

European Union Election Observation Missions: How to assess effectiveness?

I do think that fair elections are extremely important. This is not because such elections will necessarily lead to wonderful outcomes. It is because these elections, per se and due to the political freedoms that must surround them if they are to be considered fair (and, consequently, if the resulting regime is to be democratic), mark a crucial departure from the arbitrariness of authoritarian rule. When some fundamental political freedoms are respected, this means great progress in relation to authoritarian rules and gives us ample reason to defend and promote fair elections.

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I. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, a universal consensus has appeared on the desirability of pluralist democracy and this implied a heavy emphasis on multi-party elections to promote democratization. In the wake of this renewed enthusiasm, during the early 1990s several developing countries experienced numerous competitive multiparty elections that marked for various of them a transition from a long period of authoritarian, military or one-party rule to weak democratic governments.² While countries that undertook later in the 1990s the political transition continued to hold founding elections, in countries that had experienced early regime change, the ending of electoral cycles originated a wave of “second” elections that started the possibility of a democratic consolidation.³

By the middle of the 1990s one of the most striking developments related to this wave of founding and second elections has been the flourishing of an international election observation industry: first in Africa, countries which had suffered decades of civil war started a peace process with multi-party elections and many one-party or military regimes were replaced by governments

¹ O'Donnell, Guillermo, *In Partial Defense of an Evanescent “Paradigm”*, “Journal of Democracy”, 13, 1 (2002), pp. 6-12.

² These events have been called “founding” elections.

³ Bratton, Michael, *Second elections in Africa*, “Journal of Democracy”, 9 (1998), pp. 51-66.

deriving their mandate from multi-party elections. Donor governments, international organizations and NGOs sent thousands of international elections observers to these countries.⁴

Their goals were roughly the same: promoting peace, fostering democracy, supporting human rights. According to the European Commission, for example, “Election observation expresses the EU’s interest and concern in promoting democratic elections within its wider policy of support for democracy, the rule of law and human rights”.⁵ “The purpose of an EU Election Observation Missions around the world is to provide support for the development of the country’s democratic institutions and procedures, and to assist partner countries in their objective to hold elections of a high standard. In this context the EU EOM [Electoral Observation Mission] will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the electoral process”.⁶ Analogous are the purposes of other international (such as the United Nation, the African Union, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, etc.) and governmental and non-governmental organizations (Carter Center, International IDEA, IFES, International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, etc.).⁷ Thus, the ultimate purpose of any observation mission is to support states in realizing their commitment to hold democratic elections with an eye to democratization.

While scholars and policy makers admit how complex and multi-faceted the problem of democratization is (there are historical, cultural and institutional factors enabling democracy to prosper), in practice, policy measures were strongly focused on elections. Implicit in this emphasis on multi-party elections is the assumption that elections are pivotal for democracy and democratization. Surprisingly, however, very little attention has been paid to the effectiveness of electoral observation missions and few empirical work has been done⁸ to discover whether electoral observation missions is effective in deterring and discovering election-day fraud. Therefore, this will be the focus of my research proposal. The question I will try to answer in this paper is: How can we assess international election observation effectiveness in deterring election-day fraud?

In the following pages I will first describe European Union election observation methodology, whit an eye also to the bureaucratic machine behind it. The reason why I decided to focus on EU’s work is twofold: first, the EU (as the OSCE/ODHIR) adopts a methodology that is particularly

⁴ Anglin, Douglas, *International Election Monitoring: The African Experience*, “African Affairs”, 97 (1997), pp. 486-489.

⁵ *Handbook for European Union Election Observation*, Second Edition, European Commission, 2008. http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/docs/handbook_en.pdf

⁶ <http://www.eueompakistan.org/xxdefault.asp?id=1&show=18&m=0>

⁷ *Declaration of Principles for International Election observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers*, 2005. http://www.idea.int/publications/other/upload/dec_obs_coc.pdf

⁸ To the best of my knowledge, the only published empirical work very focused on this subject is Susan Hyde, “The Observer Effect in International Politics, Evidence from a Natural Experiment”, *Word Politics*, 60, 2007, pp.37-63. The same author will soon publish a book on this topic.

suitable for empirical quasi-experimental research, as we will see in the second part of this work; second, the EU, contrary to the OSCE/ODHIR focuses its work on Africa, the continent whose democratic processes I am interested in. In the second part, therefore, I will show the research design of the project I am presenting.

