Many eyes of any kind?

Comparing traditional and crowdsourced monitoring and their contribution to democracy

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Abstract

While elections, as one possible mechanism for a peaceful transfer of power and a way to articulate and aggregate populations' political desires, are becoming more and more the norm around the globe, huge challenges remain for transparency and accountability of political processes. In other words, embedded democracy, including checks and balances, the rule of law, a culture of political participation and responsiveness of government, among other things, is far less entrenched than procedural democracy.

With the increasing availability of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), citizens become more involved in demanding openness and holding their leaders accountable. One of the premier applications of this new wave of citizen reporting is crowdsourced election monitoring. It is believed that this new methodology almost magically improves the quality of elections, still the central component of embedded democracy. However, the potential effects of crowdsourced election monitoring remain poorly theorized.

The present contribution sets out to first theoretically conceptualize the positive effects of election monitoring for democracy; and second to examine the implications of crowdsourcing for the monitoring of elections and - by extension - for democracy. Based on the analytical framework of embedded democracy it identifies six areas in which election monitoring can strengthen the partial regimes and external embeddedness of a democracy. Furthermore, it categorizes the main methodological differences between "traditional" and crowdsourced election monitoring and concludes that the added value of crowdsourcing lies mainly in the strengthening of civil society via a widened public sphere and the accumulation of social capital with less clear effects on vertical and horizontal accountability.

Though mainly theoretical in nature, some empirical evidence for this article is drawn from cases of crowdsourced and traditional election monitoring throughout Southeast Asia.

1. Introduction

"Two heads are better than one" or "four eyes see more than two". Corroborated by everyday experience, the validity of such proverbs is intuitively accepted by most people. Two persons are better at making critical decisions together than alone; two peers are better than one at assessing an academic article; many observers are better than a few at assessing the freeness and fairness of elections. But what if the "many eyes" are untrained persons without established knowledge of what they are assessing, deciding or observing? Are they better or worse than just one set of eyes of a trained expert?

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Much credit has been given to new Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) for radically transforming the way people around the globe engage in politics. The "Arab Spring", the "color revolutions" of Eastern Europe, and other instances of political mobilization have been accredited to mobile phones, twitter, facebook, and crowdsourced[2] information sharing. Yet, just how profound the changes are remains unclear and under-researched. The effect of these ICTs can hardly be generalized and is dependent on political context, the specific technology and, importantly, the area of application.

One such field of application, where ICTs are believed to have a huge potential to increase citizen engagement, and to unfold positive effects for political accountability, is election monitoring[3]. While SMS reporting has been used internally by international election observers for quite some time, crowdsourced citizen reporting is expected to have significant added value for election observation – and by extension for democracy. The question is how these added positive effects might be achieved. For this, a thorough, theoretically grounded comparison of the methodologies of traditional election monitoring and of crowdsourcing is necessary. This topic is highly applied and relevant. Established election monitoring organizations (EOMs) are already embracing these new and "sexy" technologies, while having little theoretical understanding and little empirical evidence on what added value ICTs and crowdsourcing really bring to the table.

The present contribution thus sets out to examine the implications of new (ICTs) for the monitoring of elections. How does crowdsourced citizen reporting via ICTs differ from "traditional" election observation, and what significance do these differences have for the purported positive effects of monitoring on democratic accountability? The study aims to assess these questions by comparatively examining the methodologies of election monitoring and of crowdsourcing. I will attempt to establish a theoretical rule of proportion: If traditional election monitoring strengthens democracy, and crowdsourcing strengthens election monitoring, then crowdsourced election monitoring should theoretically also strengthen democracy. To achieve this, I will first try to identify areas in which election monitoring can strengthen the partial regimes and external embeddedness of a democracy (based on the analytical framework of embedded democracy). Secondly, I will categorize the main methodological differences between traditional and crowdsourced election monitoring, and in a third step conclude what added value crowdsourced election monitoring might provide in regards to embedded democracy.

The objective is to add to the theoretical understanding of these methodologies, and to pave the way for a future empirical assessment of whether there are any potential synergy effects from integrating both approaches. It must be stressed that none of the findings have undergone empirical testing but are strictly deducted from theoretical deliberations. They are however loosely based on anecdotal evidence from a mini-survey of traditional and crowdsourced election monitoring in Southeast Asia (see Grömping 2011).

2. Election monitoring

Among the huge array of interventions under the "democracy assistance" umbrella (see for example Carothers 1999), electoral assistance features prominently. It includes a wide range of activities, from support for first-time elections, assistance for constitutional and legal reforms, assistance to electoral management bodies (EBMs), voter registration, voter education and political party support, to election monitoring (Reilly 2003; Reynolds et al. 2005; Lean 2007; UNDP 2001). All of these activities are aimed at strengthening elections as the premier

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[2] *Crowdsourcing* in this context means garnering information on electoral misconduct from reports send via SMS, Email, Twitter and other ICTs by ordinary citizens.
[3] Though there is some debate on this (Adewumi & Daramola 2010; Kelley 2009), the terms "election monitoring" and "election observation" will be used here interchangeably.

mechanism of vertical accountability in a democracy. One of the most prominent areas of electoral support is undoubtedly the field of election observation and monitoring. It is a means to strengthen the democratic practice of elections by enhancing their transparency and strengthening public confidence in them (Alvarez et al. 2008). By assessing the degree of electoral fraud[4] or violations of electoral rights, it can potentially bestow legitimacy to the winning party, or deprive them of it. In fact, it can be argued that the wish for legitimacy is one of the driving forces that lead governments to allow election observers (Kelley 2008b:25). However, criticism is leveled against observer missions that endorse flawed elections or fail to condemn them (Abbink 2000; Björnlund 2004).

