

## CHAPTER SIX

# The Qualitative Component of the Quick Count

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In many election observations the final vote count attracts the most attention. This is entirely understandable. The vote count determines election day winners and losers, and the integrity of that count is a longstanding concern in many countries. The final count, however, is just one aspect of an election. No one doubts that an accurate, honest vote count is a necessary condition for a democratic election, but it is not a sufficient condition. Electoral outcomes too often have been rigged in ways that have little or nothing to do with the counting and tabulation of results. The will of the electorate has been nullified for example by: blocking legitimate candidates and parties from appearing on the ballot; otherwise tilting electoral laws and regulations; financing campaigns illicitly, including through the improper use of state resources; preventing open and free campaigns; intimidating and bribing voters; using biased voter registration lists; interfering with the secrecy of the vote; manipulating the administration of the election and complaint mechanisms; and preventing legitimate winners from assuming office.

For these reasons, election observers must concentrate on the *quality* of the electoral process before, during and after election day, and contemporary election observations should not depend on just impressionistic evidence of anecdotes. To be effective and credible, contemporary election observations should not depend on just impressionistic evidence or anecdotes. Anecdotal or impressionistic evidence is unreliable, and it leaves too many important questions unanswered. Qualitative problems in the process should be quantified as much as possible so that their impact can be characterized appropriately. For example, if unused ballots have been tampered with then there is surely a cause for concern. But the more important questions include: How widespread was this problem? Did the tampering work in favor of one party to the detriment of others? Was the tampering part of a larger scheme aimed at interfering with the outcome of the election? The only sure way to answer these

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important questions is to collect reliable and systematic information from well-trained observers.

This chapter is divided into two parts and provides basic guidelines for designing the qualitative component of the election-day observation. To collect qualitative data, observers use standardized forms, and the place to begin is with the design of these forms. What should observers try to measure? What questions should be included? And what principles should be followed to make sure that the questions included on forms will produce reliable and useful evidence? What are the most common mistakes, and how can these be avoided? These issues are illustrated with a discussion of observer forms that have been used in the field. The second part of the chapter discusses a variety of strategies that can be used to analyze the qualitative results.

Two preliminary points need to be emphasized regarding the qualitative component of an election observation. The first is that the general methodology driving the qualitative evaluation of elections through observer reports is exactly the same as the methodology that underpins the generation of the vote count data for the quick count. The qualitative reports come from the same observers and from the same polling stations used for the retrieval of vote count data. Recall that these polling stations are sample points that are determined by random selection. This means that the qualitative data gathered from observers have the same statistical properties as the vote count data; the findings of the qualitative analysis of sample data can be reliably generalized to the quality of the entire election-day process throughout the country. The same margins of error also apply. Because of these characteristics, the qualitative data provide a *systematic* way of evaluating election day processes *on a national basis*.<sup>1</sup>

The second primary point to emphasize is: there is no such thing as an election that is completely free of error. Nor does the fact that errors have been made necessarily mean that fraud has taken place. Nationwide elections are complicated events to plan and administer. Election-day mistakes are made everywhere. In the vast majority of cases, these mistakes are simply a matter of human error. A polling official may get sick and fail to report to the polling station on election morning. As a result, a polling station may end up being short of the proper number of officials. Materials might have been misplaced or inadvertently sent to the wrong polling station. A polling station might not open on time because someone forgot to tell a supervisor that a building has to be unlocked early on Sunday morning so that officials can set up. Because national elections are difficult to organize you can expect that some things might go wrong on election day.

<sup>1</sup> Quick counts discussed in this handbook most often concern national elections (e.g., presidential elections and elections for proportional representation by national political party lists). The data collected for such quick counts is highly reliable for evaluating national developments but will not necessarily be able to assess processes and results at the sub-national level, such as elections for single-member legislative districts or local elections – unless the quick count is specifically designed to do so.

The important point is that most of these kinds of errors qualify as unintentional human error. In societies where corrupt practices have plagued elections for decades, people understandably tend to view any irregularities on election day with a great deal of suspicion. It is a mistake, however, to leap to the conclusion that each and every election day problem necessarily indicates that there has been a fraudulent attempt to fix an election. Such human errors are usually random; they do not conform to any particular pattern. Moreover, random error usually means that the “mistakes” do not end up favoring any one political party or any one candidate running for office.

Because the qualitative observation data rely on exactly the same statistical principles as those used to generate the quick count vote data, analysts using the qualitative data have the tools to determine whether “errors” found in the analysis of qualitative data at the national level are random or whether they are systematic. There are strong reasons to worry about evidence of systematic patterns of “errors.” Random problems should certainly be reported, but the more important task for analysts is to determine what are the consequences of non-random problems. It is possible, for example, that analysis will show that a disproportionate number of problems that disenfranchise voters occurred in areas that are traditional opposition strongholds and/or problems that indicate multiple voting occurred in ruling party strongholds, at an incidence that could affect the outcome of elections. On the other hand, analysis could demonstrate that the problems do not follow a politically discriminatory pattern or that the incidence is *minimal*.

### DESIGNING OBSERVATION FORMS

The goal of the qualitative part of the quick count observation is to provide a systematic and reliable evaluation of important aspects of the electoral process. But any effective evaluation needs benchmarks against which behavior can be evaluated. Administrative rules for elections usually set out in detail exactly how things are supposed to work at each polling station on election day, and these rules usually set out clear guidelines that cover the selection and duties of polling station personnel. These rules and administrative guidelines establish what are the acceptable procedures for the administration of the polling station. Typically, they specify what materials are required at polling stations, they provide instructions for polling station personnel and they set out procedures for dealing with anomalies. Electoral authorities issue these procedures based on the law—they should also should seek public input and broad political agreement. Domestic observation organizations might find that the official rules are incomplete, arbitrary or in some way fall short of desirable standards. If so, observers should point out these problems in a report. However, when it comes to the design of the qualitative observation forms, the place to start is with the rules established by electoral authorities. These rules are public and they define what are the *officially* acceptable, or unacceptable, standards for the election-day operations of polling stations.

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For an observation to maximize its impact, observer groups have to be able to gather key pieces of information quickly, analyze the data quickly and interpret and release the data quickly.

It is useful to invest some time thinking about what particular issues might be uniquely relevant for a particular election.

### **How Long Should the Forms Be?**

When election observer groups first try to decide precisely what qualitative issues they want to evaluate, they often produce a vast list of questions about election day procedures for observers to answer. Undoubtedly, a vast number of “important” questions *could* be asked about the quality of any electoral process, but it is not possible for practical reasons both to ask every single possible question and to have timely and useful data. The problem is one of resource constraints; tough choices have to be made.

The most important constraint on election day is time. The more data observers are asked to collect, the more time it takes to collect the data, transmit the information, enter the data into computer files and analyze the it. For an observation to maximize its impact, observer groups have to be able to gather key pieces of information quickly, analyze the data quickly and interpret and release the data quickly. Citizens want to know whether the election is “going well” or “going badly” on election day. They usually want to know about whether the polls opened “on time,” for instance, before the polls have closed. Because time is vital, the qualitative reporting forms have to be short. That said, the next challenge is to decide which qualitative questions are the most important of all. Once decisions have been made about what needs to be evaluated and measured, the next matter is to decide the best way of going about constructing the measure.

There is no single list of qualitative questions that work equally well for every election in all countries. And it is useful to invest some time thinking about what particular issues might be uniquely relevant for a particular election. For example, if there has been recent experience with military intervention in election day procedures, and opposition parties and others express concern that these experiences might be repeated, then there are good reasons to consider including questions about the role of the military, or the police, on the qualitative observation forms. If there are reasons to believe that proper voter identification cards have not been universally distributed, or that the election day registration of voters will be problematic, then questions about these issues should be included in the qualitative observation forms.

How many questions should qualitative observation forms contain? There is no hard and fast rule, but most experienced election observation groups usually end up using qualitative observation forms that contain somewhere between 12–15 questions. Experience shows that election day qualitative reports rarely use data from more than 8 of those 12-15 questions. At issue is a practical matter: It is simply not possible to collect, transmit, digitally enter and analyze more than 15 qualitative observation questions to report in a timely way on election-day processes. If data cannot be used, then why collect it?



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**With such a short form (12 to 15 questions), doesn't this mean that we will not be getting some very important information?**

No, not at all. Experience shows that the information needed to determine whether the election is proper or not can be collected in 12 to 15 questions. If observer groups want to ask many more detailed questions about the quality of the electoral process, this can be accomplished without compromising the short qualitative form. How? Usually, additional qualitative information is collected in one of two ways. One way is to ask quick count observers to collect additional qualitative data on a separate form. The additional information from that extra form can be collected from observers after election day. The reason for reporting these data separately is to avoid over-burdening the communications system. Alternatively, more detailed qualitative data can be gathered by observers who are not a part of the quick count observation. Either way, these additional data can be used in a more detailed post-election report. The important point is that this information should be reported separately so that it will not overload the communication system. The information is not lost, it is just collected and analyzed later.

**The Do's and Don'ts of Question Design**

Designing the content of the observation forms (the questions) is an important task that requires patient and careful attention to detail. Past practice suggests that the best way to go about designing the questions is to recruit a small team of people who can work together. That team needs to be able to identify what are the 12-15 most important qualitative questions for observers to ask, and they need to be aware of some key factors that will guide them to make informed decisions about what is the best way to ask these questions. For that reason, members of the team have to have some expertise.

Typically, the volunteer coordinator takes the lead in designing forms. She or he works with several additional individuals, including:

- *The executive director or a board member*—Knowledge and judgement about the political environment is needed to be sure that questions address the likely key problems in election-day procedures, such as disenfranchisement or illegal voting based on voter lists, ballot box stuffing, crediting votes to the wrong candidate, etc. Therefore, the executive director, a board member, or other such person must help to design the forms.
- *An electoral law expert*—Because questions aim to evaluate the quality of election day processes, the team needs to include someone who is knowledgeable about how election day processes are supposed to work. This means including someone on the team who knows the details of the electoral law and regulations.

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Each and every proposed question should be able to pass a series of “tests.”

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- *The lead trainer*—Observers must be “trained to the forms.” That is, trainers have to explain to observers the details about exactly how the forms are supposed to be used. This team member has to be able to think about the structure and content of the form from the point of view of the observer and to anticipate how the structure and content of the forms shape the training of observers.
- *A data analyst*—Someone responsible for analyzing data on election day must be on the team to consider methodological issues of question construction, the practical challenges of data transmission and data entry, as well as the interpretive challenges of how the data will be configured and used on election day.

With the team in place, the next task is to work together to make the detailed decisions about precisely how each question will be formulated. Cumulative experience with qualitative form construction and measurement suggests some useful rules to follow. In effect, each and every proposed question should be able to pass a series of “tests.” These can be summarized as follows:

- *The usefulness test*—For each proposed question, the analyst should be able to specify first, why it is critical to have that particular piece of information quickly, and second, precisely how the data from that question will be used in the analysis. If there is no compelling reason for having the information quickly, or if it is not clear exactly how the data from the question will be used, then the question should not be asked.
- *The validity test*—Recall that validity refers to how well an indicator, the data produced by answers to questions on the form, actually measures the underlying concept to be measured. Here, the question that needs a clear answer is: Exactly what concept is being measured by the question? And, is there a better, more direct, or clearer way to formulate the question to measure that concept?
- *The reliability test*—Reliability has to do with the consistency of the measurement. The goal is to reduce the variation in responses between observers, that is, to have independent observers watching the same event record that event in exactly the same way. When questions are worded ambiguously observers are more likely to end up recording different results when independently measuring the same event. Note that validity and reliability are the most serious sources of non-sampling error plaguing systematic observation data.
- *The response categories test*—Response categories for questions have to satisfy two minimal conditions. First, the response categories should be exhaustive. This means that the structure of the response categories should collectively cover all of the possible meaningful ranges of responses. Second, response categories have to be mutually exclusive. That is,

the range of values in one response category should not overlap with those of other categories.

- *The efficiency test*—Response categories should be designed to achieve the maximum efficiency by keeping the number of response categories to a minimum. This has a significant impact on the volume of data that are being transmitted. The fewer the number of response categories used in a form, the faster and more accurately the data can be transmitted. Furthermore, fewer key strokes are required to enter the data into the computerized dataset.

### **What to Avoid**

Lessons from past experience also suggest that some practices should be avoided. These include:

- *Open-ended questions*—When designing observation forms it is very tempting to want to include a few open-ended questions. For example, if observers record the fact that the police might have intervened in election day activities at a particular polling station, then it is natural to want to know the details of what exactly happened. But the qualitative short forms are not the best places to record this information; details of incidents that could have a significant impact on the electoral process should be gathered on separate forms. Answers to open-ended qualitative questions might well produce “interesting findings,” but these kinds of data are cumbersome. Uncategorized answers to open-ended questions are a type of “anecdotal evidence,” and to be of any analytic help these kinds of answers have to be re-coded into useful categories. The problem is that it is very time consuming to recode such data. For all practical purposes it is too difficult to both categorize and analyze these data within very tight time constraints.
- *False precision*—Analysts want to work with precise results, but attempting to achieve very high levels of precision is seldom warranted. Extra precision usually involves collecting more data, which increases the load on observers and communications systems. It also requires more time to enter data that, in most cases, do not provide a substantive payoff when it comes to the basic interpretation of the evidence. Consider the following example related to the opening of polling stations:

*We want to know at what time the first voter cast a ballot at a particular polling station, so we ask the observer to record the exact time, say 8:02 am. That may be the most precise result; however, that level of precision is unnecessary. Moreover, this specification of the question introduces time consuming complications for both data entry and analysis. Suppose five polling stations opened at the following times: 6:37; 9:58; 7:42; 11:59 and 12:10. To determine the average opening time involves*

arithmetically summing all these times and then dividing them by the number of observations, five. Simple computational systems operate in units of 1, 10, 100 and so on. The problem is that the standard clock does not; there are 60 minutes in an hour, not 10 or 100, and there are 24 hours in a day, not 10 or 100. Computing simple averages, therefore, produces a figure that makes no sense and is actually incorrect. It is possible of course to write an algorithm that "translates" standard clock time into standardized units, and then translate those standardized units back into standard time. However, that practice is awkward, time consuming and it involves unnecessary extra work. At the end of the day what we really need to know is: What proportion of all polling stations opened "on time"? What proportions were "late" or "very late?" And how many, and which, polling stations did not open at all?

