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Conditions For Elections To Succeed In Reducing Conflict And Instability

Dr Iffat Idris
GSDRC, University of Birmingham
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Question

What are the (minimum) desirable conditions for elections to be successful in reducing conflict and instability?

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1. Summary

Post-conflict elections can pave the way for democratisation and peacebuilding, but can also lead to renewed conflict. Minimum conditions for ensuring that elections promote the former and reduce conflict and instability include: peace and demilitarisation; international involvement; not holding post-conflict elections too early; holding national and local elections separately – ideally, local before national; election systems (notably proportional representation) that distribute rather than concentrate power; independent, permanent and well-resourced election management bodies; and media that promote voter education, messaging by parties and candidates, and election transparency. However, it is important to stress that specific criteria needed for successful post-conflict elections will be context-dependent.

This review looks at the conditions needed to ensure that post-conflict election reduce conflict and instability. It draws on a mixture of academic and grey literature. While there was substantial literature on the various criteria, notably international involvement and election administration, it was largely gender-blind, as well as disability-blind.

Post-conflict elections have the potential to establish legitimate government and can pave the way for democratisation and sustained peace. However, because they determine the distribution of power, they can also trigger renewed conflict. The risk of this is exacerbated by the difficult circumstances in which post-conflict elections are typically held (e.g. damaged infrastructure, weak institutions). The challenge is how to achieve the potential benefits while avoiding the risks. What are the conditions or criteria needed to ensure that post-conflict elections do not lead to conflict and instability?

While the criteria/conditions needed for 'successful' post-conflict elections will to a large extent be context-specific, this review has identified the following as generally applicable:

- **Absence of conflict and demilitarisation** – Absence of conflict and security is essential to be able to conduct elections, e.g. for people to have confidence to go out and vote. This in turn requires the demilitarisation of armed groups and combatants; otherwise, powerful conflict-era bodies will dominate and win the election. Demobilisation is a complicated and lengthy process, and some argue that elections can be held even in the absence of security and stability, as democracy paves the way for peace and security.

- **Peace agreements** – Since the 1990s post-conflict peace agreements (peacebuilding efforts) have commonly featured plans for elections. Conduct of elections is often seen as a key landmark in the peace process. Peace agreements will lay out the framework for post-conflict elections, and hence can be critical in determining if these are successful.

- **International involvement** – Support from the international community is needed both for the actual conduct of elections (i.e. technical, financial, capacity building assistance) and to confer legitimacy on the elections. With regard to the kinds of assistance provided, two points are notable: one, donors should provide electoral technology suited to the capacity of recipient countries – and not necessarily the most advanced technology – so that its use is sustainable; two, rather than funding expensive international monitoring missions, it might be better to support local observer groups/domestic monitoring bodies.

- **Conduct of elections** – The manner in which post-conflict elections are held is critical to ensuring these do not lead to renewed conflict and instability. Three aspects are especially significant: timing, sequencing and election process.

- Timing of elections – There is major debate in the literature about the pros and cons of holding early post-conflict elections. These can usher in a legitimate government and enable the departure of international peacekeeping missions. However, given the capacity issues and the likely dominance of conflict-era groups, early elections could lead to former combatants taking power – in the long-term this will undermine democracy and increase tension, and could generate further conflict. Overall, the literature favours *not* holding early elections in post-conflict states.
- Sequencing of national and sub-national elections – While most election experts agree on the need to differentiate national and local elections, there is debate about which should come first. There are some benefits to holding national elections first, e.g. these have a higher profile and are more likely to attract international support. But these seem outweighed by the benefits of starting with local elections, e.g. these are more relevant to ordinary people, and the stakes in terms of power are less and hence they are less likely to lead to violence. Option 3, holding national and local elections simultaneously, can promote coordination between sub-national and national parties.
- Election process – Elections must have credibility and legitimacy if the results are to be accepted and renewed conflict avoided. Credibility comes from the election system (the way in which votes are converted into seats) and the election administration (esp. election management bodies). There is consensus that systems based on proportional representation (PR) are preferable in post-conflict contexts compared to majoritarian (winner-takes-all) systems in which losers get nothing. In segmented societies, PR systems can be modified to encourage cooperation between rival groups. Election management bodies should be permanent, independent of government, and properly resourced and staffed.