II. Why, who, how, when, and where the European Union observes⁹

The European Union is one of the leading organization in the field of election assistance and observation. It deployed its first ad hoc observation mission to the Russian Federation in 1993. Since then, the EU was able to develop a comprehensive, rigorous and systematic long-term methodology to assess all aspect of an electoral event against international standards. Starting from short-term, ad hoc operations, the EU is now in a leading position, together with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, in the deployment of long-term election observation missions.

Following a simple organizing structure, that is, by answering to five questions (why, who, how, when, and where?), in the following pages I will try to give a short description of the work, the goals, the organization and the methodology of an European Union Election Observation Mission.

II.1 Why?

European Union Election Observation Missions (EU EOMs) are one of the most important components of the European strategy to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law throughout the world. By their primary objectives, i.e. building public confidence in an electoral process, helping deterring frauds, intimidation and violence, etc., EU EOMs contribute also to other key EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy objective, mainly strengthening democratic institutions, peace-making and peace-building.

At the end of the '90s, in view of its growing role in election observation, the European Commission felt the necessity to establish a systematic and consistent approach to ensure the coordination between election observation and EU human rights and democracy programs. Following this need, in 2000 the Commission issued the Communication on EU Electoral Assistance and Observation¹⁰, that enumerated the main EU's election observation objectives:

- to promote the respect for fundamental freedoms and civic and political rights;
- to contribute to the prevention or resolution of conflicts;

⁹ This part is entirely based on the analysis of EU documents, particularly the cited *Handbook for European Union Election Observation*. See

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/election_observation/index_en.htm

¹⁰ *EU Election Assistance & Observation* - Communication from the Commission COM(2000) 191 final

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2000:0191:FIN:EN:PDF>

- to enhance the public confidence in the electoral process through deterrence to fraud, and therefore helping the country's democratization;
- to assess the whole election process in accordance with international standards.

Moreover, the Communication required a close cooperation between the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. Within the framework of an impartial, independent and long-term approach to election observation, the Communication established a standard methodology for assessing elections in accordance with international standards for democratic elections and in line with the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation*.¹¹ We will return on this issue later on.

II.2 Who?

The programming and implementation of election observation activities are under the responsibility of the Human Right and Democratisation Unit of the Directorate General for External Relations of the European Commission, that uses the funds of the European Community Budget, especially those of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, in close cooperation with the DG EuropeAid, and the relevant geographic desks of the DG External Relations and DG Development. Because of the political and diplomatic implications of election observation, the EU works in close association with its Member States to ensure EU policy coherence in the planning and the implementation of EOMs. This cooperation takes place in the relevant Council Working Groups.

Looking at the structure of an EU EOM, each mission must be lead by a Chief Observer (CO) who is a Member of the European Parliament appointed by the Commissioner for External Relations, helped by a Deputy Chief Observer (DCO), while long-term and short-term observers are citizens of Member States, which have the responsibility to select them. However, the final decision on the composition of an EU EOM rests in the hands of the Commission. Obviously, a prominent role is played by the European Parliament, whose members, as said, are the chief observers of EU EOMs. However, the European Parliament has also the possibility to send observer delegations working in collaboration with EU EOMs. Finally, EU Member States and the European Parliament play an important role in the political follow-up of an EU EOM.

II.3 How?

How the EU decides to send observers? Which are the conditions to be met? Which is the observation methodology? This will be the topic of this long paragraph.