### Observation Forms: An Example

How these design principles help to produce efficient, usable questions that satisfy the usefulness, validity, reliability, measurement and efficiency tests is illustrated in the forms presented in Figure 6-1.<sup>2, 3</sup>

The content of Form 1 covers six areas. The first part, the code and the polling station, are identification numbers. The "code" refers to the security code number assigned to each observer. Using such a code makes it far more difficult for outsiders to break into the observation system, or to interfere with the observation. Data entry personnel are trained not to enter any data from callers who do not supply the correct code number. The code number and the polling station number have to match those contained in the database. After the correct codes are supplied, the reported data from Form 1 are entered into the master database.

The first substantive question identifies the time of installation of the polling station. The second set of questions indicate which polling station personnel were present at the installation and whether they were the appointed officials or substitutes. The third block of questions is a checklist for reporting the presence or absence of required voting materials, and the fourth block collects data on whether proper installation procedures were followed. The fifth section identifies which party agents were present at the polling station and the final part indicates what time voting began.

Data entry personnel are trained not to enter any data from callers who do not supply the correct code number.

<sup>2</sup> These forms reflect the best elements of forms used in a number of countries, most especially Peru and Nicaragua. The original Nicaraguan forms are contained in Appendices 9A and 9B; the Nicaraguan forms include instructions to the quick count volunteers.

<sup>3</sup> These forms are not intended to present a definitive list of questions. They must always be adapted somewhat to meet the conditions in each election, and there are some questions that may be considered for inclusion in any election. For example, groups may consider placing a question at the end of the form asking the observer whether the results at her or his assigned polling station should be "accepted" or should be "challenged," or the observer may be asked to rate the overall process at the polling station on a scale from one to five (with one being "excellent," two being "good" three being "neutral," four being "bad," and five being "unacceptable").

FIGURE 6-1:  
SAMPLE OBSERVER FORMS

<b>FORM 1: Installation of the Polling Station</b>			
Code	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/>		
Polling Station	<input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/> <input style="width: 20px; height: 20px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/>		
<b>1. What time did the installation of the polling station begin?</b> <i>(circle the correct letter)</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> A Before 6 a.m.	<input type="checkbox"/> B 6 - 7 a.m.	<input type="checkbox"/> C 7 a.m. - 9 a.m.	
<input type="checkbox"/> D After 9 a.m.	<input type="checkbox"/> E It was not installed.		
<b>Who was present to administer the polling station?</b> <i>(circle the correct letter)</i>			
	Original	Substitute	None
<b>2.</b> President	<input type="checkbox"/> A	<input type="checkbox"/> B	
<b>3.</b> First Member	<input type="checkbox"/> A	<input type="checkbox"/> B	<input type="checkbox"/> C
<b>4.</b> Second Member	<input type="checkbox"/> A	<input type="checkbox"/> B	<input type="checkbox"/> C
<b>5. Were the proper materials in the polling station?</b> <i>(circle YES or NO)</i>			
		<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
If your answer is NO, go to question 6. If your answer is YES, skip to question 7.			
<b>Answer YES or NO.</b>			
<b>6a.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Voter List
<b>6b.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	All required forms (tally sheets, protocols, complaint ledgers, etc.)
<b>6c.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Ballot Boxes
<b>6d.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Ballots
<b>6e.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Voting Booth
<b>6f.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Indelible Ink
<b>7. Were the proper procedures followed?</b> <i>(circle YES or NO)</i>			
		<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
If your answer is NO, go to question 8. If your answer is YES, skip to question 9.			
<b>Answer YES or NO.</b>			
<b>8a.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Ballots were counted before voting began.
<b>8b.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Ballot boxes were confirmed empty before voting began.
<b>8c.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	The voting booth was set up to ensure secrecy.
<b>Which party agents were present?</b> <i>(circle YES or NO)</i>			
<b>9a.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Party A
<b>9b.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Party B
<b>9c.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	Party C
<b>10. What time was the first vote cast?</b> <i>(circle the correct letter)</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> A Before 7 a.m.	<input type="checkbox"/> B 7 - 8 a.m.	<input type="checkbox"/> C 8 - 10 a.m.	
<input type="checkbox"/> D After 10 a.m.	<input type="checkbox"/> E Never		

FIGURE 6-1 (CONTINUED):  
SAMPLE OBSERVER FORMS

FORM 2: Voting and Final Results	
Code	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>
Polling Station	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>
<b>1. Was the voting/counting process suspended at this polling station?</b> <i>(circle YES or NO)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If your answer is YES, report the incident via telephone.	
<b>2. Were all proper procedures followed during voting?</b> <i>(circle YES or NO)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If your answer is NO, go to question 3. If your answer is YES, go to question 4.	
<b>Answer YES or NO.</b>	
3a.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Officials explained the voting procedures.
3b.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Each voter was provided and cast only one ballot.
3c.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   All persons with voter i.d. cards were permitted to vote.
3d.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   All persons on the voter list were permitted to vote.
3e.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   All persons who were not on the voter list and did not have voter i.d. cards were turned away.
3f.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   As voters were handed ballots, their names were checked off the voter list and ink was applied to their finger.
3g.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Other significant problem (Note and report to local coordinator.)
<b>4. When did the counting of votes begin?</b> <i>(circle the correct letter)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> A Before 6 p.m. <input type="checkbox"/> B 6 - 8 p.m. <input type="checkbox"/> C After 8 p.m.	
<b>Other than polling station officials, who else was present at the vote count?</b> <i>(circle YES or NO)</i>	
5a.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Party Agents
5b.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Observers
5c.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Voters
5d.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Police
5e.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Others

FORM 2 (continued)	
<b>Which Party Agents were present during the counting process at the polling station?</b> <i>(circle YES or NO)</i>	
6a.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Party A
6b.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Party B
6c.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Party C
<b>7. Were there any irregularities in the counting process?</b> <i>(circle YES or NO)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If your answer is YES, go to question 8. If your answer is NO, go to question 9.	
<b>Answer YES or NO.</b>	
8a.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   There were more ballots found in the box than the number of voters checked off on the voter list as having voted.
8b.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Party agents/observers could not observe the opening and scoring of ballots.
8c.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Votes were credited to the wrong contestant.
8d.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Ballots were improperly voided.
8e.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Unused ballots were illegally marked and added.
8f.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Tally sheets not posted, copies not given to party agents/observers.
8g.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Other significant problem (Note and report to local coordinator.)
<b>Results for the President</b>	
9a.	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Votes   Party A
9b.	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Votes   Party B
9c.	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Votes   Party C
9d.	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Void (null and blank)
9e.	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Challenged ballots
9f.	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Spoiled ballots
<b>10. Did any political party contest the results?</b> <i>(circle YES or NO)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> YES   If your answer is YES, go to question 11. <input type="checkbox"/> NO   If your answer is NO, go to the end of the form.	
<b>Which party contested the results?</b> <i>(circle YES or NO)</i>	
11a.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Party A
11b.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Party B
11c.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   Party C

The application of the principles of question design can be most easily illustrated by working through an example:

Suppose observers want to know whether polling stations opened on time on election day. One possibility is to simply construct a question as in version A.

Version A: **“Did the polling station you were observing open on time on election morning?”**

Yes       No

But there are several problems with this wording of the question. First, observers will almost certainly have in their minds different ideas about just when a polling station is in fact “open.” Is a polling station “open” when the election officials are all present? Is it “open” when all of the election officials and party agents are present and after all of the materials have been set out? Or, is a polling station “open” at the moment that the first voter casts their ballot? Moreover, we need to be very clear about what “on time” means? If a polling station is supposed to be “open” at 6:00 am and the first voter casts a ballot at 6:25, has the polling station actually “opened on time?”

Variations in how these concepts are understood pose problems of validity and reliability. If observers have in mind different views about what “on time” means, and it is left up to observers to decide what “on time” means, then the observers will produce unreliable measures. Version B of the same question is both a more valid and more reliable way to ask the very same question.

Version B: **“When did the first voter cast a ballot at the polling station?”**

Before 7:00     Between 7:00 and 8:00  
 After 8:00     Did not open

This particular version of the question has several advantages:

- First, this question wording reduces any ambiguity about the question of when a polling station actually “opens,” and it provides a clear guideline to observers for what qualifies as “on time.” There is no conceptual ambiguity, and so there is validity.
- Second, because the response categories are varied across time, analysts can examine the distribution of “opening times” that will reveal the scale and scope of administration problems in getting polling stations “open.” These categories allow responses to vary in meaningful ways; the “usefulness test” is satisfied. Also, the measurement categories are clear; there is no room for observers to provide their own interpretation of what is “late” or “early.” Consequently, the measurement will be reliable. Note too that the response categories in version B of the question satisfy both of the measurement rules: the categories are exhaustive and mutually exclusive.

- Third, this version of the question also supplies us with an important additional piece of information; it tells us which polling stations did not open at all.

There is a caveat to the above example: The concern about late opening of polling stations is not simply a guage of administrative organization. It is also an indicator of whether prospective voters had a genuine opportunity to vote. Late openings do not measure whether anyone was disenfranchised as a consequence of the problem. An observer outside the polling station determining how many people left lines due to long waits might better measure that. Even that indicator does not address whether those persons returned later. These are the types of issues to discuss when designing an observation and its forms.

### **ANALYZING QUALITATIVE DATA**

Analyzing data within very short time constraints is no easy task. Data analysts usually have to begin to prepare for the job well in advance of election day by:

- gathering contextual information;
- developing a clear election-day plan;
- creating a software “shell” for the presentation of graphics; and
- establishing a working protocol for management of results produced by the analysis team.

### **Pre-Election Preparation**

During the run-up to elections, analysts gather different kinds of contextual information that will help them to interpret the qualitative data.

#### ***Contextual Data***

Typically, the most useful contextual data to gather are those from previous elections (when available), especially from the election immediately preceding the present observation. For example, consider the case of voter turnout. Voter turnout indicates levels of citizen participation on election day and citizen participation is an important measure of the health of an election process. But how do you know if voter turnout is “high” or “unusually low?” At least two kinds of benchmarks are helpful for making these kinds of evaluations. The most obvious benchmark comes from documentation of the recent electoral history of the country. Was voter turnout in the present election “unusually low” when compared with levels of voter turnout in the previous election, or with other national elections in the recent past? International benchmark comparisons might also be helpful, but these comparisons have to be made cautiously because electoral rules have significant effects on levels of voter turnout. Voter turnout is typically systematically higher in countries using proportional representation than in majoritarian electoral systems. Any international comparisons have to take such factors as electoral rules into account. Prior

Typically, the most useful contextual data to gather are those from previous elections (when available).

elections can also provide useful benchmark data for interpreting whether the number of challenged ballots or other anomalies were “unusually high.” Most election commissions keep records of prior elections, and those records should be publicly available.

Pre-election preparation also involves gathering data from international organizations that conduct election observations. These organizations may have participated in observer missions, or they may have assisted domestic non-governmental organizations conducting observations in the country. Some of these organizations keep records of previous involvement, and their archived files on other elections can provide important detailed contextual election data.

### **A Clear Plan**

It is essential that analysts develop in advance a clear plan addressing: Exactly how will they work with the observer data when they start to arrive on election day? Which parts of the dataset will be examined first? In what order will the data be analyzed? Do the analysts know exactly how to proceed if findings indicate that there may have been some problems? Which are the problems that seem most likely to arise on election day? How will they be analyzed? These questions must not be left until election day, and they should be discussed in advance with those responsible for presenting the results to the public. The point is to eliminate as many “surprises” as possible.

### **Using Graphics**

Next, analysts must plan how they will use graphics. Graphic presentations of data make observation results more accessible to the media and to the public. In many cases newspapers will simply print the graphic results produced by observer groups. The production of user friendly graphics solves two problems. It saves newspapers the trouble of producing their own graphics, and it reduces the chances that errors will be made in the presentation of findings.

The production of graphics is time consuming, and it is remarkable just how much disagreement can arise over the matter of what is the best way to present information. Just as the leadership of the organization should prepare in advance drafts of what an election day statement of results might look like, so too should the analysis team prepare ahead of time the software “shell” for the presentation of graphics. That “shell” should reflect choices about format, addressing issues, like: Will the data on key questions be illustrated with bar charts? Will they be presented using pie-charts? Or, will they be numeric tables? Will the charts include the organization’s logo? How will each of the graphs or tables be labelled?

These questions may seem trivial, but it is essential to eliminate in advance as many things as possible that may cause election-day disagreements and lost time. Such disagreements have delayed press conferences, and they have led

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In many cases newspapers will simply print the graphic results produced by observer groups.

