

Chapter 12:

Austerity and Financial Investment in Electoral Management

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12.1 Introduction

Funding for public services are often at the heart of election campaigns. Promises of more money for hospitals make for good election pledges; pointing out that the incumbent has cut money to schools can be an equally astute political move. Ironically, money to run elections themselves are not necessarily something that we will find on campaign billboards or manifestos. In fact, as much as the financing of elections might hit the news, the focus might be on how much running the elections 'cost' the public purse rather than the value of investment in them.

Yet, one potential cause of electoral mismanagement is the lack of available resources for electoral officials. Without enough staff and finances there is a strong risk that errors may occur, queues may form at polling stations and citizens may be unregistered. Despite this intuitive logic, there is relatively little information available on the funding that electoral officials receive to test this claim – and few have therefore been able to make the causal linkages. In many countries, the information about how much money is spent on elections is not routinely collected or published. Studies which have attempted to gather this information on a cross-national level have struggled because of hidden costs and different accounting systems and governance structures – they have therefore only been able to make inferences from a limited range of cases.

This chapter sheds new light on this area. It begins with a literature of what we know about the funding of elections already. Importantly, the focus here is on the funding of the electoral process and not the funding of political parties' campaign expenditure – a related, but separate issue. The chapter consists of two empirical studies. The first provides new data on the funds and source of funds received by EMBs around the world that was collected from original surveys. The demonstrates the huge variety in budget size – but also allows us to identify the effects of austerity. There is evidence that funding cuts can affect the quality of elections. The second study draws from a roundtable discussion of the challenges that electoral officials face in funding elections. The overall conclusion of the chapter is therefore that the funding of elections is an essential but often overlooked aspect of research on electoral management.

12.2 Existing Research on Resources and Election Quality

There has been little scholarly interest in the financing of electoral processes until recently. The landmark publication was the IFES report on the Cost of Registration and Elections (CORE) Project, funded by the UNDP (López-Pintor and Fischer 2005). As that report set out in the introduction, there had not been a 'project of global research exclusively devoted to EMB budget and cost' (López-Pintor and Fischer 2005, 4). The project therefore sought to develop some working definitions for types of costs, identify the sources of funding, and evaluate election budgets in ten countries.

Some important initial findings were made. The project reported that costs varied substantially according to the democratic environment and system of government. Costs were estimated to be lower in stable democracies than transitional and post-conflict democracies. However, in emerging democracies, the institutionalization of permanent professional staff was leading to cost rises. The use of different electoral rules in federal systems placed an additional financial burden. All countries were experiencing some broader trends towards increasing costs, however. Costs in the areas of personnel and technology were increasing over time, regardless of levels of democratic consolidation. Meanwhile, increasing computerization was leading to further technological costs. A project of similar geographical coverage has not been attempted since then, however, there have been some useful advances based on studies of individual countries.

Studies have showed how different forms of electoral administration have different costs. Krimmer et al. (2018) compared the costs of different voting methods in the 2017 Estonian local elections and concluded that the administrative costs per vote of online voting were half the price of the second cheapest option (Election Day Voting). Arguments for adopting internet voting to save money have been made elsewhere (Webroots Democracy 2017). Chapter Nine from this book also contributes towards this literature by revealing how the move from household to individual electoral registration substantially increased costs in the UK.

The determinants of spending within countries have also been explored by Hill (2012) in her 'Public Sector Cost' model. She examines the expenditures in California counties between 1992 and 2008 and identifies how economies of scale and the choice of voting technology can be significant drivers of costs. Meanwhile, Clark (2019) identifies how spending is shaped by the extent to which production

costs such as postal voting, polling stations or the socio-economic characteristics of local areas in the UK, based on data from the 2014 European elections. Politics matters too. Historical accounts of US politics often stress that local elites can seek to manipulate electoral rules for political gain and limiting the supply of polling stations and staff is one tactic to dampen reduce turnout amongst particular populations (Hasen 2012; James 2012; Keyssar 2009; Kousser 1974). Mohr et al. (forthcoming) provide quantitative data to argue that Republican county commissioners in North Carolina spend significantly less on election administration once the county electorate reaches a politically satisfactory Republican majority.