¹¹ *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers*, Commemorated October 27, 2005, at the United Nations, New York.
http://www.idea.int/publications/other/upload/dec_obs_coc.pdf

The first stage of the process leading to the decision on whether to deploy an EU EOM is the development by the DGs External Relations, EuropeAid and Development of a list of countries whose elections should be considered for observation. This list is drawn from the rolling calendar of upcoming elections maintained by the DG External Relations. Then, the list must be discussed both in Council Working Groups and in the European Parliament Election Coordination Group, with the purpose of placing these elections in two categories: “priority countries” and “countries to be followed”. This decision is taken on the basis of the country’s need for election observation and of the level of their democratic development. In particular, countries are classified as priority in light of the possibility for an EU EOM to improve the election quality (for example by building confidence or deterring fraud); to strengthen the work of the EU in crisis-management, peace building or democratisation programmes in the country concerned; to support a political development or a democratic transition; etc. Finally, the EU pays also attention to maintain a geographical balance among the areas where EU EOM are deployed. Therefore, it is not at all definite that parliamentary and presidential elections are given priority over referenda or local elections. Moreover, the decision to prioritise some countries against others does not mean that the EU has not interest in some countries or in some elections, neither that a prior judgement on the electoral process has already been made. The matter is only one of distributing scarce resources among applicants.

The second stage in the process is the deployment of an exploratory mission to the countries previously identified as “priority” with the purpose of producing an internal report containing recommendations on whether to deploy an EU EOM or not. These missions are normally conducted between six and four months in advance of the scheduled election day, and usually last for around two weeks.¹² They are composed of five to nine people and have the aim to establish if an EU EOM would be useful, feasible and advisable. To decide if an EU EOM will be useful the exploratory mission must establish if it will concretely contribute to the electoral process by deterring fraud, violence, or by building confidence in the electorate and in all stake-holders. Then, an EU EOM will be feasible if, given the logistic constraints, the EU will be able to undertake a credible election observation, if there are security conditions for the safe deployment of observers, if it is likely that the EU will receive a written invitation from the host country’s electoral authorities and that the state and the electoral authorities will both sign a separate memorandum of understanding with the European Commission. Finally, in order for an EU EOM to be advisable, there must be “minimum

¹² *Handbook for European Union Election Observation*, Second Edition, European Commission, 2008, p. 94.
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/worldwide/electoral-support/documents/eu_election_observation_handbook_en.pdf

conditions for effective and credible election observation”¹³ (an invitation has been received from the country’s authorities, there is guarantee of unimpeded and full access to all election material, stakeholders and sites, freedom of movement, not-interference with EU EOM activities and a proper security situation); there must be an interest on the part of all stake holders (authorities, political parties and civil society) and of the international community in the deployment of an EU EOM; and there must be some possibility that the recommendations contained in the final report will be considered and implemented in the following election without create political problems. To gather all the information needed, the exploratory mission meets with a variety of interlocutors, such as political parties, electoral authorities, mass media, civil society, national and international organizations, representatives of EU Member States, etc. Finally, among the duties of the exploratory mission, there is also the presentation of an indicative budget. The final report produced by the exploratory mission must provide an assessment of the country’s situation, include the scope of the eventual EOM (size of core team, number of observers, deployment time, accreditation procedure, logistical requirements, etc.), and assess the security situation. It can also include recommendation to improve the electoral process. This report is then sent to the Director General of DG External Relations, who, on that basis, forwards a recommendation to the Commissioner for External Relations. The ultimate decision on the deployment rests in the hands of the Commissioner for External Relations, who must take into account the recommendations of the exploratory mission. S/he, therefore, must decide whether to deploy an EU EOM and share the exploratory mission’s report with the European Parliament, the Council and Member States.

The third stage follows the decision to deploy an EU EOM and consists in planning and preparing an EU EOM. First of all, to deploy an EU EOM, it is strictly necessary that an invitation has been sent from the electoral authorities of the host country. This is so because the EU does not intend to violate the international principle of national sovereignty. After that, the European Commission must sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Electoral Management Body of the host country, outlining the rights and responsibilities of both parts. The EU EOM will ensure impartiality and non-interference with the electoral process; in return, it will be guaranteed unimpeded access to all areas and all persons concerned with the election, the permission to operate without interference, the freedom of movement and a certain degree of safety and security for EU observers. When it is the case and security is at stake, a MoU may also be negotiated with the UN. After receiving the invitation and signing the MoUs, the European Commission prepares the “Term of Reference”, a complete description of the needs of the mission, from the number of observers, through the tasks of the core