Election monitoring is conducted by at least two types of actors: international or domestic monitors. Traditionally, election monitoring has been the realm of international observer missions[5] and has been theorized mainly in this context (Hyde 2009; Kelley 2008a; Kelley 2012; Pridham et al., 1994; Santa-Cruz 2005). The OSCE, one of the most prolific actors in the field of monitoring, defines it as "the systematic, comprehensive and accurate gathering of information concerning the laws, processes and institutions related to the conduct of elections. [Election monitoring] evaluates pre-election, election-day and post-election periods through comprehensive, long-term observation, employing a variety of techniques" (OSCE 2005:1-2). International election monitoring exposes governments and EMBs to the scrutiny of the public, which is believed to promote accountability, broader political rights and civil liberties (UNDP 2001; Ritter 2009).

Much less attention has been paid to the role of domestic election monitoring, which refers to monitoring conducted by election officials, political parties, local media, and nonpartisan organizations within their own country (NDI 1995). The latter (nonpartisan civic associations and networks) are regularly tied to international democracy assistance for their operating budget and legitimized by election law of their countries. They mostly define themselves in terms of the "democratizing potential of civil society" (Lean 2007:291). Citizen engagement in such monitoring efforts is seen in the context of a virtuous circle of increasing "social capital" and increasing participation (Putnam 1993), hence the "democratizing" effect.

Many international organizations advocate election monitoring as part of their efforts of democracy promotion. ASEAN is such an organization that encourages its members to accept international observers, increasingly so since the plans for a "people-centered" ASEAN Economic Community are assuming shape. The spread of election observation as an international norm can certainly be observed in Southeast Asia, where seven out of ten countries holding elections now allow international and/or domestic observers (see Grömping 2011).[6] Organizations that conduct election monitoring are understandably convinced of their positive effects on democracy. They claim to deter electoral fraud or violence, strengthen democratic institutions and build public trust in the electoral process. Empirical evidence of these claims is very rare and mostly based on individual case studies.[7] In order to even discuss the purported positive effects on democracy, it is imperative to first establish a theoretical understanding of possible linkages between election monitoring and democracy.

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[4] Electoral fraud is here used as an umbrella term, referring to "any purposeful action taken to tamper with electoral activities and election-related materials in order to affect the results of an election, which may interfere with or thwart the will of the voters" (López-Pintor 2011: 6). This also includes electoral violence as the most extreme technique in an escalating repertoire of election fraud (Lehoucq 2003, Rapoport & Weinberg 2001:28).

[5] Some major actors are the UN, EU, OSCE, the Commonwealth, African Union, IFES, IRI and NDI.

[6] Out of eleven countries in Southeast Asia (including East Timor), only Brunei Darussalam does not hold any elections whatsoever. Singapore, Viet Nam and Lao PDR do not allow observers.

[7] For a rare cross-sectional quantitative study dealing with the effectiveness of election monitoring see Kelley (2012). The author also provides a comprehensive survey of case studies regarding this question (see Kelley 2012:266-267, footnotes 33-35).

3. Embedded democracy

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government, [and] shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections […] held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures" (UN 1948). This is generally recognized as the minimum requirement of democratic rule. Of course, a multitude of understandings of democracy exist, which can be grouped on a continuum from minimalist to maximalist conceptualizations[8]. The minimalist view is primarily concerned with institutional arrangements that safeguard participation and peaceful political competition. Free and fair elections - in the words of the UDHR "genuine" elections - are certainly the core aspect of this view of democracy. But it also includes universal suffrage, the right to vote, the right to challenge incumbents and be in political opposition, as well as basic freedoms of expression and association (see among others Dahl 1970; Hartlyn and Valenzuela 1994; Schumpeter 1962 [1944]).

The other extreme stresses the need for "substantive" democracy from an either liberal or social-justice point of view (see among others Diamond 1999; Foweraker and Krznaric 2000; Held 2006; Kaldor & Vejvoda 1997). Here, the above-mentioned requirements are seen as necessary but not sufficient. Instead, the rule of law, a strong protection of wider political rights and civil liberties (including property rights or minority rights), as well as the responsiveness of government, accountability, transparency, and – importantly – distributory social justice need to be taken into account to ensure the quality and substance of democracy.

