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**From Bullets to Ballots
A Summary of Findings From Six Post-conflict
Election Studies**

**by Krishna Kumar and
Marina Ottaway**

**U.S. Agency for International Development
Center for Development Information and Evaluation**

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not of USAID.

Since the end of the cold war, peace accords ending internal conflicts have been followed within a short time by elections. These post-conflict elections seek both to promote democracy and to consolidate peace under the most difficult possible conditions.

Many war-torn societies have no prior experience with democracy, thus no electoral institutions. All are polarized politically, with deep distrust and antagonism between former enemies who often remain armed to some degree. Harsh economic conditions characterized by massive unemployment, high inflation rates, and food shortages erode public confidence and add to the atmosphere of mistrust. The shattered transport and communication infrastructures turn the logistical task of organizing elections into a nightmare.

The international community plays a central role in post-conflict elections. Bilateral donors, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations have performed remarkable logistical and organizational feats in many countries. Nevertheless, large gaps exist in our understanding of the effectiveness of electoral assistance programs in war-torn societies and above all of the impact of post-conflict elections on the consolidation of peace and on further democratization.

This evaluation seeks to narrow the existing gaps. It asks three sets of questions:

Planning and conduct of elections. Who took the initiative for elections? What were the objectives and expectations? How were the elections planned and conducted? What problems attended the planning and implementation processes? What were the results of the elections? How were they perceived and accepted by the contending parties?

International assistance. What was the nature of international assistance? How did the assistance affect the conduct and outcome of elections? What problems did the international community encounter in delivering its assistance?

Effects of post-conflict elections on democratization and reconciliation. How did elections promote or hinder these processes? What factors and conditions affected the impact of elections on democratization and reconciliation processes?

To answer these questions, the study evaluated elections in six countries. Only countries in which elections had taken place at least two years previously were selected. That made it possible to evaluate the longer term effect on democratization and peace consolidation. Furthermore, documentation had to be easily available, and all regions had to be represented. On the basis of these criteria, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation selected Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Nicaragua. It commissioned well-known scholars with both extensive knowledge of a country and election-monitoring experience to prepare the case studies. The six reports were presented and discussed at a workshop in November 1996 and revised. The results were incorporated into a synthesis. This report summarizes the synthesis findings.

The Country Context

The countries included in the study were diverse. Although they had all experienced civil war, the nature of the conflict, the way in which it unfolded, the process that led to a peace accord, and the degree of involvement of the international community varied significantly.

Angola

Two movements, the Movimento Popular de Liberação de Angola (MPLA) and the União Nacional Para a Independencia Total de Angola (Unita), had fought each other since the country became independent in 1976. With Soviet and Cuban support for the MPLA and South African and U.S. support for Unita, the conflict acquired an international dimension that made it more intractable. With the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the transition from apartheid in South Africa, external supporters lost interest. In May 1991 the MPLA and Unita negotiated an end to the deadlocked conflict. Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in September 1992.

Despite a United Nations presence (the UN Angola Verification Mission —UNAVEM), the combatants never completely demobilized. That created a dangerous imbalance. International assistance removed the logistical obstacles to elections but could not change the political situation. Elections were thus held under extreme political tension, with Unita leader Jonas Savimbi stating openly that he would not accept elections results if he lost. When initial election results showed the MPLA was winning, Unita returned to war.

Cambodia

After the Khmer Rouge seized power in 1975, Cambodia experienced 42 months of bloody rule in which a fifth of the population died. In 1978 the Vietnamese defeated the Khmer Rouge and installed a new government. Civil war engulfed the country as the remaining Khmer Rouge continued their resistance and a new monarchist coalition, the Unified National Front for an Independent, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (Funcinpec), came into existence. In 1991, a peace agreement was finally signed in Paris.

Because Cambodia had been devastated by the Khmer Rouge first and then by the war, the UN played a much broader role in Cambodia than in any of the other countries under discussion. It virtually administered the country until the elections.

Organizing the elections was a major logistical undertaking, given the destruction of infrastructure and the large-scale displacement of the population. The complete absence of a democratic tradition made free elections even more difficult. Furthermore, demobilization failed. The Khmer Rouge refused to allow UNTAC in the areas it controlled, and it demobilized no troops. The government army, estimated by the UN to number about 130,000, demobilized only 42,000 men. Many of them remained in village militias. Funcinpec and

other groups demobilized only token numbers. Yet despite these and other problems that forced a postponement, the elections were held successfully in May 1993. A coup in 1997 overturned the results, killing or exiling Funcinpec leaders.

