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Polling for peace and security

Pre-election and post-election polling in fragile and precarious situations

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Introduction

It is increasingly recognised that elections are not a panacea: important as they are, elections are only part of the process towards peace, security, and development. While few would argue that the multi-party democratic system is not the most desirable way to achieve legitimate governance, it is nevertheless the case that elections – by producing winners and losers – can increase the short term chances of conflict. Analysing the nature, causes, and consequences of violent conflict today, the World Bank's 2011 World Development Report proposes that strengthening institutions to provide citizen security, justice and jobs is key to breaking the cycles of political and criminal violence plaguing fragile countries. It underlines that elections are a means for such institutional transformation, not its end.

It is therefore crucial that elections in fragile and conflict-affected situations are monitored closely. Methodologically-sound polling of citizens' perceptions of safety, justice and employment, carried out by a neutral third party, could provide the knowledge base needed for targeted policy interventions to anticipate and, ideally, prevent election violence and disturbances in flashpoint areas. Furthermore, follow-up surveys at regular intervals could enable policymakers and their international partners to assess the impact of elections and make adaptations when problems arise.

In the course of the next two years, a number of important elections are forthcoming in Africa – including in Cameroon (2011), DR Congo (2011), Liberia (2011), Kenya (2012), Mali (2012), and Sierra Leone (2012). The revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and potentially other Middle Eastern countries in 2011 also sets the stage for crucial elections in what will be new and very fragile democracies. Fafo proposes to develop and implement targeted polls to monitor these fragile situations, drawing on its extensive experience in polling and generating perception data through surveys. The polls will be based on a standardised module, but each will be fine-tuned to the political situation in the country in question.

Approach

The polling tool should be ready to be fielded in advance of the election campaign and will be designed to allow for quarterly repetitions to capture developments in perceptions and attitudes. Based on the situation in the country, the poll can be nation-wide or made to cover only potential 'hot-spots' where the stakes are high and the likelihood of election disturbances and violence equally high. Content-wise the poll will include the following sub modules.

1. A limited number of socio-economic background variables
 - a. Age, sex, ethnicity, religion and education
 - b. Self-assessment of living conditions
2. Elections
 - a. Political preferences
 - b. Perceptions of election process

- c. Legitimacy of past/upcoming elections
 - d. Fear of electoral violence
- 3. Conflict issues
 - a. Reason for conflict (prior or existing)
 - b. Harmful incidences
 - c. Fear of political violence
 - d. The presence of ex-combatants
- 4. Security
 - a. Experience of actual security related events
 - b. Perception of security (fear of going out, crime, visiting markets, sending children to play outside etc)
 - c. Place of dwelling safer or not (compared to one year ago)
- 5. Legitimacy and performance of organizations
 - a. Performance of public services
 - b. Legitimacy of government, political parties, NGOs, international actors
- 6. Trust in
 - a. Family and friends
 - b. Various organisations and institutions
- 7. Outlook towards the future
 - a. One year from now (better, worse, the same)

Recent events in the Middle East have shown that certain groups, such as youth, can become a topic of particular interest. Therefore, polls may have add-on-modules that are specifically targeted for the region or country concerned. Such modules may for example include more extensive questions on youth, education, the situation of women, or the labor market.

Methodology

The polls will be carried out as representative samples, using state of the art sampling procedures. Depending on the country, the polls will be carried out either in collaboration with local organisations or independently, but in no circumstances will they be implemented together with institutions or think-tanks directly affiliated to the political process.

The questionnaires will be designed for a maximum interviewing time of 20 minutes, and interviewing will be done directly on Personal Data Assistants (PDAs) for increased data control and efficiency. This will eliminate the need for a separate data entry entity in the field organization and will allow for daily updates of a data file for analysis and control. The PDAs will also reduce drastically the need for printed material, including paper-based questionnaires, and make it easier to update the field instruments if required.

In addition to the survey data generated from the polls, information to complement and enrich the analysis will also be obtained through qualitative ethnographic techniques such as in-depth interviewing, focus groups and life-history approaches.

Output

The results will be presented in the form of a policy brief with the main findings from the poll, a tailor-made tabulation report, a PowerPoint presentation with graphic figures, and the data on an excel file for further analysis.

Time frame

It is anticipated that a total of five weeks (35 calendar days) are required from start-up to the release of results of the first polling round. The following rounds, or repeats, may be squeezed into a schedule that is one week shorter (28 calendar days).

Fafo and polls

Fafo has wide experience in carrying out perception surveys and opinion polls in politically sensitive and unstable environments. In conjunction with the World Development Report 2011, Fafo carried out polls in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Sierra Leone, DR Congo, the West Bank, Gaza, and Colombia. Fafo also implemented a poll in Iraq in December 2004 in conjunction with the January 2005 election. A number of polls have been carried out elsewhere in the Middle East, such as in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Recently Fafo has trained and helped established a polling organization in Eritrea. Furthermore, Fafo has vast experience with living conditions surveys and other large-scale household sample surveys in conflict and transition countries, such as Eritrea, Mali, Uganda, Liberia, DRC, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Colombia, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Lebanon and South Africa. Hence, Fafo has exceptional expertise in designing representative and reliable surveys in complex environments.

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