While the maximalist definitions deservedly draw attention to the output side to assess the democratic nature of a regime, it is more fruitful for the purpose of this study to remember that the electoral process itself is the defining characteristic of democracy. Questions of equality and social justice are not only contested, they also go beyond the electoral regime, and certainly beyond what election monitoring is supposed to accomplish. In order to discuss the purported effects of election monitoring, I therefore draw on the concept of "embedded democracy" (Merkel 2004), which relies more – but not exclusively – on the input side (i.e. minimalist understandings of democracy). Following this concept, a stable constitutional democracy is embedded in two ways:

"Internally, the specific interdependence/independence of the different partial regimes of a democracy secures its normative and functional existence" (Merkel 2004:36). These five partial regimes, which interact and mutually enforce each other, are a democratic electoral regime, political rights of participation, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and effective power to govern (see Fig.1). They are defined by function, not by output. The *electoral regime* forms the core of the partial regimes by providing a rules-based means for transfer of power through elections. *Political rights* (e.g. universal active and passive suffrage, the rights to political communication and organization) are the prerequisites necessary for a functioning electoral regime. The function of *civil rights* in turn is to guard the citizens against abuses by the state or the tyranny of a majority. They form the core of the rule of law. *Horizontal accountability* refers to the division of powers (legislative, executive and judicative) common in constitutional democracies. This partial regime is key in ensuring checks and balances of institutions independent of each other and (in part) the voter. Finally, the *effective power to govern* is supposed to ensure that those elected are the ones actually governing. Threats to this partial regime are extra-constitutional veto powers (e.g. military, drug cartels, or even supranational bodies that restrict the nation-state's capacity to act).

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[8] This distinction is proposed by Bühlmann et al. (2008) based on recent overviews of democratic theory such as Held (2006) or Schmidt (2008), among others.
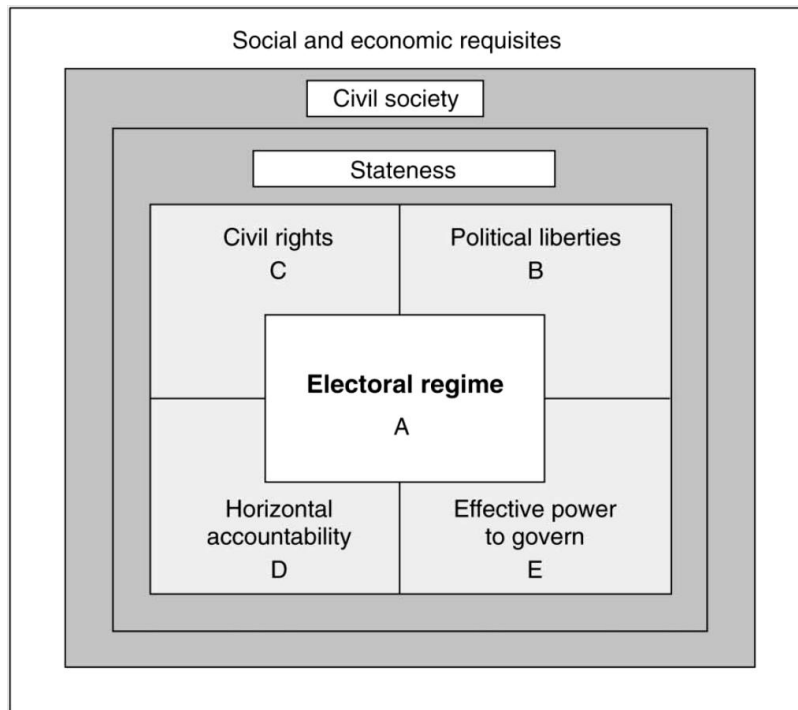
Fig.1: Internal and external embeddedness of democracy. Source: Merkel (2004), p.37.

"Externally, these partial regimes are embedded in spheres of enabling conditions for democracy that protect it from outer as well as inner shocks and destabilizing tendencies" (Merkel 2004:36). The most important of these spheres are the socio-economic context, civil society, and international and regional integration. The outermost layer, the *socio-economic context*, can under certain conditions create a buffer against shocks and strengthen democracy. A developed economy, minimization of economic inequalities or a pluralistic socio-economic structure are all conducive conditions in this sense. Their absence, on the other hand, might endanger the stability or quality of democracy. *Civil society* forms the second "protective layer" of an embedded democracy. Its positive effects on democracy have long been theorized. Merkel (2004) draws on four strands of arguments: Civil society can "protect the individual from the arbitrary use of state power [...], support the rule of law and the balance of powers [...], educate citizens and recruit political elites [...], and institutionalize the public sphere as a medium of democratic self-reflection" (Merkel 2004:47). If a strong civil society can fulfill these functions, it can have considerable stabilizing effects on democratic processes and institutions. Inversely, the absence or weakness of civil society might jeopardize the functioning of even strong partial regimes (see above). The final layer, *international integration* or *stateness*, refers to the effects that membership in international economic or political organizations (such as the EU or possibly ASEAN) can have on democracies. In such organizations, several members might pull each other towards further democratization (or possibly into the opposite direction). Democratic norms proliferate. On the other hand, this layer is also related to partial regime E (effective power to govern). A government's capacity to act might be limited by international integration, as is very apparent in the case of the EU.