El Salvador

An endemic conflict between a socialist-oriented insurgency and a military counterinsurgency escalated into civil war during the 1980s. The war pitted the leftist Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) against right-wing death squads. The turmoil caused 75,000 deaths, displaced half a million people internally, and caused 250,000 others to flee the country. Paradoxically, elections also played an important role in this period, with the centrist Christian Democratic Party and the rightist Arena being the most important contenders.

A peace agreement was signed in January 1992, but elections were not held until March 1994. The interim allowed for a successful demobilization of combatants and allowed the FMLN to start transforming itself from a guerrilla movement into a political party. Held in a climate of “institutionalized distrust,” the elections were nevertheless peaceful.

Ethiopia

A three-month war between the leftist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam and a number of ethnic-based liberation movements ended in May 1991 with the routing of Mengistu. The victors, the most dominant among them the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), established a government of national unity, then organized local and regional elections for June 1992. The coalition functioned under extreme tension because of rivalry among the different factions, in particular between the TPLF and another movement, the Oromo Liberation Front..

The tension marred election preparations. Institutions functioned poorly, and the cantonment of rival troops was partial at best. Lack of experience in competitive elections and limited international involvement compounded the situation. Irregularities occurred in the registration of voters, and the opposition parties were often prevented from registering their candidates. These factors helped cause the Oromo Liberation Front to withdraw from the elections on the eve of the balloting and to decamp its troops. Elections went ahead anyway, but they were not competitive multiparty elections.

Mozambique

War between the ruling Marxist–Leninist Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo) and the insurgent South Africa–backed Resistencia Nacional Moçambicana (Renamo) came to an end with an agreement negotiated in October 1992 with much international support. The international community played a central role in the Mozambican elections, as it did in running the country (it financed 60 percent of Mozambique's national budget).

In the wake of the Angolan disaster, the international community was determined to keep Mozambican elections from failing. It financed and supervised the demobilization of

combatants and the preparation of elections. It even set up trust funds to help Renamo transform itself from an armed group into a political party and to help other political parties establish themselves. The international community also battled all along the political apathy of the two sides to make the agreement work. Despite delays in the demobilization process, leading to a postponement of elections until October 1994, international involvement allowed obstacles to be overcome.

Nicaragua

Resistance to the leftist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua grew during the 1980s, and war between the government and the U.S.-supported Nicaraguan resistance—the contras—escalated, displacing over 15 percent of the population. Elections in 1984, deemed neither free nor fair, brought no change. A cease-fire was reached in 1988, and elections were held in February 1990. The international community played a central role in helping organize the elections, monitoring the vote, and finally convincing the defeated Sandinistas to accept election results. The contras were not demobilized before the elections but, politically marginalized, they neither disrupted the process nor were a factor in the outcome.

Conduct and Outcome of the Elections

All post-conflict elections largely followed a similar pattern: the parties to the conflict entered into a peace agreement, which included a commitment to multiparty elections; electoral institutions were organized; an attempt was made to demobilize or at least encamp the armed groups, including the government army; laws concerning elections, political parties, and the media were enacted or amended; voters and then candidates were registered; elections were held. The international community provided major support for these tasks. Despite these similarities, the conduct of elections and their outcomes varied significantly among countries.

Initiative for the Elections

Initiative for elections came from both internal and external pressure. Externally, the demise of the Soviet Union created pressure to move toward elections. Major donor countries made it clear they supported elections. In Central America, furthermore, a regional momentum existed to end all conflicts and move toward democracy. Internally, support for the elections came from organizations of civil society committed to democracy and human rights. It came too from opposition parties hoping to gain power and from incumbent governments that saw no other way out of the conflict. Not all organizations that supported elections were committed to democracy; some only saw elections as a means of gaining power. Indeed, the parties that lost elections usually resisted accepting the outcome initially, leveling accusations of fraud.

In most cases, the election date was unrealistic, leaving insufficient time for preparations and also for further negotiations aimed at consolidating the peace. The short preparation time in Angola and Ethiopia contributed to the elections' shortcomings. El Salvador, which held very successful elections, had the longest preparation time. Opposition parties usually demanded early elections, but the international community contributed to the problem by providing logistical support that allowed a shortened preparation time.