- **Administrative and communications infrastructure** – As well as the specific systems and capacity to run elections (e.g. election management bodies), wider administrative and communication infrastructures need to be functional to a sufficient degree to allow related activities, e.g. voter registration, civic education, to take place. In addition, a functioning justice system and police are needed to deal with cases of fraud, abuse, etc.
  - Media - Studies have identified the media as among the most important criteria needed for success in post-conflict elections. The media can support voter education, messaging by candidates and parties, and election transparency – vital for election legitimacy. The form of media used (e.g. radio, social media) needs to be tailored to the context.

2. Post-conflict elections

A key goal in all post-conflict states is peacebuilding and democratisation. Elections are a vital element in this. 'Elections play a crucial role in post-conflict peace processes. They provide one answer to the fundamental question – often a major cause of internal armed conflict – of who is to legitimately rule the country' (Rosset & Pfister, 2013: 6). Reilly (2002: 118) sums up the rationale for post-conflict elections:

> elections provide an inescapable means for jump-starting a new, post-conflict political order; for stimulating the development of democratic politics; for choosing representatives; for forming governments; and for conferring legitimacy upon the new political order. They also provide a clear signal that legitimate domestic authority has been returned – and hence that the role of the international community may be coming to an end.

Given the many benefits, it is not surprising that commitment to elections and democratisation is present in US foreign policy as well as within the international peacekeeping community (Dutton, 2014). However, because elections lead to the distribution of power and control over state resources, they can also be a trigger for renewed conflict. 'Elections in emerging democracies and post-conflict societies have a great potential to plunge a country back into violent conflict, to undermine processes of stabilisation and to discredit democratisation' (Kuhne, 2010: 2). Rosset and Pfister (2013: 6) echo this: 'because of their role in allocating power, elections can also represent a catalyst for violent conflict. While root causes of political conflict often precede the electoral process, failed elections can be the spark that leads to political violence.' Dutton (2014: 1) highlights the difficult circumstances in which post-conflict elections are typically held:

> ….in an environment where violence and civil war have critically damaged infrastructure and national security, as well as undermined social economic and political institutions. Left in the wake of conflict is a population in fear of violent uprisings and corrupt leaders. Under these circumstances, post-conflict elections almost seem predestined for failure which could result in further conflict and regional instability.

She cites a number of studies which find that elections have the potential to make things worse. 'Ineffective elections can potentially lead to a reversal in the peace process, costing thousands of additional lives, wasting millions of dollars, time and energy, e.g. Haiti and Angola' (Orr, 2002: 142, cited in Dutton, 2014: 1). Similarly, Savo Heleta (2010: 1, cited in Dutton, 2014: 2) concluded that when conducted too early or in the absence of certain criteria, 'elections would not lead to pluralism and democracy but rather instability, further polarization, and post-election chaos'.

The challenge therefore is how to achieve the potential benefits of elections (legitimate government, consolidation of peace, etc.) whilst avoiding the risks? What are the conditions or criteria needed to ensure that post-conflict elections do not lead to conflict and instability?

Before answering this question it is important to highlight the difficulty in researching conditions needed for elections to reduce conflict and instability. There are a number of challenges:

- Firstly, the indicator most prevalent in the literature is the successful conduct of elections themselves, i.e. without violence, with all parties accepting the result, etc. It is far harder to assess success in terms of long-term peace and stability, or socioeconomic development, promotion of human rights, or improvement in quality of life (Dutton, 2014). Flores and Nooruddin (2012: 559) assess success in terms of either a recurrence of conflict (obviously, indicating lack of success) or economic recovery (defined as the restoration of per capita GDP to the highest level reached in the five years prior to the latest conflict episode). However, they concede that such measures 'ignore long-term goals of peace building (e.g. social reconciliation)' but point out that 'such goals likely depend on the achievement of these short-term objectives' (Flores & Nooruddin, 2012: 559).

- Secondly, each post-conflict context is unique and the mix of factors involved will often be unique to that context. This makes it difficult to look at the effect of individual conditions/criteria: both because they cannot be isolated from other conditions, and because it is hard to compare the effect of the same factor in different contexts. Research 'is case specific and not comparatively applicable across cases' (Dutton, 2014: 6).
- Thirdly, different research studies identify different criteria as being critical, i.e. there is a lack of consistency in findings (Dutton, 2014).

Nonetheless, the literature identifies a number of common criteria for success which appear to be influential in most contexts. These are discussed below. Given the limitations described above, these criteria should not be taken as a universally applicable and comprehensive list, but rather as conditions most likely to ensure that post-conflict elections do not lead to conflict and instability.