There have been some claims that a lack of resources can lead to poorly run elections in cross national studies (Birch 2011, 26; Pastor 1999), studies of American elections (Gerken 2009; Hale and Slaton 2008; Highton 2006) and UK elections (Clark and James 2016). Evidence to support this has been sparse. However, (James and Jervier 2017) shows how austerity can lead to cuts in services such as voter outreach work. Clark (2014) provides correlations between the funding and meeting performance standards.

Conversely, there have also been concerns raised in public debate about inefficiencies within electoral services. Cost efficiency is an important measure of success identified in Chapter Four of this book. There has been public concern expressed in Scotland about the amount of money that has been paid to Returning Officers to run elections, when they already earn a high salary from their role as Chief Executive. This led to the Scottish Parliament Select Committee on Local Government and Communities (2017) launching an investigation that recommended that Returning Officers should not be paid for their work.

Overall then, there has been an increase in research in this area – but insights have been limited by the relative paucity of data. A further criticism is that there is often a functionalist logic in determining the drivers of costs and their sufficiency. Costs are modelling statistically based on socio-demographic characteristics and the choice of election administration. They are, this chapter will argue, also the result of social, strategic processes. They are the result of planning, negotiation, the building of relationships between actors. In short, agency. The party-political side of this has been noted, but not the managerial-political dimension. This argument will be developed shortly.

12.3 EMB Budgets: A Macro-Scopic Overview

This chapter is firstly able to strengthen the literature by presenting original data on the budgets of many EMBs around the world using the EMS surveys (James et al. 2019) and ELECT (Karp et al. 2016) surveys.¹ Questions were included in both surveys about the sources of income, who the actors were in approving the budget, the overall annual budget and the overall trends. The surveys were sent to EMBs over email and they nominated an official to complete them on their behalf. It isn't possible to double check the data provided against other sources since this is not published elsewhere so there are some limitations in reliability. Not all questions in the survey were answered and many countries did not reply. Nonetheless, it is the most complete picture of EMB budgets available and supersedes the existing research.

12.3.1 Budget sizes

A total of 55 EMBs provided data on their annual budget and 20 provided their election year budget. In some cases, EMBs provided both. As the book has already argued, several organisations are often involved in delivering elections. The reported data therefore does not cover the entire cost of electoral management systems. Data is at the organizational level rather than country level and there might be other EMBs who did not reply. Nonetheless, this is a substantial advance on the range of data collected to so far. Data was collected in the local currency and some conversion is therefore needed to enable comparison. The standard practice is to convert into US dollars. It is usually recommended that comparison best undertaken by converting to a purchase parity rate rather than simply taking exchange rates. Purchase parity rates allow the local costs of goods and services in each country to be accounted for (OECD and Eurostat 2012). The purchasing price parity rate in 2016 against US dollars was therefore taken from the World Bank datasets.² Responses in local currencies were then divided by the PPP rate against the US\$ in 2016. All data is therefore reported using this converted rate.

The data reveals substantial variations in budgetary levels at different points in the electoral cycle. The EMS survey (but not the ELECT survey) asked respondents to report on the annual budget in the last year that a national election was held in addition to the last year that the survey was undertaken. Budgets were considerably higher during the year of an election. In Poland, for example, the National Electoral Commission had a budget of \$216.5m USD PPP during the election year of 2015, but this

¹ The data is also used in Garnett (2019)

² World Bank (2018) 'PPP conversion factor, GDP' , <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/pa.nus.ppp>, date accessed 30th October 2018.

dropped to \$51.6m in 2016. Likewise, in Israel the difference was even more marked - from \$5.0m (2017) to \$63.8m (2015). Yet, in some cases budgets can be very stable. In the Electoral Council of the Netherlands, the budget only rose from \$2.3m to \$2.6 between 2016 and 2017, despite there being a national election in 2017. The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations saw a budget reduction in an election year (see Figure 12.1).