Design and Planning of Elections

All six elections were held under extremely difficult logistical and political conditions. International assistance solved most of the logistical problems, producing elections that were technically acceptable, although not problem free. These logistical feats made possible elections that would have otherwise been prevented by political conflict. But the international community could not solve the underlying political problems. This led to renewed conflict in Angola, a political deadlock in Ethiopia, and an unorthodox political compromise—a system with two prime ministers that collapsed in 1997—in Cambodia.

Electoral institutions were superficially similar in all countries. Each had a national election commission composed of representatives of major parties and of technocrats. Each had similarly composed regional and district councils, and polling station officials assisted (and kept under surveillance) by party representatives.

Neutrality was better ensured by reciprocal controls by party representatives than by the professionalism of technocrats. The most serious violations occurred when electoral institutions failed to include representatives of all parties. That was the case in Ethiopia at the provincial and, more serious, local level.

With the exception of Ethiopia, which only conducted regional and local elections in 1992, all countries chose to elect the parliament on a system of proportional representation. Angola, El Salvador, Mozambique, and Nicaragua also held presidential elections. Cambodia opted for a parliamentary system.

Proportional representation encouraged the formation of many parties, as expected. However, only the major parties that had been involved in the conflict received a significant number of votes. Thus, proportional representation did not change the nature of the contest in the short run.

Parliamentary systems are considered to be more conducive to power sharing than presidential ones. Indeed, Cambodia, with a parliamentary system, devised an unusual power-sharing system with two prime ministers after the elections. But Nicaragua, with a presidential system, also introduced an important measure of power sharing when the defeated Sandinistas were given the important defense portfolio and were thus put in charge of demobilizing the *contras*. This probably avoided a crisis.

Problems in Election Preparation

Three kinds of problems were encountered in election preparation:

Logistical problems, which might have been insurmountable for the national government, but were solved in an impressive fashion by the UN, bilateral donor agencies, and international nongovernmental organizations.

Procedural issues with political implications—for example, registering voters, legalizing political parties, training polling station officials—that were often open to technical solutions with the help of the experienced election organizers.

Political conflict among parties, which was not open to a technological solution and often proved intractable. The incomplete demobilization of competing armies exemplifies such intractability. International support and expertise could not make up for the lack of political will. Incomplete demobilization contributed to resumption of hostilities after the elections in Angola, Ethiopia, and eventually Cambodia.

A Technical Success

Compared with the problems encountered in the preparation period, the elections themselves were largely uneventful. Voter participation was high everywhere, ranging from 85 percent in Nicaragua to 92 percent in El Salvador. Familiar forms of fraud such as buying votes and stuffing ballot boxes appear to have been rare. All six countries encountered violence and intimidation in the weeks and months preceding the elections but very little during the voting. This has implications for the optimum international monitoring of post-conflict elections—it suggests the international community should center its efforts less on election day and more on an ongoing assessment of the preparations.

From a technical point of view, the elections were a success. With the exception of the Ethiopian elections, which were not officially certified by the international observers, all elections were accepted as “free and fair” by the international community, despite many irregularities.

The political outcome was more mixed. Except in El Salvador, the losers were initially unwilling to accept the election results. The major parties, when defeated, at first claimed fraud. International pressure, however, prevailed on all parties to accept results in most cases. In Mozambique, for example, Renamo sensed defeat and threatened to pull out of the electoral process on the eve of the voting. In the end, though, strong diplomatic pressure and an extra \$1 million contribution to the Renamo trust fund persuaded its leaders to participate. In Angola, by contrast, Unita utterly refused to accept defeat. Its leader, Jonas Savimbi, expected from the outset to win the elections. He declared repeatedly that only massive fraud could deprive him of victory. He returned to war when election returns showed that the MPLA had won.

The elections in El Salvador and Nicaragua succeeded politically. The outcome was accepted by the opposition, and democratically elected governments were formed. In Nicaragua the new government made concessions to its erstwhile adversaries: it signed a “protocol of transition” and appointed a Sandinista as head of the armed forces to oversee demobilization of the contras. Such measures alleviated the Sandinistas' security concerns and contributed to their surrendering political power.

By contrast, the elections in Angola and Ethiopia ended in renewed conflict. Angola precipitated a return to civil war. In Ethiopia the most important opposition parties, including the Oromo Liberation Front, pulled out of the process a few days before the elections because of their frustration with government recalcitrance. The elections thus consolidated the power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front as a de facto single party, which was tightly controlled by the Tigrean People's Liberation Front. That left the country with neither a power-sharing government nor a loyal opposition.

