

Foundational state design processes, transitional political processes, and election support intervention effect on government performance

The intervention had a harmful impact on the government performance indicators.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa, South Asia, Middle east and North Africa

Effect: Harmful effect ($g=-0.095$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (4 studies with 23 effect sizes)

Short summary

Interventions including participatory clan chief selection, anti-fraud measures, citizen social monitoring, UN operations, constitution-building, and governance-strengthening initiatives had inconsistent effects on government performance. While some activities improved consultation, alignment between leaders and citizens, and perceptions of service delivery, the overall effect was negative due to mixed outcomes across contexts.

Long summary

The intervention

The interventions focused on enhancing governance and public administration in post-conflict and fragile contexts. Participatory processes aimed to increase consultation between clan chiefs and their communities. Anti-fraud initiatives used citizen monitoring and reporting to reduce electoral manipulation and improve compliance with governmental procedures. Constitution-building efforts encouraged public engagement to support democratic governance, while broader governance-strengthening initiatives sought to improve transparency, service delivery, and institutional responsiveness. UN operations included micro-level efforts to support security, economic recovery, and political reintegration following civil conflicts. These interventions were implemented in various contexts, from local villages to national-level processes, and often combined multiple strategies to address governance challenges.

How the intervention is expected to work

Participatory selection of clan chiefs is intended to foster greater alignment between leaders' decisions and community preferences, increasing consultation and responsiveness. Anti-fraud interventions are expected to enhance trust in government by reducing electoral manipulation and improving perceptions of legitimacy. Constitution-building and governance-strengthening initiatives aim to strengthen democratic practices, reduce corruption, and improve service delivery. UN operations seek to support citizens' confidence in institutions and facilitate peaceful political engagement through local outreach and assistance in post-conflict governance processes. The effectiveness of these interventions depends on the local context, implementation fidelity, and the interaction between multiple governance measures.

The evidence base

The cell includes seven studies: five quasi-experimental impact evaluations and two qualitative studies (Richmond 2011; Stokke 2022).

Studies were conducted in Liberia, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Kosovo, Palestine, Timor-Leste, Myanmar, Iraq, and at a global level.

Evidence findings

The evidence from five impact evaluations indicates that the interventions generally had a harmful effect on government performance indicators. Effect sizes vary across studies, ranging from $g = -0.368$ to $g = 0.121$, highlighting inconsistent impacts across different contexts. Participatory selection, anti-fraud measures, social monitoring, and governance-strengthening initiatives sometimes failed to improve institutional effectiveness or public trust, and in certain cases worsened perceptions of government performance. Overall, the findings suggest that these interventions had a negative impact on government performance.

Included studies

Baldwin & Eric (2011) examines the effects of participatory processes for selecting clan chiefs in rural Liberia. After the civil war, some chiefs were appointed by higher authorities, while others were selected by their communities. All chiefs who became incapacitated after 2002 were replaced through participatory processes, providing a natural experiment to study the effects of these processes on established institutions. The research employs a difference-in-difference estimation strategy to identify the effects of participatory processes independent of timing effects. The study draws on survey data and outcomes from behavioral games conducted in 70 clans across 13 of the 15 counties in rural Liberia. Within each clan, 15 households were targeted for interviews, and additional community-level activities were conducted to measure contributions to public goods. The participatory selection of chiefs increases consultation at the community level and raises levels of political participation both locally and nationally. However, it also reduces contributions to local public goods, suggesting that chiefs selected through participatory processes may be less effective at enforcing cooperation. The study finds that participatory processes do not result in the selection of more educated or connected chiefs, but they do lead to more consultative leadership. The study is rated as medium confidence because it is a non-experimental study and only partially describes the intervention.

Berman (2019) examines Afghanistan's 2010 parliamentary elections as a case study to test the impact of an anti-fraud intervention on citizens' attitudes toward government and their willingness to comply with its authority. The study employed a randomized control trial (RCT) involving 471 polling centers, with 238 centers receiving fraud-reducing interventions (notification letters) and 233 serving as controls. Data included election fraud reports, administrative records, and pre- and post-election survey responses from 2,904 citizens near polling centers. Attitudes were assessed using two indices, first measuring government perception (e.g. belief in democracy, trust in governance) and second measuring compliance (e.g. willingness to pay taxes or report insurgent activity). The intervention significantly reduced three measures of election fraud, including tampering with tally sheets, by about 11 percentage points. Government perception and compliance attitudes improved significantly as well. The study is rated low confidence as attrition not being reported in the study.

Gonzalez (2015) assessed the impact of a social monitoring initiative in which citizens used cell phones to report instances of fraud during the 2009 Afghan Presidential election on institutional corruption. The study was conducted in Afghanistan. The study was designed as an experimental study design and covered 139 neighborhoods for capturing the mobile coverage. The study found that there is a considerable drop in fraud levels for polling centers within the coverage area. In particular, for centres within a 5.7-kilometer bandwidth around the coverage boundary, the share of votes classifying as Category C+ fraud is about 5.2 percentage points lower in centers on the coverage side. Given an average share of about 19.8 for centers on the non-coverage side, this represents about a 26 percent drop in the share of fraudulent votes. The study was rated as low confidence due to quasi-experimental study design, partial description of intervention and attrition of more than 20% as reported in the study.

Saati (2015) The study assessed the public participation in constitution building following war, following an institutional crisis or during a transition from authoritarian rule leading to higher

levels of democracy. The study is designed as a quasi-experimental study design. The study used 20 cases of participatory constitution-building processes and compared them to each other; and 28 cases of non-participation. The study shows that when all cases of participatory constitution building processes were treated equally, and their individual democracy scores were not viewed in light of the democracy levels of the cases of non-participation, it did indeed appear as if the proposition put forth by advocates of public participation in constitution building had empirical support. In addition, more than half of the cases of non-participation also displayed improved democracy ratings after the second elections following the enactment of the new constitution revealing that, when it comes to strengthening democracy, there is more to the story than public participation in constitution building. The study is rated as medium confidence due to the non-experimental study design and partial description of the intervention.

Tesfaye (2016) The study assessed to identify how strengthening governance responsiveness and legitimacy through civil society may lead to sustainable peace in Iraq. The study was designed as a quasi-experimental design. This report is based on data from three rounds of nationwide public opinion surveys between 2013 and 2015, and in-depth interviews with 5,000 respondents across the country in each of the three years. The study found that when people who feel marginalized begin to believe the government is going to be more responsive, accountable, and fair, support for armed violence and the sectarian groups that perpetuate it decreases. Also, as the violent conflict continues or escalates, sectarian divisions have the potential to increase as political opportunists – both domestic and foreign – stoke tensions to gain power. The study is rated as low confidence due to quasi-experimental study design and partial description of intervention and outcome.

Confidence assessment

Overall confidence in this cell is low due to the limited number of studies and inconsistent effects across different contexts and interventions.

Other outcomes in the study

Community and state governance / Civic participation

Violence and atrocity prevention / Nature and scale of violence or atrocities

Social cohesion / Willingness to participate or help