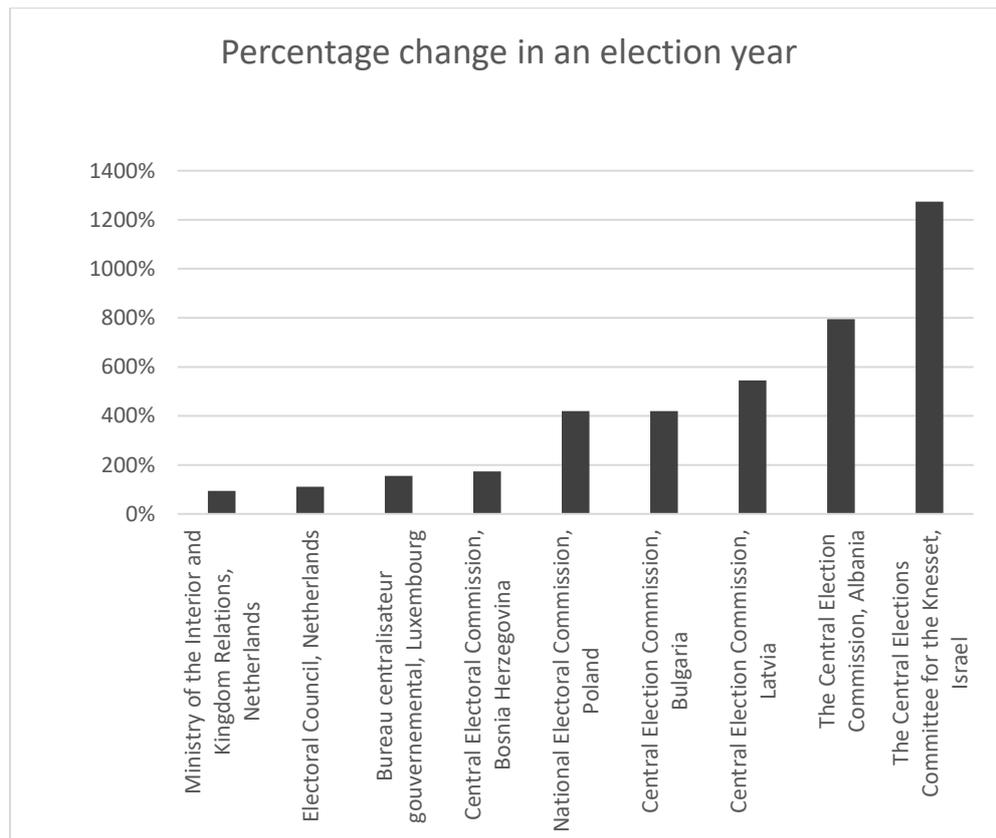


Figure 12.1: Percentage increases in EMB budget from a non-election year to an election year

Appendix 1 details the full set of data collected. It is immediately obvious that EMBs come with extremely diverse budget sizes. The Commission on Elections in the Philippines, for example, had a budget of \$894m, while the General Election Commission of Mongolia had budget of only \$513,537. Variation is to be expected because of the sizes in geographical space and voting age population. Yet allowing for this, fiscal year budgets can be as much as \$33.29 per member of the voting age population, as it was in Costa Rica in 2016. They are similarly high in Rwanda (\$27.54) and Panama (\$26.53). By contrast the cost in Albania was only \$0.76 per person, and \$0.07 in Tanzania. Even though the Albanian Central Electoral Commission and the Tanzanian National Electoral Commission

don't implement the whole of the electoral cycle, they are responsible for roughly three-quarters of it, based on their organisations' response to the surveys.

There was some evidence that spending per person was lower in democracies. A comparison of means showed that the mean level of spending per person was \$3.63 in 'Free' states using the Freedom House 2016 measure. By comparison the mean spending levels were higher in partially free states (\$6.25) and not free states (\$12.8). This seems to echo findings reported by Lopez-Pintor and Fischer (2005:4) that were stable democracies costs would be much lower than transitional and post-conflict democracies, described above.