Elections in Mozambique and Cambodia require a more nuanced evaluation. In Mozambique the formal political outcome of the elections was positive. However, the degree of intervention by the international community, the dependence of Renamo on foreign funding, and the intense pressure that had to be exercised by the international community to keep the election process on target—all these raise questions about the political will of Mozambican leaders and the technical capacity of Mozambican institutions to sustain democracy independently.

In Cambodia the outcome of the elections was exceedingly complex. Funcinpec won the largest number of seats and theoretically could have formed a coalition with smaller parties, leaving the former ruling party, the Cambodian People's Party, in the opposition. But the CPP controlled the civilian administration and the military, and it was not inclined to play the role of loyal opposition. A tense and dangerous impasse was resolved with the formation of a joint government by Funcinpec and CPP, characterized by the appointment of two prime ministers. The uneasy alliance finally collapsed in 1997, when the CPP again seized power, putting an end to the democratic experiment.

Table 1. Outcome of Elections			
Country	“Free and fair” by International Observers	Losers' Reaction	New Government Formed According to Democratic Principles
Angola	yes	reject and return to war	no
Cambodia	yes	negotiate power-sharing pact	?
El Salvador	yes	accept	yes
Ethiopia	no formal certification	opposition withdraws before elections, fighting	?
Mozambique	yes	accept, but election-eve crisis	yes
Nicaragua	yes	obtain concessions, then accept	yes

In conclusion, in all countries the political parties' commitment to a democratic transition remained weak in the immediate aftermath of the elections. The role of the international community was crucial in the early days in persuading all political parties to accept the election results, even when the vote counts did not live up to their expectations.

Consequences for Democratization and Reconciliation

Post-conflict elections are expected to contribute to both reconciliation and democratization. The two are intertwined. Without reconciliation (that is, the transformation of armed conflict into political contention) there can be no democracy.

Elections are only one of the many factors that affect reconciliation and democratization. Elections are events, whereas reconciliation and democratization are longer-term processes. Elections can make only one among many contributions to these processes. The common assumption is that the contribution will be positive. The case studies suggest that, unfortunately, elections can also have a negative impact. The most blatant case is that of Angola.

One measure of the success of post-conflict elections is whether they led to the formation of lasting democratic government institutions. The picture here is mixed. In El Salvador, Mozambique, and Nicaragua, the elected governments are still in power, and democratic institutions are becoming consolidated. In Ethiopia the 1992 local elections were followed by national elections, first for a constituent assembly and then for the parliament. Though marred by lack of genuine competition, these elections showed at least respect for the procedures of democracy. In Angola, despite the disastrous resumption of civil war, the parliament elected in the 1992 elections still functions. Unita deputies finally took their seats in early 1997, although war still continues. Cambodia presents the most discouraging picture. The elected government was overthrown in 1997, and there is no indication at present it can be reinstated or the democratic institutions revived.

In most cases, electoral institutions needed for the next elections have been allowed to weaken. Voter registries have not always been kept up to date, and little effort has been made to ensure that the experience gained by election officials (particularly polling station workers) would not be lost. Some countries will have to make a fresh start for future elections.

Another measure of the success of the elections in fostering democracy is whether the political parties and organizations of civil society formed in the election period survived. Again, the picture is mixed. The transformation of military movements into political parties has succeeded in El Salvador, Mozambique, and to an extent in Ethiopia. It has not in Angola and Cambodia. New political parties formed to contest the elections, on the other hand, have almost all disappeared. Some democracy-promoting nongovernmental organizations have survived in all countries, although most remain fragile, have little grass-roots support and are dependent on donor financing. Many have already disappeared. Finally, the independent press has generally survived after the elections, although it struggles financially in many countries. In Ethiopia, furthermore, journalists remain subject to constant harassment.

As for reconciliation, in the aftermath of post-conflict elections three countries (El Salvador, Mozambique, and Nicaragua) have made significant progress. The former warring groups have been more or less integrated into the emerging pluralistic democratic system. To capture political power, they continue to follow democratic means. In the two Central American countries, several factors contributed to this successful outcome. They include previous exposure, though limited, to democracy; absence of deep ethnic or geographic cleavages; genuine commitment to the peace process; and the positive influence of and pressure from other states in the region. In Mozambique, successful demobilization and reintegration of armies, heavy dependence on foreign assistance, war fatigue, and discontinuation of outside support to rebels were major contributing factors.

