Interregional Organizations and Election Integrity: Resolving Conflict and Promoting Democracy

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Introduction

Regional organizations are in a delicate position when it comes to encouraging electoral integrity, particularly where their relationships to domestic political parties are concerned. On the one hand, encouraging a free and fair electoral process necessarily means supporting a viable, competitive opposition; and opposition parties are often far more receptive to international attempts to democratize the electoral process than the incumbent regime. On the other hand, such support for the opposition can easily be construed as bias and interference in the domestic political process. How can regional actors encourage opposition participation in elections without appearing to favor the opposition over the incumbent regime? In cases where election results are disputed, how can regional organizations best help countries move toward resolution and more democratic outcomes?

The delicate position of interregional organizations is further complicated by the potential for conflict in electoral competition. My research on opposition-initiated election boycotts indicates that opposition participation in elections can be encouraged by increasing available information in the pre-election period. At the same time, my research suggests that more competitive elections often result in post-election conflict. Thus, as international actors encourage opposition participation they may also increase the chances that they will be needed to help resolve conflict after the election. The issue of electoral fraud and manipulation lies at the root of this conundrum. Claims of fraud and manipulation are often central to the opposition's reasons for boycotting, and attempts to encourage their participation typically include assurances that fraud will not ruin opposition prospects at the polls. However, opposition participation often increases the incumbent's motivation to commit fraud and/or the opposition's motivation to accuse the incumbent of fraud in the election's aftermath.

This brief offers evidence-based recommendations in light of the realities facing inter-regional organizations. Clearly, the easiest way to increase the integrity of elections, to improve opposition participation and reduce post-election conflict, would be to reduce electoral fraud. As equally clear as this simplistic observation, however, is the reality that electoral fraud is incredibly difficult to combat, and even the most honest election irregularities will leave room for suspicion of fraud. Furthermore, it is well understood that interregional organizations have their own organizational reputations and considerations, which cannot be ignored when considering how best to encourage democratic elections in member states. Given these realities, this brief suggests measures that regional actors can take to increase the integrity of elections where there is a high probability of fraud and manipulation (suspected or actual), while minimizing criticisms of interference and maximizing their own visibility.

The general recommendations of this brief are that interregional organizations' efforts to improve the integrity of elections focus on (1) increasing available information during the pre-election period, and (2) offering diplomatic engagement and mediation services in periods of post-election conflict. These recommendations are consistent with observations made by the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID), which advocates electoral assistance that emphasizes the 'whole electoral cycle' approach, and combines diplomacy with assistance. The remainder of this brief explains these two recommendations in more detail: the first recommendation is discussed light of my own research of over 700 elections since 1975; the second recommendation draws on case studies

from the Organization of American States (OAS) and the African Union (AU). The final section of the brief considers the feasibility of these recommendations given the particular circumstances facing different interregional organization.

Pre-election Conflict: The Central Role of Information

Media freedom lowers the probability that the opposition will boycott the election. Pre-election disputes, where the opposition threatens not to participate, arise by some combination of two issues: suspicions of fraud or other malfeasance on the part of the incumbent, and uncertainty about how well parties would do in completely fair electoral competition. The typical pattern of pre-election dispute involves the opposition complaining that the incumbent has rigged, is rigging, or will rig the election, and the incumbent stonewalling such complaints and characterizing the opposition as forfeiting for not having enough actual support in the electorate. Where information is tightly constrained, it is easier for each side to cling to their positions without moving toward a compromise that would produce opposition participation in the election. In the most conflict-prone countries, constraints on the flow of information during the campaign period make pre-election protest three times more likely to occur (Beaulieu 2011).

Two kinds of information are needed to help incumbent and opposition parties find some middle ground: the extent to which either side is capable of and attempting to commit fraud, and the support that each party currently receives in the electorate. The more that interregional organizations can facilitate the availability of these two types of information, the more opposition participation we would expect to see. This section details three mechanisms by which interregional organizations might increase available information in the pre-election period, ordered from highest to lowest visibility.

