



MAKING IT COUNT:

Lessons from Australian Electoral Assistance

DECEMBER 2017

Key messages

Overall, this evaluation found that Australian assistance is well regarded and has made a positive contribution to the quality of elections.

Electoral assistance could be improved by:

- increasing attention to the wider governance and political environment in each country
- ensuring longer-term planning, and timely and inclusive assistance
- better using Australia's considerable expertise.

THE EVALUATION

Elections are important to Australia's interests in Asia and the Pacific because of their potential to affect stability, prosperity and growth.

Well-run inclusive elections can build state legitimacy and support the peaceful transfer of power within countries. Conversely, problematic elections may be flashpoints for instability.

Donor contributions to elections need to be carefully considered and calibrated amid the risks. Too much involvement can leave donors open to accusations of interfering in another state's political processes; too little may provoke criticism that the donor did not do enough in the case of a poorly run election.

This Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) evaluation considered 30 Australian-funded initiatives worth more than \$135 million and spanning 20 national elections in Afghanistan, Fiji, Indonesia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and Tonga. It considered all aspects of electoral assistance including: voter registration; election management bodies; electoral

institutions, laws and policies; awareness-raising and other efforts to improve the quality of electoral participation; support with election logistics and delivery; and election observation.



People with disabilities vote in Indonesia. Photo credit: Sopian

FINDINGS

Effectiveness

This evaluation found evidence that support for **voter registration** improved the quality of voter lists for some elections in some countries; it was one of the most effective areas of Australian assistance. In difficult contexts, however, voter registration gains were diluted by other threats to electoral integrity such as vote buying or corruption of officials.

Capacity building of electoral management bodies was effective at the individual level, but less effective in building the capacity of institutions. With the exceptions of Indonesia (between 2011 and 2014) and Timor-Leste (between 2000 and 2012), capacity building was generally weak in addressing the legislative, financial and political environments which determine the scope for electoral commissions to act effectively.

Voter awareness programs returned impressive results on reach and showed some evidence of improving basic knowledge. They were less successful in achieving their more ambitious civic education objectives.

Support for **election delivery** was reasonably successful. However, ‘surge support’ may have exceeded requirements in some countries. Australian assistance for election observation was generally not based on internationally recognised good practice (such as the United Nations *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* and *Code of Conduct for International Election Observers*).

Inclusiveness

The evaluation found that electoral assistance could do more to maximise opportunities to support **gender equality, women’s political empowerment and disability inclusion**. For example:

- Activities to make election management bodies more gender-inclusive focused on developing policies and procedures. They did little to increase women’s access to leadership positions or influence women’s roles at polling stations.
- Activities to improve women’s electoral participation focused on candidate training. They failed to consider wider attitudes and norms, and legal and institutional barriers.



A voter prepares to cast his ballot during national elections in Papua New Guinea. Photo credit: Commonwealth Secretariat

- Support for disability inclusion prioritised physical access to polling places by people with disabilities, but rarely their political empowerment. Important exceptions were Indonesia and Timor-Leste, where Australia worked with national and international partners on disability inclusive election monitoring, and used this experience to inform more inclusive electoral policies and procedures for future elections.

THIS EVALUATION FOUND AUSTRALIA WAS WELL REGARDED FOR PROVIDING RESPONSIVE AND FLEXIBLE ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE.

Efficiency

This evaluation found Australia was well regarded for providing responsive and flexible electoral assistance. However, it identified problems with efficiency related to: last-minute assistance; using a limited range of interventions and partners despite diverse and complex challenges; underutilising Australia’s considerable knowledge and expertise on elections; not routinely collecting or using evidence on particular types of electoral assistance; and not allocating requisite human resources to lead and coordinate assistance.

Recommendations

The recommendations of this evaluation, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) management response, centre on:

- Improving engagement on electoral assistance within a wider strategy for effective governance in each country.
- Mainstreaming gender equality by addressing structural barriers to political empowerment of women and people with disabilities—such as social norms, financial and practical constraints.
- Building electoral assistance capability within DFAT, and enhancing analytical and advisory resources for staff.

Office of Development Effectiveness

The full evaluation report, and DFAT’s management response, is available at dfat.gov.au/ode. ODE is a unit within DFAT which monitors the quality and assesses the impact of the Australian aid program.