Reconciliation remains elusive in Angola, despite new negotiations and agreements. In Cambodia, the hope for reconciliation was dashed in early 1997. Ethiopia, finally, enjoys

peace but without reconciliation. Indeed, the 1992 elections led to a premature closing of the democratization process. Parties that were members of the transitional government before the elections stopped cooperating and even briefly went back to war. Several international attempts at reopening talks failed to achieve results. The intransigence of the ruling party and of the opposition alike has so far prevented a relaunching of the process of reconciliation and democratization.

In conclusion, the overall effects of post-conflict elections on reconciliation and democratization have been positive in some countries and mixed or even negative in others. El Salvador, Mozambique, and Nicaragua can be cited as successful examples. The other three countries present a less encouraging picture.

Factors Affecting the Elections and Their Political Outcome

Several factors and conditions affected the outcome of elections.

International involvement. Without continual pressure and persuasion from the international community, the march toward democratization and reconciliation would have been slowed, if not derailed. USAID and other donors were aware of the need for such involvement. Consequently, immediately after elections, they were quick to put in place a variety of programs to continue strengthening organizations of civil society and to help the new governmental institutions, such as parliaments, to work more smoothly. Equally crucial was the role of the international community in encouraging major parties to continue dialog and mutual adjustment.

Presence or absence of democratic traditions. Whether participatory social institutions existed was particularly relevant. Such institutions include local political units, voluntary associations, a relatively independent media, previous competitive elections, and an emerging middle class economically independent of the state. The two Central American countries, which had some limited experience with democracy, are making satisfactory progress toward democratization and reconciliation. The remaining four states had no democratic tradition at all and little tradition of free participation in democratically organized voluntary associations. In all these countries progress toward democratization has been halting, and many authoritarian tendencies are still evident.

Ethnic cleavages. Significant ethnic cleavages existed in at least four countries, and they affected elections and consequent political developments. In Ethiopia virtually all political organizations were constructed along ethnic lines. In Angola the MPLA and Unita had different ethnic constituencies, although neither movement could be considered to be strictly ethnic. The situation was similar in Mozambique. The role and power of ethnic Vietnamese was a major issue dividing the parties in Cambodia. Although there were some ethnic tensions in Central America, these were less important than the other cleavages that existed. Ethnic cleavages do not appear to prevent completely democratization and reconciliation, but they do make both processes more difficult.

Economic growth. The expectation that democratic stability would promote economic growth, and thus alleviate poverty and economic stagnation, helped the democratization process. Moreover, the leaders who came into power after elections were fully aware that

future international assistance depended largely on their adherence to essential democratic norms.

Demobilizing and reintegrating armies. These post-conflict elections show that significant progress toward demobilization and reintegration of the opposing forces is paramount to the success of elections and even more to a lasting process of democratization. All countries where demobilization was incomplete (Angola, Cambodia, and Ethiopia) experienced renewed fighting either immediately after the elections or later.

Continuing dialog and negotiations. All post-conflict elections were preceded by negotiations and a peace agreement—this is what made the elections possible in the first place. But between the signing of the peace agreement and the holding of elections, countries differed widely in the extent to which open channels were maintained among the major parties. In Angola contacts between Unita and the MPLA appear to have been minimal and formal; thus, the mutual distrust was not lessened in any way. By contrast, opposition parties constantly negotiated with the ruling party in Nicaragua to resolve mutual disagreements and to deal with potential conflict. They were therefore in a position to strike a mutually satisfactory bargain after the elections.

International Electoral Assistance

International assistance was broadly divided into three categories: technical and logistical assistance, political assistance, and financial assistance.

Technical and logistical assistance aimed to solve organizational problems. It included helping set up and providing technical support to electoral institutions, training polling station officials, and transporting election material around the country. In some cases, as in Mozambique, the international community did most of the work in these areas. In countries with a stronger administrative structure, the international community assisted domestic institutions. All cases revealed the considerable technical expertise of international organizations and nongovernmental organizations in organizing elections. In Angola and Cambodia, in particular, the international community accomplished remarkable logistical feats.

Assistance to improve the political context included, in general, training political party officials, promoting civic education, and strengthening prodemocracy nongovernmental organizations. In particular those capable of supplying monitors for the elections. In some cases it involved promoting further negotiations among rival parties to solve conflicts that arose during the preparation of elections. Some of the countries that most needed improvement in the political climate received very little assistance in this regard. In Angola and Cambodia, for example, demobilization and logistical problems absorbed most of the attention of the international community. Political tasks fell to second priority. Similarly, the short time frame given for election preparation also caused the international community to concentrate their efforts on technical tasks. It is understandable why this happened, but it is also unfortunate.