Analysts should establish a working protocol for the management of results produced by the analysis team.

to missed media opportunities. Advanced preparation avoids such problems. More importantly, they save time on election day and eliminate possibilities of making mistakes that can damage the credibility of the election observers.

### ***Establishing an Election Day Protocol***

Analysts should also prepare for election day by establishing a working protocol for the management of results produced by the analysis team. This protocol can significantly reduce the potential for election day friction with quick count leadership and mistakes like forcing premature release of data. The protocol should clearly address the following questions: *How, when, and to whom will the analysts report the results of the analysis on election day?* These issues need to be discussed and agreed upon prior to election day.<sup>4</sup>

The political leadership of civic organizations does not always understand precisely what is entailed in the analysis of election day observation data, and they have expectations that are sometimes unfounded. Furthermore, there are extraordinary pressures surrounding election day. Quick count organizers are under external pressure to release results as quickly as possible. The pressures can come from multiple sources, including: the media, international observer groups, representatives of donor countries, political parties, and even the election commission. The constraint facing the analyst is that it takes time for data to arrive and be entered before they can be analyzed. Moreover, analysts need to have enough data to undertake a reliable analysis. If leadership bows to pressures and makes premature pronouncements, they may be inaccurate and produce extraordinarily negative consequences.

### **Steps in the Analysis of the Qualitative Data**

On election day, the analysis of the qualitative data usually proceeds through three discrete steps:

1. *Scanning the data*—Identifying “outliers,” signs that something has gone wrong.
2. *Searching for systematic patterns*—Determining whether problems are randomly distributed or clustered.
3. *Ascertaining the impact of the problems*—Determining whether problems have a material impact on the outcome and favor any particular party or candidate.

### ***Scanning the Data***

The analysis of the qualitative data usually begins with a scan of the data and an analysis of the distribution of the responses to each and every question in the qualitative dataset. The task here is to identify “outliers,” those responses that signify that something might have gone wrong. Recall that all the questions were drafted, and informed in large part by, the election law and administrative

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 8: *The “End Game”* for a discussion of developing and following a protocol for sharing internally and releasing quick count results.

regulations governing election day procedures. Consequently, the responses to each question will indicate whether those regulations have been satisfied or some problem is detected.

Consider the case of responses to Question 1 in Form 1 above. The response categories to the question about “installation of the polling station” allow for four responses. The distribution of responses across the first three categories indicates what amounts to the “rate” of installation. In well-run elections the expectation would be that the majority of polling stations should be installed before 7:00 a.m. if the polls are to open to the public at 7:00 a.m. If a large proportion of polling stations were installed between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00, then these would be “late” but not necessarily problematic, depending on whether there are still ample opportunities for everyone at those polling stations to vote and the absence of other problems. Far more problematic are those cases where observers report that the polling station was “not installed.” In those cases, significant numbers of voters may be disenfranchised unless extraordinary remedies are set in place by authorities. These cases will require further investigation by the analyst.

Analysts should report the distribution of responses across all categories, identify precisely which polling stations were “not installed” and attach the list of non-installed polling stations to the report of the distribution of installation times. The reason for attaching to the report case-by-case identification of each polling station not installed becomes clear through experience. When reporting to the public that, say 4 percent of the polling stations were “not installed,” the media typically ask two questions: which ones? and why were they not-installed? The first question can be addressed by supplying the attached report. The second question may be harder to answer in the initial report, but the reply should at least be: “We are investigating the matter.” Local knowledge might reveal that the polling station was not installed because it had very few voters registered there and it was merged with a polling station at the next table, a polling station that also had very few registered voters. As long as all voters had a real opportunity to vote, there is no reason to assert that the problem was sufficient to compromise the fairness of the election. Contextual data collected prior to election day also is important. With these contextual data it becomes possible to say whether levels of non-installations are higher or lower than in previous elections.

The same procedure should be followed for each and every question. Consider another case. Questions 6a-6f on Form 1 above have to do with the presence of materials at the polling station. Most election laws require that all of these materials be in place. The analyst, therefore, should scan the data to search for *any* cases that do not satisfy these criteria. Those cases should be identified. The same applies to the responses to Question 10 about the time of the first vote. If a response to the first vote question is “never,” the observer recorded that no one voted, then this indicates a serious problem at the polling station. The next step takes the analysis further.

If the problem cases are distributed randomly and the scale is not large, then the likely cause of the problems is simple human error.

A clustering of problem cases may signify an administrative problem within a particular district. District supervisors or coordinators are usually in the best position to get to the bottom of a localized problem

### ***Searching for Systematic Patterns***

Step 1 procedures will indicate if anything has gone wrong, where it has gone wrong and what is the potential scope of the problem. Step 2 is essentially a search for systematic patterns. It begins by a statistical search for patterns of regularities, or irregularities, for those cases that step 1 analysis has identified as “problem cases.” Recall that if the problem cases are distributed randomly and the scale is not large, then the likely cause of the problems is simple human error. However, this has to be determined systematically, and there are two ways to proceed. What needs to be determined, first, is whether the problem cases are clustered in any one region of the country or not. This can be established by cross-tabulating all of the problem cases by region of the country and within region, by district.

If the problem cases are clustered, say in the capital city, or in a particular region, then the reasons behind this should be explored. A clustering of problem cases may signify an administrative problem within a particular district. In those cases, it is useful to alert the emergency team about the problem and to contact the observer groups’ regional or municipal supervisors to generate local information about why these problems arose. Regional or municipal supervisors are usually in the best position to get to the bottom of a localized problem—not least of all because they will be in contact both with the local observers and the local election commission officials.

While these local inquiries are being initiated, analysts should continue to analyze the data by cross-tabulating the problem cases with all other response to questions in the qualitative forms. That strategy is important because it can shed light on the shape and depth of the problems with these cases. For example, if the polling station was “not installed” (Question 1, response E) then it should follow that people should not have been able to vote (Question 10, response E). A simple cross-tabulation of these two sets of question can establish definitively whether this was the case.

These cross-tabulation checks will also enable the analyst to determine if most of the problems across most categories are concentrated within the same polling stations, or if they are not. This is a critical line of investigation. Once again, an example helps to illustrate the point. If the analysts takes the problem cases where polling stations were “not installed” (Question 1, response E) and crosstabulates these with the responses to Questions 2-4, and Questions 6a-6f which concern the presence of polling station officials and election materials, then the results will allow the analysts to rule out, or isolate, certain reasons for why the polling stations were not installed. So if, for the majority of cases of non-installed polling stations, the analyst finds that the answer to questions 6a-6f is uniformly “no” (the materials were not present), but the answers to Questions 2-4 were “A” (all nominated polling station officials were present), then the analyst would conclude that the problem of non-installation was not the absence of polling station officials, but probably was the absence of proper election materials. Such a finding should be communicat-

ed to the observer group's regional coordinator who can be asked to investigate why materials did not arrive at these polling stations.

The analysis might reveal an administrative problem, as with the above example. These findings should form a part of the observer groups' report. Alternatively, information from a local coordinator may reveal that the polling stations that were "not installed" are not really a problem at all. The polling station might not have been installed for sensible administrative reasons. Local knowledge might reveal that the polling station was not installed because it had very few voters registered there and it was merged with the next polling station, one that also had very few registered voters. As long as all voters had a real opportunity to vote, there is no reason to assert that there was a problem.

However, the observer group's municipal coordinator may determine that materials (or, for example, ballots) were not delivered to the polling station in the quick count sample nor to any other polling stations in the surrounding area. Analysis of past voting patterns may reveal that voters in this area tend to favor a particular political party. This could indicate a deliberate political discrimination affecting a local election, or it could turn out to be part of a national trend.

In the interpretation of the qualitative evidence, therefore, the analyst should be prepared to combine local information with information that comes from the qualitative dataset.

### ***Determining the Impact of Problems***

In Step 3, analysts determine the impact of "the problems." At issue is the question: Does the scope and scale of the problems identified in Steps 1 and 2 have a systematic and/or material impact on any particular political party or candidate?

The data from the qualitative reports are a part of the same dataset as the data reported for the quick count. Because there are both qualitative and vote count data merged in the same dataset, it is possible to determine whether qualitative problems are related in systematic ways to vote count results. The crosstabulation of qualitative results with vote count results can incorporate items from either Form 1 or Form 2. The basic logic can be illustrated with a simple example.

Transparency is an essential characteristic of democratic elections, and the electoral rules allowing party agents to be present at polling stations are intended help to ensure transparency. The theory is that party agents from competing parties will serve as checks on the transparency of polling station procedures, including the counting process. Most elections feature at least two major parties with a reasonable chance to win national office, but some parties are better organized than others. All parties may be entitled to have party agents present at all polling stations, but not all parties will necessarily have the organizational capacity to place party agents in each and every polling station

The analyst should be prepared to combine local information with information that comes from the qualitative dataset.

By combining the qualitative data with the numeric quick count data, it is possible to evaluate the issue of transparency systematically.

to watch the vote count. A vote count might qualify as “transparent” at any particular polling station when party agents representing at least two different and competing political parties are present and can actually observe ballots being removed from the ballot box, the determination of for whom they should be counted and the recording of the results.

By combining the qualitative data with the numeric quick count data, it is possible to evaluate the issue of transparency systematically. Questions 6a-6c on Form 2 above and Questions 9a-9c on Form 1 indicate which party agents were present at which polling stations. And Questions 9a-9f on Form 2 indicate vote results. Using the qualitative data, analysts can identify precisely, first, which polling stations had fewer than two party agents present and also identify what was the vote count result from that polling station.

Following this approach makes it possible to determine the answer to important questions: Did vote counts at polling stations with fewer than two party agents have vote results that were systematically different from the results from polling stations where there were two or more party agents present? Did presidential candidate A, systematically win more votes in those polling stations where an agent from party A was the only party agent present? If the answers to those questions is “yes,” then the data should be probed further. One possible reason for that finding might simply be that Party A is stronger in that region of the country. That outcome, then, does not necessarily mean that fraud has taken place. The data should be further analyzed, however, to determine whether the same finding holds for polling stations in the same region/district where there are two or more party agents present at polling stations. Further, analysis will be able to determine: 1) just how many polling stations in the sample had fewer than two party agents present; 2) what is the size of the vote “dividend” (if any) to Party A where Party A agents are the only party agents present; and 3) whether the size of that “dividend” could have had any impact on the overall outcome of the election.<sup>5</sup>

The general point concerning how to use the combination of the qualitative results and the count results is made using the case of “transparency.” Exactly the same kind of combined analysis could be used with a number of other combinations. For example, analysts can examine the impact of irregularities on vote count results (Form 2, Question 2). The very same principle applies when a party contests the results from a polling station (Form 2, Question 10). In that case, it can be systematically determined whether all, or most, challenges were issued by the party in second place.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Here the size of the sample is very important. If a national sample is small, with corresponding relatively large margins of error, it will not be possible to conduct this type of analysis with a significant degree of confidence, and certain problems could even not be detected.

<sup>6</sup> The qualitative data provide a sound basis upon which to draw inferences about the severity of identified problems or the importance of the absence of significant problems. However, groups must use caution when speaking publicly about problems identified and the likely impact on the overall quality of election-day processes. Statements or reports should be carefully crafted so the significance of the qualitative data is not over-extended. For additional information on public statements, see Chapter Eight, *The “End Game.”*



## REMINDER

**The central points emphasized in this chapter have focused on the design and the analysis of the qualitative part of the observation. The most important points can be summarized as follows:**

1. There are strong reasons for observer groups to pay close attention to preparations for undertaking a qualitative observation that can complement the collection of data on voting results in a quick count.
2. Qualitative observations are very systematic and reliable precisely because they use the same general methodology, and observers, as those for collecting voting results in a quick count.
3. The design of the qualitative forms has to begin with a clear knowledge of the rules governing the administration of the election. The structure of the qualitative forms should be designed by a team that includes the volunteer coordinator, a trainer, an electoral law expert, a data analyst and the executive director or a board member.
4. The qualitative forms should be short, and there are principles that should be followed to ensure that the forms are useful and produce reliable and valid data.
5. Preparation for the qualitative analysis should begin with the collection of contextual data well before election day.
6. Analysts should develop an analysis plan before election day. That plan includes the creation, testing and development of graphics capacities that are approved before election day. And protocols for how, when, and to whom the analysis team distributes the results of the analysis should be established before election day.
7. The analysis of the qualitative data should be staged through three steps that include: basic data scanning; the search for systematic problems; and the analysis of whether the problems identified in the qualitative analysis are likely to have any material impact on the vote.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Collecting and Analyzing Quick Count Data

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**T**he random sample is drawn, observer forms are developed and distributed and observers are recruited and trained. On election day, observers take up positions at assigned polling stations and get ready to collect and report the data. This chapter deals with the next steps. The chapter begins with a discussion of data reporting protocols. It explains how and when observers report data on the quality of the process and the vote count results. Some of the problems associated with information flows on election day, and practical solutions to those problems, are discussed. The chapter then examines the important question of how the recovered data are used, particularly with regard to the vote count. It considers the main strategies for analyzing data on vote totals and steps taken to ensure that the results released will be reliable. It concludes with a discussion of how and when quick count findings can be released.<sup>1</sup>

## DATA REPORTING PROTOCOLS

On election day, domestic observers usually make two reports. For the first report observers use a questionnaire similar to Form 1 illustrated in Chapter Six. Form 1 contains information about whether proper procedures have been followed during the *opening* of polling stations. This first qualitative report is made after the polling stations have opened, usually immediately after the first voter in line has voted. The second report comes from a form similar to Form 2, also illustrated in Chapter Six. This provides qualitative data on the voting procedures and the closing of the polling stations, as well as data on the vote count. The common practice is for observers to report these data immediately after polling stations have produced an official result. In most cases, a polling station result is “official” after the polling station officials and the party agents present at the count have signed the public document that records the vote totals for that particular polling station.