3. Peace

Absence of conflict and demilitarisation

The first and most obvious condition is the absence of conflict and, related to that, demilitarisation. 'A sufficiently secure environment is the sine qua non for organising and carrying out elections successfully. The majority of combatants and militias should therefore have been disarmed (or at least reliably pacified) and sufficient progress made in the building of new army and police forces' (Kuhne, 2010: 3). Lyons (2004: 38) stresses the need to demilitarise politics before holding post-conflict elections:

> To demilitarize politics entails building norms and institutions that bridge the structures of wartime based on violence, predation and fear (such as militias, black markets and chauvinistic identity groups) to arrangements based on security and trust that can sustain peace and democracy (like political parties, open economies and civil society). The powerful actors that developed and were sustained during a protracted civil war cannot be wished away. Neither can the enabling environment for peaceful political competition be proclaimed into existence. To the extent that politics is demilitarized during the transitional period, post-conflict elections are more likely to result in a new political order that can sustain peace and democracy.

Lyons (2004: 39) warns that unless politics is demilitarised before elections, a legacy of fear may remain prevalent and determine election outcomes: 'the powerful organizations of war are likely to dominate the campaign, exploit voters' fears and win the election'. A study of elections in South Sudan (Heleta, 2010, cited in Dutton, 2014: 31) also concludes that security is one of the criteria that should be applied to determine if a country is prepared to hold elections.

Brancati and Snyder (2012: 828-829) use 'Angola's two contrasting experiences with post-conflict elections (to) illustrate the importance of demobilizing before holding elections'. In the first in 1992, the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) won a majority in the national legislature. However the rebel opposition, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), led by Jonas Savimbi, 'remained militarily mobilised during the election campaign, refused to accept what Savimbi claimed were rigged results, and resumed fighting'. By contrast in the 2008 elections, UNITA had been demobilised and, despite faring worse than in

the 1992 election and again questioning the validity of the results, 'UNITA did not resume fighting and instead challenged the results unsuccessfully in the country's newly formed courts' (Brancati & Snyder, 2012: 829).

However, Brancati and Snyder (2012: 828) highlight the fact that, 'Successful demobilization is a complicated and lengthy process, requiring rebels to return to their barracks, hand in weapons, find new sources of employment and rejoin civil society'. They add that 'strong bureaucratic institutions and generous financing are needed to facilitate demobilization' (Brancati & Snyder, 2012: 828).

There are also those who argue that elections can be held even in the absence of security and stability. Donnelly and Serchuk (2005: 5, cited in Dutton, 2014: 29), for example, writing in the context of the 2005 elections in Iraq, argued that despite the insecurity in the country, polls should proceed because 'it is not that peace and security must precede democracy-but rather, that democracy itself will help pave the way for peace and security'.

Peace agreements

Post-conflict peace agreements will often include plans for elections, typically preceded by some form of interim administration and assignment of roles for the international community, notably peacekeeping missions. Joshi et al (2017: 6) note that elections have been at the centre of peacebuilding efforts since the 1990s. Flores and Nooruddin (2012: 560) give figures showing that the number of elections held in the first year following a civil conflict doubled between the 1970s and 1980s, and increased fivefold between the 1970s and 1990s. Joshi et al (2017: 6) cite Lopez Pintor who 'coined the term "reconciliation elections" to describe the new emphasis being put on elections in civil war peace processes at the time'. They elaborate (Joshi et al, 2017: 6):

> '(T)he electoral process' in the aftermath of civil war was perceived as containing 'all the expectations of the peace process' and constituting 'its political and psychological culmination point'. In particular, 'election day' is seen as a key visible event in the peace process.

Peace agreements have a critical role in determining whether post-conflict elections are stabilising or destabilising because they will set out the framework or arrangements under which elections are held (or alternatively, will set out the pathway to elections, e.g. framing a new constitution, which will determine election arrangements). Many of the criteria/conditions for post-conflict elections described in this review will be included in peace agreements.

4. International involvement

There is consensus in the literature on the central role international assistance plays in post-conflict elections. DFID (2010: 6) stress: 'The international community has an important role to play in supporting the successful planning, delivery and embedding of elections within a wider context of support to political systems and deepening democracy'.