Financial assistance. The transitional elections were very expensive, with much of the cost defrayed by the international community. The cost for Cambodia has been estimated at \$2 billion—including the cost of the UN mission. In Mozambique the cost of the elections

alone has been estimated at \$85 million, with larger amounts spent on the UN mission and demobilization. The Angolan transition was probably cheaper up to the time of the elections, because the UN mission was kept small and the process lasted only 16 months. The failure of the elections, however, produced further high costs for the international community (and of course to Angolans). The UN mission was still operating in Angola in early 1997. This suggests that in evaluating whether the costs of elections are too high, the cost of failure should also be considered.

Post-conflict elections in war-torn countries will always be expensive, but some of the costs were probably too high and established unrealistic expectations and standards for the future. Polling-station officials were in some cases paid salaries that were extraordinarily high in relation to the country's per capita income. And air transport was used frequently to expedite the process. Such expenditure levels can create a dangerous precedent.

The United States contributed significantly to all aspects of these transitions. It was involved to some degree with the negotiations of the peace agreements in all cases and later supported the election effort through international and nongovernmental organizations. A major component of bilateral U.S. electoral assistance in all countries was support for what can broadly be defined as civil society. Through organizations such as the National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, and International Foundation for Electoral Systems, USAID promoted voter and, more broadly, civic education. It also provided training for personnel of local human rights and democracy organizations, political party officials, and election monitors. When the situation allowed, these activities continued after the elections. They became part of a sustained effort at promoting democracy.

These issues arise with regard to international electoral assistance:

Time. In most cases, not enough time was allocated to organizing the elections. Although the international community did not always decide the timing, it did contribute to the problem by its willingness to compress election preparations into a short time frame. In Angola, for example, the date of September 29–30, 1992, was chosen during negotiations at the insistence of Unita. But no elections would have taken place at that time without the international community's logistical support and its disregard for political conditions.

Political intervention. Assistance aimed at improving the political context had to tread a fine line between promoting democracy and promoting particular political parties. In Mozambique, for example, the international community set up a trust fund to finance the transformation of Renamo from a guerrilla movement into a political party. It was argued that there could be no credible elections if Renamo did not make the transition.

For the same reason, the international community provided support in Nicaragua not only to prodemocracy organizations but also to the National Opposition Union. (The UNO was a broad-based coalition of 14 parties, united only in their opposition to the Sandinistas.) Under the circumstances, this assistance was justified.

Countries in which a democratic transition is more problematic (because of chaos reigning in the country, or weakness of opposition parties owing to earlier repression, or control by previous single parties over all government resources) are also the ones where

prodemocracy programs more easily acquire partisan overtones. Donors need to establish clear criteria on the more political forms of assistance.

Sustainability. The far-reaching role of the international community raises a question long familiar to agencies involved in economic development programs, that of sustainability. Is the political development represented by these elections sustainable? There are reasons for concern. Many of the country studies point with alarm to the disappearance of electoral institutions funded at great expense for the post-conflict elections.

It is also unclear whether civil society organizations that were fostered by the international community during post-conflict elections can become self-supporting in a reasonable time. This relates not only to the many nongovernmental organizations that carry out civic education (and draw their support exclusively from the international community) but to political parties as well.

The most difficult question concerns political sustainability. The more the success of elections was due to international intervention, the more fragile was the outcome. In post-conflict elections, the tendency by the international community has so far been to do whatever possible to make the elections a success. Unless sustainability is taken into account in designing programs, future elections may still require exorbitant amounts of international support—or be doomed to failure.

Lessons, and Recommendations for Donors

The six evaluations yielded a number of lessons leading to recommendations for assistance in the future. The following are key.

■ *International electoral assistance is essential.* Case studies indicate that without substantial international assistance, elections would not have materialized in Angola, Cambodia, and Mozambique, and they would have been less credible in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The Ethiopian elections, which saw the lowest level of international involvement, were also the least credible of the six.

In a climate of deep mutual distrust and antagonism, the international presence helped prevent gross irregularities and widespread fraud. It strengthened the legitimacy of nascent democratic groups and provided a reasonable assessment of the situation to others in the international community. However, in countries where one of the major parties lacked the will to abide by election results, international monitoring was ineffective (as in Angola) or even served to lend legitimacy to uncompetitive elections (as in Ethiopia).

