories, Rwanda, South Sudan and Yemen), “Transitional Relationships” (Bangladesh, Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique and Uganda) and “Trade Relationships”. Development policy has an overarching focus on Africa.

[Grant programmes for CSOs related to electoral support](#) include the Human Rights Fund and the Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) Fund. Capacity building related to election assistance processed through programmes such as [United Nations Department of Political Affairs \(UNDPA\) and United Nations Development Programmes \(UNDP\)](#). Dutch electoral assistance incorporates election and democratic frameworks based on standards and methodology used by IDEA.

Norway

Norway provides [funding for electoral assistance](#) through institutions such as the UNDP. In addition, NORDEM offers [electoral assistance](#) in the form of capacity building and election training.

Development funds are mainly administered by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), while the [Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights \(NORDEM\)](#) receives additional financing from the Department of Foreign Affairs. Norway’s country focus is broadly based internationally, but with specific emphasis on Africa and post-conflict countries (status of 2010).

Sweden

Election programmes received in 2012 some 4% of the funding earmarked for Democracy and Human Rights in the Swedish development portfolio, amounting to some 22 million Euros.²⁰

Election assistance is managed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and covers election monitoring, observation, voter participation and helping to establish election commissions. Sweden also provides assistance in media training and capacity building, to strengthen independent media coverage of elections and promote coverage in rural areas.

SIDA has from 2009 reduced its broad country focus as well as activities in Latin America to the benefit of Eastern Europe, and of Sub-Sahara Africa for long-term cooperation in development in aid and democracy promotion.

Implementation of policies related to SIDA's human rights and democratic assistance is to be in accordance with European Commission thematic and geographical priorities.

e.) International/Regional Governmental Organisations

International IDEA has a long-standing focus on electoral issues and has contributed to the debate on effective electoral assistance as well as providing knowledge resources and working with electoral management bodies and other stakeholders on effective electoral management.

The **OSCE** is the leading election observation organisation in its region, but only provides occasional electoral assistance, either through ODIHR (on reforms of the electoral or administrative framework) or OSCE field missions (training of election management bodies, voter education campaigns, media work).

The **Council of Europe** is also engaged in electoral observation and plays an important role in standard setting, for example through the Venice Commission, which adopted a [Code of Good Conduct in Electoral Matters](#) and reviews electoral legislation of member states, mostly together with ODIHR. The Council of Europe occasionally delivers electoral assistance to electoral management bodies.

The **Organization of American States's** main focus is election observation, but as the OSCE, it occasionally also carries out technical assistance based on member states' requests. The Commonwealth observes elections and occasionally also engages in technical assistance, as does the **African Union** and the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**.

The **OECD's** Development Assistance Committee (DAC) gave some focus on electoral assistance and together with partners developed 'Principles for International Electoral Assistance'. Their final version was published in a wider report on [Accountability and Democratic Governance](#) from 2013. They do not represent a binding international

²⁰ <http://www.sida.se/globalassets/global/portfoljanalys/sida-portfolio-within-democracy-humanrights-2012.pdf>

commitment but rather a good practice reference document. Since then the OECD has not given more attention to electoral assistance.²¹ The OECD's principles address the role of regional organisations: "Electoral assistance providers should take full account of the valuable role that regional organisations can play, both in election monitoring and electoral assistance, and seek the greatest possible complementarity with such organisations".²²

f.) NGOs

International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES)

With around 400 employees in Washington and in the field, IFES is a lead player in implementing electoral assistance. IFES focuses on technical assistance for election officials, providing research for political systems and enhancing political participation of minority groups and women. IFES increasingly promotes the use of communications technologies within local contexts (social media, visual aids for voter outreach, greater consideration of electronic voting). IFES receives the majority of [funding](#) (more than 90%) from American donors. IFES maintains its [involvement with the BRIDGE programme](#) by standardising procedures for election staff training.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI)

Washington-based and affiliated to the Democratic party, NDI promotes the integrity of electoral and political processes based on international human-rights law and the practicalities of citizen mobilization. NDI is the leading organisation on citizen observation and has played an instrumental role in developing and spreading standards for election observation. NDI sometimes deploys election observation missions of its own and also has a long-standing profile in strengthening political parties.

International Republican Institute (IRI)

Washington-based and affiliated to the Republican party, IRI supports democratic governance but is less active directly on elections and best known for carrying out opinion polls.