Dutton (2014: 14) notes that, 'Post-conflict countries often lack the infrastructure, resources (including but not limited to money), legitimacy, and experience to conduct successful elections'. She cites a comprehensive review by USAID of lessons learned by the international community supporting post-conflict elections, which found that international 'assistance is important, if not

crucial for the conduct of post-conflict elections' (Lopez-Pintor, 2005: ix, cited in Dutton, 2014: 14).

International support for post-conflict elections tends to fall into two broad categories: technical, financial and other assistance for the conduct of elections (e.g. support with voter registration, polling stations, election rules, staff training) and election monitoring (through international election monitoring missions and/or domestic monitoring bodies/groups). As well as providing technical, logistical and financial support to conduct elections, international assistance helps confer legitimacy to post-conflict elections which they would not have had otherwise (or far less). However, while there is consensus in the literature on the need for international involvement to ensure success of post-conflict elections, 'it has not determined how large of a foot print is needed or for how long' (Dutton, 2014: 15).

There is extensive guidance in the literature on the kinds of electoral assistance donors can provide. It is beyond the scope of this review to detail that, but two points are especially important. One, Reilly (2002) urges donors to match electoral technology they provide to the capacity of recipient countries to use it. 'Highly expensive levels of basic equipment and staffing is a common problem; an over-reliance on sophisticated information technology more suited to a First World country than a Third World one is another' (Reilly, 2002: 126). He cites the examples of Mozambique and Cambodia, both of which were given advanced technology by donors, but then could not use it in subsequent locally-run elections (Reilly, 2002: 126). He argues that the over-riding aim should be to ensure a *sustainable* electoral administration rather than using the latest election technology. This is echoed by Carothers (2015: 1) who warns of:

> The danger of putting into place expensive, locally unsustainable technical systems (electoral white elephants, like state-of-the-art, costly voter registration systems) instead of 'good enough' systems that will be affordable locally over the long term.

Two, Reilly (2002: 126) also urges donors to think hard about the relative merits of funding expensive international election monitoring missions versus supporting local observer groups and the domestic electoral administration (Reilly, 2002: 126). Carothers (2015: 2) notes that: 'Domestic monitoring efforts have… become more sophisticated in many places, with international support helping provide comparative experience and needed funding'. However, he points to a number of problems that still remain, notably that: 'Election observation carried out in isolation from a larger diplomatic policy of support for free and fair elections leads to observer reports of flawed elections ending up having little impact'.

5. Conduct of elections

Timing of elections

The timing of post-conflict elections is a major topic of discussion in the literature. The main division is between those in favour of holding elections early to establish a legitimate government, versus those who feel that early elections can lead to renewed tension and even conflict.

Arguments put forward by proponents of early elections include (Brancati & Snyder, 2012: 825):

- 'Early elections can improve a country's chances of consolidating democracy by strengthening the legitimacy of post-conflict governments;

- ‘Failing to hold elections…could leave former combatants without a peaceful mechanism to influence politics and compel them to return to fighting instead.
- ‘Even imperfect early elections….can help consolidate democracy because they habituate politicians and voters to democratic routines and pave the way for cleaner elections in the future.
- ‘Electoral violence…. is a normal part of most democratic transitions, a price worth paying to crush authoritarian resistance and advance countries toward a more just and effective form of government.
- ‘Elections held soon after wars end…. may take place in a context more conducive to peace and democracy since peacekeepers can help monitor elections and quell residual violence preventing voters from turning out at the polls.
- ‘The prospect of early elections…. makes foreign countries more willing to commit peacekeeping forces to war-torn countries in the first place because successful elections provide an opportunity for peacekeepers to extricate themselves from obligations abroad.
- ‘In holding elections early…. countries can attract international aid faster since many aid organizations make good governance a prerequisite for aid.’

Mansfield and Snyder (2005 and 2007, cited in Brancati & Snyder, 2012: 825-826) argue against early elections:

> Early elections can derail democratization and propel countries back on a path toward war…... Elections in... post-conflict states, ought to wait until some progress has been made in building effective political and administrative institutions. When countries democratize in settings lacking an independent judicial system, a competent bureaucracy, and free media… electoral politics becomes an exercise not in civic deliberation but in coercion, manipulation, and nationalist, sectarian, or radical appeals. This illiberal style of politics…. often gets locked into political institutions and ideas, sending a country’s political development on a detour that makes democratic consolidation more difficult and war more likely.