Despite the large budgets in many organisations, the budgets are usually small as a proportion of overall public expenditure. Table 12.1 details the percentage of overall government expenditure (column 4) and the percentage of expenditure on public services (column 5) that the EMB is responsible for. Data was collated from the UN National Accounts Official Country Data³ on levels of public expenditure in order to do this – and since this dataset is itself limited, we only have data from a small pool of organisations. However, it is striking that investment levels are typically a small proportion of overall government expenditure and the amount spent on public services. Typically, they are well below 1 per cent of expenditure on public services. However, there are some major exceptions such as the Kenyan Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal in Costa Rica. It is possible that these extreme values might represent erroneous responses from the EMB or the data held by the UN.

Organisation	Country	% of overall expenditure	% public services budget
Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission	Kenya	1.9867	
Supreme Electoral Tribunal	Costa Rica	0.8846	22.4252

³ UN National Accounts Official Country Data - UNDATA http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=government+expenditure&d=SNA&f=group_code%3a301 accessed 22nd October 2018. In most cases data on public expenditure levels was provided for 2016 – but for Senegal, Panama, Mozambique, New Zealand the latest data available at the time of writing was from 2012 and Russia was 2013. This was therefore used.

Central Commission for Election and Referendums	Kyrgyz Republic	0.7165	3.0805
National Electoral Commission	Senegal	0.5130	2.1791
Tribunal Electoral	Panama	0.3527	
Electoral Commission	Malta	0.3338	
State Election Commission of the Republic of Croatia	Croatia	0.2661	1.6068
National Election Commission	Rep. of Korea	0.2561	1.7832
National Electoral Commission	Mozambique	0.0815	0.3288
Electoral Commission	New Zealand	0.0776	
National Electoral Committee	Estonia	0.0508	0.5591
National Electoral Commission	Poland	0.0280	0.3163
National Electoral Commission	Tanzania	0.0225	0.0083
Central Election Commission	Bulgaria	0.0204	0.1987
Central Election Commission	Latvia	0.0146	0.1384
Norwegian Directorate of Elections	Norway	0.0139	0.1355
Central Government Office	Luxembourg	0.0126	0.0698
Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation	Russia	0.1191	1.1751
General Election Commission of Mongolia	Mongolia	0.0103	0.0389
The Central Elections Committee for the Knesset	Israel	0.0070	0.1298
Electoral Authority	Sweden	0.0030	0.0335
Electoral Council	Netherlands	0.0011	0.0166
Central Electoral Board	Spain	0.0003	0.0025
Federal Public Service - Directorate General Institutions and Population - Service Elections	Belgium	0.0000	0.0000

Table 12.1: Percentage of government expenditure and public services expenditure spent on elections.

12.3.2 Budgetary change and its effects

To identify trends in budgets, and to control for cyclical variations, respondents were asked whether their budget had changed overall over the course of the last five-year period.⁴ A 5-point scale was used with ‘decidedly increased’ and ‘decidedly decreased’ at each end of the scales (see Figure 12.2 and Table 12.2). Data was relatively centrally located. The ‘remained about the same’ option was the mode answer in both cases, but there was a tendency towards budgets increasing rather than decreasing. The two organisations to see overall budgets reduced were Slovakia and Bosnia Herzegovina. The most significant increases were reported in Moldova, Albania, Romania and Ecuador.