The Carter Center

This Atlanta-based NGO provides electoral assistance and conflict management related to elections under the umbrella of its peace programmes. It operates projects [internationally](#), with a major focus on programmes in Africa, the Americas and [China](#). TCC implements short term and long term election monitoring and has a long-standing focus on international standards for democratic elections.²³

²¹ Telephone interview on 11 September with Eduardo Gonzalez, Governance Advisor, OECD-DAC.

²² OECD guidelines, page 91.

²³ See TCC's and DRI's Swiss-funded report 'Strengthening International Law to Support Democratic Governance', 2012.

Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA)

EISA plays an important role in sub-Saharan Africa in monitoring elections, providing assistance to election management bodies as well as facilitating exchanges between election management bodies and support to the African Union.

Electoral Reforms International Services (ERIS)

A London-based NGO, ERIS is the longest-standing European NGO involved in election assistance. ERIS projects are usually funded by the EU, the UK and other European donors.

Democracy Reporting International (DRI)

Author of this study, DRI supports civil society organisations to observe elections and become effective advocates of long-term electoral and democratic reforms able to generate political will for reforms. Occasionally DRI provides technical assistance to EMBs. DRI has published numerous assessments of electoral frameworks providing detailed analysis on the impact of particular arrangements in specific contexts.

Open Society Foundations (OSF)

OSF acts more as a donor than an implementing organisation. Within OSF's governance and accountability portfolio, transparent elections play a minor role with a focus on issues like campaign finance monitoring.

OSI focuses support on Europe, the United States and other regions. OSI conducts many of its operations by directly [funding](#) external organisations, with upwards of \$350 million in 2012 alone. Projects implemented by regional offices also provide [research and evaluation of electoral methods](#).

g.) IT Corporations

Providers of hard- and software for the technical and logistical aspects of election assistance, in particular e-voting and voter registration, have been closely involved with international assistance for a long time. The entry of some of the large internet corporations is a more recent phenomenon.

Google has developed the platform „Politics and Elections” as a voter-education tool in recent elections including in India. In the latter, it drew strong criticism from political parties and privacy groups for a planned [cooperation with the Indian Election Commission](#) to improve access to voter-registration information.

Microsoft also provides an online platform for voter education and information about elections. Yet, the interaction between these internet-based programmes and the traditional electoral assistance approaches appears limited. Vodafone has been involved in many countries in efforts to bring people to register to vote.

2. STRATEGY, METHODS AND SPECIFIC CONCERNS

h.) Strategic Orientations

In terms of strategic orientation, the various donors do not necessarily align: UNDP links assistance to MDGs and ultimately poverty reduction. The EU's main policy document on electoral support presents the policy as a contribution to peace, security and the prevention of conflicts.²⁴

USAID presents its democracy support as a centre-piece of its development agenda, building the foundation for poverty eradication. It builds its democracy support portfolio less on activities but rather on two 'higher-level outcomes' such as 'participation and inclusion' and 'accountable institutions and leaders'.²⁵ It is possible that the wording of these higher-level outcomes responds to the resistance in many countries to 'democracy support' or the concept of competitive elections. 'Inclusion' and 'accountability' are difficult to dismiss concepts by any government.

It is noteworthy that the OECD's principles for electoral assistance were outlined in a larger publication on 'accountability and democratic governance'. Similar to USAID, the OECD publication treats accountability as a higher-level outcome that can be reached in many ways, elections being one of them. The OECD publication stresses the need to strengthen 'accountability systems' as they can be found in a particular country, rather than focussing too much on specific forms or institutions of accountability. It recommends identifying through analysis of the political economy the overall accountability context in order to then identify where support has most effect. This should lead to 'best fit' rather than standardised 'best practice'.²⁶

DFID and the FCO make clear that electoral assistance is one of many options of supporting democracy. DFID/FCO also make clear that their electoral support should not be an isolated contribution, but that it should be motivated by higher-level objectives such as democratisation or stabilisation of fragile states.

Most policy documents highlight the need to fully integrate election support in democracy support at large, but there is a sense that election assistance is still somewhat isolated. UNDP notes in its 2014 lessons learned report: "Grounding electoral assistance more in democratic governance has been highlighted in many forums and workshops as important, but implementation remains challenging." (page 57).

There are numerous obvious links between election assistance and wider democracy support: Support to election management is connected to public administration reform; work on the legal framework crosses into parliamentary strengthening; work with parties is related to party strengthening in general and domestic observer groups could become

²⁴ EC Communication of 2000.

²⁵ USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance, 2013.