Election Observation

Election observation provides multiple opportunities to promote transparency and increased flow of information during the campaign period. Observers often help provide direct assistance in this regard, by uncovering information related to opportunities for and attempts at election rigging. Observer information may help to confirm opposition suspicions, and make incumbent attempts to stonewall increasingly difficult, or observer information may reassure a suspicious opposition and pave the way for opposition participation.

Beyond the direct information on election-related activities that they provide, election monitors might further boost information availability, indirectly, by commenting on media activity and emphasizing the need for media freedom in their reports and recommendations. The African Union observer report from Uganda's 2011 election, for example, noted that 'national electronic and print media fell short of living up to its responsibility of providing access and level playing field to all contesting parties' (Imanyara 2011). To the extent that it translates into actual improvements in media performance, an emphasis on media freedom should help to increase available information in the future, regarding both potential fraud or irregularities, and the relative competitiveness of the incumbent and opposition.

Such assessments of media activity will be easier to accomplish in those instances where observer missions include some long-term component, as in the case of the OAS in Guyana's 2006 election. With observers in place in the months leading up to the August elections, this mission was in a position to offer detailed commentary on the performance of the media during the campaign period, noting aspects where the media performed well and also highlighting deficiencies in the balance of media coverage and the accuracy of information. This particular report did not offer substantive recommendations with respect to media performance in the future, most likely because the issue of media performance had already been addressed so directly in agreements between the Guyanese Elections Commission and aid donors regarding media monitoring (OAS 2006: 14). Nevertheless, observer reports provide the opportunity for interregional organizations to underscore the importance of media freedom in their recommendations.

The primary advantage of observer missions for interregional organizations is their high visibility. This visibility is good for demonstrating the organization's commitment to improving the integrity of elections. There is some debate as to whether observer missions increase or decrease the probability of pre-election conflict, or boycott, in the elections they observe.[1] We see instances where observer information on incumbent fraud was used by the opposition to justify boycott, such as the 2000 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia elections (Beaulieu and Hyde 2009: 405). We can also find examples where the issues raised by observers helped incumbent and opposition parties to negotiate an agreement that allowed the opposition to participate. The work of observers for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Azerbaijan in 1998, for example, allowed for opposition and incumbent parties to address some opposition concerns, and led to the participation of several opposition parties who had previously threatened to boycott the election (Kelley 2011: 1534).

Observer reports are more reactive than pro-active. The visibility of observer missions may provide a useful platform to promote the increased availability of information in elections, but the impact of observers promoting information availability will only be felt in future election campaigns. The final concern regarding the use of observer missions to promote increased information in the election is that, because of their high visibility, observers invite the criticism of bias and interference in the electoral process. Thus, organizations hoping to minimize perceptions of interference in elections should be aware that the same visibility that makes observer missions an attractive tool for promoting electoral integrity also invites criticism. The two remaining options are more pro-active in their approach to encouraging increased information, but less visible than observer missions. Organizations should consider that this lower visibility might actually help to avoid perceptions that interregional organizations are interfering in domestic political matters.

Election-Related Assistance Projects

Another option for increasing available information in the pre-election period is for interregional organizations to provide assistance with particular aspects of election administration that are often neglected for lack of funds and expertise, and can substantially increase information regarding the relative competitiveness of parties. Providing technical

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[1]   For competing arguments see Beaulieu & Hyde (2009) and Kelly (2011).

assistance with census-taking or updating voter registers will result in increased information about each party's support base. For example, in recent years the OAS assisted Bolivia with technical aspects of updating its voter register, and provided Paraguay with an audit of its register, along with recommendations for improvements. Assistance with these activities may also reduce real or perceived opportunities for electoral manipulation. While less visible than observation, offers of electoral assistance have the advantage of providing more pro-active opportunities to increase available information and encourage electoral participation.