This chapter focuses primarily on the official vote data (Form 2), but there are broad issues of data reporting that apply to *all* observer reports. So, the place to begin is with general guidelines that apply to both the first and second reports.

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<sup>1</sup> Readers should refer to Chapter Six, *The Qualitative Component of the Quick Count*, for more detailed information on how qualitative data are collected and analyzed.

For each report, observers make three separate calls; they report the same data to three different locations.

- Call # 1:** Observers make the first call directly to the central data collection center.
- Call # 2:** Observers make the second call to their assigned regional coordinator.
- Call # 3:** Observers make the third call to a back-up network of private telephones in the capital city.



### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### **Why do observers make three telephone calls for each report on election day? Isn't this a waste of time and effort?**

No, three calls are not a waste of time and effort. Sometimes attempts are made to disrupt domestic observation efforts, and the point of attack is usually the observer group's communications system. This might mean shutting down the power source to the data collection center or cutting off the telephone system. Precautions have to be taken. For that reason, it is now standard practice to install back-up power systems at the data collection centers so that the observation effort has an independent, stand-alone power source for election day. (Some groups locate the center in a hotel that has a back-up generator.) Having observers make Call #2, and Call #3 is another standard and complementary security precaution. With these back-up communications alternatives in place, a quick count's success is not entirely dependent on a single communications link. The availability of these alternative data routings means that observer groups still have the capacity to successfully complete a quick count even if the communications system at the data collection center is shut down or fails.

The main challenge of a quick count is to collect, deliver, assemble and analyze large volumes of information — and to do so reliably and quickly.

#### **INFORMATION FLOWS**

The main challenge of a quick count is to collect, deliver, assemble and analyze large volumes of information—and to do so reliably and quickly. Because the effectiveness of quick counts requires efficient information flows, it is important to have a very clear idea about exactly how election day information flows will work. In fact, there are two sets of information flows to consider. The first has to do with the information flows from observers in the field to the data collection center. Then there are the information flows within, and from, the data collection center. Both of these sets of information flows are monitored through the central database. In effect, it is through the database that information traffic can be directed in ways that maximize the efficiency of data recovery on election day.

### Information Flows from the Field

The experiences of groups that have conducted quick counts provide two very clear lessons about information flows, and each of these has important logistical and analytic implications that need to be clearly understood.

First, on election day, there are very substantial fluctuations in the volume of information flows from observers in the field to the data collection center. The typical pattern, summarized in Figure 7-1, is based on real data gathered from a recent Latin American election. In that particular case, the election law required that polling station officials open the polling stations by 7:00 a.m. Observers were asked to be present at the polling station by 6:15, some 45 minutes before polling stations were due to open. They were asked to report their Form 1 data, the qualitative data, immediately after the first voter had voted at their polling station.

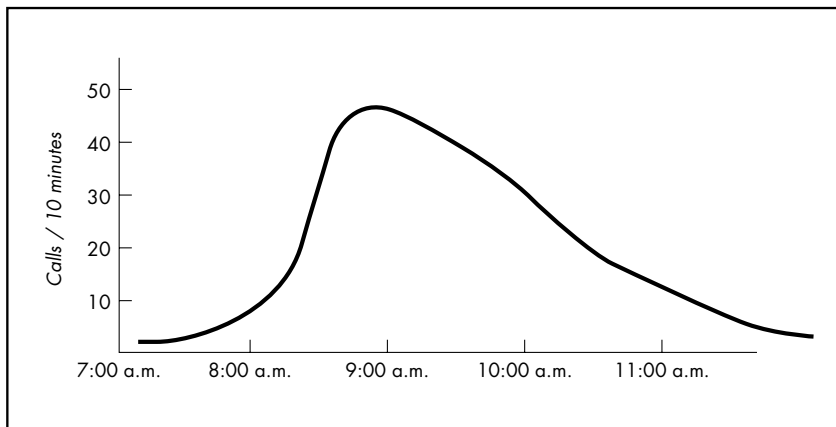


FIGURE 7-1:  
TYPICAL DISTRIBUTION OF  
PHONE CALLS

This pattern of fluctuations in the volumes of information is essentially the same for both the qualitative and the numeric data. At 7:00, the data collection center receives no information at all. Information begins to trickle in to the data collection center after the first thirty minutes, between 7:30 and 8:00. The earliest data to arrive come from the most efficient polling stations and where observers have easy access to telephones. By 8:30, the number of phone calls into the data collection center has increased dramatically, and by 9:00 that trickle has turned into a deluge. In this particular case, calls were arriving at the data collection center at a rate of some 55 calls per 10 minutes or 5.5 calls a minute. After that peak period, the volume of calls coming into the data collection center starts to fall off, and then it slows down dramatically.

These uneven information flows present a logistical challenge. The task is to develop a strategy that anticipates—and then effectively manages—the peak volume of information intake. At issue are two questions. Does the group have the communications capacity to accept all the calls during the peak period?

There are very substantial fluctuations in the volume of information flows from observers in the field to the data collection center.

The task is to develop a strategy that effectively manages the peak volume of information intake.

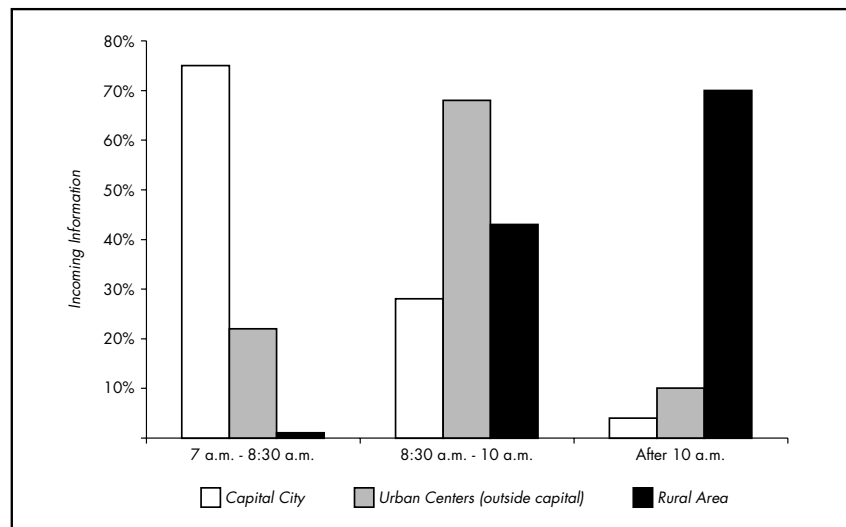
Information bottlenecks or breakdowns could lead to information losses.

More critically, are there information bottlenecks or breakdowns that could lead to information losses? Information losses are extremely serious for two reasons. First, they amount to an unnecessary waste of organizational time and effort. The practical issue is clear; there is no point in recruiting and training observers and asking them to report data if the communications system does not have the capacity to receive the data. Second, information losses mean that the *effective* size of the sample is reduced, and for reasons outlined in Chapter Five, it is clear that reducing effective sample size means increasing the margins of error of the quick count results. More technically, it means that the usable sample becomes a less reliable basis for estimating unknown population characteristics.

The second lesson learned is that, on election day, information flows into the data center at uneven rates from different regions of most countries. (See Figure 7-2.) There is no mystery about why there are dramatic regional variations in information flows. Information from the capital cities nearly always arrives first, mostly because the communications infrastructure in capital cities is nearly always far better than in rural areas, and observer access to telephones is nearly always easier in capital cities than elsewhere. Information from rural and remote areas, by contrast, are usually the last data to arrive because communications infrastructure is typically poor, and observers often have to travel great distances to reach telephones or radios. These uneven regional distributions of information flows have both organizational and analytic implications.

Because we know ahead of time that information flows are likely to be uneven in these two respects, it is important to take steps that will both maximize and protect our effective sample by managing the information flows more efficiently.

FIGURE 7-2:  
REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF  
INFORMATION FLOWS



**Strategies for Managing Information Flows from the Field**

Most groups plan to report quick count data to data collection centers by telephone, if at all possible. The sample size determines the total number of calls that will flow through the data reporting system on election day. The configuration and capacity of the telephone system has to be designed to manage the volume of information that is likely to come via telephone lines. More importantly, the telephone system has to be able to manage the peak volume of data flows. The following example illustrates how the volume of data is calculated.

A quick count observation in one country uses a sample of 600 polling stations, and each telephone call takes, on average, about four minutes to transmit the observer information. This means that the volume of information to be transmitted is  $600 \times 4$ , or 2400, telephone line-minutes. In an ideal world, it might be possible to design a communications system so that each data point in the sample would have its own dedicated telephone number (in this example, 600 telephone lines). This is not necessary; it is not very efficient, and it is very expensive. An alternative strategy is to (1) estimate what the peak volume of calls will be and then (2) design a communications system that has the capacity to manage the volume of information at that estimated peak load, in countries where this is possible.

Generally, the most efficient telephone system to use is what is called a “cascading” telephone number system. Here, observers are provided with one phone number to call, but that phone number will automatically transfer and re-route observer calls to the next available free line. Cascading telephone number systems may have as many as twenty lines dedicated to a single number. This system is most efficient because it decreases the likelihood that callers will get a “busy” signal when they call the number.

“One-number/one-line” systems are more common but far less efficient. First, they require more available numbers. Second, observers need to be provided with a list of alternative numbers to call in case the first telephone number they are assigned turns out to be “busy.” The onus is upon the observer to find an open line from the list of numbers. Unless the data center telephone numbers are carefully assigned to each observer, observers may face the problem of having to repeatedly call the same number until that particular line is open. This wastes valuable time. In “single-number/single-line” telephone systems, the more efficient practice is to have no more than fifteen observers assigned to the same data center telephone line and to provide each observer with a list of up to five alternative telephone numbers to call. If this strategy is followed, then it is important to rotate the order of the alternative numbers provided to each of the fifteen observers. Observers tend to use the first number at the top of the list of telephone numbers they are given, so rotating the numbers on these lists decreases the likelihood that each observer will be call-

The telephone system has to be able to manage the peak volume of data flows.

Generally, the most efficient telephone system to use is what is called a “cascading” telephone number system.

Alternative ways of delivering observer information to data collection centers should be considered.

ing the same number at the same time. Careful planning is required to reduce the chances of having information bottlenecks on single-number/single-line telephone systems.

Installing large numbers of telephone lines in any one facility and doing so at short notice is often a challenge. For bureaucratic reasons, it may take a long time to order telephones and to have the lines installed. Or it may be just too expensive to buy, or rent, and install the needed number of lines. Even when it is possible to install the necessary number of land lines, they may not be dependable. For these reasons, alternative ways of delivering observer information to data collection centers should be considered.

Recall that a substantial proportion of the data reported early tends to come from observers who are located in the capital city region. If the data collection center is located in the capital city, then one alternative to consider is the possibility of hand-delivering observer data to the data collection center. For example, organizers might consider having volunteers on motorcycles pick up the data from observers at pre-arranged collection points and times throughout the city. If one third of a country's voters (and so, about one third of the sample) live in the capital city, then using such an alternative data delivery system to complement direct phone calls can substantially reduce the information load on telephone lines and the number of required telephones.

Strategies involving the hand delivery of data, of course, are manpower intensive and require careful coordination and supervision, but they can be effective. In Malawi's 1999 quick count, 16 vehicles rode circuits from three locations, picked up observer reports and delivered them to these locations. The forms were then faxed to a central data collection center.<sup>2</sup>

There are other alternatives to hard-wired telephones to consider. These might include the use of cell phones, solar phones, satellite phones, and radio and fax systems. Each alternative has its own combination of advantages and drawbacks.

In most developing countries, people do not have the luxury of entirely efficient and adequate telephone communications systems. For that reason it is important to evaluate the adequacy of the existing communications system well in advance. The next step is to calculate the load and distribution requirements for a quick count communications effort. And the final step is to strategically configure a quick count communications system around what is available, so that the system that can adequately manage the information load of the quick count. This may mean patching together a combination of communications avenues for the delivery of observation data.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 10 for additional information on the Malawi data collection process.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**What type of telephones are most useful during a quick count?**

The advantage of *cell phones* is that they reduce the amount of time it takes an observer to get to a phone. Observers have the phone in hand. Cell phones are particularly useful where the communications infrastructure is inadequate and where there are few working or reliable hard line phones available in the immediate vicinity of the polling station. However, cell phones tend to be expensive, and they have a limited range. Their effectiveness depends on the terrain and upon the observers' proximity to the data collection center. Cell phones are usually powered by batteries, and the effective battery life of a cell phone can be very unpredictable.

*Solar phones* have the same kinds of advantages as cell phones and some of the same limitations. The key difference is that these phones charge the power source through solar energy. Constant re-charging of these solar energy-absorbing batteries reduces the efficiency of the battery. That is a significant consideration because, in most cases, vote count data are delivered at night, when there is no opportunity to recharge batteries via solar sources.

