

It is of little solace to a rural candidate in Yemen that financial constraints prevented an international monitor from witnessing pre-campaign nomination intimidation early in the electoral process, or to a 23-year old electoral observer stranded along a deserted highway in Bosnia that it was endemic communication problems between headquarters and the field that prevented delivery of spare tires and radio batteries.

A fair yet responsible comparison must therefore balance the interests of the voter, candidate and the front-line electoral field worker with understanding for the unique circumstances surrounding election support for each of the five multilateral organizations. From this emerges a comparison that focuses on both international mission standards and broad organizational goals and constraints, both lateral comparison across the five and longitudinal measurement of the rate of reform within each organization. Objective criteria, organizational priorities, and learning are therefore all taken into consideration.

A final comparative consideration that must be made relates to the measurement of electoral and democratic impact. A key purpose of this study was to look not only at mission operations but also at whether they were actually making a difference. Unfortunately, however, it is difficult to directly measure the dependent effects of electoral assistance. This is because the relatively recent phenomenon of electoral support still provides an insufficient number of longitudinal and lateral case studies to examine, and does not permit a fair and thorough post-mission examination for behaviour changes. The impact of an election on democratic development cannot properly be measured without a good ten years of hind-sight, whereupon the pre- and post-election democratic trajectories can begin to be compared. More importantly, perhaps, how does one really know what would have happened had an observation mission not been present? Such counter-factual contemplation is difficult since successful electoral observation or assistance would presumably result in little change to the democratic trajectory. Infrequently can one say with certainty, therefore, that electoral support has had a lasting impact.

For this reason, and in the interest of fairness to the organizations, this report uses both direct and indirect standards for determining the comparative influence of multilateral electoral activities. Indirect criteria include: organization structures and operation, selectivity criteria, evaluation criteria and scope, mission structure and operation, credibility and resolve, and capacity for learning. The two direct criteria are impact on electoral process and impact on democratic development. All eight sub-categories have degrees of overlap with each other and are highly interdependent.

Organizational structure and operations

The constitution and constraints of the multilateral organization as a whole can have a strong impact upon the behaviour and impact of an electoral mission. This criterion therefore looks at the broad historical, international, financial and organizational advantages and disadvantages that the organization operates under, and their effect on field-level electoral activities.