Advocacy and Assistance for Media Freedom

While observer missions can certainly take note of media freedom and advocate for greater media freedom in their reports and recommendations, more general diplomatic engagement and assistance on the subject of media freedom and proliferation may be advisable at all times. General increases in media freedom will increase available information (both about fraud and competitiveness) during election campaigns. For example, the Radio OKAPI programme in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the BBC World Service Trust Sanglap programme in Bangladesh, have increased available information in these countries, during electoral periods (DFID Report). While these programmes clearly provide an important benefit to voters, informing them about national-level political competition, such increase in information will also benefit political elites by increasing the availability and accuracy of information regarding fraud and general competitiveness, which should increase the opportunities for disputing parties to reach resolution and participate in an election.

Like electoral assistance, general advocacy for, or assistance with, increased media freedom is not as visible a means of engagement as observer missions. Like electoral assistance, however, this kind of advocacy has the advantage of being more pro-active and is less likely to be criticized as politically motivated. Two other aspects of this third option bear mentioning. First, by advocating for media freedom at all times, interregional organizations take the entire electoral cycle into consideration, something that has been advocated by Britain's DFID, for example. Second, while the more general focus of this approach might cause challenges for funding—will it be defensible to use funds earmarked for democracy promotion and electoral assistance to promote increased media activity and freedom?—the fact that other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are also interested in media freedom for their own purposes may present opportunities for collaboration and joint funding.

Post-Election Conflict: More Direct Engagement is Better

Thus, interregional organizations have several options they might use to increase available information in the pre-election period and encourage opposition participation in elections. Opposition participation, however, is a double-edged sword. It clearly improves democratic representation and the overall competitiveness of the election, but increased competitiveness is associated with an increased probability of conflict and dispute. Again, fraud (actual or alleged) is central to the relationship between competitive elections and conflict. In a close race, the incumbent who wants to stay in power will have increased motivation to cheat, and

the opposition party that comes closer to winning will have increased motivation to accuse the incumbent of fraud, whether those accusations are accurate or not. Clearly, the likelihood of protest after a competitive election decreases as electoral fraud and manipulation (actual or perceived) decrease in a given country's electoral history. Many countries, however, are still quite removed from such circumstances, so the question becomes one of how to deal effectively with the election-related disputes that are likely to arise as a consequence of increased competitiveness and suspicions of fraud.

My research finds that attention and support from democracy-promoting international actors often makes the difference between post-election conflict leading to democratic reform or authoritarian entrenchment. In general, I find that under circumstances of prolonged electoral conflict (both pre-and post-election protests) international support is particularly helpful. In cases of only post-election conflict, however, the impact of international support is more ambiguous and likely depends on the particular strategies for engagement that international actors choose. Evidence from the Organization of American States (OAS) and the African Union (AU) offer insights into the forms of post-election intervention are likely to be most helpful for democratic outcomes. The conclusions we draw from these cases are that direct engagement, particularly in the form of mediation, will yield the best results in situations of post-election conflict. More specifically, interregional mediation is most effective when it facilitates prolonged negotiation and focuses on improvements for the country's future (as opposed to revisiting specific election events). Clearly, direct engagement raises the potential for accusations of interference, but some of these perceptions can be mitigated with a focus on impartial mediation of the conflict.

The OAS in Peru

Peru's 2000 presidential election is instructive because it highlights the value of interregional involvement in cases of post-election conflict and offers some clear insights for the most effective forms of engagement. The OAS mission to Peru in the wake of the 2000 election was so successful because it involved direct intervention, but still positioned itself primarily as a mediator, helping domestic actors to come to their own resolutions. Furthermore, the efficacy of these post-election mediation efforts was enhanced by a pre-election observer mission that had been willing to criticize and expose irregularities in the pre-election period to a greater extent than previous OAS observer missions (Cooper and Legler 2006: 58). In fact, the work of the OAS observer mission is credited with forcing Fujimori to hold a second-round runoff, rather than trying to claim he had won a majority of votes in the first round of the election.