*Satellite phones* are another option. The great advantage of satellite telephones is that they are the best, and sometimes the only, technological alternative for getting quick count data very quickly to data collection centers from very remote areas. Satellite phones work well regardless of terrain and regardless of how far an observer is from data collection centers. The major drawback of satellite phones is that they are extremely expensive and sometimes hard to acquire. In addition, they also rely on batteries as a power source, and in remote areas these may not be easily re-charged. Observers using satellite phones also require some special training in the use of the phones.

*Radios* are often very useful for retrieving data from remote areas. They do not have the range of satellite phones, but they are much cheaper. The major disadvantage of radio systems is that they are manpower and equipment intensive. Observers have to "buddy-up" with a radio operator. The use of radios also requires a great degree of coordination. Radio operators have to coordinate transmission times and radio band frequencies with other radio operators who, in turn, are buddied-up with observation data receivers. Furthermore, radio data sometimes have to be relayed, after radio transmission, via the regular telephone system. Radios are much less expensive than satellite phones, but extra steps are often required to get data to the data collection center, and this is organizationally burdensome. Further, these data can be difficult to verify because radio transmissions are usually "one shot" transmissions and observers cannot be recontacted easily.

**KEYS TO SUCCESS****Three key points emerge from this discussion of information flows:**

1. There are huge differences both between and within countries when it comes to communications infrastructure. No two countries are exactly the same. Observation groups have to carefully design their communications system, and that design has to be grounded in a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the available communications infrastructure. Planning communications systems involves exploiting the strengths of the infrastructure and designing strategies that will compensate for weaknesses.
2. The volume of information flows is uneven. Effective communications systems are designed around estimations of peak information loads.
3. The sources of information are uneven. Because the timing of the delivery of final quick count results is geared entirely by the rate at which the slowest data arrive, special attention has to be given to the question of how data can be most efficiently transmitted from sample points that are located in remote areas.

**Information Flows within the Data Collection Center**

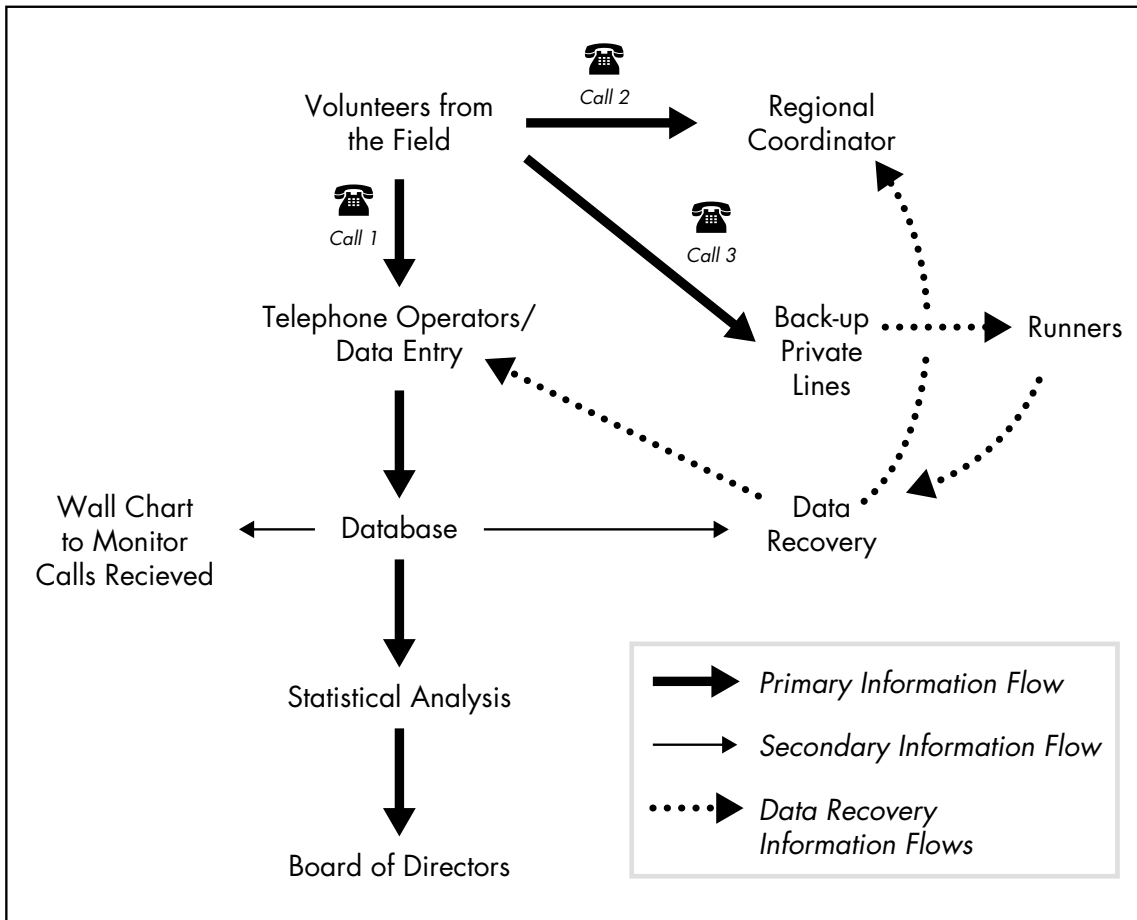
After observers have recorded quick count data at their polling station, they make their first telephone call directly to the data collection center. Figure 7-3 illustrates the pathways of information flows at the data collection center. After the identity of the caller has been verified (by the use of a security code word or set of numbers), the call from the observer is accepted and the observer information is recorded by telephone operators at the data collection centers.

Precisely how these data are recorded depends on what kind of technology is available to the observer group. Where there is little access to technology, a pen-and-paper approach can be enough. Phone operators simply enter the phone data by hand onto forms. Where more sophisticated technology is available, observers calls may be directly routed through to the data entry facility where operators using headphones can enter the data directly into the database, while the observer remains on the telephone line. Keeping observers on the telephone line while the data are entered is more efficient, and it reduces

<sup>3</sup> These types of direct data entry systems are far more efficient because built-in software safeguards alert data entry personnel to “illegal” responses to categories in observation forms. Keeping the observer on the telephone line during data entry reduces inaccuracies and eliminates the time consuming, and sometimes futile, task of trying to re-contact observers to resolve inconsistent or illegible responses that often appear in hand copied forms.

data losses.<sup>3</sup>

Follow the pathways in Figure 7-3 indicated by the solid arrows that go from Call #1 through to data entry. Notice that immediately after the data have been entered, the information is routed directly to the database. The database accepts these observation data and stores the data within a subfile that is attached to a larger database. That larger database contains a great deal of information that is vital to the entire observation. It is by linking the newly received observer data with these other stored data that the database can be used to direct



information flows instantaneously within the data collection center.

FIGURE 7-3:  
QUICK COUNT  
INFORMATION FLOWS

**The Master Database**

The master database, a computerized information storage place, can be developed during the very first phases of organizing for an election observation. In

The database should be developed from the moment when observers are first recruited.

The database is an extremely valuable tool for guiding information flows within the data collection center on election day.

fact, the database should be developed from the moment when observers are first recruited. This database is an important basic resource that can be used for tracking recruiting and training, as well as for monitoring election day information flows. The database contains information, stored as records, for each and every volunteer observer. It usually includes: each observer's name, address and contact telephone numbers; whether and when the observer has been trained; when the observer was sent election day observer materials; and when they received those materials.<sup>4</sup> The database also contains the name, location, address and contact telephone numbers of the regional coordinators to whom the observer reports (Call #2), and it contains the same information for the backup private telephones to whom the observer will make Call #3. Most crucially, the database also contains the number and location of the polling station to which the observer is assigned.

With these pieces of information in a single computer record, the database becomes an extremely efficient tool for retrieving and linking key pieces of information. For example, recruiters can consult the database to track how well recruiting is proceeding. Trainers can refer to the database to find out who has been trained and how to contact people who need to be trained. The organization can use the database as a source of addresses for mailings to volunteers. Regional coordinators can use the database to keep in touch with observers who report to them and to identify those observers who are collecting data from the sample points in the quick count.

In addition to these general day-to-day operational uses, the database is an extremely valuable tool for guiding information flows within the data collection center on election day. Refer again to Figure 7-3. Notice that immediately after data from observers are entered by the data entry operators, the information is directly entered into the database. A computer program then re-directs the quick count observation data simultaneously to three locations: to the statistical analysis unit, the wall chart and the data recovery unit. In the statistical analysis unit, data become available for analysis. Volunteers working on the wall chart record which polling stations in the sample have reported in their data, and keep a running tally of the arrival of reports from the polling stations in the sample. Volunteers in the data recovery unit track each sample point that has NOT reported.

### **Sample Clearing and Data Recovery**

Suppose that, after the first two hours, 20 percent of the sample points from the capital city have not reported. The vital question becomes: How to retrieve these data? The data recovery unit will take computer generated reports from the database and start the process of data recovery. Each computer generated report received by the data recovery unit will contain the following

<sup>4</sup> The database may track additional information concerning the organization's staff and volunteers of various types, such as skills or types of tasks performed during the course of the election observation (e.g., types of pre-election monitoring undertaken) and interests/activities beyond election monitoring (e.g., voter education, "congress watch," etc.).

information from the database: the precise location of the missing sample point; the identity of the observer at that datapoint; the contact telephone number of that observer; the name and contact numbers of the regional coordinator for that datapoint; and the name and contact number of the back-up private phone contact for that datapoint. It might be difficult to contact directly the observers who are at the missing data point. They may still be at the polling station and out of telephone contact, and there are a number of possible reasons for why the data may not have been reported to the data collection center by the observer. The particular polling station might have opened late, and the observer may not yet have had the opportunity to gather the data. Another possibility is that the observer may have tried to call the data collection center while the data center phone lines were busy. Recall, though, that observers are required to follow a *three* call regime to report each piece of information. Call #2 should have gone to the regional coordinator and Call #3 to the back-up private telephone. So the data recovery unit can begin data recovery by phoning the back-up assigned to that observation point, or they can call the regional coordinator. If neither has received the data from the observer, the data recovery team alerts the regional coordinator so that she or he can investigate the matter. The regional coordinator directs efforts to determine the cause of the missing data, perhaps by involving a municipal coordinator to recover the data for the missing sample point.

The dotted lines in Figure 7-3 indicate the calls from the data recovery unit to the back-up private telephones and to the regional coordinators. The process of data recovery is a continuous one throughout election day. The sample clearance unit has the task of identifying missing data points and alerting the data recovery unit to the possibility that data may be missing for an entire province or state. These patterns require immediate attention because they suggest that there is a systemic problem in data retrieval. There may have been a breakdown in the observation communications system, or they could indicate a substantial and regionally specific problem in the administration of the election. Either way, the task of the data recovery unit is to determine the source of the problem and to alert the leadership about the scope and scale of any such problem. This information also has to be relayed to the analysis unit so that analysts are aware that possible adjustments may have to be made in the weighting of the data for the final report.

Evidence of data retrieval problems usually becomes apparent after observers have completed the task of reporting the Form 1 data, the first qualitative reports that observers call in immediately after the first voter at a polling station has cast a ballot.<sup>5</sup> These Form 1 reports provide an early indication of where the observation effort is working and where it is not. The tasks of the data recovery unit are, first, to determine why there are the missing data points in the Form 1 phase of the observation, and second, to develop a strategy for

The regional coordinator directs efforts to determine the cause of the missing data.

Form 1 reports provide an early indication of where the observation effort is working and where it is not.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter Six, *The Qualitative Component of the Quick Count*, details the content and reporting procedures for Form 1.

reducing the missing data points for the crucial vote data that are reported in the second phase of the observation. It might be that data are missing from a sample point in phase 1 because an observer has fallen ill. Another possibility is that the observer's cell phone batteries have gone dead. An observer may have been intimidated or refused entrance to the polling station by a poorly informed polling station official. Once the reason for the missing data point has been established, the regional coordinators can take steps to make sure that the problem is solved by the time that Form 2 quick count data are due to be collected. These corrective steps may entail assigning a back-up observer to the polling station, providing the observer with a new battery, or informing election officials to follow procedures to ensure that all observers are admitted to polling stations as entitled. Efforts to minimize missing data are vital because they increase the effective sample size and so reduce the margins of error in the vote count projection.

When the data recovery team recovers data for these missing sample points, the unit relays the new information directly to the data entry unit. As the recovered data are entered, they are cleared through the database, and they are automatically routed into statistical analysis and the sample clearance unit. This same procedure is replicated for each and every missing data point.

### **STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF QUICK COUNT DATA**

Analyzing quick count data is part art and part science. Certainly, the foundations—the sampling and the calculations of the margins of error—are grounded in pure science. But there are judgments to be made at several steps in the process of arriving at a final characterization about election-day processes. Observation data accumulate fairly rapidly on election day. It is not unusual to have as much as 30 percent of the total sample collected and digitized within 90 minutes of the opening of the polls. And as much as 65 percent of the total expected data may be available for analysis within as little as two and a half hours of the polls closing. After the digital entry of the data, the data are usually stored in a simple data file.

The primary role of the analysis unit is to develop a clear picture of the character of the election day practices by carefully examining election day observation data. With data from Form 1, for example, it becomes possible to determine the extent to which proper administrative procedures for opening the polling stations were, or were not, followed. It is the analyst's job to ensure that the overall picture is an accurate and reliable one. That picture has to be developed one piece at a time.