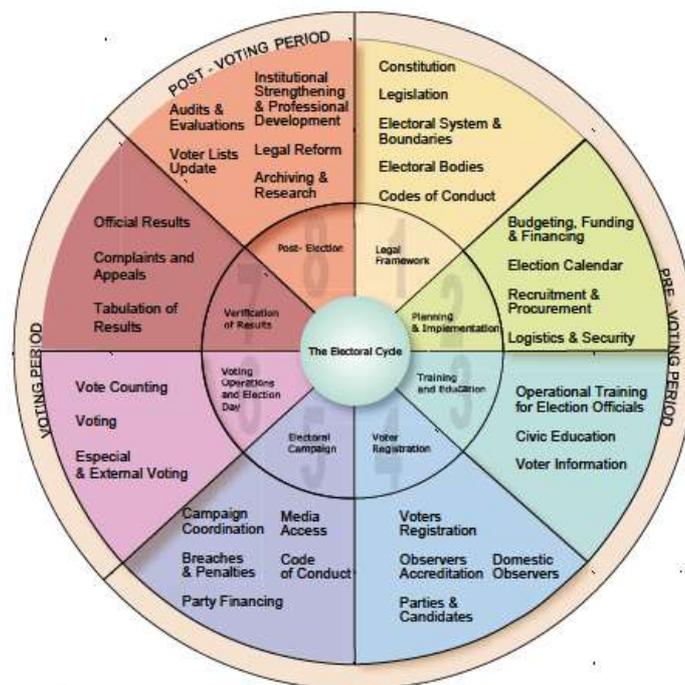
²⁶ OECD-DAC Guidelines on Accountability and democratic governance.

long-term advocates for electoral and wider reforms. However, it seems that election support is best conceptualised as one area of democracy support, avoiding that all democracy support is seen through election lenses. Using elections as a starting point can obscure the fact that a country may have more urgent democracy problems, such as a weak rule of law, a powerless parliament or no real political parties.

i.) The Election Cycle Approach (ECA)

The ECA is the most influential and widely accepted methodological tool in election assistance and has become the basis of electoral assistance by all major players.

Based on the realisation that credible elections happen in a wider political and security context, the ECA situates the act of voting in the broader framework of long-term preparation of elections, including the legal framework, and their completion through voting, counting, publication of results and installing the elected body. The ECA enlarges the focus of election assistance from the event-based and technical approach centred on the voting event itself, to include a more long-term – usually multi-annual - approach that should include consideration of the political context.



The Election Cycle Approach (ECA).

By way of example: Half of UNDP’s electoral assistance projects in 2014 take place in countries that have no elections this year.²⁷

One reason for the swift acceptance of the ECA may be the agenda-setting power of the two biggest players, the UN and the EU. Together with International IDEA they effectively established this approach as an international standard around 2005.

²⁷ Telephone interview with UNDP, 23 July.

The merit of the ECA is that it allows a systematic assessment of needs and support, avoiding the excessive focus on election day that characterised election support in the past. Indeed, if applied properly it can avoid misallocation of funds. For example, if an electoral process is flawed from the outset because of a legal framework that violates fundamental electoral guarantees, support to the election management body will not heal these flaws.

While the ECA is accepted as a policy by the community, according to interlocutors and evaluations its implementation in reality is not always guaranteed. Because of slow funding mechanisms or short-term political pressures to do something – often for good reasons – many electoral assistance projects are programmed or implemented shortly before an election with no long-term perspective and grounding in the ECA.

That said, the challenge of connecting the ECA with a broader democratisation agenda remains: Strengthening elected institutions – legislatures in particular - supporting the separation of powers and empowering citizens to participate in the political process beyond elections are objectives that are usually not captured by the ECA.

j.) Reference frameworks

While international electoral *observation* has for a long time been based on international obligations, such as article 25 II of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – the right to vote and to stand elections – this reference is not used by all players of electoral *assistance*.

While UNDP and the EU make reference to these obligations, UN EAD is more reluctant, fearing that raising the idea of obligations could be seen as imposition and that elections are essentially a national process according to nationally agreed rules.