4. Strengthening embedded democracy through election monitoring?

Without delving deeply into this functionalist model of democracy, we can see that the concept of embedded democracy provides for a number of linkages between election monitoring and democracy. These links function through the strengthening of both internal and external embeddedness. In the following theoretical considerations, the UN declaration of Principles for International Election Observers (UN 2005) shall serve as an ideal type of "traditional" election monitoring methodology.

a) Strengthening partial regimes

On the "internal" side, the electoral regime (partial regime A) and political rights (partial regime B) are meant to ensure *vertical accountability* between the electorate and those being elected. Elections serve as a sanctioning mechanism or periodical review of political performance. The political rights are the minimum requirements that are needed to allow this periodic review to work. Together, these two partial regimes provide the mechanisms for vertical control of the government. On the other hand, *horizontal accountability* (partial regime D) is provided by independent institutions such as the judiciative, but also election commissions or other EMBs, who are supposed to supervise the functioning of partial regimes A and B. While it would be hard to establish effects on civil rights (partial regime C) or the effective power to govern (partial regime E), the theoretical effects of election monitoring on vertical and horizontal accountability should be threefold:

I. Following the logic of rational choice, election monitoring by either international or domestic observers should enhance vertical accountability by changing the incentive structure for political parties and governments regarding electoral fraud (Kelley 2012:100ff.). Namely, election monitoring is expected to increase the risks of exposure of cheating and increase incentives for honesty. Simultaneously it signals increased international and domestic costs of exposure. The risk of exposure is greater because a mission's short-term (STOs) or long-term observers (LTOs) will be stationed at polling booths, conduct interviews, sometimes survey the media, and conduct other activities that make cheating less likely to remain undetected. Most importantly, these missions routinely publish reports that either condone or condemn an election. Thereby the international and domestic costs of exposure are increased – the world is watching and might withdraw aid money or political support, for example. Finally, election monitoring should increase the incentives for honesty, because countries, especially transitional democracies, should be eager to earn legitimacy through favorable reports of independent observers. The presence of international and/or domestic observers should structure these incentives in a way that electoral fraud becomes less likely, and political rights are more respected. The partial regimes of political rights and the electoral regime can thus fulfill their function of vertical accountability better.

II. The same argument also applies to a certain degree to horizontal accountability. Since observer missions frequently criticize EMBs or the judiciative in their reports, these institutions of horizontal accountability are exposed to a similar change in incentives as outlined above. No election commission likes to be singled out for their failure to ensure free and fair

elections. Thus, their incentives to proactively prosecute infringements on the electoral regime or political rights should be higher. However, the pressure should be less strong when compared to political parties and especially governments, as the very nature of partial regime D makes these institutions independent from the electorate and also not as susceptible to international pressure as for example governments, who vie for international legitimacy and foreign aid (often conditional on their "democratic performance").

III.   A third positive effect on both vertical and horizontal accountability is expected to work through constructivist logic (Kelley 2012:105f.). All partial regimes of embedded democracy are "manned" with individuals, who act according to self-interest and organizational logic (arguments I and II), but also according to their norms and beliefs. Politicians, bureaucrats, judges and election commissioners alike are not immune to changes in the normative environment. Most election observation organizations do more than just observe the conduct of election before and during election day. They conduct trainings, develop best practices with EMBs, engage in voter education and so forth. According to the UN, one of the premier missions of election observation is to provide recommendations and build capacities for improving electoral processes (UN 2005:2). These activities are believed to contribute to gradual normative change within the relevant institutions of vertical and horizontal accountability. This normative change would then lead to stronger safeguards for political rights and a better functioning of the electoral regime. Whether or not such constructivist arguments hold true is contested. There is some evidence that the diffusion of norms might actually lead to institutional change (Chand 1997:547). In any case, such changes would be expected to take a long time to gain ground.

b)   Strengthening external embeddedness

On the "external" side, election monitoring can potentially support the functioning of two of the "buffer" layers that surround and enable the partial regimes of embedded democracy. While the socio-economic context is unlikely to be influenced by election observation, the functions of civil society are supported in several ways. Additionally, the international context, within which a democracy is embedded, might be influenced by election observation.

IV.   A big potential for election monitoring lies in its mobilization of civil society. This is less true for international observer missions, but all the more relevant for domestic election observation. Most domestic observers rely heavily on large networks of volunteers, who are stationed at polling booths and report their observations in a structured format. In some instances, these trained volunteers reach into the thousands.[9] This turns domestic election observation organizations into potent agents of civil society, who can fulfill some of the functions laid out in the concept of embedded democracy. "Seen from a Tocquevillian point of view, civil society puts normative and participatory potential at a democracy's disposal. This serves as an immunization of freedom against the authoritarian temptations of the state and limits the tyrannical ambitions of societal majorities" (Merkel 2004:46). By actively engaging citizens in the venture to hold the government and political parties accountable and by putting public scrutiny on the conduct of elections, domestic election observers accumulate social capital in the form of norms, knowledge and

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[9] Examples in Southeast Asia are the domestic observation networks COMFREL and NICFEC (Cambodia), Pollwatch/P-Net (Thailand), or NAMFREL (Philippines), who all field several thousand observers.

capacity to participate. This strengthens the capacity of civil society as a whole to protect embedded democracy against internal and external shocks, because it contributes to an active and participative citizenry.