In addition to direct assistance, the international community played a vital though less visible interventionist role. Diplomats, donor agency staff, and technical experts constantly mediated between major contestants, exerted subtle and not-so-subtle pressure for ensuring “free and fair” elections, and in many cases persuaded major contestants to accept the voters' verdict. For example, without intense international pressure, it is doubtful the Sandinistas in Nicaragua or the Cambodian People's Party in Cambodia would have accepted the election outcome. Diplomatic interventions were as essential as the direct assistance.

Recommendation: In cooperation with other international agencies, continue to provide economic and technical assistance for post-conflict elections to promote peace and democracy in war-torn societies. It should also step up efforts to promote dialog and reconciliation among the parties.

☛ *Three measures can reduce the divisive effects of post-conflict elections.* In practically all case-study countries, political parties appealed to parochial loyalties to gain votes. There is little doubt that in many instances elections left a bitter legacy, aggravating existing tensions and cleavages.

Case studies point to three measures that can reduce the divisive effects of political contestation. First, the experience of Nicaragua and Mozambique suggests that constant discussions, consultations, and negotiations between leaders and representatives of rival parties during the planning and conduct of elections tend to promote a better understanding and appreciation of the opponent's perspective and can resolve many differences. Negotiations on election rules and practices are particularly important to reinforce commitment to elections and acceptance of their results by all parties. Postelection power sharing is another issue that should be the object of preelection negotiations. Whenever possible, parties should be encouraged to enter into discussions concerning longer term policy issues.

Second, developing and enforcing a comprehensive code of conduct produces positive results. Formulating such a code involves a sustained dialog among rival political leaders. That results in a broad consensus on complex and controversial issues that may surface later in elections.

Third, civic- and voter-education programs, when efficiently and effectively organized before elections, can help create a positive atmosphere.

Recommendation: While planning elections, formulate appropriate strategies to prevent and control the divisive effects of political contestation. Such strategies may involve 1) promoting an ongoing dialog between rival political parties to plan and manage elections, 2) developing a code of conduct for political parties, and 3) designing and implementing extensive civic and voter education programs, starting before elections and continuing in their aftermath.

☛ *Stringent time frames have adverse consequences.* Elections need adequate time for planning and execution. In Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Mozambique, the original timetables for holding elections were based on unrealistic assumptions. The planners underestimated the obstacles created by deficient transportation and communication systems, the government's limited capacity, difficulties in donor coordination, and above all, the lack of political will.

Demobilization could not be completed in several countries; voter education programs could not be carried out effectively or could not be initiated at all; sustainability issues were not addressed because experts were under more pressure to meet unrealistic deadlines than to build institutions and infrastructures that could be used in the future; the overall cost of elections was inflated by reliance on air transport; and the postponement of elections made necessary by unrealistic schedules created further confusion and misunderstandings.

Although stringent time schedules are counterproductive, flexibility must not become an excuse for inaction. A longer timetable needs to include realistic target dates to complete specific tasks, and donors must pressure parties to move forward.

Recommendation: Budget adequate time for planning and conducting elections. The time frame should be based on an in-depth assessment of the existing situation and not on unrealistic political expectations; it should include intermediate target dates. Flexibility should be built into the election calendar to deal with unexpected problems or seize fresh opportunities but must not be allowed to become an excuse for inaction.

In the zero-sum game of international assistance, post-conflict elections are costly and come at the expense of other activities that promote development and democracy. Moreover, it is doubtful that in an environment of ever shrinking budgets for international assistance, considerable resources will be available for promoting reconciliation elections in the future.

Several measures can reduce the overall costs of elections. First, a reasonable and flexible time frame can result in appreciable economies. Second, election procedures can be designed in line with the country's financial capacity. Third, greater use of local manpower and expertise can save resources; when indigenous experts are not available, donors can try recruiting them from neighboring countries. And fourth, donors can improve their coordination and division of labor. For example, instead of many countries and organizations sending their own “observers” to monitor an election, a few may, by common consent, be entrusted with the responsibility.

Recommendation: Take the lead in examining the cost-effectiveness of reconciliation elections and suggesting ways to reduce their overall costs without sacrificing efficiency and effectiveness. The goal is to create electoral mechanisms the national governments will be able to support by themselves in the medium term.