¹³ Council Decision 9262/98 (Annex III of European Commission Communication 2000).

team, to the budget. It is also among the duties of the Commission, in this phase, to find a so called “Implementing Partner” (IP) or “Service Provider” (SP)¹⁴ that will provide the administrative and logistical services required to properly deploy an EU EOM (issuing contracts and making payments to observers and national staff, making travel arrangements, arranging accommodation, arranging accreditation, providing information on the country and on the security environment, procuring computer and communication equipment, developing and maintaining the EU EOM website, etc.). The IP is an organization that, acting on behalf of the European Commission, implements administratively and financially the EU EOM. It is easy to understand that the role of the IP is especially important, even if they are not involved in the assessment of the election. The Commissioner for External Relations must then appoint the Chief Observer (CO), that is a Member of the European Parliament and leads the EU EOM. During this phase it also starts the process of selection of core team members, long-term and short-term observers (LTOs and STOs) on the basis of the recommendation of the exploratory mission. The core team is usually composed by the following positions¹⁵:

- 1) chief observer, who has the overall responsibility for the EU EOM: s/he must ensure that the EOM respects the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation*, the signed MoUs, the EU standard methodology and best practice in election observation, the *Code of Conduct for International Election Observers*, etc.;
- 2) deputy chief observer, who is responsible for the management of political, analytical, methodological, operational and security aspects of the EU EOM; s/he is the principal political and technical advisor to the CO and deputises for the CO in her/his absence;
- 3) election analyst, who has the responsibility for assessing the work of the electoral management body, voter registration and the procedure for voting, counting and the tabulation of results;
- 4) legal analyst, who is responsible for establishing if the legal framework, the implementation and enforcement of national laws and the implementation of complaints and appeals procedures are compliant with international standards for democratic elections;
- 5) political analyst, who is responsible for assessing political developments and campaign activities related to the electoral process;
- 6) media analyst, who has the responsibility for assessing the legal framework for media coverage, the media environment, the role of the media in the electoral process and the degree of freedom of expression;

¹⁴ “Implementing Partner” (IP) is used when the organization is an international agency; “Service Provider” when it is a non-governmental organization or a private company. Here we will use the term IP as a synonymous for both.

¹⁵ *Handbook*, pp. 116-122.

- 7) observer coordinator, who is responsible for the coordination of LTOs and STOs and for the gathering and the initial analysis of observer reports;
- 8) operation expert, who has the responsibility for the deployment of observers and the logistical implementation of the mission; s/he is the EU counterpart of the IP;
- 9) human rights analyst, who is responsible for analysing the human right situation in the country;
- 10) press and public outreach officer, who has the responsibility for maximizing the visibility of the EU EOM through media coverage and public outreach;
- 11) statistical analyst, who contribute to the preparation of observer forms and oversees the statistical analysis of observer reports; and
- 12) security expert, who is responsible for security risk assessments, security planning and the implementation of security plans and procedures; s/he advises the CO and the DCO on all security issues.

The last four positions may not always be included in smaller missions; in this case their responsibilities will be assigned to other mission members. Each EU EOM, however, needs also the support of national staff, identified by the IP and selected by the core team. The national support staff is contracted to help the work of each EU EOM position: from core team, to media monitors, to LTOs and STOs. The role of the national staff is really delicate since they must show a conduct adequate to their role, avoiding partisan activities, respecting national laws and avoiding actions that could cause the mission's impartiality to be questioned.¹⁶