V. The mobilization of civil society by election monitors enhances democracy in another way as well – by strengthening the public sphere. The "pre-institutional" public sphere according to Habermas serves as a space to articulate and aggregate interests before they are acted upon politically. "Through self-determined forms of participation, these interests should influence the agendas of politics beyond political power and business interests. [B]oth parties and parliaments 'rely on the supply of informal public opinion' which can only 'form within the structures of a non-power driven public sphere'" (Merkel 2004:47, referring to Habermas 1997:374). The contribution of election monitoring to the public sphere lies in its articulation of the need of citizens' to be informed about the trustworthiness of political actors and the electoral process itself. Through the activities of monitors, issues of accountability and transparency enter the public sphere and are accessible to critical discourse and the formulation of opinions.

VI. The layer of international integration, which serves as either a facilitating or hindering factor for embedded democracy, is also potentially affected by election monitoring. Similar to argument III, this layer can be strengthened through the diffusion of norms about free and fair elections. International monitoring organizations are mostly active in particular regions and usually engage in election observation in a limited set of countries.[10] In many regions, their continued presence slowly enhances the understanding of free and fair elections as a norm that has become almost universal. Already, failure to invite observers is often seen as a plan to cheat in elections. Coming back to the example of Southeast Asia, one can observe this creeping shift of the international environment towards more and more acceptance of election standards and election observation. Though ASEAN exerts minimal institutional pressure towards its members, the Asian Network for Free and Fair Elections (ANFREL), established in 1997 as Asia's first regional election observation network, has slowly effected a "regional integration from below" in regards to election monitoring. ANFREL is comprised of a number of domestic organizations concerned with elections from 15 Asian countries.[11] In addition to election monitoring, the organization is active in training and research as well. ANFREL is an important actor, because it managed to be accredited in numerous elections throughout the region in recent years and has built strong local networks. It exemplifies the growth of a regional civil society and a change of norms. From only few deployments in the beginning, the organization has grown steadily. ANFREL or its domestic partners have been active in 17 out of 33 elections in the region since 2006 (see Tab.1). Given the consensus of non-interference in ASEAN, civil society initiatives are comparatively better placed than states or ASEAN itself to observe elections, expose misconduct and monitor electoral violence, and thereby gradually change the international environment within which states operate.

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[10] E.g. the OSCE mainly in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states; AU in Africa; ANFREL in Asia; OAS in Latin America. Others, like the EU, the UN, NDI or IRI are active globally.
[11] Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Thailand.

Country	Election Type	Date	Domestic	Regional/International	Crowdsourced
Brunei	-	-	-	-	-
Cambodia	Parliamentary	27-Jul-08	COMFREL, NICFEC	EU, ANFREL	-
	Commune Council	03-June-12	COMFREL, NICFEC	ANFREL	Cambodian Voter Voice
Indonesia	Regional (Aceh)	11-Dec-06 and 4-Mar-07	???	EU, ANFREL	-
	Presidential	08-Jul-09	-	-	-
	Legislative	09-Apr-09	???	ANFREL, Carter Center*	-
	Regional (West Papua)	20-Jul-11	???	ANFREL	-
	Regional (Aceh)	09-Apr-12	KIP	ANFREL	-
Lao PDR	Parliamentary	30-Apr-06	-	-	-
	Parliamentary	30-Apr-11	-	-	-
Malaysia	Parliamentary	08-Mar-08	-	-	-
	Permatang Pauh by-election	26-Aug-08	NIEI	ANFREL	-
	Kuala Terengganu by-election	07-Jan-09	NIEI	-	-
	Parliamentary	Before 27-Jun-13	???	???	Jom Pantau
Myan	Parliamentary	07-Nov-10	-	TACDB**	Burma Election

mar					[Tracker]
	Referendum	10-May-08	-	-	-
	By-Elections	01-Apr-12	Election Monitoring Network (88 Generation Students)	ASEAN	-
Philippines	Legislative	14-May-07	NAMFREL	ANFREL	-
	Regional (Mindanao)	08-Aug-08	???	ANFREL	-
	Presidential & Legislative	10-May-10	NAMFREL***, PPCRV	ANFREL, Carter Center*	[Vote Report Philippines]
Singapore	Parliamentary	07-May-11	-	-	-
	Parliamentary	06-May-06	-	-	-
	Presidential	27-Aug-11	-	-	-
Thailand	Parliamentary (Nat'l Assembly)	02-Apr and 23-Apr-06	???	-	-
	Parliamentary (Senate)	19-Apr-06	???	-	-
	Referendum	19-Aug-07	???	???	-
	Parliamentary (Nat'l Assembly)	23-Dec-07	Poll Watch/P-NET	ANFREL	-
	Parliamentary (Senate)	02-Mar-08	???	???	-
	Parliamentary (Nat'l Assembly)	03-Jul-11	Poll Watch/P-NET	EU, ANFREL	[Thai Election Watch]
Timor-Leste	Presidential	09 Apr and 09-May-07	SOMET, KOMEG	EU	-
	Parliamentary	30-Jun-07	SOMET, KOMEG	EU, Carter Center, NDI, ANFREL, IFES-EWER	-