DFID/FCO refer to international standards but make it clear that assistance should look at long-term improvement, and not necessarily at achieving standards in the next election. However, most actors have developed technical standards that govern their electoral assistance engagement in different forms as legally binding agreements, a plethora of toolboxes, handbooks and how-to guidelines. Many of these efforts are now shared through a variety of international platforms that have developed around electoral assistance. For practitioners the [ACE Electoral Knowledge Network](#) has become the most important platform for resources and online debate.²⁸

OECD-DAC Principles on Electoral Assistance 2013

- Take the local context seriously
- Be alert to electoral risk
- Don't misuse electoral aid
- Ground electoral aid in complementary diplomatic policies
- Recognise the role of regional organisations
- Embrace a full concept of ownership
- Build on donor coordination
- Be as comprehensive as possible
- Think and act across the electoral cycle
- Push for integration with wider democracy support
- Emphasise citizens' understanding and engagement
- Include a focus on local elections
- Make connections to work on accountability
- Don't neglect gender
- Respond more consistently to flawed elections
- Keep learning about impact, and act on it.

²⁸ Originally ACE stood for 'Administration and Cost of Elections' but in 2006 it was changed to ACE Electoral Knowledge Platform with ACE becoming merely a brand name.

The final version of the OECD-DAC's principles on electoral assistance was formulated on the basis of discussions with and comments by representatives of major election assistance providers.

k.) Measuring impact

There are differing views on measuring and assessing the actual impact and effect of election assistance. A culture of best-practice and benchmarking seems to be developing. The major players have published many evaluations of electoral programmes. DFID has a note on evaluation of elections and electoral assistance.

Bilateral donors tend to be more hesitant in sharing the assessments of their own individual programmes with the wider public, exceptions include Norway (through the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation - NORAD)²⁹

Effectiveness and oversight of policies implemented by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is under the purview of the [Policy and Operations Evaluation Department \(IOB\)](#). Swedish SIDA uses self-evaluation of programmes to assess relevance of initiatives, effects, and corrective measures.

In the United States, oversight and evaluation of development and implementing institutions has a strongly political dimension. After the Palestinian Elections in 2006, an intense debate led to the Amendment of the Foreign Assistance Act and generally much closer congressional oversight over programmes and initiatives funded by USAID. The agency's role has come under renewed intense scrutiny in the context of programmes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

l.) Information Technology (IT)

The general move towards IT based solutions is a trend in elections as well. Key components of the electoral process are increasingly addressed through IT in many cases, such as voter registration, voting and result tabulation and aspects of voter information campaigns. While the trend is undeniable, the development is not uniform. For example, many European countries have been reluctant to move to e-voting, while India and Brazil have used e-voting for a long time already.

Introduction of IT solutions affects elections and assistance in many ways. They can bear on the integrity of elections: positively, for example when results are quickly and reliably published, or when voter lists are less contested; negatively, when there is a sense that IT systems are introduced and applied in an un-transparent manner and where part of the political spectrum, such as smaller opposition parties or marginalised groups lack means to understand and monitor IT-based systems.

IT also plays a major role in costs of elections and assistance. Sometimes governments hastily embrace IT solutions – often under strong lobbying by vendors – expecting the international community to pick up the bill. Often international experts urged the introduction of expensive technology, in particular in voter registration. UNDP's

²⁹ See the database of reports on www.norad.no/en/tools-and-publications/publications/evaluations

evaluation of its own operations noted an “almost default support for expensive high-tech solutions”, which takes up “a significant part of basket funds or project costs.”³⁰ UNDP delivered high-tech election solutions to some 55% of its beneficiary countries, but recognises growing concerns about costs and appropriateness.³¹

In Bangladesh an initial USD 78 million-project to introduce biometric voter registration had to be followed up by a UNDP project of USD 30 million aimed at securing the initial investment by creating a country-wide infrastructure for storage, inventory and training. These questions are raised in Yemen currently, which plans a nation-wide biometric voter registration.

m.) Women and Elections

Traditionally the question of women representation in elected institution was in the focus of electoral assistance and analysis, but attention has been widened to further questions such as registration of female voters, women in the electoral administration, the impact of practical arrangements on women turn-out. UNDP assesses that its electoral assistance has increased women participation.³²

While there does not seem to be one publication specifically aimed at women and electoral assistance, there are studies and guidelines on various aspects of the theme, such as UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department for Political Affairs’ [Joint Guidelines on enhancing the role of women in post-conflict electoral processes](#), NDI’s [A guide to women’s voting rights](#), OSCE-ODIHR’s [Handbook for monitoring women’s participation in elections](#), and UNDP’s [Electoral financing to advance women’s political participation: a guide for UNDP support](#).