Brancati and Snyder (2012: 823) note that early elections ‘often take place when the rule of law is weak, making it more likely that elections will suffer from irregularities, candidates will resort to illiberal populist appeals, and losers will refuse to accept the results peacefully’. They also assert that early elections can empower ‘former combatants rather than liberal, programmatic political parties’ because the former ‘generally possess greater material resources, more extensive organizational networks, and stronger ties to society than newly formed, pro-reform groupings’ (Brancati & Snyder, 2012: 825). They warn that ‘former combatants renege on democratic procedures once in power and bias future elections in their favour’ (Brancati & Snyder, 2012: 825).

Flores and Nooruddin (2012: 558) also cite research which suggests that: ‘inchoate political institutions cannot effectively manage the inevitable tensions accompanying early post-conflict elections. In fragile post-conflict societies, elections may thus serve as flash points for further conflict, rather than instruments of conflict resolution’. They differentiate between countries which have some history of democracy, and those with none. Based on their analysis of election data, their conclusion is unequivocal: ‘unless elections are delayed at least two years in new democracies and one year in more established democracies, renewed violence is likely within a relatively short time’ (Flores & Nooruddin, 2012: 566).

Overall, the literature seems to favour *not* holding early elections in post-conflict states. However, Brancati and Snyder (2012), who generally 'side with the sceptics of early elections', add that under certain conditions the risks of early elections can be mitigated. These include when one party has secured a decisive victory (in conflict) over the other; when armed groups are demobilised; in the presence of peacekeeping missions; and if power-sharing arrangements are put in place so the losers in elections still have some access to power and state resources (Brancati & Snyder, 2012: 828-829).

Sequencing of national and local elections

Related to the issue of timing of post-conflict elections, is debate about the sequencing of national and local-level (sub-national) elections. Kuhne (2010: 3-4) writes that most election experts 'agree on the need to differentiate between national and local elections'. Laws (2017: 5) stresses that, 'The sequencing of national and sub-national elections also impacts on the prospects for peaceful democratic transitions in the aftermath of conflict'.

Arguments in favour of national elections being held first in post-conflict situations include (Laws, 2017: 5-6):

- '(T)hey have a higher profile than sub-national elections and are therefore more likely to attract international support in the form of training, electoral observation and financial resources.
- '(S)tarting at the national level (can) generate incentives for the creation of national rather than regional political parties.
- '(S)ubnational elections are more likely than national elections to spark renewed warfare when the previous civil war was fought over demands for regional autonomy or independence, and when control over the subnational legislature is paramount.
- 'Former combatants with a territorial base may be well positioned to win regional elections if they are held soon after wars end…. holding subnational elections before national elections may strengthen separatist parties with territorial bases, as occurred prior to the breakup of Yugoslavia.
- 'Rebels may not even compete for office at the national level following separatist wars because competing at this level would legitimise the national government.

By contrast, according to Kuhne (2010: 3-4), election experts generally consider it to be more prudent to start with local level elections:

> The stakes in terms of power and wealth to be distributed are less dramatic than on the national level and, even more important, in these countries 70 to 80 percent of the population normally lives in rural areas, far removed from national capitals, where the big power game takes place. Therefore, local elections are more relevant for their day-to-day lives than national ones.

Laws (2017: 5-6) gives two further key arguments for holding sub-national elections before national elections in post-conflict contexts:

- '(N)ational elections are politically and procedurally more sensitive and therefore require a longer preparation time. Having sub-national elections first grants political parties time to organise themselves and build up a local support base, and gives candidates an opportunity to gain political experience before they take the step to national politics.

- ‘(Starting) with local elections as a trial run (has been done in the hope that) candidates will focus on issues such as service delivery and development, rather than on more incendiary disputes over history or identity. In Kosovo, local elections held soon after the conflict ended helped weaken the political power of the party associated with the Kosovo Liberation Army while strengthening moderates in Ibrahim Rugova’s Democratic League of Kosovo. Elsewhere, local consultation processes preceding national elections, such as the World Bank’s Community Empowerment and Local Governance project in East Timor in 2000, moved the political focus onto more nuts-and-bolts issues of development.’

There are also those who ‘contend that simultaneous national and local elections are the best option, as they can facilitate the mutual dependence of regional and national leaders. The more posts that are filled at the regional and local level the greater the incentive for regional politicians to coordinate their election activities by developing an integrated party system’ (Laws, 2017: 6). After the ouster of Suharto in Indonesia, this was the approach used to good effect in the country’s transitional 1999 elections, ‘with identical party-list ballots being presented to voters at simultaneous elections for national, provincial, and local assemblies in an effort to strengthen the nascent party system’ (Laws, 2017: 6).