	Presidential	17-Mar and 16-Apr-12	SOMET, KOMEG	UN, ANFREL, IFES-EWER	Belun
	Parliamentary	07-Jul-12	SOMET, KOMEG	UN, ANFREL, IFES-EWER	Belun
Viet Nam	Parliamentary	22-May-11	-	-	-

* These missions were targeted or focused observations and did not result in statements on the overall administration of the electoral process

** Unofficial/Non-accredited

*** Not accredited for quick-count, but fielded observers.

Tab.1: Election monitoring in Southeast Asian Countries (2007-2012) (adapted and extpanded from Grömping 2011)

To sum up, six potential positive effects of election monitoring on democracy have been identified. Election observation can strengthen the partial regimes of embedded democracy by altering the incentive structures for governments and political parties regarding electoral fraud; by changing incentives for EMBs and courts to monitor elections; and by normative change through recommendations and capacity-building. Furthermore, election observation can strengthen the factors conducive for embedded democracy by strengthening social capital within civil society; by strengthening the public sphere; and by normative change through international "peer pressure".

The empirical evidence for these mechanisms is as of yet ill-established. Again, Kelley (2012) is one of the few quantitative attempts at measuring the positive effects of election observation. She provides some evidence that the behavior of political actors can indeed change given the presence of international observers (Kelley 2012:129). However, her findings do not cover domestic observation efforts at all. Further quantitative testing of the outlined mechanisms is definitely necessary to establish a convincing argument that election monitoring has positive effects on democracy.

5. ICTs, mobile technology, and *crowdsourced* election monitoring

The above-mentioned deliberations about the positive effects of election monitoring are based on the current practice of international and domestic observer organizations. In particular, they assume "expert" observers who have received some kind of training, plus a wider range of activities than simple observation and reporting. It is apparent that the quality of election monitoring, and thereby its possible positive contributions to democracy, are strongly dependent on the quality of the work of observers. If observers are not believed to detect electoral fraud accurately and report it neutrally, all positive effects would be undone. That is why it is commonly assumed that only a strict methodology, including systematic training of LTOs and STOs, design of detailed questionnaires and forms, and clear codes of conduct can guarantee the success of an observer mission. But what if election observation is not conducted according to these tight standards but with the help of hundreds or thousands of citizens, through a diffuse, unregulated and amorphous process called crowdsourcing? Do many

untrained eyes outweigh a few trained ones? Or is expert knowledge better than the "wisdom of the crowd"?

The advent of new Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and mobile technology is rapidly transforming the modes of civic engagement around the world. The term ICTs pertains to diverse technologies that enable users to process and use information and knowledge, and communicate it to others. ICTs not only enhance the flow of information drastically, they also facilitate communication between numerous previously unconnected individuals and communities in a many-to-many manner via internet-based technologies such as Twitter, Facebook, podcasting, blogging, RSS feeds or peer-to-peer networks (Chadwick, 2006; Miller et al. 2009). In addition to that, the increasing ubiquity of mobile phone technology makes many of these functionalities mobile. The way in which news are spread, information is processed, and political action is mobilized in this age of ICTs is through crowdsourcing, which originally means delegating complex tasks to a large number of people – a crowd. For example, instead of established media outlets providing information to the public, citizens provide this information themselves, by reporting events to each other through social media.

The optimistic view sees ICTs and crowdsourcing as generating countless possibilities for meaningful, spontaneous political participation of everyday citizens armed with cell phones and laptops. Starting as early as the 1960s, the democratizing effects of access to media technologies were theorized (Lipset 1960 in Corrales, 2002:34), and newly invented ICTs were quick to be labeled "technologies of freedom" (Pool 1983) or even "liberation technologies" (Diamond 2010). Implied is the potential to expand political, social, and economic freedom. Just how far the "liberating" effects of ICTs go, is a matter of fierce contention, however. Arguments have been made that the internet (Groshek 2010) or mobile phone prevalence (Miard 2009) have a negligible effect on democracy or political activism. On the other hand, repressive regimes are inventive in their efforts to suppress ICTs or at least to raise the barriers for access (Eyck 2001; Kalathil & Boas 2001; Nikolayenko 2009). In sum, these voices recognize that the internet is after all just a technology, crowdsourcing just a methodology used or discarded by humans. What use is made of its potential is not determined by the technology itself but by the users (Manji 2008; Schudson 2003).

ICTs have been used in the context of traditional election monitoring missions for quite some time. In particular, SMS messaging often facilitates the delivery of reports from trained field observers, who might be spread over hundreds of polling station, to the mission HQ. Thus they help overcome many logistical problems of observer missions. "When combined with a reporting methodology that utilizes a representative sample of polling stations, SMS reporting contributes to a deep understanding of how elections are conducted across a country and whether the results reflect the will of the people" (Schuler 2008:151). Reduced costs and timeliness of reporting are seen as great advantages of SMS use (Bardall 2010).