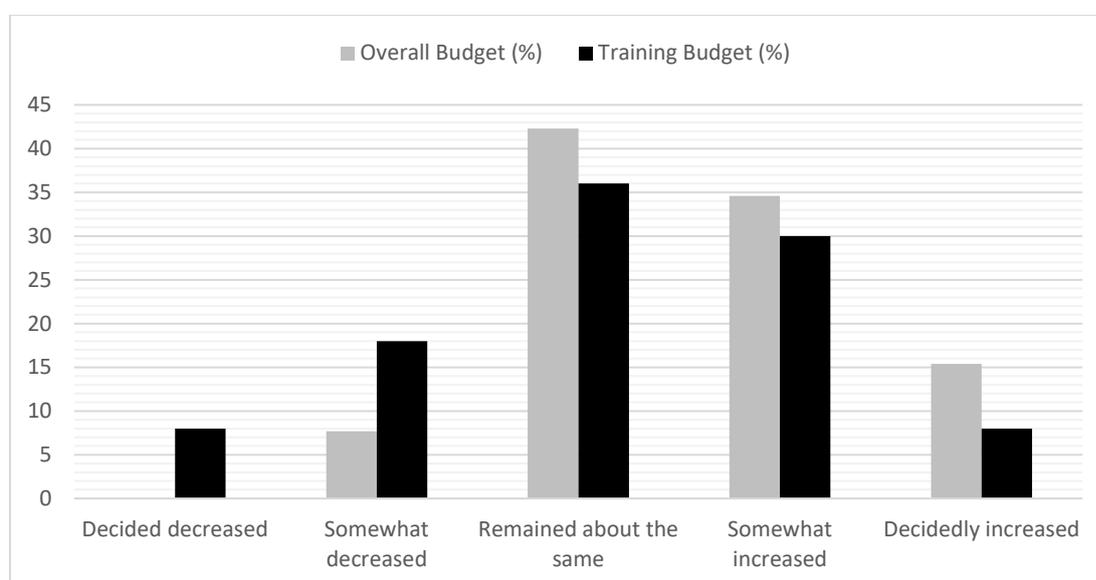


Figure 12.2: Changes in EMB Budget Size 2011-2016

	Overall Budget (%)	Training Budget (%)
Decided decreased	0	8.0
Somewhat decreased	7.7	18.0
Remained about the same	42.3	36.0

⁴ The question about overall budgets was not included in the ELECT survey, so there is a higher number of responses for data on the training budget.

Somewhat increased	34.6	30.0
Decidedly increased	15.4	8.0
N	26	50

Table 12.2: Changes in EMB Budget Size 2011-2016

There was a strong relationship between changes in the overall budget and the training budget, as we might expect. Bivariate analysis returned a positive Pearson's correlation of 0.474, significant at the $P < 0.01$ level. In other words, EMBs making general cuts, will make cuts to training.

We might expect that the budgets would be shaped by the overall financial position of the government. Those countries that were expanding government spending might be investing more in elections. Meanwhile, those who were making cuts might be making cuts to EMBs. There is some evidence for this. The proportion of GDP that made up government expenditure was taken from the World Bank in 2011 and 2016.⁵ The percentage change over the period was calculated. Pearson correlations were then calculated between this figure and changes in EMB budgets reported in the surveys. There was a strong correlation between overall change in government expenditure and EMB budgets (.420, significant at $P < 0.05$ level) which provides some strong evidence for EMB budgets being shaped by broader government austerity drives. Interestingly, there was no relationship found with the budgets for training. This suggests that the overall picture of government finance significantly shapes EMB budgets, but the budgets for specific aspects of EMB work can have much more local drivers.

Importantly, the data also provides evidence some for the importance of funding for electoral management. Pearson correlations were also run against changes in the budgets and two measures of EMB performance. A question was taken from the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity 4.5 which asked 'The election authorities performed well' (Norris et al. 2016). The latest version of the PEI survey was taken at time when the EMS and ELECT surveys were run. This is a crude measurement of performance (see Chapter 3), but it does provide a parsimonious way of identifying a possible relationship. A correlation of .363, significant at the $P < 0.05$ level (2-tailed) was returned.

⁵ World Bank (2018).

12.3.3 Actors and sources of income

If budgets are so important, then it is worth considering who controls them. Data from the same surveys reveal that it the legislature is political actor most commonly involved in approved EMB budgets. Based on data from 72 countries, the legislature is involved in 61.1 per cent of countries. The head of government or executive are involved in 41.7 per cent of countries. Other actors, such as the civil service (4.2), civil society (2.8), judiciary (1.4) and political parties (1.4). The two countries that indicated that the civil society played a role included Indonesia and, Sao Tome and Principe. No further information was included in the survey about how they were involved.