However, the big part of an EU EOM is composed by long term observers and short term observers. Since the observation methodology developed after the 2000 Commission Communication is based on a long-term approach, the work of LTOs is vital. In their areas of responsibility (AoR) they must observe and report on the political context and its development, the performance of the electoral management body, the efficiency and reliability of the voter registration process, the procedures for candidate registration, campaign activities, freedoms of expression, assembly and movement, the role of the media, issues of human right related to the election, the activities of the civil society related to the elections, the effectiveness and the reliability of processes for managing complaints and appeals, election day practices, the counting and tabulation of results and the environment during the post-election period. In addition, LTOs are responsible for preparing and managing the deployment of STOs, that extend the scope of EU EOMs observation coverage on election day. Even if they stay in the country for a really short period (one or two weeks), the role of STOs is important in the overall assessment of the electoral process. In their AoR, STOs must observe voting, counting and tabulation processes, reporting on

¹⁶ *Handbook*, pp. 122-123.

the following aspects: the environment during the election day, the presence of intimidation or restriction on freedom of movement, the implementation of voting procedures established by law and consistent with international standards, the implementation of counting procedures, the tabulation and the publication of results and the post-election environment.¹⁷

The EU applies the same methodology in each country whose elections it observes. This methodology is consistent with international standard and the aforementioned *Declaration of Principles*. This assessment does not consist in a comparison between individual countries; on the contrary, it involves the comparison of each election against international and agreed minimal criteria. The EU's methodology, being based on a long-term approach, involves the observation of the whole electoral process, from the electoral framework to the resolution of disputes. Therefore, in their reports, EU electoral observers must cover the following issues¹⁸: political context, legal framework (including electoral system), election administration, voter registration, party and candidate registration, election campaign, media, complaints and appeals, human rights (including participation of women and minorities), role of civic society, election day, and result and the post-election environment.

II.4 When?

Deploying an EU EOM is a long and hard work. The three steps we have just underlined cover a long time-frame. Actually, in a single-round election the process starts from 12 to 6 months prior to the election day when the European Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament set the list of priority countries. Then, between 6 and 4 months prior to election day, the exploratory mission must do its job, leading to a decision by the Commissioner for External Relations on whether to deploy an EU EOM or not. If the Commissioner decides to set up an EU EOM, the procedure for selecting core team members, LTOs and STOs and the appointment of the chief observers takes place within this time-frame. The preparatory phase must be concluded by two and a half months before election day with the selection of observer by the Commission, the closure of a contract with the implementing partner and the signing of MoUs between the State and the electoral authorities of the host country and the European Commission.

After this stage, it opens up the out-and-out deployment phase, starting, from 8 to 6 weeks prior to election day, with the announcement by the Commissioner for External Relations of the forthcoming deployment of an EU EOM. In the main time the chief observer and the core team members arrive in the host country. Shortly after, 5 weeks before election day, also LTOs shore in

¹⁷ *Handbook*, pp. 141-150.

¹⁸ *Handbook*, p.24.

the country to observe the pre-election environment, each distributed, in pair, to various regional locations. Finally, a week before election day, also STOs are deployed.

At election day observers are spread all over the country, observing voting and counting procedure in as many areas as possible. Their findings will be publicized, one to three days after the election, in a preliminary statement, while observers are still paying attention to the post-election environment. In a week after election day, STOs are back to Europe, while LTOs will stay in the country one week more. The core team, after closing the mission, departs after the publication of final results, usually 2 to 4 week after election day.

Then it needs some times to draw up the final report: actually, it is presented in the country up to two months after the completion of election-related procedures. Finally, at least one more month later, the European Commission provides a follow-up with technical advices, taking account of the EU EOM recommendations.¹⁹

II.5 Where?

In deploying an observation mission there are two kinds of “where”: the first one, already treated, refers to the decision on which countries to send an EU EOM and it is resolved by the mentioned procedure of classifying countries as “priority” or “to be followed”; the second one, instead, is more specific, and relates to the criteria by which observers are deployed throughout a country where the EU has already decided to send an EU EOM. And it is to this second aspect that this paragraph is devoted.

The deployment of STOs and LTOs is not casual, even if it could finally be defined as random. To understand this kind of contradiction, just consider that there are five main criteria used to determine the location for the field deployment of observers with the purpose of assuring a balance between the maximum coverage possible and security and logistical constraints²⁰:

- 1) given the number of observers, the deployment must ensure a balanced geographical coverage of the country;
- 2) there must be a balance between urban and rural areas of the country, but the major urban centres must be covered;
- 3) areas of specific relevance (i.e. post-conflict, minority and refugees areas) must be covered;
- 4) logistical restrictions (i.e. poor transportation and communication infrastructure or accommodation) may prevent observers to deploy to certain regions; and
- 5) observers team must not be deployed to areas where there are significant and not manageable security problems.