While election assistance handbooks include chapters on women, it is difficult to ascertain how seriously the issue is addressed in electoral assistance projects as a cross-cutting theme. UNDP’s evaluation notes that staff assessed that women issues cover 9% of “efforts” in electoral assistance.³³ Occasionally major projects are devoted to woman participation in a particular election, such as [DFID’s GBP 8 million project](#) to increase women participation in Afghan elections in 2014.

n.) Minorities, Disadvantaged Groups

There appears to be little specific electoral assistance to support minorities. While OSCE/ODIHR published [Guidelines to Assist National Minority Participation in the Electoral Process](#), there appear to be only a few other initiatives in this area. In contrast the issue of voters with disabilities has become more important in the last years. IFES and NDI published in 2014 [Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes](#). Both organisations work on the theme in various country programmes.

³⁰ Evaluation, page 62.

³¹ Evaluation, page xii (summary).

³² Evaluation, page 41.

³³ Effort is defined as “degree of involvement in the opinion of field staff”. It does not reflect funding. See evaluation page xii (summary).

o.) Elections and Conflict

A special case in this context is the question of conflicts and elections. All organisations stress the nexus between electoral process and conflict. This has become almost an issue area in its own right. The experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have played a part in this development, as well as those in Kenya, DRC and South Sudan. International partners have undertaken many efforts to come to terms with fragility and security risks. Most larger donors and actors include conflict risks into their assessment and pay much greater attention to the aspect of security in electoral assistance. There have been numerous publications, guides (UNDP's [Elections and Conflict, A Guide to Analysis, Planning and Programming](#)) studies and tools (for example [International IDEA Election and Conflict Tool](#) and [IFES-Election Violence Education and Resolution](#)) on election-related conflicts.

Nevertheless, this field can still be considered to be emerging. UNDP's evaluation notes that its successes in this field have greatly relied on the quality, political sensitivity and experience of their resident representatives and their chief technical advisors.³⁴

DFID developed guidance for posts to develop 'electoral risks registers' drawing on own and external analysis and structured on the basis of risk/likelihood/impact/indicators/mitigation. They encourage posts to consider carrying out such analysis with national stakeholders and possibly international partners that participate in election support co-ordination. It appears that posts increasingly draw up such risk registers.³⁵

Electoral assistance generally should have the potential to reduce electoral violence by increasing the quality of an electoral process and the trust in it, even though in some cases it cannot change contextual conditions that undermine genuine elections.

More specifically electoral assistance can respond to specific risks of electoral violence through:

- **Technical assistance:** For example, when voter registration, result tabulation or electoral dispute resolution are problematic areas, these can be improved by technical assistance.
- **Legal and administrative framework:** The constitution, laws or administrative arrangements may contribute to electoral violence, requiring legal reforms.³⁶
- **Training and engagement of stakeholders:** Election officials, judges, politicians, media and civil society can all play a role in enhancing or mitigating electoral violence. Training can address these groups. Stakeholders can also be engaged, for example in forums of political parties or traditional leaders.

³⁴ Evaluation, page xiii (summary).

³⁵ Telephone interview with Aislin Baker, DFID, 21 August.

³⁶ A clear concern in recent years has been 'winner takes all' arrangements which hugely raise the stakes in elections. DRI published and applies a Swiss-funded study on increasing inclusion in constitutional arrangements: *Pluralism in Constitutions*, 2013. It can be downloaded from http://democracy-reporting.org/files/dri_research_report_pluralism_in_constitutions.pdf

- **Enhanced transparency:** More transparency can reduce the potential for conflict. Support to domestic observation or media training for electoral reporting can enhance the overall transparency.
- **Enhanced Analysis:** Better analysis can help designing mitigating action. Donors support creation of analysis, for example through assessments of electoral frameworks³⁷, mapping of constituencies and likely violence, political economy analysis and election observation. They directly engage in creating or gathering analysis, for example through DFID's above-mentioned risk register.
- **Political measures:** While outside the realm of electoral assistance in a strict sense, political measures can play an important role (political demarches, establishment of panels, deployment of mediators, special envoys, etc.).

Election violence is mostly discussed in cases where wide-spread, visible violence breaks out. It is much less discussed in its less visible manifestations of long-term repression against opposition that characterises some authoritarian, façade democracies. For example, the disappearance or silencing of opposition leaders, for example in Rwanda, is a form of 'silent violence', which deserves equal attention. Generally, the whole area of electoral violence is strongly connected to overall political context analysis.

p.) Political context, minimum conditions

The question of minimum conditions for support is possibly the most difficult challenge for the election assistance community, as it tends to be related to political will. The OECD noted:

„Donors appear to have had trouble grappling with the overlay of politics, power relationships and incentive structures that affect governance and accountability. They have struggled to link support programmes to the realities of the wider political context or to the informal ‚rules of the game‘.”³⁸

Thomas Carothers noted:

„Most (though certainly not all) elections that fall short of international standards do so not because of a lack of resources or knowledge on the part of those organizing them. Rather they fall short because of insufficient political will, i.e. a lack of democratic intention and commitment on the part of some major elements of the political elite.”³⁹

UNDP's own evaluation of its electoral work identified lacking political will as the first factor that can undermine the effectiveness of electoral assistance:

³⁷ DRI also regularly assesses with local partners legal and administrative frameworks of elections.