Table 12.3 below demonstrates the most frequently cited sources of income to EMBs. Respondents were asked ‘which following institutions provide funds for EMB.’ Responses are ranked by the mean score, where 1 indicated ‘on a regular basis’ and 5 indicated ‘never’. Nearly all EMBs receive funding from national governments, with local and regional tiers of government also being not uncommon. International organisations and foreign governments, however, feature prominently in many countries.

	Regular basis	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	n	Mean
National governments	95.1%	-	-	1.6%	3.3%	61	1.18
International organisations	7.9%	7.9%	34.2%	13.2%	36.8%	38	3.63
Local governments	8.7%	13.0%	8.7%	4.3%	65.2%	23	4.04
Regional governments	11.1%	11.1%	5.6%	-	72.2%	18	4.11
Foreign governments	-	10.3%	13.8%	6.9%	65.5%	29	4.21
Private donors (philanthropists)	-	4.2%	12.5%	-	83.3%	24	4.63

Private donors (business corporations)	4.3%	-	4.3%	-	91.3%	23	4.74
Civil society organisations	-	8.7%	-	-	91.3%	23	4.86
Political parties	-	-	-	-	100.0%	20	5

Table 12.3: Sources of EMB revenue

12.4 The Challenge of Funding Elections

If funding and investment in the electoral process is so self-important, why is it not provided? What related challenges are there in funding the electoral process? One way in which the causal effects of the funding can be identified, is through the stories of electoral officials themselves. A ‘storytelling’ session in Stockholm at International IDEA in November 2017. Ten senior and experienced practitioners drawn from Africa, North America, Asia and Oceania were invited to share the ‘war stories’ from their time running elections. The venue of the meeting was International IDEA’s Headquarters, located in an eighteenth-century building on Strömsborg,⁶ a small islet in central Stockholm, surrounded by bridges carrying a motorway through Stockholm. Some delegates recalled how they in fact in the same room was a venue for a meeting in 1996 where ACE was developed with organisations such as the UN and IFES contributing. At that time, the funding elections was top of the agenda, but put into the ‘too hard, do later’ category.

The roundtable therefore effectively provided a focus group with rich information that can shed light on the challenges – information that is rarely captured. The roundtable was recorded by International IDEA. The author, who was present at the roundtable, transcribed the focus group material and undertook a thematic analysis to identify key themes from the interviews. Names of countries, contributors, locations and currencies were removed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Quotes were selected very sparingly because of the politically sensitive nature of the discussions.

Ten key themes were identified. One of these was budget cuts. Undoubtedly, wider budget cuts could contribute towards making elections difficult to fund. One delegate recalled how their budget has been cut down to a third of its usual size this year following broader austerity cuts, which was ‘more than any other institution of government.’ This had major consequences for the delivery of elections:

⁶ Local folk law has it that the building used to be a bar before it was restored for office use. The owners would issue passports for the islet until the Stockholm authorities became annoyed.

‘That therefore reduces your ability to achieve your strategic objectives. You have a strategic plan but you cannot fulfil it all because of these continual cuts. It is not an electoral year, but there are issues to do with the electoral cycle that we are not able to do.’

The argument of this chapter, in line with the realist sociological to electoral management approach developed Chapter Two, is that the overall budget, cuts made to it and its appropriateness for running elections effectively is not external to the process of organising elections. A focus purely on quantitative budgetary data misses many of the important social interactions that take place in the financing of elections which shape the complex relationship between budgeting, human relationships and performance outcomes. As one delegate explained, financing elections can be ‘tragi-drama.’ The remaining nine themes are described now.

12.4.1 Lobbying purse-string holders

One major challenge is that electoral officials will find themselves competing with other government departments and/or public organisations for resources. In this context, the government upon whom they dependent for resources, but who will have their own priorities, may not be receptive for the demands for money. As Table 12.3 showed, governments and parliaments often have the power to approve budgets. Even where EMBs are supposed to have statutory independence, they remain reliant. Even if they were ‘elevated to be a higher constitutional body’

‘financial independence was one of the areas where independence has not fully been implemented and we are still linked to the government payment system. We are 100 % funded by the government so that creates a dependency.’