### **The Initial Data Analyses**

The very first data exploration undertaken by the data analysis unit has two goals. The first is to establish that there are no election day software or hardware problems that could interfere with the smooth flow of observation data

The primary role of the analysis unit is to develop a clear picture of the character of the election day practices by carefully examining election day observation data.

through the entire computing system. The second goal is to scan the data for any early signs of substantive election day problems. This scanning, described in Chapter Six, involves data sweeps across all observer responses, on all items in Form 1, to determine if there are any unusual response patterns.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **How do you recognize an unusual response pattern?**

The statistical answer is to search for those items in the observer forms that signify that behavior at a polling station does *not* conform to proper procedural norms. For example, under usual administrative regulations, polling stations should be supplied with proper materials that include: ballot boxes; ballots; indelible ink; and so on. Usually, these materials are supplied and distributed by election commissions in single packages. Under ideal conditions, all polling stations should have all of these materials in place. An initial sweep of the data can verify whether or not this is the case. That data sweep should also be able to alert analysts to any substantial variations in these response categories. For instance, the data may show that ballot boxes and ballots were delivered to 98 percent of all polling stations. In that case we would expect indelible ink to be present at 98 percent of all polling stations, and we would be able to identify and include in our report a precise and systematic list of where these important materials were NOT present. If, to continue the same example, our data showed that indelible ink was present in only 65 percent of the observed stations, then we would want to determine why there is such a discrepancy. If indelible ink turns out to be missing in 35 percent of the cases, then one possibility is that the election commission made a logistical error. Are the 35 percent of the cases all in the capital city? Are the cases limited to particular regions? Or are they randomly distributed throughout the country? The initial data analysis will alert analysts to unusual variations in the data that require more detailed investigation when more of the data become available.

### **The Evolution of the Vote Count Results**

Analysts simply do not have enough time to wait until “all the data are in” to analyze election day results. Indeed, it would be a very serious mistake to wait until all of the theoretical sample data have been reported by observers. No domestic observation group anywhere has ever succeeded in collecting 100 percent of the designed probability quick count sample. This presents a dilemma. The problem is that there is no way of knowing ahead of time exactly what size the effective sample will be. That being so, the standard practice is to repeatedly examine the data as they arrive and to continue to do so up to the moment when it can be clearly established that the data have reached the point where they are stable.

This “point of stability” is an important concept that underlies the evaluation of both qualitative and quantitative findings. Technically, the data are con-

This “point of stability” is an important concept. Analysts watch the data findings until the basic results, the distributions across key variables, do not change.

considered to have stabilized when the addition of new information from observers has no discernible, or material, effect on the results that have already been accumulated. In practice, this means that analysts watch the data findings evolve until the basic results, the distributions across the key variables, do not change. To establish a point of stability, analysts have to plan regular “takes” of the data, regular intervals at which additional pieces of the accumulating data are downloaded from the quick count database and analyzed.

There is no hard and fast rule about precisely what these intervals should be or how regularly these data takes should be timed. One of two criteria are usually used. The frequency of the data takes might be set according to timed intervals: Take 1(T1) might be 30 minutes after the polls have closed, T2 might be one hour after they have closed, T3 after one hour and a half later, and so on. Alternatively, the intervals for the data takes might be established according to the number of completed cases in the evolving dataset. So T1 might be analyzed after there are 100 cases in the dataset, T2 after 200 cases, and so on.

The usual procedure is for T1 to be early, perhaps after the first fifty sample points have arrived. The T1 data take serves two purposes: It provides an initial check on whether all the computer hardware and software are handling the data satisfactorily, and it provides benchmark data. The data from T2 are usually used to conduct initial data sweeps, to scan the data for unusual variations. Then, data from T3 through to Tn, are used to investigate in greater detail the origins, and possible causes, of these variations. At issue are a number of key questions. What is the scope of the problems? Are the problems randomly distributed or not? If the problems are not randomly distributed, then in what ways can the distributions be said to be non-random? And, does the non-random distribution of problems work to the material benefit of any party competing in the election?



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Does the non-random distribution of a problem necessarily mean that fraud has taken place?**

No, not necessarily. Consider the previous example once again. The fact that the indelible ink did not show up in 35 percent of the cases and that all of those cases are concentrated in, say, the capital city, may only mean that there was an administrative error in the distribution of materials and that administrative error was only made by the official working on the materials for the capital region. An election report should certainly draw attention to the evidence indicating the scope and location of such a problem. But that evidence, by itself, is insufficient grounds for drawing the conclusion that fraud has taken place. What is required is a further investigation of the reasons for why the indelible ink was missing from the materials for capital city region polling stations. Additionally, if the election is expected to be close (or a sub-national election in the area is quite competitive), the missing ink could warrant added vigilance against illegal, multiple voting.

### Analyzing the Data by Strata

To this point, discussion has focused only on aggregate analysis; all of the available data are considered together as a single block of data. There are, however, compelling reasons to unpack the data when the vote count data (Form 2 data) are being analyzed. The standard practice is to divide the total sample into components (strata) and to examine, in detail and separately, the data from each of these different components. The strata, or segments of the total sample, that are commonly identified for this purpose often take the following form:

- Strata 1** – all sample points within the capital city;
- Strata 2** – data from sample points in all urban areas outside the capital city; and
- Strata 3** – the remaining points in the sample, from all rural areas in the country.

Strata may be defined differently in different countries. Capital cities are nearly always considered as a single strata for the simple reason that they are usually the largest urban population concentration in the country and they may contain as much as one third of the total population of the country (and so, one third of the total sample). The precise definitions of the other relevant strata require careful consideration. Selected strata should be relatively homogeneous. For example, they might be defined by a regionally distinct ethnic or religious community in the country. They may have historically different political loyalties. Alternatively, strata might include a part of the country with a unique economy, such as a coastal region. For analytical purposes, however, it is rarely useful to identify more than four strata within the total population. Ideally, the strata should be of roughly equal size.

The strategy is to examine separately the evolution and sources of variation in the data from the capital city (Strata 1), separately from the data coming from urban areas outside of the capital city (Strata 2) and separately for data coming from rural and remote areas (Strata 3).

There are a number of reasons for analyzing the data using this stratification procedure. First, as has already been pointed out, data typically arrive at the data collection centers at different rates from different regions. Second, it is quite possible, and in fact quite likely, that different political parties will have different strengths and levels of citizen support among different communities in different parts of the country. Political parties often appeal to different class interests (e.g., the professional/business middle class or agricultural workers) and to different communal groups defined by language, religion, ethnicity or age. The point is that these communities, or interests, are hardly ever distributed evenly throughout the country. Those uneven distributions are usually reflected in regional variations in support for parties and in the evolution of quick count results. The following example illustrates this point:

Standard practice is to divide the total sample into components (strata) and to examine in detail, and separately, the data from each of these different components.

By analyzing the different strata separately, analysts can ascertain more reliably the point of stability.

Once the data have stabilized within all strata, the addition of new data cannot change the distribution of the vote for the country as a whole.

In one country, different parties have different levels of support within different demographic segments of a population. Consequently, shifts in the balance of support for political parties during the evolution of quick count results (T1 ...Tn) simply reflect what is technically called different "composition effects." Party A may appeal to the young, and Party B to older citizens. If there are more young people living in the capital city, then "early" results from the quick count might show that Party A is ahead. These aggregate results change as data arrive from those parts of the country where there are higher concentrations of older people. In preparing for the analysis of quick count data, analysts should become familiar with what these variations might be. Census data, data from previous elections and knowledge of the historical bases of support for the parties are all useful sources for providing analysts with this kind of background information.

By analyzing the different strata separately, analysts can ascertain more reliably the point of stability. In fact, the most reliable, and conservative, practice is to analyze the data to determine the point of stability *for each of the strata*. Statistically, by following exactly the same procedures that are outlined in Chapter Five, it is useful to calculate what are the margins of error for each of the strata. With that calculation in hand, analysts can determine what are the minimum number of data points required *within each strata* to satisfy a margin of error of, say, 1 percent for each of the strata. Using that guideline, analysts can determine quite precisely just how many sample points are required from each strata for the data within that strata to stabilize. When the point of stability is reached *for each of the strata*, then the addition of new sample data will have no impact on the distribution of the vote within each strata. Once the data have stabilized within all strata, the addition of new data cannot change the distribution of the vote for the country as a whole. The aggregate result, after all, is the sum of the stratified results. Figure 7-4 provides a graphic summary of how vote counts aggregately "stabilize" during an analysis of data from "takes" T1...Tn.

Notice in Figure 7-4, that the early results (T1, T2 and T3) show considerable variation in the distribution of support for Party A and Party B. That variation can be explained by a combination of factors. First, the data that arrive first come from the capital city, and support for Party A is higher in the capital city. Second, the effective sample, at T1, is very small, and it produces estimates that are both biased (capital city results) and have high margins of error. By T4, as the effective sample size increases, the differences in the balance of vote support for the parties is declining. At T4, Party A and Party B are in a close battle, and Party B appears to be catching Party A. By T5, Party B's popular strength in the rural areas is beginning to show. The effect is to place Party B ahead of Party A, and by T6 the data appear to have stabilized.

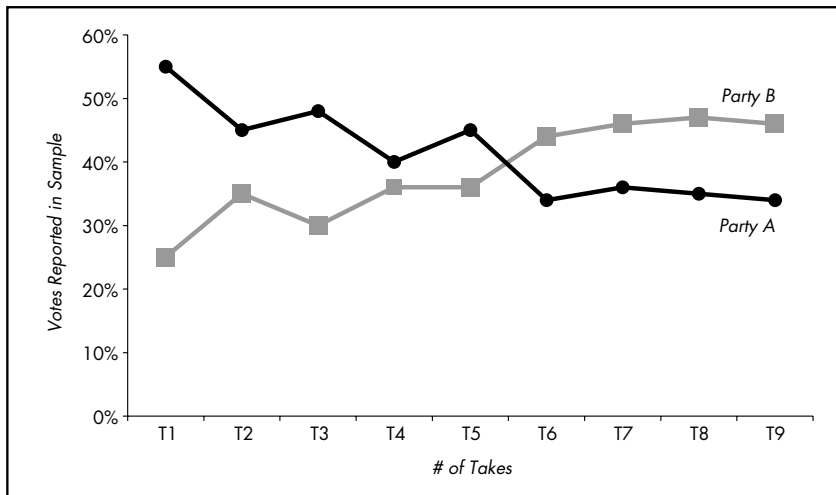


FIGURE 7-4:  
STABILIZATION OF VOTES REPORTED  
IN SAMPLE

### Projecting the Election Result

On election day, domestic observation organizations come under intense pressure to “call the election,” to release quick count results on the vote projection as early as possible. It is sometimes argued that such an early projection is important because it will help to contribute to political stability. These pressures may come from the media who are anxious to break the news and to meet their deadlines. Pressure may come from organizations that fund the observation effort and which feel entitled to get the very earliest results first. Pressure may also come from within the ranks of the election observation group, perhaps from those who want to see the group be the first to release results or from those who worry that to release the data late will make the observation efforts irrelevant. Typically, pressure to release projections of electoral results as soon as possible comes from all of these sources.

The analyst’s priority, however, must be a commitment to ensure that any data that are released are only released after it has been clearly established that the data are accurate and reliable. In fact, it is clearly a very serious mistake to release data that have not been thoroughly checked. The consequences of releasing unreliable, or worse yet incorrect, data can be disastrous. The release of very early, or preliminary data, can be both misleading and counterproductive, and the effect may be to undermine the legitimacy of the quick count and the entire observation effort. There are very strong reasons, then, to exercise caution. All of the results should be re-checked even after the data have apparently reached the point of stability.

The following checks on the data are now standard, and they help to increase confidence in the election observation findings:

- *Voter turnout rate*—Recall from Chapter Five that the efficacy of the sample depends partly on assumptions about levels of voter turnout. Previous elections provide a record of what the typical voter turnout rates for the

The analyst’s priority must be a commitment to ensure that any data that are released are only released after it has been clearly established that the data are accurate and reliable.

country have been. Recall that information about the typical level of voter turnout is usually used to inform analysts about the estimated sample size. Voter turnout is factored into calculations about the margins of error. There is no way to predict what turnout rates will be before election day, but Form 2 quick count data will provide a real measure of actual voter turnout on election day. So, the analytic questions to examine are: was the voter turnout rate in this election higher or lower than average, and does the voter turnout rate in the election meet the assumptions used in the original calculation of the margins of error? If the turnout rate meets, or exceeds, the levels assumed in the calculation of the margins of error, then there is no problem. But, if the voter turnout is lower than expected, the margins of error have to be recalculated, and the new criterion has to be applied to the stabilized data. A lower than expected turnout may mean that the effective sample size has to be somewhat larger than originally anticipated, and that might mean delaying the announcement of a result until the minimal criterion is satisfied.