³⁸ OECD-DAC Guidelines on Accountability and democratic governance, page 14.

³⁹ Carothers, Thomas (2010): International Elections Assistance: Context, Challenges, and Possible Strategic Principles, Discussion Paper presented at the OECD-DAC-GOVNET 1st Roundtable on International Electoral Support, Paris, March 2010.

“Lack of political will directly affect the ability of technical assistance to address some of the key impediments to stronger electoral processes, or for the assistance to have meaning beyond the holding of an event.”⁴⁰

The problem has been identified by electoral assistance providers, but the clear and early identification of such problems and the drawing of consequences, in particular not to support, are rare. Usually pressures combine in favour of technical assistance: Host governments want elections to be seen to be legitimate, donor governments are under pressure to be seen to help a country and a partner government and the professional assistance community have a natural bias to do something, although there are policies that may state otherwise.

The EU’s policy is to ascertain that electoral assistance is “politically advisable”, requiring that a potential beneficiary country has sufficient democratic space for democratic elections. The aim is to avoid that electoral assistance can be used to legitimise a flawed process. The EU may also raise issues related to the electoral process in the framework of its regular dialogue with a government. In Pakistan the EU contracted DRI to specifically address political will for reforms, by engaging with parliament, media and civil society to adopt electoral reforms.

The UN Guidelines on Electoral Needs Assessments from 2012 elaborate on the importance of assessing the political context and of identifying political risks, in particular the risk to “be associated with, or to be seen to legitimise, an electoral process that lacks credibility”.⁴¹ The Guidelines indicate that Needs Assessment Missions should recommend mitigation of such risks without saying how that could be done. Instead it stresses the benefits of UN intervention including that elections may “gain enhanced credibility and acceptance by the electorate, if trust is built because of the UN’s presence”.

While the guidelines mention in one sentence the possibility that electoral assistance may not be provided due to risks, it indicates here issues like lack of time or availability of other actors, rather than lack of political space for elections.⁴² The UN approach can thus be considered the softest compared to other assistance providers, establishing no minimum conditions for support and expressing a clear bias towards engagement.⁴³

DFID/FCO make clear that minimum conditions for credible elections must be met in order to consider electoral assistance. The “How To Note” indicates:

“We will at times necessarily need to engage with imperfect electoral processes, as this is precisely where support is needed. However, in cases where the electoral system is so skewed in favour of the incumbent that no real competition is possible, we would not engage directly with the electoral authorities, to avoid condoning electoral fraud

⁴⁰ Page 36.

⁴¹ Page 17.

⁴² Page 18.

⁴³ The Note also indicates: “Requests by Member States and Territories for electoral assistance are, as a rule, considered favourably.” Page 18.

or legitimising authoritarian practices. Working with civil society actors to improve the electoral process and uphold basic democratic principles, can then be an alternative. Factors suggesting we should not provide direct support for the conduct of elections include:

- *opposition leaders or parties barred from participation;*
- *the franchise removed from sections of the population;*
- *opposition parties denied freedom of speech, assembly and organisation, or prevented from accessing the media; and*
- *insurmountable practical impediments, such as the lack of a settled constitutional and legal framework or an independent election management body.*⁴⁴

The National Endowment for Democracy has a specific democracy support (not only elections) approach to what they consider ‘Highly Repressive Societies’, listing in this category for example Uzbekistan, Cuba and China. Here they focus on supporting pro-democracy groups and suppressed minorities. Their entire democracy support is categorised by the level of a transition (including beyond ‘highly repressive’: assisting democratic transitions; aiding democrats in semi-authoritarian countries; helping new democracies).⁴⁵

With many political systems hardening into authoritarian façade democracies, often supported by other authoritarian regimes, it becomes more urgent to give more attention to the wider political and governance context and avoid investments in elections that have no potential for democratisation.