Peru's presidential election in 2000 is also an ideal case because it falls squarely within the grey area that most interregional organizations operate in when dealing with election-related conflict. In this election, the true undemocratic nature of the elections was ambiguous. Unlike military coups, where attempts to secure power undemocratically are committed in a more obvious manner and the potential for subsequent violence can be assessed with an evaluation of who commands what military resources, electoral conflict offers no such straightforward indicators of who might be trying to secure power undemocratically and what their ultimate recourse to violence might be. Fujimori, the incumbent, was widely suspected of fraud and manipulation: using the military for pro-government campaigning and opposition crackdowns, propping up pro-government parties to siphon votes from the

opposition, etc. And while the main opposition candidate, Alejandro Toledo, alleged fraud (and boycotted the second round of the election) the potential for this electoral conflict to escalate into more prolonged violence was also ambiguous. Though most observers could agree that these electoral irregularities were problematic, they were careful to stick to criticisms of 'irregularities' rather than condemning fraud outright (Cooper and Legler 2006: 63). Even with careful diplomatic considerations, the more critical tone of the 2000 observer mission set the stage for post-election intervention.

The other important point to note, before turning to the specific tactics of the OAS mission, is that this intervention happened when the norm of non-intervention was still very powerful among OAS member states. As events unfolded in the aftermath of the 2000 election, several important Latin American states resisted more involvement in Peru's domestic affairs. Mexico questioned whether these electoral results truly met the OAS's criteria for the end of democratic governance. Brazil retained visible diplomatic ties with Peru and Venezuela, clearly demonstrating self-interest, advocated for non-intervention. The US was in favor of intervention and ultimately threatened Peru with suspended bilateral aid, which likely provided some counter-balance to these states' positions, but the role of the US in the OAS intervention was minimal, and tended to be more supportive than leading. As such, the case of OAS involvement in the Peru 2000 election should be relevant for those interregional organizations that may not perceive opportunities for engagement in electoral conflict because they are constrained by norms of non-intervention.

Following Toledo's boycott of the second round, Fujimori's declaration of victory, and ensuing civil unrest in Peru, the OAS was invited by the Peruvian government to conduct a high level mission with the stated purpose of investigating options and offering recommendations to further strengthen democracy. While the OAS was formally invited by the Fujimori government, and framed the mission as a neutral exercise to help a struggling country, it is also clear that diplomatic pressure was instrumental in convincing Fujimori that greater OAS involvement in Peru was essential to resolve the crisis. This invitation for the OAS mission produced three days of direct dialogue between mission members and relevant stakeholders and produced recommendations for future improvements. Most importantly, though, it opened the door for the OAS, once present in Peru, to expand its involvement by offering to mediate dialogue roundtables between the government, opposition and civil society, and to consider the recommendations that had been generated by the OAS high committee.

Having established the dialogue roundtables, and having laid out an agenda, OAS representatives emphasized that their role was strictly confined to mediation. Any decisions to emerge from the roundtables were to be undertaken through negotiation among the Peruvians present, and OAS representatives would assist in the process of negotiation. In this way, the OAS was able to retain an appearance of neutrality, while continuing to engage in the process of democratization in Peru. Initially both the government and main opposition withheld substantial participation. Representatives of the government were understood to be representatives from a committee convened by the government, but not direct representatives of Fujimori. Similarly, Alejandro Toledo declined to participate directly in the roundtables, allowing other leaders from his Peru Possible party to fill the single seat granted to their opposition party. The OAS's persistence with the negotiations paid off as political crises erupted and ultimately brought down the Fujimori regime.

Undoubtedly corruption scandals would have brought an end to Fujimori's rule, even in the absence of an OAS high mission, but it is not clear that the transition to democratic government would have gone so smoothly without the intensive involvement of the OAS, which had already been entrenched through the mediation process.