¹⁹ *Handbook*, pp. 101-102.

²⁰ *Handbook*, p. 24, p. 101.

However, given these overall constraints, observers teams are free, in their area of responsibility, to choose perfectly randomly which polling station to visit and which not. Keeping this in mind, we can go to the second part of my work: the research design.

Research Design²¹

Is it true that electoral observation can bring cleaner elections, as proponents of this costly enterprise assert? The answer to this question is of fundamental importance to the evaluation of the efficiency of election observation. What we want to know is simply if we are spending well our limited resources (in term of time, money, people, etc.), if our efforts in that direction are worth doing, if our actions bring the expected consequences. Therefore:

Which is the immediate effect of international election observation on election-day fraud?

The only strategy to asses the effectiveness of international observation is through a micro-level analysis because any cross-national study would be plagued by endogeneity problems: in fact, due to the complexity of environments in which election observation takes place, it would be nearly impossible to establish if an election has been free and fair because of the presence of international observers or if it would have been free and fair regardless of that presence. How to develop a cross-national comparison using either a most similar system design or a most different system design having more variables to control for than observations?

An intelligent way to offer a solution to this problem of causal inference is examining the effects of international election observation at the micro-level, meaning by this at polling station level, the first vote aggregation level. Therefore, in order to assess the causal effect of international observation missions we need to analyse a quasi-experiment in which observers are assigned to polling stations in a way that approximates randomization. The quasi-experiment allows us to verify if international election observation has some effects on domestic political actors' behaviour: actually, by comparing election results of polling stations visited by observers with results of polling stations not visited by them, it is possible to notice if the presence of observers causes a reduction in election-day fraud, therefore evaluating the "observers' effect" at the subnational level. This strategy of comparison allows us to automatically control for a number of country-specific variables that would have been really difficult to include in the comparison, thus strengthening the *ceteris paribus* clause. In other words, if international election observation reduces election-day fraud directly, all else held equal, the party that is cheating should gain, in mean, less votes in

²¹ This part is based on the work of Susan Hyde, "The Observer Effect in International Politics, Evidence from a Natural Experiment", *World Politics*, 60, 2007, pp.37-63.

polling stations visited by observers compared to polling stations that were not visited. Through this micro-level strategy it will be possible to test for the effect of international election observation in a way that country-level studies are unable to do because of endogeneity problems.

Before going to the tough description of the research strategy, it is necessary to spend some words on the incentives of leaders who invite international observers and then try to cheat during elections. Today, leaders of democratizing countries face a trade-off between their desire to stay in power and international pressures (flavoured with aid conditionality) to hold internationally certified free and fair elections. If incumbents are sure they will win elections, they do not need to cheat; however, this situation is quite unlikely, since no one can be sure of the outcome of a truly democratic election. Therefore, incumbents who want to stay in power and, at the same time, obtain international aids will, on the one hand, abide to international norms by inviting observers, but, on the other hand, they will try to cheat in front of them. In theory, the presence of observers should increase the costs of committing frauds, either by making incumbents running the risk of being caught or by making more difficult and costly to organize frauds. While it is unlikely that election frauds can be completely eliminated, the role of observers is precisely to make them costlier, thus improving the quality of elections and contributing to democratization.

There are various types of election fraud, ranging from manipulation of voter registers to ballot-box stuffing²² and international election observers can have different effects on them. However, testing all of them would be difficult and misleading. Therefore, with the purpose to gain empirical leverage, the design of this research is limited to the manipulation that can occur on election day in and around polling stations. Even this particular type of manipulations, in reality, can take many forms, but those forms share one attribute: the goal of increasing the vote share for the candidate(s) or the party(ies) that are committing frauds. It is exactly to this kind of fraud that electoral observer are best keen at deterring and discovering: in fact the behaviour of internal political actors may be influenced by the physical presence of international election observers inside and around the polling stations. What I'd like to test is whether the physical presence of observers reduces election-day fraud; therefore, in terms of hypothesis:

H₁: If international election observers are present at the polling stations, then the fraud-sponsoring candidate(s) or party(ies) should gain a lower average vote share in the cases where observers are present.