- *Rogue data*—In nearly all election observations, there are findings that are difficult to account for and which apparently indicate that, to some extent, procedural requirements for the administration of the election may have been violated. In some instances, these “findings” might be attributable to something as simple as errors in data input, which can and should be corrected. In other cases, there may be genuine rogue results. If, for example, quick count data show that 757 votes were recorded at a particular polling station when the allowable maximum for each polling station is 600 votes, then this rogue result should be documented and investigated. If the number of rogue cases is large, then there may be reasons to question the legitimacy of the count. The prudent strategy is to conduct a late sweep of the data to identify the scope and scale of “outlying data results” and to do so before the quick count results are released.
- *Missing data*—Even though the data on the vote count may have stabilized by T6, as in the example in Figure 7-4, it will almost certainly be the case that 100 percent of the entire sample will not have reported. Missing data require the attention of analysts. The analysts must determine how the missing data are distributed across the sample. If the missing data are distributed relatively evenly between the various strata (capital city, urban areas outside of the capital, and rural/remote areas), then it is unlikely that the addition of these data to the sample will have a material effect on the outcome predicted by the stabilized data. The problem is that missing data tend not to be evenly distributed throughout the effective sample. Data from rural/remote areas are usually more likely to be missing than are data from the capital city region. In that case, it is prudent to run an analytic check to determine what the overall result would look like if there were no missing data. That can be done by analyzing the differences in vote distributions for the competing political parties within each strata and then supplementing the stabilized data with weighted missing data. The weights are determined arithmetically

simply by the proportional distributions of missing data across each of the strata. For example, if in the rural areas Party B's support is greater than party A's by a ratio of 6:4, and 50 percent of the missing data are in the rural areas, then all that is required is an adjustment of the stabilized results that allocates additional votes to Party B and Party A by a ratio of 6:4 for those missing cases. The same procedure is followed for each of the other two strata. This weighting procedure is a technical adjustment to the stabilized data from the effective sample. For statistical reasons it is clear that, if the minimal limits for each of the strata have been satisfied, then it is highly unlikely that such adjustments would have any material effect on the outcome of the election. Nonetheless, the weighting procedure and the technical adjustment produces a statistically more accurate quick count result.

- *Projecting a close race*—The most difficult circumstances facing quick count analysts are those that arise from a very close competition between rival political parties. Under these conditions, it is particularly important for analysts to resist any pressure for the early release of quick count results and to concentrate on the main task of accumulating as much data from the sample as possible. At issue is the margin of error of the effective sample. If the stabilized results show that the votes for the main contestants for office (Party A and Party B) are separated by less than the margin of error of the effective sample, then the quick count results cannot statistically project who the winner should be. That same principle can be expressed as a more positive rule of thumb: *quick count data are reliable and can be released when the data within each strata have reached the point of stability, and when the difference in levels of voter support for rival political parties exceeds the margins of error of the effective sample.*

Careful analysts will work through all of the above checks before coming to their conclusion.

If the stabilized results show that the votes for the main contestants for office (Party A and Party B) are separated by less than the margin of error of the effective sample, then the quick count results cannot statistically project who the winner should be.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Has a close election ever significantly delayed the release of quick count results?**

Yes. For example in Peru's 2000 presidential election, the race between political rivals was so close and so hotly contested that the willingness of the observer group (Transparencia) to release a quick count result hinged not only on missing data but also on the analysis of a subsample of polling stations located in foreign countries. The question facing analysts in that particular case was: could the outstanding votes put the leading candidate over 50 percent to avoid a runoff? In this instance, the leadership of Transparencia was sufficiently experienced to resist the release of the quick count data until that detailed analysis had been concluded. Transparencia's credibility as a nonpartisan group with substantial technical competence allowed the public to accept with confidence Transparencia's projection that a second round should be required.

Most observer groups now routinely work with sufficiently large random samples that they are unlikely to face the problem of elections that are statistically “too close to call.” Even under these unlikely circumstances, of course, domestic observer groups have a vital role to play. In these situations, they should promote and monitor a comprehensive and completely transparent vote count by election authorities, as well as the impartial and expedited resolution of any electoral complaints.

Moreover, analysis of the quality of voting and counting processes (together with analysis of the broader electoral environment) can help determine whether official results are to be accepted as credible.

**REMINDER**

**Information is the lifeblood of quick counts, and the goal of this chapter has been to outline what are the most important aspects of information management to ensure a successful quick count. There are a number of points to re-emphasize:**

- 1) Election day information flows are uneven. The volume of election day information flows is uneven, and the origin of incoming information is uneven. Communications systems have to be designed to accommodate these variations.
- 2) The design of the communications system has to begin with a careful examination of the adequacy of the available communications infrastructure. Because quick count samples will identify data points that are in remote locations with weak or no communications infrastructure, special attention has to be given to developing a strategy for delivering data from remote areas to data collection centers.
- 3) Problems will inevitably develop in the data collection process as in all complex, time-sensitive operations. Data flows can be interrupted, cellular phone systems can be overloaded, electrical power can be cut, viruses can affect computers—but anticipating possible difficulties and preparing in advance to manage them will allow for a successful quick count.
- 4) The development of a core database has become an important tool for increasing the efficiency of information management. That tool is useful not only for larger organizational planning but also for election day data recovery and analysis.
- 5) The analysis of election day quick count data has to be staged through several sequential steps that include: monitoring data recovery and sample clearance; tracking data distributions between different strata; identifying points of data stabilization; conducting data checks against specific criteria to establish the reliability of vote distribution results; recalculating the margins of error of the effective sample; and weighting the recovered data against the designed sample.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# The “End Game”

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**A**fter promoting the quick count, building a volunteer network, training observers and setting up a data collection system, election day arrives. At headquarters, phones begin to ring, volunteers key in data, and analysts compile reports. At this point, organizers celebrate the technical success of the quick count. What is often underestimated, however, is the difficulty of the work that immediately follows—managing and releasing quick count results.

The strategic use of quick count results is the most sensitive phase of the project. The “end game” can also be the most controversial aspect of a quick count. Who should have access to the qualitative information? Who should get the projected election results? When and how should the information be shared?

This chapter suggests ways that groups might approach the end game. It describes a process for developing data use protocols, discusses the most common approaches to releasing results and describes specific activities that support a data use plan. This chapter concludes with a few words on how organizations that conduct successful quick counts work after elections to prepare for the future.

## **DEVELOPING A PROTOCOL FOR DATA USE**

Many successful groups hold a pre-election meeting or retreat at which leaders, key staff and advisors can develop a protocol for releasing quick count results. Experienced groups with a strong, cohesive leadership facing a fairly predictable electoral situation may need only a short time for such a meeting. However, new groups struggling with internal factions and confronting a murky and problematic election day may need an entire day in a confidential setting to reach consensus on how, when and with whom to share quick count results. In any case, groups usually proceed through several steps to arrive at a data use protocol. They review the electoral context, revisit their original goals and create a draft election-day schedule.

The difficulty of managing and releasing quick count results is often underestimated.

**Reviewing the Electoral Context**

A discussion about managing quick count data should be preceded by a review of the electoral context. While many key staff and board members may be experts in election administration, electoral law, political campaigns, media coverage or international cooperation, it can be difficult to keep abreast of every development in every area. This is particularly true during the often action-packed run-up to elections. It is, therefore, best to briefly discuss the following areas concerning the electoral context:

- *Administrative preparations*—Are materials in place? Are polling station officials trained? Are counting centers properly outfitted? Have election officials held simulations to estimate the timing of voting procedures and the duration of the official counting process? How will authorities release the official election results (e.g., in real time on the Internet, at time intervals as preliminary results, not until a percentage of results are in)? Have authorities made any public statements regarding quick counts?
- *The political environment*—Are the candidates and parties expecting a fair process, and are they likely to challenge the outcome in the event they do not win? What election-day problems are the political contestants expecting, if any? Do political parties trust the independent quick count? Will they be doing their own quick counts?
- *Polling data*—How does the public view the process to date? What is the likely turnout? Are there any reliable opinion polls on election results? What is the status of public confidence in the process? Will citizens trust the official results and/or the quick count?
- *The international community*—Are international observer organizations present? Are any of them considered credible, and are any coordinating with national observers? Will diplomatic missions also report on the process? Are they prepared to play a role in providing external validation that the election satisfies the necessary minimal conditions of a genuine, democratic election?

**Revisiting Quick Count Goals**

It is important for groups to reaffirm the validity and appropriateness of their original quick count goals before finalizing data use decisions. The purpose of a quick count can impact how groups use results. Goals include:

- deterring fraud;
- detecting fraud;
- offering a timely forecast of results;
- instilling confidence in the electoral process;
- reporting on the quality of the electoral process;
- encouraging citizen participation;
- extending organizational reach and skills building; and
- setting the stage for future activities.

### Creating an Election-Day Schedule

Setting out an election-day schedule helps develop a reasonable timetable for releasing qualitative and quantitative data. This is an important resource for staff responsible for running or supporting specific election-day activities. The schedule should highlight important external and internal milestones or activities, such as the following:

- officials and observers arrive at polling stations;
- voting begins and quick count observers leave polling stations to make their first call;
- the majority of Form 1 quick count reports (on the opening of the polling stations) arrive at the data collection center;<sup>1</sup>
- quick count analysts complete a first report on Form 1 data;
- group releases a report of quick count findings on installation of the polling stations at an estimated time;
- voting ends;
- minimum and maximum time it will take for votes to be counted at the polling station level;
- the majority of quick count Form 2 data (on the quality of the voting and counting processes, and the vote totals) arrives at the quick count center;<sup>2</sup>
- report completed on quick count Form 2 data, including projections of the election results;
- the electoral authorities tabulate and release official results (whether in real time, in increments or once totals are available); and,
- group releases qualitative data and quick count vote projections at an estimated time.

### The Content of a Data Release Protocol

Now retreat participants are ready to turn to the specifics of a protocol that will govern how they release quick count results. Any data release protocol should answer at least five basic questions:

1. Who will have access to quick count results internally, and when?
2. Precisely what information will be available for release to outside sources?
3. To whom will the data be released?
4. When (estimated) will the information be shared?
5. In what manner will reports be shared?

Experience shows that it is critical to establish ground rules for managing quick count findings within the organization well in advance of election night. Projections of election results, in particular, are vital data, and it is often best to limit internal access to this data to (1) the statistician who is generating and checking the results as well as preparing the graphics and (2) the executive

Projections of election results, in particular, are vital data, and it is often best to limit internal access to this data.

<sup>1,2</sup> See Chapter Five, *Statistical Principles and Quick Counts*; Chapter Six, *The Qualitative Component of the Quick Count*; and Chapter Seven, *Collecting and Analyzing Quick Count Data* for detailed information on Forms 1 and 2 and the manner in which data from the forms are collected.

director and designated members of the board of directors. Civic groups may take steps to ensure the security of quick count findings, including:

- explaining to all headquarters staff who will, and will not, have access to quick count data;
- banning all cell phones from headquarters on election night; and
- placing security guards at the main doors of the data collection center and at the analysis room.

In discussing how to share quick count results with outside sources, groups should consider first the legal framework. Are there any requirements or restrictions regarding “going public” (i.e., releasing the information publicly or privately to others)? In some cases, election law prohibits the release of any results by any group prior to the public announcement of the official results by the election commission.

Civic groups must also address the expectations of several groups and actors, including:

- electoral authorities;
- political contestants;
- funders;
- affiliated non-governmental organizations;
- important civic and religious leaders;
- international observer missions; and
- the diplomatic community.

Many individuals or groups may request, or expect to have access to, quick count data. Quick count leaders must consider their responsibilities to each group, as well as advantages and disadvantages of sharing quick count results with them. For example, quick count organizers may acknowledge the legal obligation of election officials to provide accurate and timely election results, and they may feel obligated to allow reasonable amounts of time for this to take place before releasing quick count results. However, authorities should know that the group has completed an accurate quick count and is prepared to release results if fraud becomes apparent or an extended delay causes serious public concern. Political contestants have a right to an open, honest and competent electoral process; quick count organizers have a responsibility to inform all of the contestants, without discrimination, of their findings, including apparent fraudulent practices that may affect election results.

Funders may expect to receive quick count results. Therefore, quick count organizers and funders should hold open discussions before election day about strategies for managing qualitative and quantitative quick count data. Finally, quick count organizers must evaluate the role that civic leaders, the diplomatic community and international observer groups can play in achieving electoral accountability and share quick count findings with them accordingly.

A protocol provides a detailed framework for managing qualitative and quantitative information gathered during the quick count. Advance agreement can help ensure that the group's internal election day operation runs smoothly. It also gives groups an opportunity to publicize and discuss plans with key audiences such as political parties, electoral authorities, funders, civic leaders, the international community and the media. This demonstration of transparency can promote better communication and cooperation with these audiences and increase the project's overall credibility.

### **RELEASING QUICK COUNT DATA**

Almost all groups release their quick count results publicly in two phases. First, they hold a midday press conference to share results from the morning report (Form 1). This is the early qualitative information, which provides hard data and attaches percentages to such questions as how many polling stations opened on time and how many received sufficient quantities of the required materials. This report provides officials, political leaders and other interested parties with an evaluation of how the process started, and at the same time it provides them with a reminder of the presence of observers.

A second press conference is held or a statement is released once the data has come in from the evening observer calls, after the quick count data have been processed and analyzed (Form 2). These data contain information on the quality of the process as well as the election results. Some groups plan to release all of the information to the public as soon as the reliability of the data is determined. Others release only the qualitative information to the public and the projected results are shared only with the election commission and/or individuals or groups that are pre-selected for their trustworthiness, neutrality and leadership.

Groups that decide to release all of their information to the public as soon as possible usually do so because they face no legal restriction regarding release of information. Groups that decide to release a limited amount of information to the public (usually the qualitative information) do so because they are prohibited by law from publicly divulging quick count results until either partial or full official results are released. Others are required by law to first provide information concerning numeric projections of results to electoral authorities. Still others make a determination that they are not interested in "beating the election commission to the punch." Instead, they wait a reasonable amount of time for the election commission to release official results. Then they release quick count results to reinforce confidence in the election authorities.