Election process

If elections are credible and have legitimacy, political actors have less opportunity to reject the results and are less likely to resort to violence to achieve their goals (Rosset & Pfister, 2013: 31). This means that the process by which elections are held is vital to ensuring that elections succeed in reducing instability and conflict. Joshi et al (2017: 9) stress:

> The decisive factor in our view regarding whether elections are stabilizing or destabilizing, is the acceptance or rejection of the electoral outcome. The key determinant of whether all significant parties will accept the outcome is the level of trust that has been established between the parties, and the level of confidence that has been established in the country's electoral institutions to deliver a fair result.

Similarly, Reilly (2002: 124) asserts: ‘The mechanics of the electoral process can have a profound impact… on the success or failure of post-conflict democratization’. Reilly (2002) divides election mechanics into two aspects: election system (how votes are converted into seats) and election administration. Rosset and Pfister (2013: 31) elaborate on the specific features needed to promote credibility and legitimacy of elections: (capacity and) impartiality of election management bodies; presence of local and international election observers/monitoring missions; effective security; election staff in adequate numbers and with the requisite capacity; and awareness raising among the general population (voter education - to promote high turnout).

Election systems

Of the two main groupings of election system – majoritarian (based on small, single-member electoral districts) and proportional representation (with larger, multi-member electoral districts and proportional outcomes) – there is consensus in the literature that the former would not be suitable for post-conflict contexts. This is particularly the case where the population is divided on ethnic/religious/other lines. Kuhne (2010: 5) warns that:

> So called ‘first past the pole’ or ‘winner takes all’ systems…. are highly problematic for segmented societies; they will easily turn ethnic and religious divisions into a zero-sum

> competition; those (ethnic-religious) groups that lose will feel excluded from the political process and all the benefits it offers; the risk of violence and even civil war will be high.

By contrast, proportional representation has the advantage that 'all major groups and their leaders will continue to have a stake in the system (parliament and related bodies) after elections; the risk of groups feeling excluded is much lower' (Kuhne, 2010: 5). In highly segmented populations, proportional representation (PR) election systems can ensure that even minority groups get a voice in decision-making. Reilly (2008: 22-23) points out that in post-conflict settings, the decision to use PR systems is driven more by administrative concerns than wider political issues:

> Indeed, in many post-conflict elections, national PR systems are the only feasible way to hold an election, as a uniform national ballot can be used, no electoral districts need be demarcated, and the process of voter registration, vote counting and the calculation of results is consequently simplified.

Many post-conflict elections, in particular those conducted under UN auspices, have used PR systems, e.g. Bosnia (1996. 1998, 2000, 2002), Kosovo (2001), Rwanda (2003) and Iraq (2005) (Reilly, 2008). However, Kuhne (2010: 5) points to 'a problematic downside to this approach: it does not satisfy the need of people in rural communities to directly relate to and identify with "their" candidates: in developing countries 60 to 80 percent of the population tends to live in the rural areas'. A further risk of PR systems is that they can encourage the formation of political parties based on ethnic/other identity lines, and thus can exacerbate ethnic/other tensions in society (Laws, 2017: 8).

Such concerns have led to the emergence of 'hybrid systems' ('improved proportional representation') which use both multi-member electoral districts where candidates are elected along proportional lines and direct election candidates. However, the downside of these is that they can be too complicated for voters in countries newly practising democracy and with low levels of literacy and education (Kuhne, 2010).

Other systems aim to break down ethnic/other divisions, and encourage parties to bridge such divides and actively engage with those from different groups. So-called 'centripetalism' seeks to 'utilize electoral systems that encourage cooperation and accommodation between rival groups, and therefore work to break down the salience of ethnicity rather than foster its representation in parliament' (Reilly, 2002: 128). This is done by building incentives into the system for parties and politicians to reach across to seek the votes of members of other groups. In the Northern Ireland single transferable vote (STV) system, for example, voters have to choose a first choice candidate, but also their second, third and subsequent choice from the candidates standing. Analysis of the 1998 (Good Friday Agreement) elections found that the use of a transferable ballot 'enabled pro-peace Republican and Unionist voters to give their first vote to their communal party, but to transfer their "secondary" votes to pro-agreement, non-sectarian parties' (Reilly, 2002: 135). Under this system parties that are able to negotiate with and work with others are rewarded, 'thus strengthening moderate voices and the political centre' (Reilly, 2002: 129).