☛ *The construct of “free and fair” elections needs revisiting.* Most international observer missions have become increasingly sophisticated in evaluating elections and in issuing nuanced reports that assess both progress made and continuing problems and that take into consideration the perceptions of the major parties and the general population. However, both the political pressures under which the international organizations and foreign governments operate and the reporting by the media often give the impression that elections are simply judged as “free and fair” or “not free and fair.” Such assessments have little discriminatory value.

Recommendations: First, continue efforts to ensure that all international and domestic observers rely on the same professional criteria in judging elections. Second, broaden efforts to increase the media's sophistication in reporting about elections. Third, when there is no choice but to accept flawed elections to prevent more violence, acknowledge the flaws lest the credibility of the electoral process be undermined in the eyes of the citizens.

☛ *Promoting democracy is a long-term endeavor.* The experience of all countries studied indicates that democratization requires continual reconciliation efforts among the former warring parties, reform of the security forces, rebuilding of law-enforcement agencies and the judiciary, observance of human rights, strengthening of civil society, and rapid economic

development alleviating poverty and unemployment.

Recommendation: Accompany assistance for post-conflict elections with a long-term strategy to nurture democratization and economic development, and with a firm commitment of resources.

■ *Certain preconditions are essential for the success of post-conflict elections.* Poor conditions do not necessarily make it impossible to hold elections, but they greatly reduce the chances for lasting results. The following preconditions are crucial:

- Existence of a state capable of performing the essential functions expected of it. To some extent, international assistance can make up for the weakness of the state, as happened in Cambodia and Mozambique, but this is extremely costly.
- A working consensus among former warring parties about the structure and functioning of the government and relations between national and subnational units. If there is no such consensus, it is unlikely the losers will accept election results. International assistance cannot make up for an absence of consensus.
- A demonstrable political commitment on the part of the major conflicting parties to carry out the agreed-on peace accord. In theory, the international community could make up for the lack of commitment by creating strong peace-enforcing mechanisms. The cost of such undertaking, though, makes such solution unlikely.
- Significant progress toward demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. Here, too, strong international peace-enforcing mechanism could in theory be a substitute, but probably not in practice.

Recommendation: Provide technical and material support for elections only if 1) there exists a functioning state; 2) major political parties agree about relationships between national and subnational units and about structure and functions of government; 3) warring parties demonstrate a commitment to implement a peace accord; and 4) significant progress has been made in demobilizing and integrating armies belonging to conflicting parties.

■ *There are interim alternatives to early elections.* In countries where preconditions for elections are not met and elections thus entail a high risk of failure, interim alternatives to elections need to be considered. Such alternatives would need to satisfy a number of requirements:

1. They entail less risk of return to conflict or consolidation of authoritarian regimes than early elections held under unfavorable conditions.

2. They help consolidate the peace agreement and create interim mechanisms for governing the country until elections are held.

3. They are sufficiently low cost to be sustainable. This rules out the possibility of a de facto international trusteeship.

4. They have as the end point the holding of free and fair competitive elections. The time required to get to elections will undoubtedly vary from country to country.

The countries studied offer some indications of measures that could serve as interim alternatives to early elections. They indicate, for example, that the countries with the most successful elections were also the ones in which a continuing process of negotiations took place in the interim between the original peace agreement and the elections. Such process helped solve specific problems and develop consensus on basic issues. It also consolidated the peace agreement as the parties learned to work with one another even before the elections. This suggests that one interim alternative to early elections may be to continue negotiations on a broader range of issues than those reached in the peace agreement.

South Africa offers an example of the importance of lengthy negotiations in a successful transition under unfavorable circumstance. That country took four years to get to its post-conflict elections. There were three interim alternatives to early elections. The first were all-party negotiations, which brought about agreement on a new constitution and on the necessity to form a government of national reconciliation. The second was the establishment of peace committees. The third was creation of multiparty “transitional executive councils” to supervise certain governmental functions.

Circumstances vary from country to country. Efforts to consolidate peace and generate a consensus that will eventually allow elections should be adapted to each country's most urgent needs. But in all cases transitional institutions need to initiate programs of political liberalization and economic reconstruction.

Recommendation: In cooperation with the State Department and bilateral and multilateral agencies, explore alternatives to early elections in extremely polarized societies (such as Burundi, Somalia, or the Congo) for an interim period. During this time peace can be consolidated, essential state institutions can be rebuilt, and a climate for democratic contestation created.