On the contrary, if the presence of international election observers has not effect on election day fraud, then the fraud-sponsoring candidate(s) or party(ies) should perform almost equally both in polling stations that were observed and in those that were not.

²² Schedler, "The Nested Game of Democratization by Elections", *International Political Science Review*, 23, Jan 2002.

Therefore, the measurable effect of the observers' presence on election-day fraud consist of decreasing the vote share for the fraud-sponsoring candidate(s) or party(ies): actually, he should perform worse, in mean, in observed polling stations. Obviously this holds, *ceteris paribus*, only if election-day frauds are actually occurring.

The experimental nature of this research proposal lies in the random assignment of observers to polling stations. Even if it is not the researcher that assigns observers to randomly selected polling stations, this research design can at any rate be called "experiment" if the researcher can demonstrate that the treatment (in this case observers) is assigned "as if" it were random. It is the EU EOM methodology that can give a solution to this problem: in fact it assures that there are no geographical or other kinds of bias in the distribution of observers to polling stations²³ (see above paragraph II.5) and, more importantly, the choice of polling stations to visit is not driven by information about polling-stations attributes regarding voting patterns, otherwise the assignment of the treatment could not be considered near random.²⁴ However, another significant source of bias in choosing polling stations to visit can be the discretion allowed to single short-term teams: actually, they were frequently criticized for choosing polling stations that were either "convenient" (visiting areas near the observers' hotel or near tourist destinations) or "interesting" (visiting areas in which problems are expected). Clearly, these selection methods are non-random and can have two consequences: first, an intelligent politician may anticipate those behaviours and concentrate his efforts to cheat in other places, where he expects observers would be unlikely to go; second, observers' reports can be disproportionately biased on their findings. For these reasons, EU EOMs are particularly suited for this quasi-experiment: in fact they do as much as they can to discourage these observers' behaviours. Thus, the quasi-experimental setup allows to test if the presence of international (in this case European) election observers reduces the level of election-day fraud.

However, the random assignment of the treatment (observers) is not the only requirement that makes this quasi-experiment possible. There are other three features that must be present in order to test for whether the presence of international election observers reduces election-day frauds: first, as already said, widespread frauds must have occurred on election day; second, disaggregated, polling-station-level election results must be available; third, the list of polling-station visited by observer must also be available.

²³ "On election day, an EU EOM increases its coverage to observe voting and counting at polling stations. EU observers are deployed in mobile teams throughout the host country, and each team visits a number of different polling stations within its designated region. The number of polling stations visited nationwide is intended to provide a viable statistical sample so that an effective and credible assessment can be made of election day." *Handbook*, p. 25.

²⁴ Even if observers possess information regarding single polling stations (but it is quite unlikely) and thus decide to visit stations they believe to be problematic, the (maybe) examined effect of observers on fraud will be strengthened.

The kind of evidence we are looking for depends on the kind of election (presidential or parliamentary) we are facing, as well as on a feature of the electoral system (one or two round systems). In case of one-round parliamentary or presidential elections, we should compare polling stations that received the treatment (observers) with polling stations that did not. On the contrary, if we are facing an internationally observed two-round presidential election, we must consider two rounds of treatment (polling stations observed) and a separate voting distribution for each round. We must bear in mind that observers, choosing polling stations randomly, can visit a polling station only during the first round, only during the second round or during both rounds. This creates a fourfold sample of polling-station-level election results based on the treatment: a number of polling stations was never monitored, another was monitored only during the first round, another only during the second, and another during both rounds.