Election administration

Election administration encompasses in particular election management bodies, voter registration and boundary limitation. Of these the first is the most critical:

> Probably the most important administrative decision concerns the composition of the body managing the elections, and specifically whether the elections are run by the government of the day or whether some form of Independent Electoral Commission is established, and whether such a body is composed of political parties or non-partisan civil servants (Reilly, 2002: 125).

Reilly (2002: 125) reports that evidence from non-partisan electoral commissions compared to electoral administration based on political appointees and party representatives (e.g. in the United States) clearly shows the former is preferable. 'Party-based commissions have an almost inevitable tendency to split along party lines' (Reilly, 2002: 125). He cites the examples of Cambodia, Namibia and East Timor with non-partisan election commissions as contributing to the success of elections in those countries, while the dangers of party-based electoral administration was illustrated in Indonesia's transitional elections in 1998 (Reilly, 2002: 125).

Laws (2017: 9) cites several studies which 'find that independent, non-partisan and permanent electoral management bodies represent best practice in terms of electoral administration in post-conflict environments. Their perceived neutrality from political interference lends credibility and integrity to the electoral process'. Kuhne (2010: 7) echoes this, identifying the following ideal traits in election commissions:

- 'Such a Commission should preferably be conceived as a permanent body; this, however, may be difficult in many developing countries for reasons of cost; there are second best solutions.
- 'Definitely, the Commission should not be part of government, e.g. under the authority of the president, minister of the interior or any other minister. Otherwise it will have no credibility in terms of impartiality.
- 'As part of this independence the appointment of its head and leading members should not be the sole prerogative of the president or the government.
- 'Providing the commission with sufficient funding, staff and technical means is, of course, a sensitive issue in view of the limited funds available in most developing countries. Western donors may have (and actually have had) a role to play here.'

6. Administrative and communication infrastructure

Necessary infrastructure

As well as the specific systems and capacity to run elections (e.g. election management bodies, polling staff), wider administrative and communication infrastructures 'must have been re-established to a degree that they allow for a sufficiently smooth conduct not only of the elections themselves but also related activities, like voter registration, civic education, etc.' (Kuhne, 2010: 3). In addition, Kuhne (2010: 3) stresses the need for a functioning justice system and police which have the capacity 'to deal with cases of fraud, abuse and other legal issues related to the proper conduct of elections; otherwise the opposition parties and the population at large will have no confidence in the fairness of the elections'.

Media

Dutton (2014) carried out a study of three post-conflict elections – Sierra Leone (2007), Iraq (2010) and Bosnia Herzegovina (2010) – to identify the criteria needed for success in such

elections. She found the criterion that was 'most prevalent and valuable was the media' (Dutton, 2014: 12). She lists the various benefits of the media in the elections she studied (Dutton, 2014: 12-13):

- Voter education – the media directly led to election success by ensuring the population was informed and educated on the voting process. Media campaigns ensured voters were informed and prepared.
- Candidate messaging – the media enabled competitive candidates to reach voters directly. This allowed voters to evaluate each candidate and reinforced the democratic principle of competition. Each voter knew there were options and various candidates.
- Election transparency – Thanks to the media, voters knew when the polls opened; they knew when the people were voting, and they were informed of the results. This constant transparency gave voters confidence in the process. Once voters understood the process, elections gained legitimacy and support of the voters.

Dutton (2014: 14) stresses that, in order to lead to successful post-conflict elections, the media 'must be carefully tailored to the audience'. Thus in Iraq, with high internet use, social media played a key role in candidates and parties getting their message across to voters, whereas in Sierra Leone election information was disseminated over the radio, since that was 'the preferred channel for information and communication for up to 90 percent of the population' (Dutton, 2014: 14). She concludes: 'Successful media and journalists take into account issues such as literacy, power availability, broadcast range and access and experience in order to ensure the audience receives the message' (Dutton, 2014: 14). She also cautions that there will often be a legacy of fear and mistrust of the media in post-conflict countries, because of the common history of government-run media and/or of media corruption and bias. This makes the role of the media in post-conflict elections even more critical, as 'party-driven media plying on the fears and prejudices of the population can do untold damage in a nation that has only recently emerged from violent conflict' (Von Gienanth & Pittz, 2008: 34, cited in Dutton, 2014: 14).

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This report is based on six days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

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