

The effect of peace processes and diplomacy on transitions of power

Effect: Positive presence of IEOs increases the legitimacy of the election and acceptance of the result, but they are unlikely to achieve the structural changes necessary for lasting peace)

Confidence in study findings: Low (one study, low confidence)

Short Summary

Independent Election Observers (IEOs) are foreign observers from official and non-governmental agencies who are in the country during preparations for the election and during the election itself. They issue periodic reports on the process. IEOs can have positive systemic (macro) and local (micro) effects on election processes and so build confidence in the outcome. The presence of the observers adds legitimacy to the election, which can encourage broader participation. However, there is a danger of giving inappropriate legitimacy to an election held by an authoritarian government. The Sudan case study supports that these benefits were observed at macro and micro levels, even if the resulting election has shortcomings. And, they are unlikely to achieve the structural changes necessary for lasting peace

Long summary

The intervention

Independent Election Observers (IEOs) are foreign observers from official and non-governmental agencies who are in the country during preparations for the election and during the election itself. They issue periodic reports on the process.

The 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Observation and The Code of Conduct for International Election Observers lays out three principles:

- 1) observers should “establish communications with all political competitors in the election process, including representatives of political parties and candidates who may have information concerning the integrity of the election process” (Article 15a).
- 2) observers must “welcome information provided to them concerning the nature of the process” (Art. 15b), and the third principle articulates that the observer should “independently and impartially evaluate such information” (Article 15c).
- 3) observers: should evaluate as an important aspect of international election observation whether the political contestants are, on a non-discriminatory basis, afforded access to verify the integrity of all elements and stages of the election process. International election observation missions should in their recommendations, which may be issued in writing or otherwise presented at various stages of the election process, advocate for removing activities by political competitors to safeguard the integrity of the electoral processes. (Article 15d) (p.41-42)

How is the intervention expected to work

To assess how the IEO can support elections, resulting in a transition in power (e.g. leadership changes):

- 1) the legitimisation of the political process adopted by the observed country and of the electoral processes involved
- 2) IEO contributes to confidence-building measures; deterrence of manipulation and intimidation; improvement and change of the political system; democracy and human rights observance; training of observers or parliamentarians as resource persons for other elections
- 3) help promote national reconciliation and sound democratic practices

However, there are several counter-theories as to why this may not work:

- 1) a false sense of legitimacy that may be inferred by having elections observers
- 2) insufficient standards used to judge an electoral process
- 3) political conditionality to impose their hegemony and undermine the sovereignty of the concerned African states
- 4) the international community is not well positioned to do peacebuilding activities required by intra-state conflict. The first impediment he outlined was that the charters of the major regional and international institutions are founded based on respect for sovereignty, which intervenes in intra-state conflicts. Further, he noted that there is a "lack of appropriate and adequate concepts, approaches, and modalities for intervention" (p. 16).

The evidence base

There is one qualitative study assessing the **effect of peace processes and diplomacy on transitions of power** in Sudan. This study is Skinner, S. M. (2012). *Elections observation as a tool for building sustainable peace in the aftermath of Civil War*. Library and Archives Canada= Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, Ottawa. All references are from that study.

The evidence

International election observers may improve or bring changes to the political system. At both the macro and micro levels in Sudan, it is clear that there was ample opportunity for this. At the macro level, the periodic statements issued by observation groups gave advice and recommendations on how to improve the process, with evidence that this advice did affect sometimes processes. The public reports of the IEO missions in Sudan considered every aspect of the electoral process and provided recommendations on how the process could be improved. The areas that were addressed throughout the reports covered each of the five goals as laid out by The Peace Building Initiative, albeit IEO is more relevant to some than others. However, this advice is not always taken into consideration, but, at the very least, is present to help inform decisions and can be kept as a point of reference to assist in future processes.

At the micro level, stakeholders reported that meetings with observers were beneficial because they assisted in keeping them focused on the upcoming milestones and highlighted problems that they had to consider.

An aspect that detracts from the ability of IEO to maximise its effectiveness is that the host government is not obliged to follow the recommendations provided by the reports of international observers; therefore, can only be as effective in assisting in the rebuilding of institutions as the host country is willing.

Confidence assessment

Overall confidence: Low Confidence Qualitative Study (It is unclear whether the study uses an established small n approach; the procedural steps for data analysis are not clearly defined; no explanation and justification for the sample/case selection strategy; no triangulation of findings; No discussion of bias reported)