

RECONCILIATION ELECTIONS REVISITED

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Prior to the tragic events of 9/11, post-conflict elections followed two general tracks: transition elections and what I termed “reconciliation elections”. Transition elections typically involve peaceful negotiation between an authoritarian government and its opposition. A second type of democratizing elections, which I label reconciliation elections, are those held after civil wars. Unlike in transition elections, in a post-civil war context the elections constitute a political alternative. Post-9/11 elections, in Afghanistan and Iraq, belong to a third category, different from both transition elections in peaceful contexts and elections held after civil war in that one or several international actors precipitate the end of an authoritarian regime in favor of national reconstruction and democratic development. The impact of this third type of elections on the eventual democratization process also differs.

The new post-conflict electoral scenarios include a model of an interim government under the auspices of the international community. These scenarios retain a measure of civil strife, which may frequently involve violent action against both international and local actors, military and civilian alike. Furthermore, the intervening forces are placed in a dual role of occupiers and pacifiers. When an election is called, the electoral administration body (EMB) is run fully or partly by international professionals until local candidates have been trained.

Differences between post-conflict elections in the 1990s and those after 9/11 outweigh similarities. Contrary to the 1990s post-conflict elections, no major armed civil conflict existed in the new scenario prior to international intervention. Also, international forces did not act as mediators in a civil war, but exerted military power producing the collapse of authoritarian rule. Finally, an emerging democratic regime did not originally spring from an agreement between government and its opposition, but from an international decision accompanied with the use of force. The only true similarity between the two kinds of post-conflict scenarios is the common shift towards multiparty democracy brought about by the decisive use of force by international actors.

Experience with post-conflict reconciliation elections has shown that immediate electoral success depends on certain conditions. First, an effective demobilization and disarmament of former contenders must take place. Second, multiparty elections and their subsequent democratic outcome should be owned by elites. Their acceptance of the new regime will be transmitted to their supporters and thus promote the chance for peace and order, social well-being

and personal freedom. Third, all former contenders must somehow be included as options in the new democratic scene if the ballots are to effectively substitute for bullets. The recipe would hold for the new post-conflict elections as much as it did for those in the past.

Post-9/11 election scenarios pose several questions. For example, what happens to the remnants of the previous regime (middle level elites and cadres) that enjoyed and may still count on substantial popular support? Ideally, they should be allowed some role in the electoral rainbow rather than complete exclusion, which may alienate sizeable segments of society and curtail the legitimacy of the new democracy, possibly stoking further violence.

Another question concerns how democracy practitioners foster legitimacy for the new regime. In classic post-civil war elections, the main sources of legitimacy are a rejection of war and the search for solutions leading to prosperity, human rights and peace. The new post-9/11 conflict scenarios require a different answer. Contrary to elections in the 1990s, there are no peace agreements ending protracted warfare or a mediating international community between armed contenders. No referee has been requested by relevant domestic forces into the undemocratic setting, but authoritarian rule collapsed under external armed intervention, which was decided by broader international interests. The situation would resemble more that of post-World War II Europe and Japan than that of the post-civil conflicts of the 1990s in the developing world.

Since the international actors are precipitating the regime change, a heavy burden falls upon their shoulders. On the political side, an international combined package for assistance should comprise not only the facilitation of an inclusive electoral system and of responsive political parties, but also the strengthening of rule of law institutions like judiciaries and civil police as well as local government. On the socio-economic side, investment and trade should be coupled with financial and technical assistance based on long-term considerations.

Although democracy cannot work without elections, elections alone cannot ensure the working of democracy. Should other kinds of assistance fail, elections might just work as an exit strategy from an internationally unbearable atmosphere towards a different political scenario, which may evolve with time into a situation as undemocratic as the one preceding the international intervention. **E**

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