The major donors are working on developing better analytical tools to underpin electoral support. For example DFID/FCO call on their posts to carry out significant analysis before engaging in electoral assistance, pointing to DFID products that can be drawn upon such as Drivers-of-change studies, Strategic Conflict Assessment, Country Governance Analysis and Gender and Social Exclusion Analysis.⁴⁶ Analysis of the political economy is becoming increasingly important in this respect. Sometimes democracy support is explicitly linked to political context conditions. Secretary Kerry [recently indicated](#) that assistance to DRC may be cut if President Kabila stands in again in the 2016 elections despite the constitutional term limit currently in place.

However, so far there is no agreement among election aid providers on the content and methodology of political analysis. There is usually no systematic analysis, monitoring and reporting on the wider context of elections, be it by assistance organisations or independent actors. The OECD study on accountability commented on the reluctance of donors to engage in ‘political areas’:

⁴⁴ Page 6.

⁴⁵ 2012 Strategy Document, National Endowment for Democracy.

⁴⁶ Page 6.

„Undoubtedly, moves towards more political ways of working can be more risky for donors than purely technical approaches. At the same time, even technical approaches in practice shape political dynamics.

Either way donor interventions in this area affect political realities. Adopting a more politically informed approach doesn't necessarily mean greater interference in domestic politics but it will help to ensure more feasible support, including through the use of more realistic objectives, better monitoring and management of political risks, and the use of appropriate timeframes.“⁴⁷

In this context DFID's evaluation noted a lack of independent analysis on the performance of electoral institutions which would be helpful for aid providers who want to rely on more than reporting by implementers:

“We witnessed an example of good practice in Burundi, where DFID funded an international elections expert attached to the EU observer mission. The expert produced regular and detailed briefing notes on various aspects of the preparations for the election. This ensured that the donors were well informed and allowed a healthy level of challenge to UNDP operations. A modest investment in regular monitoring thus made a significant contribution to the quality of decision-making. We note that there is no third-party monitoring of the effectiveness of electoral institutions beyond the immediate monitoring of elections.”⁴⁸

Consequently, the OECD's Principles for international electoral assistance start out with political context:

„Take the local context seriously through careful, comprehensive assessments especially in fragile situations. Elections assistance efforts should be grounded in incisive political economy analyses that identify and examine the determinant power dynamics and political constraints that shape the electoral environment, as well as the specific roles that elections are likely to play in particular settings.“

⁴⁷ OECD-DAC Guidelines on Accountability and democratic governance, page 50.

⁴⁸ DFID Evaluation of UNDP support, page 17.

3. MAIN ACTIVITIES

No individual actor in electoral assistance covers the entire time-frame or range of issues of the electoral cycle. Smaller actors focus on certain themes or expertise, instead of entire regions of strategic geographical interest. This is the case for many bilateral donors, some multilateral organisations and international NGOs. At the same time, no donor appears to only support basket funds. All donors that support basket funds seem to engage in addition in bi-lateral electoral assistance.

q.) Target groups

There do not seem to be statistics for support by target group, but it can be safely assumed that **EMBs** (typically: election commissions or commissioners, sometimes ministries of the interior or electoral tribunals) are by far the biggest beneficiaries of electoral support, in particular in UNDP projects. All UNDP interlocutors consistently stressed the pre-dominance of EMBs as a target group. One interlocutor described it as the only primary target group.

EMB's are in the organisational centre of elections, which imply a significant logistical exercise in terms of constituency delimitation, voter registration, voter information/education, training of staff, preparation, distribution and collection of materials. In the wider context of electoral management, support may be given also to those concerned with electoral security such as **law enforcement officials, the army or ministries of the interior** or to those implementing out-of-country voting, such as diplomatic missions. Election management is the classical domain of UNDP and IFES interventions.

Citizens/Voters are another important target group, mostly for voter information/education or civic education campaigns. Being costly, such campaigns absorb significant shares of electoral assistance budgets. Often such campaigns are part of UNDP interventions.

Political parties and candidates are supported in different ways. They are sometimes engaged with to develop codes of conduct between parties in campaigns or to organise debates and outreach programmes. In a more long-term, structural manner parties are supported by party development programmes, but these are not strictly speaking electoral interventions and have their own logic and methodology. NDI and the German party foundations are typical actors in this area.

Media programmes target **journalists** on issues like voter/civic education, media regulations and code of conducts, balanced reporting, equitable media access for candidates and parties, violence prevention and women voting and media presence.

In many cases **civil society organisations** are supported on diverse issues such as citizen observation of elections, voter/civic awareness campaigns, conflict prevention, women, campaign financing or in building up a long-term role in electoral advocacy (election law analysis and change).