Elections are therefore often not a high priority by those that decide the budgets.

‘A lot of politicians are not particularly interested in talking about elections... For them it is just “later, later, later – we’ll get to it”, they know that it has got to be done but it is not a high priority. So trying to get them.... to actually engage early in discussions about elections costs and budgeting can be challenging.’

12.3.2 Statecraft and rent-seeking

The challenge of getting attention and explaining the importance of elections is confounded by the fact that electoral officials will find themselves amongst actors with other motivations in the budgeting for elections. Most obviously, incumbent governments (and opposition parties) will have an eye on their fortunes in forthcoming elections. One delegate explained that in their country national government funds national elections and there is a different fund for local government elections. However, problems can arise such as 'incumbent holders in the national can use the local budget in their favour.' Meanwhile, Commissioners might find themselves under pressure from Parliament:

'They can put pressure on the Commission to facilitate and pay for them to meet their constituents and threaten them with an Audit agency if they don't do so.'

Further threats include upholding the disbursement of the budget in the Parliament if they don't comply with their needs.

Pressures can also come from elsewhere to spend to spend money in areas that they wouldn't otherwise do. Often EMBs might be encouraged to employ particular-groups on election day to achieve broader societal goals. This might include representatives from social movements to consolidate peace and reconciliation, or the unemployed youth to integrate them. While these are admirable goals, some delegates suggested, there are costs involved which are not always appreciated. Likewise, there might also be pressure to employ family or friends. One delegate explained that they had estimated that a system of continuous registration with permanent staff would be cheaper than a system that involved employing short-term workers during six months periods. But the latter system was often preferred by many because it allowed them to find work for those close to them.

12.4.3 Worker management

Recruiting workers can also be especially difficult because the time bound nature of elections can give employees leverage in any industrial action disputes. Should they decide to strike on the eve of an election, costs might suddenly rise to either replace them or grant them their demands. One EMB explained how they managed to navigate this successfully:

'Obviously we had already invested in training them. We had budgeted for what we would pay them and some of them are government officials and it would have been above their salary – others were unemployed people. We said let them go. They then started filtering back one by one, so we held our bluff. But it was a nightmare as it was the eve of the election.'

Another delegate explained how they had experienced staff demanding advance payment for elections.

12.4.4 Contractor negotiation

The fixed short-term nature of elections can also leave suppliers in a strong bargaining position. Suppliers, especially if they are few in number, can often take an astute position to bargaining their contracts.

When the election comes around it is the biggest show in town with [large sums] being spent. Our suppliers understand that because they like to charge a premium. They know that an election must be held, that an election must not be shifted, ballot boxes must be supplied, things must be moved around the country and we get charged an absolute premium.

12.4.5 Procurement processes

Procedure processes are also often more complex and more difficult to manage than other government services. As noted above in section one of this chapter, there are much greater needs for resources in electoral years, but 'the government and parliament think that the EMB is like other ministries'. One delegate expressed their frustration that:

'Our first commissioners, when we became democratic decades ago approached Parliament asking for a different type of budget disbursement but to no avail to this day. The budgeting is still the same.'

In another case, a delegate explained that:

'95% of the election budget won't be given to us until the election is called. So we are trying to undertake change and we are also trying to procure materials that will be required for the election but we won't receive the money until next year.... There are also some rules that we have to work to that say that we have to have the money in your account for the items that you are trying to achieve procurement to – otherwise you are breaching purchasing rules. '

Policies are therefore unsuitable:

‘There are a whole set of government policies, rules and processes which are set in place for government departments, which are operating a business which is nothing like the delivery of an election, yet we are pushed into the same rules, and it doesn’t fit.’

Further problems might include requirements to undertake competitive tendering processes – because this can often take time and there is no guarantee that contractors will respond.