However, some complications can arise from situations in which the electoral system for parliamentary elections is a plurality system. In that cases, there may be more than a cheating candidate, at least one per electoral district. Thus, what we can do is comparing observed polling stations with not-observed ones in each electoral district, as if each district represents a single, separated election.²⁵

The simplest model sees a dependent variable, the percentage vote share for the fraud-sponsoring candidate(s) or party(ies) (V) and an independent variable, the treatment or whether the polling station was observed (O).

$$V = \alpha + \beta O + \varepsilon$$

After collecting data, we must perform a difference of means test (t-test) to examine if the presence of international observers reduces election-day fraud and, if so, to what degree. This test compares the two groups of observations (polling stations visited against polling stations not visited) and tests the hypothesis that the means of the two groups are the same.

In cases of two-round elections, it is also possible to test if a first-round observation has any lasting effect in the second round. To use Susan Hyde's terminology²⁶, the presence of international election observers can have "transitory" or "persistent" effects: the first term suggests that observers are able to deter fraud, but only during the election they are monitoring (the first round); on the contrary, the second term suggests that the effect of observers lasts also on the second-round actors' behavior. To test if there are transitory effects we need to compare the fraud-sponsoring candidate(s) or party(ies) vote share in the first round (not in the second round because there could

²⁵ There could also be some other particular situations due to electoral systems, but we will deal with them as soon as they present.

²⁶ Susan Hyde, "The Observer Effect in International Politics, Evidence from a Natural Experiment", *World Politics*, 60, 2007, p. 52.

be persistent effects at work) between unmonitored and monitored polling stations. Instead, to test if the presence of observers in the first round generates persistent effects in the second round we must compare the second round vote share between the group of polling station monitored only in the first round and the group of polling station never monitored.

However, our results could be biased if we do not take account of other control variables. The firsts to come to my mind is the size of the polling station, that is highly correlated to the difficulty in reaching it: the smaller in terms of voters registered and/or of votes cast the polling station is, the higher the difficulty to reach it by observers (and voters). In this regard, if observers have systematic difficulty in reaching small polling stations, the mean difference between monitored and unmonitored polling stations can be the result of systematic differences between polling stations that are easy to reach and those that are not. This would bias the results of the tests if small polling stations (that are difficult to reach) are systematically related to support for a particular party or candidate. What we must make sure is that the effect of observers' presence is robust to the inclusion of measures of polling station size.

The second control variable to be included in the model is a measure of the urban-rural divide: if a candidate (or a party) performs very well in urban areas (or in rural ones) and the sample of visited polling stations includes a disproportionate number of rural (or urban) polling stations, than it is possible that the candidate/party's disproportionate support in urban (or rural) areas biases the results of the mean difference comparisons between monitored and unmonitored polling stations. To control for this possible source of bias we can divide polling stations according to their geographical position (urban vs. rural) and then perform the difference of means tests and see if the relation still holds.

The third control variable is in the wake of the preceding one: the rationale is the same, but instead of the urban-rural divide it takes into consideration the possibility that some candidates or parties has a particularly strong electoral support in some areas (maybe in their areas of origin, or among people of the same ethnicity, religion, etc.). Therefore, if a high proportion of unmonitored polling stations is located in those areas, the results of the mean difference can be driven by this bias. This problem is resolved through the same system as the previous one.

A question remain to be answered. To which cases this analysis will be applied? As already mentioned, the choice of the cases is an important part of the research. Unfortunately, due to the scarcity of data, not all elections observed by the EU are suitable to the application of this design. At least, they must posses two characteristics: first, there must be a candidate(s) or a party(ies) trying to cheat; second, polling station level election results must be available. In light of those requirements I will select three or four cases and, if possible, I will try to represent a case of a one-

round election, a case of a two-round election, a case of presidential election and a case of parliamentary election. This will allow me to broaden the empirical validity of the main findings.

Conclusion

I hope that this research could show the value of election observation work. As we know, election observation is a costly enterprise with lots of implication both on the political future of a country and on the life of its citizens. Detractors of EOMs try to underestimate the significance of observers' work, underlining their shortfalls and their problems. For this reason, since I sincerely believe in the external support that EOMs give to the democratic future of a country, I would like to find a positive evidence for sustaining these democratic efforts.

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