However, in the context of this study, the use of SMS technology by traditional EMOs is of less interest. What I focus on is crowdsourced reporting. This means that an online platform such as Ushahidi or Managing News is used to aggregate and map incoming reports from citizens. Anyone can send in reports via SMS, email, online form or twitter. Sometimes these reports are verified by human operators before posting them online, sometimes they are posted in real-time. Through the lens of the general public, crowdsourcing thus enables potentially anybody to not only observe, but also to communicate their observations of electoral misconduct or violence. Countless spontaneous initiatives around the world use mobile phones, social media and diverse web 2.0 technologies to collect crowdsourced citizen reports of fraudulent activities and to visualize them with open-source mapping tools[12].

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[12] Some examples are: www.sharek961.org/ ; www.thaielectionwatch.net ; www.kartanarusheniy.ru/ ; www.votebd.org/ ; www.uchaguzi.co.ke/ ; http://save.kg ; http://golos.org ; http://burundi.ushahidi.com/ ; www.eleccionvisible.com ;

It is already clear that crowdsourced citizen reporting is a different exercise than systematic election monitoring. The aim of election observation is to deter fraud, to inform citizens about the conduct of elections, and to allow them to decide if the process was genuine. For this, it uses trained observers who evaluate voting practices. Furthermore it aims at effecting gradual normative change by providing recommendations and capacity-building to EMBs, political parties and voters. On the other hand, citizen reporting is mostly based on rather subjective and anecdotal impressions from citizens. It is not necessarily meant to give a representative picture of quality or conduct of an election. Rather it is a source of on-the-ground impressions from voters and a way to engage them. Just as the goals of both methodologies are different, so are their approaches to the task. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to identify a number of crucial differences between traditional monitoring and crowdsourcing. The findings are summarized in Tab.2.

a) Epistemology

The most obvious difference between both methodologies can be summed up as "expert-knowledge vs. wisdom of the crowd". The two approaches are based on radically different epistemologies, meaning they have different conceptions of what constitutes knowledge and how it can be generated. A known number of trained observers who submit a known number of more or less structured observations in traditional monitoring is contrasted with a potentially infinite (but in reality often quite limited) number of untrained observers - an anonymous crowd that submits a varying number of anecdotal observations.

Perhaps it is the very fear of this ominous 'crowd' that leads to much of the skepticism against the usefulness or the safety of crowdsourcing. A diffuse distrust or even fear of an uncontrollable and politically engaged public seems prevalent in many countries, certainly in Southeast Asia. The most common argument fielded against crowdsourcing is that the crowd does not possess the necessary expertise to make accurate observations or generate accurate knowledge. This assumption is contested by a growing body of literature asserting that a diverse untrained crowd can outperform experts under certain conditions (e.g. Page 2007; Surowiecki 2004). Experts with similar training tend to converge on the same solutions - or focus on similar observations in the case of election monitoring. On the other hand, a diverse but untrained crowd will have a greater diversity and coverage. It should for example be able to capture incidents that go under the radar of traditional election monitoring. The reason is that election observers cannot cover all locations (especially locations far away from polling stations) and are only present shortly before and after the election.[13] Crowdsourcing on the other hand enables citizens to report incidents of intimidation or vote-buying even in remote locations and weeks before or after the elections. This is but one example of how crowds might outperform experts. The main advantage of crowd wisdom lies in its diversity and its greater number of observations or guesses about the truth. Underlying this insight is the fact that crowdsourcing employs a probabilistic epistemology: there is no fixed "truth" that needs to be recognized and identified by expert opinion – crowdsourced truth is a probability. The more observations are accumulated, the larger and more diverse the number of observers is, and the more cross-checks are possible between individual observations, the larger the probability will become that what is reported has actually happened.

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http://elecciones.com.co/ ; ; www.votenaweb.com.br ; www.cuidemoselvoto.org/ ; http://sudanvotemonitor.com/ ; www.marsad.ma ; www.u-shahid.com ; http://ichoose.transparencymaldives.org/ . Tab. 1 lists crowdsourced Ushahidi deployments for election monitoring in Southeast Asia.

[13] This is in regards to short-time observers (STOs), which are mobilized in great numbers only a few days before the election, and are usually stationed directly at polling stations. It is true that long-term observers (LTOs) cover a larger timespan, but their number is usually quite limited.

Yet again, criticism about the inaccuracies or even dangers of crowdsourcing seems to become more and more substantiated as well. "It is remarkable how little social influence is required to produce herding behavior and negative side effects for the mechanism underlying the wisdom of crowds" note Lorenz et al. (2011:5). They conclude that precisely the thing that makes crowdsourcing most accurate - a diverse crowd of strangers who address a question with few preconceived ideas – can easily be lost if "peers" or experts insert opinions and exert social influence. Similarly, Page (2007:212) speaks of a possible "madness of the crowd" when it is influenced by a strongly voiced opinion which can turn into majority opinion. In the context of election monitoring, this hints at possible data poisoning by deliberately inserting faulty observations that can trigger herding behavior.