The African Union: Ethiopia and Kenya

The African Union's involvement in election crises in Ethiopia (2005) and Kenya (2007) provide useful points of comparison to the case of the OAS in Peru. Like the OAS, the AU sent observer missions to monitor these elections. Similar to Peru, powerful western countries attempted to pressure the Ethiopian and Kenyan governments in the aftermath of these elections, with threats of aid suspension. In the case of Ethiopia, the AU deployed a second observer mission as the election crisis escalated, but this mission was not active in mediation and ultimately had little impact. The AU took a more active role in mediating Kenya's post-election crisis. Ultimately, the success of the mediation depended on other international actors, but this intervention shared more characteristics associated with the successful OAS mission in Peru.

The Ethiopian election in May 2005 seemed to be one of the more competitive in the country's recent history, yet there were several indications of the post-election conflict that would eventually occur. Instances of government violence and intimidation were reported in the press during the campaign, and the government used the press to blame the opposition for election-related violence (Abbink 2006). Delays in the release of official results exacerbated suspicions of electoral manipulation on the part of the government. The report from AU election observers was mild, and though other observer groups from the European Union and the Carter Center were more critical, none of these reports appear to have had much impact on the crisis that ensued in the wake of the election. The US offered diplomatic pressure; the UK cut aid; and the EU and the World Bank ultimately suspended over $300 million in support for Ethiopia (Abbink 2006: 190).

The AU response to the crisis was to send a team to observe the Ethiopian government's investigation and adjudication of election-related complaints in June and July of 2005. As with the previous observer mission, the assessments were largely supportive of the government's undertakings, and offered some recommendations for future improvements, but did not bind the AU mission to the reconciliation process in any meaningful way. Some have claimed that a more fair adjudication process following the election could have averted most of the protests that ultimately left at least 42 individuals dead (Abbink 2006: 193). Compared to the OAS in Peru, it is possible that a more active AU role in investigation and mediation, rather than observing the process, would have defused the crisis. We should note, however, that part of the reason that the OAS high mission was invited to Peru, was that it explicitly promised the government it would not dwell on issues in dispute around the previous election, but would focus on moving the country forward to strengthen democracy. Thus, it may not have been possible for the AU to engage more directly in the electoral matters in dispute. An offer to mediate conflict between government and opposition, to move Ethiopia forward, might have produced more positive consequences.

The case of Kenya's post-election crisis in 2007 more closely mirrors the kind of mediation that resulted in successful outcomes for the OAS in Peru. Initially, the AU took a direct

role in mediating Kenya's electoral crisis. Ultimately, these mediation efforts stalled and the AU elected to draw on the expertise of other international actors, such as the very influential Kofi Annan, to continue mediation. Both the initial AU mediation attempts and the second-round of mediation efforts highlight critical aspects of successful interregional engagement in a post-election crisis.

Kenya's December 2007 election is an excellent example of the kinds of challenges presented by competitive elections. The presidential race was close fought and there were serious concerns about manipulation of vote counts. When the incumbent was declared the winner of the election, the opposition refused to accept the results and violence ensued. The violence claimed the lives of hundreds of Kenyans (some estimates place the death-toll as high as 1,500) and it soon became apparent both to the government, the opposition, and international actors, that negotiations would be necessary to end the crisis.

The chair of the AU arrived on 8 January 2008 and attempted to negotiate a preliminary agreement between the incumbent and opposition before he left on 10 January 2008. Essentially these 'principles of agreement' would establish a framework for further investigation and recommendations regarding the 2007 election conflict. Ultimately the incumbent refused to sign the agreement and negotiations stalled. In contrast to the OAS mission in Peru, where a preliminary investigation was followed by a prolonged period of mediation, the AU attempted to mediate an agreement very quickly, which likely explains its failure at this stage. Recall that early on in negotiations in Peru neither the incumbent nor the main opposition candidate fully endorsed the process, and it was only with prolonged negotiation that the two parties became more fully engaged. In addition to the attempt to accelerate negotiations, the failure at this stage might also be due to a focus on election events, similar to Ethiopia. Again, it was only by shifting the focus of investigation and mediation to questions of the future of democracy in Peru that the OAS was able to intervene and prolong the negotiation process.

