

GPECS II



Global Project for Electoral Cycle Support II



GLOBAL COMPONENT



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Getting to the CORE: the Cost of Registration and Elections

Hundreds of countries conduct elections every year. Electoral processes are increasingly used for not only choosing representation on national, but also on local and provincial level. Despite the technical and logistical challenges, in many cases, this proves to be a major burden to the countries' national budgets. Depending on the specific context in which an election takes place (e.g. post-conflict, post-transition), the process usually consists of several cost intensive sequences, such as voter education, voter registration and the actual polling, which in some cases even consists of two rounds (in case a presidential run-off is conducted). Hence, elections are often a very complex and extremely expensive undertaking.

The amount, source, distribution and spending of national funds for elections influence the incentives and decisions of actors involved in electoral processes, as well as the sustainability of the process.

Some countries have adopted electoral practices and/or technology that they cannot finance or manage without international assistance and hence the sustainability of the (often young) democracies is heavily depending on international donors. Yet, both national and international partners currently lack a reference to determine what should be 'reasonable' costs for an election, or elements of an election, in a particular context, in a particular time. This lack of comparative data undermines EMBS', donors and technical assistance providers' abilities to properly

evaluate the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the various options prior to deciding on the various reform alternatives. Elections are sometimes seen as being extremely costly in the eyes of citizens, in particular while other state services are under financial constraints. If not organized in a cost effective manner, people's willingness to take part in an election might be undermined. Thus, by enabling a proper cost-benefit analysis, the national authorities are better positioned to justify the expense to the country's electoral processes and operations.

“While the financial aspects are critical, the notion of sustainability is broader and it extends to political sustainability. The latter revolves around the question of whether national actors have sufficient confidence and trust in their electoral processes and in their political system as a whole.”

[UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon in his 2013 biennial report on democracy and electoral assistance to the General Assembly]

UNDP works to support credible and inclusive elections upon a request from Member States, and provides assistance to an average of 60 countries per year. The



International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), active in more than 30 countries annually, supports Electoral Management Bodies (EMB) as well as citizens' right to participate in free and fair elections. Both, IFES and UNDP use their expertise to strengthen electoral processes and build local capacities to deliver sustainable solutions. In 2005, UNDP and IFES jointly published "**Getting to the CORE: the Cost of Registration and Elections**" with the intention of analyzing and comparing the cost of elections throughout the world. The innovative project developed financial tools and methods to assess the costs incurred by EMBs. At this time, there was no other comprehensive comparison of the cost of electoral events in different countries. CORE was intended to fill this void. Upon publication in 2005, the CORE study was praised as a unique contribution to the field of electoral studies and electoral assistance, and remains frequently cited by journalists, academics and practitioners. Yet, today, the data is more than ten years old and major changes regarding EMBs planning and operational procedures have taken place, especially against the background of the ever increasing use of ICT solutions.

Global evaluations examining the implementation of electoral assistance have highlighted the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of electoral processes, as well as the adoption of new technologies as key challenges in the field. A recent lessons learned study on the long-term impact of UNDP electoral assistance recommended a review of the CORE study and to enhance it with case studies and data, analysis and guidance, which are in particular taking the increasing costs of biometric voter registration and e-voting into account. Based on this recommendation, the increasing demand for data and guidelines on the costs of elections, and the lack of references, UNDP and IFES jointly initiated CORE II.

The objective of the CORE II initiative is to conduct comprehensive research and analysis of the current costs of electoral procedures and developing an election cost database accessible to EMBs, donors and electoral

practitioners. The database will help governments and development partners to strategically estimate the costs of voter registration and polling per voter and elections according to four identified main blocks. These "cost-blocks" are 'voter registration', 'civic education & voters outreach', 'electoral operations and election-day' and 'results management'.

The foreseen, sharable database will accumulate, in a disaggregated manner, electoral costs incurred around the world according to the identified blocks, and provide qualitative and quantitative information.

The project's website will be freely available to practitioners, academia, policy-makers and the general public interested in the cost of elections. Through the use of the database, users should be equipped, in some way, to answer a series of questions, for example:

- What are the cost implications of changing from one electoral system to another?
- What are the main factors (percentage) affecting the average cost per voter in a post conflict election?
- What are the average costs of conducting a boundary delimitation exercise, under the various models?
- What are the anticipated security costs of elections that take place in a post-conflict environment versus a peaceful environment?
- What are the average costs per voter for the various biometric voter registration systems?

The CORE II initiative is foreseen to be a major contribution to the cost-benefit analysis of elections. The database will not only help governments to estimate the costs for elections, but also provide citizens with detailed information on operational and logistical costs included in EMB budgets, and therefore contribute to more transparent and accountable institutions.