Legislators are sometimes identified as target groups, for example to effect legal changes to electoral laws or to address questions of political will. The **judiciary** is often involved in programmes aimed at establishing effective dispute resolution.

It appears that electoral assistance is to a large degree aimed at national elections. Sub-national (states', regions, local government) elections are rarely mentioned in any documents and no interlocutor for this study identified them as a major area. Local elections in particular tend to be complex; they may involve “hundreds of small elections”, each with its own logic and challenges.

r.) Implementation modalities

- Contractors

There appears to be a – sometimes explicit – effort to foster competition between implementing agencies. This trend to create a market for international assistance finds its logical conclusion in the entrance of private contractors in areas, which were previously the exclusive domain of international organisations and not-for profit providers. The results have however been mixed, as far as is ascertainable. Stricter and arguably more cost-effective management structures allow for a lower percentage of overhead cost. But these advantages may be somewhat mitigated by an approach that is purely project-based and often without proper expertise of the provider or durable presence on the ground.

The EU's policy directives are to contract less projects generally, prioritising bigger and longer projects. This is to take account of the fact that its staff is being reduced and that the EU is often slow in contracting and implementing projects. In the EU context more of the onus of project management, including sub-granting to local CSOs, is now passed to contractors. This tendency benefits large implementing organisations. Sometimes the EU requires the possible contractors to demonstrate in-house capacity in a given sector to reduce the role of project management consultancies.

- Basket funds

UNDP implements electoral assistance mostly through multi-donor basket funds. Its main benefit is the alignment of donors behind one plan with agreed objectives, avoiding duplicative or contradictory support. The transaction costs for the election management body are reduced, as it does not have to deal with multiple donors. Trust fund creates incentives for an election management body to engage in long-term planning and budgeting. The autonomy of EMBs in using funds depends on their capacities and trust in their integrity.

Occasionally donors set-up their own basket fund, for example Canada, Denmark and the UK in Nigeria for civic education. The US is rarely involved in basket funds, instead working through US organisations. Thus on the ground there is often a need for co-ordination between the leading US-based organisations and the UN.

Usually basket funds have a Steering Committee of donors to provide oversight; the Steering Committees are not involved in managing the fund. In some cases there are other mechanisms, such as donor coordination groups.

In some countries, in particular in high-profile post-conflict set-ups, election support is sometimes one pillar in a broader trust fund aimed at supporting a transition.

- Direct Support

Electoral assistance to EMBs is sometimes also provided on a bilateral basis without the conduit of a basket funds. In these cases, donors may contribute directly to an EMB budget, or provide technical or financial assistance through an implementing partner.

- Costs of Elections

Concerns have been raised by costs of elections for which assistance was provided. DFID has been at the forefront of pushing the UN in particular to be more sensitive to costs and to adopt the value for money principle. The [*Costs of Registration and Elections \(CORE\)*](#) study of 2005 leads the way, comparing costs per voter of elections preparing the ground for a UNDP/IFES project on electoral costs.

- Execution Mechanisms and Sustainability

There are different ways of executing electoral assistance whereby national institutions take the lead in implementation or international agencies, or a combination of both. In the case of UNDP around half of its projects were directly implemented by UNDP directly.⁴⁹ National execution is more likely in more developed countries and less likely where the electoral assistance package is large and donors concerned with expenditure.

National execution is preferable to build capacity and sustainable institutions but it carries risks in corrupt contexts as well as in countries where the impartiality of election management is not guaranteed, where funds may be used for partisan purposes or invested in an election that is not transparent.

The question of sustainability is also raised by choices made in electoral assistance. For example, the introduction of complex and costly techniques (such as bio-metric voter registration) in high-stake elections (such as post-conflict) is often not sustainable over many elections due to high costs and lacking capacity to administer them.

A large proportion of electoral assistance is directed at election management bodies (EMBs). While it is useful to work with the institutions responsible for managing elections, there are some pitfalls in this kind of cooperation. Inherently, EMBs are state bodies, and working with them bears the real or perceived risk of helping only one side in an electoral process.

Working in fragile states, especially where the government and state are conflated, the concept of national ownership may be reduced to government/dominant party ownership. The OECD's guidelines note that "*electoral assistance should be owned not only by the relevant partner government, but also by the broader political society in question. Electoral assistance providers should embrace an interpretation of local ownership that takes account of this political imperative.*"⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Evaluation, page 57.

⁵⁰ OECD guidelines, page 91.