The second round of negotiations in the Kenya crisis shifted the focus away from assigning blame for election events and toward finding solutions to end the crisis and move the country forward. In the second round, the AU handed over the task of mediation to a 'Panel of Eminent African Personalities' headed by Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (International Crisis Group 2008: 24). These negotiations ultimately produced a power-sharing agreement between the incumbent and opposition. In addition to the shift in focus, part of the success of this second round of negotiations can be attributed to the prolonged nature of the negotiations. When the predetermined period for negotiation ended on 12 February 2008, participants decided to continue the negotiations and Annan indicated that he would mediate for several more weeks if necessary (International Crisis Group 2008: 25). It may have been better for the reputation of the AU to have remained central to the second round of mediation, but this case provides an important example of how an interregional organization can partner with other international actors in the event that their own organization's influence is limited.

Case Study Conclusions

The preceding cases suggest that interregional involvement is critical to resolving post-election conflict. The example of the OAS in Peru highlights the importance of sustained

involvement in a mediation capacity to guide countries toward more democratic governance, while minimizing accusations of interference. The limited impact of the AU's post-election observation mission to Ethiopia underscores the point that involvement must be more directly oriented toward mediation if it is to produce successful outcomes. Finally the AU's involvement in the Kenyan election crisis, and subsequent mediation efforts there, are consistent with the ideas that mediation efforts must be prolonged and focused on moving the country forward, rather than resolving past disputes. The case of Kenya also highlights how organizations with limited influence can partner with other international actors to sustain engagement.

Region-Specific Considerations

The previous examples highlighted some similarities between the OAS and the AU approaches to promoting electoral integrity. Nonetheless, the fact remains that each interregional organization faces challenges specific to its particular member states and region. This section will discuss the considerations that each organization must confront to decide on a general course of action for encouraging opposition participation and encouraging resolution of post-election disputes.

The OAS

With its generally successful record of democracy promotion and support for electoral integrity in the region, the biggest issue facing the OAS is the centrality of election observation to its mission (Cooper and Legler: 27). Given the fact that OAS observer missions have increased their willingness to expose and criticize irregularities, these missions may be the best way for the OAS to increase available information in the pre-election period and to lay a foundation for more extensive intervention in cases of post-election dispute. But the visibility of observer missions leaves the OAS vulnerable to charges of interference. Furthermore, to the extent that it might be wise to invest in more electoral assistance programs or electoral-cycle programs focused on media freedom, the organization's current focus on observation may make it difficult to divert resources away from observation toward more pro-active attempts to increase information in the pre-election period.

The AU

The AU faces three challenges: funding, the problem of generating consensus among member states, and the prevalence of security concerns in the region. Funding is a problem for all AU activities, including those activities related to peace and security, which clearly receive priority over electoral assistance (Mwanasali 2008: 51). In addition to problems of insufficient funds, the question of how to allocate funds arises. The AU has the Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit with donor funds, which it can use to support the integrity of the electoral process. However, typically more funding goes toward election observation than for election assistance, because observation is higher-visibility. The AU might consider strengthening partnerships with nongovernmental organizations, such as the Election Institute for of Southern Africa or the Media Institute of Southern Africa, as a way to make Democracy and Electoral Assistance funds stretch beyond observer missions. Another

strategy for improving information availability in the pre-election period might be for AU observer missions to increase their willingness to expose and criticize electoral irregularities.

The problem of generating consensus among member states, while significant for the AU, is not unique to this region. The case of the OAS in Peru highlighted the conflicting positions and preferences of member states, which the organization had to confront while mediating post-conflict negotiations. The key from the OAS case would seem to be that it did not wait for consensus among member states to act. The AU should look to secure the support of a few states for more direct, involved, intervention in post-election conflict. Likely broader agreement among member states will only come as the AU demonstrates an increased commitment and efficacy in supporting electoral integrity.