12.4.6 Unforeseen costs

Elections, no doubt like many other public services, are likely to face many unforeseen costs. If there are not contingency plans in place then this can cause problems with the delivery of elections or costs to rise. One delegate explained that they had a court challenge on the eve of an election about the use of technology. This resulted in extra-legal costs that were not expected. Nonetheless, that additional cost was relatively small compared to the cost that would have followed with a postponed election:

If the judgement had gone the way, what would have been the financial cost of postponing the election and starting again with the printing of ballot papers etc. etc.’

The deployment of military forces overseas can also lead to unexpected costs. Military conflicts are by nature unpredictable events where the security of election equipment may require further investment.

‘We also had a situation where we had soldiers based in [xx] so we have to provide for foreign voting procedures. We allow them to vote at our missions. We also had a situation where our ballot papers had to be routed through another country in Africa because of the conflict that arose. We found out that our ballot papers were caught in a port and we could not get access to them. So we had a last minute situation where we needed to find extra ballot papers. Fortunately we always print 110% of the ballot papers needed so we had those. But we had to get a military plane to deliver them. That was something unexpected and unplanned.’

The late nature of these unexpected costs can also be a multiplier – as noted above, staff and private companies might be able to negotiate a premium on their services. One delegate explained that recount led to all staff and political parties being ‘locked up’ in a counting centres for several days with no one able to leave. Costs of providing subsistence for everyone and security for the surrounding area quickly accumulate.

12.4.7. Rising expectations

Expectation have also been rising, delegates explained. There were pressures, which they recognised and were entirely supportive of, including ensuring that wait times were not excessive and improvements were made to the services for disabled electors. These pressures had not always been present and ‘these things add to the cost’. Government was not always willing to share the financial burden and the reputational cost for any defects in service would inevitably be borne by the EMB.

12.4.8 Capacity for strategic thinking

The interplay between contextual situation and electoral officials, structure and agency, therefore shape the challenges in delivering the investment required to run elections effectively. But the scope of electoral officials, as agents, to act strategically can be shaped by their administrative capacity. One delegates explained that ‘the lack of capacity of the Commission Secretariat to do the planning and budgeting itself.’ Another explained that:

‘There are elections almost every year there is almost no time to build capacity for budgeting. We are moving to simultaneous elections’ and this might help, but budget wise it might become ‘a war rather than a drama’.

12.4.9 The legacies of historical relationships

Electoral officials seeking to fund and run elections may also find themselves with a lack of trust, as a result of how their predecessors have run elections. If an EMB or overseas donor had employed staff at a previous election and not paid them, or not settled bills with contractors – then staff and contractors might be reluctant to return to help run future elections. Advance or higher payments might be required as a result of the legacies of historical relationships. The refusal of contractors to bid for a printing contract because of trust issues in one case led to ballot papers being printed overseas at the last minute.

‘Once the ballot papers were printed we had to fly them and fly them thousands of kilometres via a military aircraft. We hit then another administrative burden because customs said that you need to bring it through the port first. We were then held up by customs.’

12.5 Conclusions

For elections to be run effectively, administrators require resource and capacity, yet concerns have been raised that these have not been provided. These claims have been difficult to evidence because of a lack of information and transparency about how elections are funded. This chapter has shown that there are considerable variations in the budgets of EMBs around the world. The overall trend towards higher budgets – more money being required to keep elections running. But this money is much needed because where investment has dropped, the quality of elections are lower.

The realist sociological approach set out in this book requires more analysis than statistical inference. By taking the lessons and stories of practitioners we can learn more about how shortfalls can occur, but also the other challenges in running elections. The chapter has therefore sought a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics behind investing in elections. Austerity, understood as a restriction in the supply of financial resources, to EMBs has a causal effect. But austerity is not the result of a top-down decision, it is the result of a series of dynamic causal mechanisms and relationships. These include insufficient advocacy, listening and networking with budget holders, challenges of statecraft and rent-seeking, negotiation practices with employees and contractors, and risk management. There are therefore practical steps that EMBs can take to improve investment in elections. This might include risk management plans, diversification of the suppliers and workforce, and simplifying procurement procedures. This is even more evidence that the management of elections matters.

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