

Risking Elections – Milestone or Stumbling Block for Democratization

International Workshop

**Monday, November 2nd, 2009
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Hiroshimastr. 17, 10785 Berlin**

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Objectives:

- To clarify, in which cases/scenarios elections may fuel internal violent conflict and in which cases/scenarios, elections have the potential to contribute to stabilization or consolidation.
- To identify strategies for national and international stakeholders in the best sequencing of a process leading up to elections.

Context:

Elections are seen as an important indicator for democratization in many transitional countries. While elections without doubt are a vital element of democracy, the singular conduct of elections as such is not a sufficient evidence to assess whether democracy is consolidated or not. To the contrary, under certain conditions elections can counteract the goal of peace building and democracy, if the timing is not chosen wisely. While some international stakeholders have been focusing in the past on holding elections at an early stage in order to create legitimacy and transfer governance responsibility to a ruling elite, certain preconditions have to be met, if elections are to enhance democratic development without putting peace and stability at risk. The question of sequencing of the political process of democratization is therefore essential.

Many international actors have realized that a comprehensive approach is necessary to create a conducive environment for free and fair elections. Important elements are confidence building measures in post-conflict societies (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, transitional justice) and institution building (administrative structures on local, regional and international level, independent judiciary). Civil society should be prepared for elections acknowledging the principals of tolerance, refrain from violence and accept election results. Voters' education is as important as a functioning multi-party system in order to conduct elections as well as a media landscape that provides freedom of speech. With regard to the electoral process, the role of the electoral commission, the drawing of geographical constituencies and voter registration are central components of elections, where international actors can provide vital support. Examples of "elections after interventions" can be found in Afghanistan and Iraq. Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti and Macedonia provide examples for the conduct of elections after internal conflicts.

But elections can also give rise to conflict under circumstances that have been regarded as stable democracies beforehand. In Ghana the risk of escalation after the elections could be averted, but Kenya was troubled by post election violence. The deterioration of the political environment had led to this severe conflict over the distribution of power leading to escalation of violence along ethnic lines. Then again in Bangladesh the transition from military rule to civil government by free and fair elections has been peaceful and (until now) sustainable. This provides evidence that certain criteria for elections have to be fulfilled to produce peaceful results.

With these cases in mind FES has put the topic "Elections and Conflict" on top of its agenda. FES would like to discuss with international experts and policy makers in which cases elections bear the risk of endangering peace and stability and under which circumstances elections are a valuable step towards the consolidation of democracy in post-conflict societies.

Monday, Nov 2nd 2009

WELCOME AND OPENING SPEECHES

9.00 – 10.30

Welcome

Jürgen Stetten

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Berlin, Germany

“Elections: Milestone or Stumbling Block for Democratization”

Dr. Jack Snyder

Columbia University, New York / USA

“Key dilemmas for engineering elections”

Dr. Winrich Kühne

John Hopkins University – Bologna Center, Germany

Discussion

Chair:

Jürgen Stetten

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Berlin, Germany

10.30 – 11.00

Coffee Break

PANEL 1:

ELECTIONS AND CONFLICT IN DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

Case Studies: Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya

11.00 – 12.30

Najia Hashemee

United Nations Development Program, Bangladesh

John Githongo

Former Permanent Secretary for Governance and Ethics, Kenya

David Azey Adeenze-Kangah

National Election Commission, Ghana

Chair:

Angelika Spelten

FriEnt – Working Group on Development and Peace, Germany

In Ghana violent conflict could be averted after the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2008 that brought a change in government responsibility. Meanwhile Kenya witnessed violent clashes along ethnic lines in early 2008 after President Kibaki was announced winner of a close electoral race. In Bangladesh parliamentary elections were held after two years of transitional rule in Dec 2008. The elections resulted in a peaceful change of government, when leftist politician Sheikh Hasina Wajed (Awami League) won with a landslide victory.

12.30 – 13.30

Lunch

PANEL 2: ELECTIONS AFTER INTERNAL CONFLICT

Case Studies: Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Macedonia

13.30 – 15.00

Félix Acka

Centre International pour le Développement du Droit, Cote d'Ivoire

Dane Taleski

Central European University, Budapest

Alex Victor D' Meza

Consultant to Conseil Electoral Permanent, Haiti

Chair:

Katharina Hofmann

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Germany

Elections in Haiti to the Senate in 2009 (originally due 2007) have been conducted in an environment of insecurity, poverty and political instability. The strong international presence of the UN Mission MINUSTAH is vital to prevent further deterioration of the security situation and serves almost as a "protectorate" in Haiti. The latest conflict in Côte d'Ivoire erupted in 2002 between Northern rebels and Southern government troops on the issue of resource allocation and criteria for the Côte d'Ivoiran citizenship. Conflict parties signed the Ougadougou Peace Agreement (2007), a detailed plan on e.g. demobilization and elections. However the proposed date (November 29th) is still open to question as the preparation process has severely slowed down. In the Macedonian case the Ohrid Agreement from 2001 ended violence between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians by providing a power-sharing structure. Despite Macedonia's relative stability political processes are gridlocked and in the up-run to elections the struggle for power resulted in intra-ethnic tensions and violence.

15.00 – 15.30

Coffee Break

PANEL 3: ELECTIONS AFTER MILITARY INTERVENTION

Case Studies: Afghanistan and Iraq

15.30 – 16.30

Zaid Al Ali

United Nations Development Programme, Lebanon

Dr. Gunter Mulack

*Member of EU Election Observation Mission to Afghanistan, Germany
Executive Director of the German Orient Foundation*

Chair:

Tina Blohm

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Afghanistan

Iraq and Afghanistan both have suffered a similar fate: Military interventions by an international coalition brought down the governing elites and a new political system was installed. Both countries have become a test case for democracy building. However, they still suffer from the instable security situation that pose a serious obstacle to the second round of elections.

CLOSING REMARKS

16.30 – 17.00

Jürgen Stetten

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Berlin, Germany

Dr. Jack Snyder

Columbia University, New York / USA

Dr. Winrich Kühne

John Hopkins University – Bologna Center, Germany

17.00

Closing

Conference language is English.