The final challenge the AU faces is that the organization has, out of necessity, placed a clear priority on addressing conflict resolution and humanitarian issues in the region. While the emphasis on engagement around matters of civil conflict may limit the resources available to devote to promoting electoral integrity, the AU's commitment to financing peace initiatives and dealing with situations that threaten to escalate into civil conflict may provide the perfect opening for further AU intervention in post-election conflict situations. In fact, we can look to the case of AU involvement in Darfur for a model of engagement that could be quite effective in addressing post-election conflict.

The AU has taken an active role in attempting to resolve the conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan, and has enjoyed some successes in those efforts (Gomes 2008: 126). In 2006, AU mediators brought the parties in conflict in Sudan into talks in Abuja, Nigeria, and produced the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). Although fighting has continued and attempts at further negotiation have not yet proven successful, many of these difficulties can be attributed to the complex, prolonged nature of the current conflict in Darfur, and the extreme extent of violence that has taken place. Other observers have commented that the AU is simply under-funded to deal with a crisis of the magnitude of Darfur. Both of these points regarding funding, and the extent of violence, suggest that AU mediation efforts similar to those that produced the DPA would result in greater success if applied to post-election conflicts of a smaller scale.

ASEAN

ASEAN still operates from a strong position of non-interference in domestic affairs, which is going to make effective engagement in either the pre or post-election period challenging (Dosch 2008). The organization's move toward positions that are more explicitly in favor of democracy since 2004 is helpful for laying a foundation from which ASEAN could justify increased action in the future. Furthermore, the organization's emphasis on promoting political liberalism provides a perfect opportunity to advocate for media freedom in the region, which should improve opposition participation in elections (Dosch 2008: 530). Changing the region's perspective on non-intervention is going to have to come from those countries with most substantial democratic experience that are currently the region's strongest proponents of democracy (e.g. Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand). ASEAN's Political-Security Community Blueprint outlines some of the region's most recent efforts in promoting political development, which tend to emphasize voluntary meetings, exchanges, and other information-provision activities. As such, it seems like general advocacy for media freedom in the pre-election period is the most feasible options for support in this region,

until (or unless) the norm of non-interference is substantially weakened.

The League of Arab States

The Arab League faces even more challenges than ASEAN, given its strong historical norm of respect for domestic regime survival, which amounts to both an endorsement of non-intervention and a rejection of any pro-democracy norms (Barnett and Solingen 2007). Recent protest events across the region may herald a new era of domestic democracy promotion, which could inform a regional norm for support for the integrity of elections. In fact, the time could be ripe for the Arab League to position itself as a strong force of support. As such, the lack of an institutional history would actually leave the organization free to choose any means of encouraging opposition participation, provided there was sufficient will among some of the more influential member states.

Conclusions

This brief has offered several policy recommendations for encouraging opposition participation during the pre-election period and defusing post-election conflict. Interregional organizations can encourage opposition participation by increasing available information in the pre-election period. Three recommended strategies are:

- Election observation missions willing to expose irregularities and emphasize media freedom in their report and recommendations;

- Technical assistance and funding in the pre-election period for tasks such as census taking and updating voter registers;

- Continued advocacy for media freedom across the entire electoral cycle.

These options come with clear trade-offs in terms of visibility, but organizations are encouraged to remember that higher-visibility efforts such as observation missions will always invite more potential for criticisms of interference and partiality on the part of the organization.

Interregional organizations are encouraged to intervene in cases of post-election conflict, where a balance must be struck between high levels of involvement and avoiding charges of interference. Mediation with the following characteristics is recommended:

- Protracted or prolonged time-frame;

- Focus on future improvements and strengths rather than resolution of past disputes;

- Reliance on additional actors in the event of organizational weakness.

In all cases, regional norms of non-interference present the most significant barrier to this kind of post-election engagement (and potentially to pre-election efforts as well). The AU's mediation of violent conflict might provide a model for more extensive engagement in post-election conflict situations. If the case can be made that post-election intervention will prevent conflict escalation, organizations might find justification for a more extensive, more effective level of engagement.

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