Under some circumstances, quick count organizers release results publicly despite legal restrictions. This strategy might be followed because their qualitative information indicates that the process has been severely flawed, official results will most certainly be fraudulent, or it is believed that no official result is forthcoming.

Almost all groups release their quick count results publicly in two phases.

**126** Statements should NOT overemphasize data on election results or solely focus on election-day events.

Two crucial points should be made regarding election-day statements by civic organizations conducting quick counts. First, statements should NOT overemphasize data on election results. Responsible, well-crafted statements place information on numeric election results firmly within an analysis of the quality of the voting and counting processes. Second, statements should NOT solely focus on election-day events. Effective statements evaluate election-day events within the context of pre-election factors and the need to monitor post-election developments.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### How can groups respond to external pressure to release quick count results?

Groups often experience extreme pressure to provide various constituencies access to their information and, in general, to release it quickly. Requests can come from internal and external sources (e.g., from board members, funders or the press).

The first step in responding to this pressure is to discuss the factors limiting the ability to predict when results will be available. The simulation held prior to elections will help to establish a general time frame, but leaders should be aware that no simulation can accurately predict election-day delays. Interference on telephone lines or viruses in the computer system may prolong data processing. Moreover, close or poorly administered elections will force organizers to allow more time for complex data analysis.

It is important for observer groups to stress their commitment to working within the law and explicitly state their commitment to independence and the truth rather than speed or politics. The point to be made is that the observation plan has been devised with great care and with the dual purpose of benefiting the country's political process and safeguarding the organization's long-term credibility.

### SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

Once groups establish consensus on how they will manage and share election-day data, they can prepare for the practical work required during elections. Certain pre-election and election-day activities can help groups play an effective and constructive role. They include:

- *The election-day simulation*—A successful simulation is the first concrete predictor of election-day success. The group can hold a press conference following the exercise to share the success, emphasizing the number of volunteers participating, the percentage of calls received of those expected and the capacity of the communication/data collection system to receive and quickly process the information. Alternatively, organizers can invite small groups to witness all, or parts, of the simulation. Funders, media representatives, electoral officials and any affiliated nongovern-

mental organizations are often particularly interested in seeing the event. Of course, security issues must be contemplated before inviting anyone to observe a simulation.<sup>3</sup>

- *Role-plays for the board of directors*—As the final phase of the quick count simulation, usually held two weeks prior to an election, leaders can participate in role-plays during which they are confronted with various election-day scenarios. Scenarios may include significant problems in the quick count operation, problems in the voting and counting processes and different projections of election results. The leadership treats these situations as “real life” and attempts to develop public statements characterizing quick count findings in each case. They may also practice releasing quick count results by holding simulated press conferences.
- *A final promotional campaign*—Some groups save resources to mount a media campaign close to elections. This is particularly effective in countries where political ads are prohibited for a period immediately before elections. Promotional advertisements often take on a character of promoting peaceful participation as well as raising awareness about the quick count.
- *A final round of meetings*—Leaders should visit electoral authorities, candidates or political party representatives, members of the local and international press and representatives from influential diplomatic and international observer missions. This is a final opportunity to build credibility and collect relevant information before election day.
- *Briefings and tours*—Many groups demonstrate transparency by providing key audiences a chance to see the quick count data collection center and ask questions regarding the technical system or the plan for releasing information. Allowing key stakeholders to see the data collection system can markedly increase their trust in the eventual quick count results. Of course, this type of activity may be impossible where there are serious security concerns.
- *Briefing materials*—Groups should consider distributing information packets on the organization and its quick count, which can be particularly interesting to international observers and media who arrive in a country close to elections.
- *Election information center*—Some groups establish a drop-in center where groups or individuals can collect information on the quick count, the electoral process and the country. When possible, resources such as phones, computers, televisions and comfortable chairs are provided, particularly on election day.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Two, *Getting Started*, for a more detailed description of a quick count simulation.

<sup>4</sup> In Nicaragua, Ethics and Transparency opened an information center geared toward the needs of visiting and domestic press. The pamphlet used to inform the members of the press about the quick count project appears in Appendix 11.

- *General networking*—Many groups exploit election-related public events to collect information on the process and promote the quick count. Such events may include: candidate debates; roundtables or dialogues on election-related themes, often sponsored by non-governmental organizations; and pre-election press conferences held by political parties, electoral authorities or other election observation missions.
- *Press statements and conferences*—All groups communicate to the public several times on election day. This is generally done through written statements, press interviews or, most commonly, press conferences. (See Figure 8-1 for helpful hints on holding press conferences to release quick count findings.)

<b>DO...</b>	<b>DO NOT...</b>
<p>Rehearse before election day. All leaders should participate in role-plays of various election-day scenarios.</p> <p>Wait for the data to stabilize. The analysis team should be confident that data are valid and reliable before leaders finalize statements.</p> <p>Consult with experienced technical advisors and other trusted counselors while developing reports.</p> <p>Carefully select spokespersons based on their credibility and political neutrality (or balance).</p> <p>Invite local and international media, affiliate organizations, supporters, electoral authorities, political party representatives and election observer missions.</p> <p>Keep any written statement clear and concise. Include only a brief summary of activities and specific findings.</p> <p>Stress any positive developments in the electoral process (i.e., high voter turnout, smooth administrative procedures).</p> <p>Frame projections of election results in the broader context of the qualitative data and pre-election findings.</p> <p>Congratulate and thank quick count volunteers and staff for their hard work and dedication.</p>	<p>Avoid planning for worst-case scenarios (e.g., a political crisis, disagreements among quick count organizers or inconclusive quick count results).</p> <p>Release any information that is subject to change, except in emergencies. Always very clearly attach appropriate caveats.</p> <p>Rush a report in response to external pressure, or out of a desire to be the first group to publicize results.</p> <p>Select controversial spokespersons, particularly if they are known to be unfriendly to parties or those who may be the subject of criticism (e.g., electoral authorities.)</p> <p>Hold a press conference at the same time as electoral authorities, candidates, political parties or other election observer organizations.</p> <p>Make statements that cannot be supported by hard data.</p> <p>Discourage citizens from voting. Negative characterizations reported publicly at midday can have this undesired effect.</p> <p>Over-emphasize "the numbers."</p> <p>Give the impression that the work is over. Observers must be called upon to follow and report on any post-election developments.</p>

FIGURE 8-1:  
GUIDELINES FOR ELECTION-DAY  
CONFERENCES

**When Rapid Post-election Action is Needed**

While it is hoped that election-day procedures all run well, this is too often not the case. The period immediately following an election often becomes more tense than the lead up to election day, and election monitors must be prepared for protracted activities, irrespective of the demands of successfully concluding an election day quick count. Figure 8-2 describes the human and financial resources that must be placed in reserve.

SITUATION	ACTION REQUIRED
<i>A natural disaster or administrative breakdown occurs. It requires the extension of voting hours or even the unexpected extension of voting over more than one day.</i>	Observers must cover and report on these developments.
<i>The tabulation of results falters or breaks down.</i>	Observers must be able to follow and report on developments at district, regional and national electoral bodies, sometimes over extended periods.
<i>The number of voting results placed into question as a consequence of irregularities or possible fraud is near to, or exceeds, the margin of difference between political contestants. (Or, the scale of irregularities or possible fraud renders it impossible to determine the necessity of a run-off or re-voting.)</i>	The organization must be able to follow and report on developments, including carefully monitoring the processing of complaints, observing recounts and/or re-voting in specific districts, and potentially prepare for new elections.
<i>Attention is focused on a presidential election or national proportional representation vote, but there are problems with other elections (such as elections for single-member legislative districts and local elections).</i>	Observers must be mobilized to concentrate attention on problem issues over a period of days.
<i>Problems surrounding the election create a political crisis.</i>	The leadership of the monitoring organization must be prepared to be called upon to help develop mechanisms to mediate or otherwise resolve the controversy.

FIGURE 8-2:  
CIVIC GROUPS CONDUCTING  
QUICK COUNTS MAY BE ASKED TO  
RESPOND TO DIFFICULT SITUATIONS  
DURING AND IMMEDIATELY FOL-  
LOWING ELECTIONS.

### Post-Election Reporting

The work of compiling, analyzing and reporting information does not end with an election-night or next-day press conference. Many groups take on observation work beyond the quick count. They monitor the resolution of complaints, the announcement of final results, the taking of office by rightful winners and the reactions of key individuals and institutions (e.g., winning and losing candidates, the government, military and the media).<sup>5</sup> Often, they release a series of press statements on these processes.

During the post-election period, many groups must turn to the work of compiling and analyzing information obtained from non-quick count observers and regional or municipal coordinators. This may be presented in interim reports if the immediate post-election situation is controversial and in a final report—a comprehensive evaluation of the election process with specific recommendations for its improvement.

### PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Groups undertake a host of post-election activities, in addition to writing and distributing final election observation reports. Leaders and staff document lessons learned, thank volunteers and, if they are planning for future activities, consolidate ties between leaders and volunteers. The post-election period also is a time when the board of directors and key staff summarize their unique insights into the election process. They may consider activities to promote electoral reform or other projects to promote or strengthen democracy.

Unfortunately, quick count funding typically ends soon after an election; therefore, post-election activities often must be conducted even as staff are tired and major staff reductions are looming. The effort is, nevertheless, crucial to the success of future activities. It is important to involve each functional team (e.g., media, technical, administration, volunteer coordination and other areas, such as legal analysis)<sup>6</sup> so that valuable information is not lost. The following outlines activities typically undertaken by each functional team and the organization's leadership.

#### The Media Team

- Lists best practices for developing relationships with the media, electoral authorities, candidates, donors, diplomatic community and international organizations. Develops a contact list for future networking.
- Compiles, evaluates and stores all materials used to promote the quick count.
- Collects evidence of the quick count's impact on the electoral process and how it affected public attitudes toward electoral authorities, political contestants, civic groups and government (e.g., through documenting news coverage, collecting public opinion survey information and conducting periodic interviews with key individuals).

<sup>5</sup> See NDI's Handbook, *How Domestic Organizations Monitor Elections: An A to Z Guide*, for more specific information on monitoring post-election developments.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Two, *Getting Started*, for detailed information on functional teams, their composition and responsibilities.

#### The Technical Team

- Sums up lessons learned regarding the application of statistical methods to the voting, counting and tabulation processes.
- Recommends future activities requiring the application of statistical methods (e.g., verifying the accuracy of voter registries, assessing the proper delineation of election districts or analyzing media coverage of political parties and issues).
- Documents how communications and information technology were used to (1) rapidly transmit information to and from large numbers of people and (2) efficiently organize, store and retrieve that information.

#### The Administration Team

- Documents effective mechanisms for working with numerous donors and managing funding for large-scale, time-sensitive programs.

#### The Volunteer Coordination Team

- Holds post-election debriefing sessions for observers, regional coordinators and communications volunteers to explain the nature of the group's longer-term structure, activities, and possibilities for involvement. Gives volunteers an opportunity to provide feedback regarding the future nature and role of the organization.
- Establishes mechanisms for future communications with volunteers (e.g., setting up a database, providing contact information, publishing newsletters).
- Compiles, evaluates and stores all training and observation materials.

#### Legal Analysis Team

- Documents knowledge about the legal framework for elections and its implementation; the electoral environment and opportunities for political competition; the ability of citizens to make informed choices without being intimidated or improperly influenced; and voter turnout, voting patterns or other background information.
- Helps group to raise awareness about election-related problems (e.g., by holding roundtables or other events with political parties, candidates, electoral authorities, the media and other civic organizations).
- Helps group to make recommendations and advocate for needed reforms.

#### Leadership (Board of Directors, Executive Director and Key Staff)

- Holds a retreat or series of meetings to process and evaluate the quick count project.
- Reviews reports and recommendations made by the functional teams and considers feedback from volunteer coordinators and observers.
- Makes basic decisions about the future in light of pre-existing plans for longer-term activities (e.g., whether to continue as an organization, how to structure the organization, what activities to pursue, how to pursue financing).

Successful quick counts demonstrate the vital role that civic organizations (and political parties) can play in promoting electoral accountability. In most countries where quick counts have been successful, groups emerge with high public profiles, reputations for integrity and competence, strong national volunteer networks, substantial knowledge of the political process and enhanced organizational capacity. Some organizations disband after elections, others go dormant between elections. Many, however, continue to play a central role in their country's political process, taking on activities such as advocating for electoral reform, promoting accountability in government and educating citizens about democracy. In this sense, the long-term impact of a quick count goes far beyond election-day reporting and includes the sustained involvement of citizens and organizations in a country's democratic development.

**REMINDER**

**The “end game” is the final phase of the quick count project; it includes actions taken before, on and immediately following election-day to support an open and genuinely democratic election.**

To maximize their impact, groups conducting quick counts should:

1. Hold a strategy meeting to consider the electoral context, review quick count goals, draft an election-day schedule and develop protocols for data use.
2. Develop and follow a protocol that estimates when information will be available and how, when and to whom it will be released.
3. Prepare to make statements or hold press conferences twice on election day: at midday to comment on the opening of the polling stations; and in the evening or the next day, once data is in on the vote count.
4. Design briefings, tours, meetings and press conferences to support plans for using quick count results; position the organization to constructively influence election-day events and promote electoral accountability.
5. Be prepared for rapid post-election activities to address urgent situations that develop as a consequence of major problems in the election process.
6. Wrap up the quick count project by implementing several activities: document lessons learned and best practices; debrief and thank volunteers; summarize knowledge of the electoral process and recommend needed reforms; and hold a retreat to re-evaluate strategic plans for the organization's future.