With just this very superficial outline of conflicting epistemologies of crowdsourced and expert knowledge, it becomes clear that the main task is to identify the circumstance under which crowdsourced election observation will work well. Some general suggestion can be derived from (Surowiecki 2004): diversity of observers, independence of people's observations, geographic decentralization, and some mechanism of aggregation. Page (2007:234) adds that "crowds can perform better than experts, provided their increased coverage more than makes up for the crudeness of their estimates." The crucial factor is in both cases a very large number of observers, and a geographic and social distribution that is not too clustered. Neither of which is regularly achieved in contemporary crowdsourced election monitoring. The number of *crowdsourced* reports submitted in six election monitoring efforts across Southeast Asia (see Tab.1) ranged roughly between 200 to 300, for example. Hardly a representative sample of the whole population of possible observations. This insight leads from the theoretical discussion of epistemology to considerations of expected biases and effects on accuracy of both approaches.

b) *Expected biases and effects on accuracy*

The accuracy of crowdsourced information is probably the most contested aspect of this methodology. The lack of vetting of reports leads to a lack of trust in their veracity. However, also traditional election monitoring is subject to several biases that might influence monitors' assessments. Kelley (2012) identifies five such biases:

The *glass house bias* (Kelley 2012:64) can lead to restrictions in the operations of EMOs in regions with a number of less democratic regimes. Since "those who live in glass houses should not throw stones", undemocratic governments are likely to restrict criticism leveled against their (also undemocratic neighbors). This is relevant for regional IGOs that conduct election monitoring as well as NGOs that depend on government funding. The glass house bias is unlikely to occur in crowdsourced monitoring projects, as they are mostly initiatives independent of governments or international organizations (see also below under *Legitimacy and Mandate*).

	Traditional election monitoring	Crowdsourced election monitoring
Epistemology	Expert knowledge	Wisdom of the crowd
	Trained and known observers	Untrained, anonymous observers
	STOs: structured observation via forms and questionnaires	Observation usually structured by event categories
	LTOs: structured and unstructured observation	
	Limited number of observers	Potentially unlimited number of observers

	Known expected number of reports	Number of reports varies widely and depends heavily on outreach	
	Truth established by expertise	Probabilistic truth, relies on great and diverse number of observations	

Accuracy and biases	Expected biases: - glass house bias
	      - subtlety bias
	      - special relationship bias
	      - progress bias
	      - stability bias
		Expected biases: - subtlety bias
		      - opposition bias
		      - stability bias?
		      - reporting bias/digital divide
		      - signal-to-noise ratio
		      - lack of vetting	

Civil society mobilization	Civil society mobilization necessary prior to mission (only domestic EMOs)	Civil society mobilization necessary before, during and after mission	
		Limited to citizens with access to internet and/or mobile technology	
Outputs	Publication of findings → time-lag	Mapping → near real-time	

	Capacity-building: voter education
	                Training for parties
	
	                Training for EMBs
		Usually no capacity-building	

	Recommendations to EMBs, gov't and political parties	Usually no recommendations	
Legitimacy / Mandate	Requires invitation/accreditation		
	Legitimacy through invitation/accreditation	No legitimacy. Seldomly endorsed.	
	Bound to mandate	Self-organized; can sometimes operate under restrictive circumstances	
	Dependent on donor funding	Costs negligible – independent from donors	

Tab. 2: Comparison of traditional and crowdsourced election monitoring methodologies.

The *subtlety bias* (Kelley 2012:66) states that EMOs are more likely to disregard more subtle forms of electoral fraud. Violence and blatant manipulations are more likely to make it into the final report than problems in election administration or obscure legal offenses. The same bias is likely to apply to crowdsourced monitoring.

Traditional EMOs are likely to operate in countries of special interest to their mission statement. The EU, the Commonwealth Secretariat or ASEAN for example send monitors to countries to which they assign special importance. This *special relationship bias* (Kelley 2012:69) might produce reduced criticism of elections in those countries. Again, this bias is unlikely to affect crowdsourced initiatives, since they are usually independent from government or organizational endorsements.

The *progress bias* (Kelley 2012:70) may result in reduced criticism towards flawed elections, if the EMO is part of an effort of democracy promotion (as most of them are). Election irregularities may be blanked out, because it is perceived as more important to attest democratic progress. The opposite is probably true for crowdsourced projects. They should actually tend to criticize election violations more in transitional democracies because they are

more likely to be endorsed by the political opposition.[14] This may in turn result in an *opposition bias* for crowdsourced initiatives if they are unable to keep strict distance from all political parties.

Finally, a *stability bias* (Kelley 2012:72) may occur in traditional EMOs if they consider how their endorsement or condemnation of elections might influence stability in a country. This bias may or may not occur in crowdsourced monitoring efforts. Depending how far the project initiators take their philosophy of open information they might decide to upload all incoming reports regardless of possible inflammatory content, or decide to interpose a layer of censorship.

As seen, some of the above biases occur in traditional as well as crowdsourced election monitoring. At least three biases however are unique to the latter and may influence the accuracy of observations. First is the reporting bias due to the common *digital divide* in democratizing countries. ICTs are more likely to be used by more affluent, better educated, technologically savvy individuals. In particular, urban populations are expected to participate more than rural populations. This is not necessarily because of a lack of mobile phone technology, which is more or less ubiquitous even in poorer countries or regions, but mostly due to the fact that the results of crowdsourced reports are usually only displayed online. Thus the results of their reports might be elusive for technologically underprivileged people. Therefore, the incentive to report is lower. This "digital divide" (van Dijk 2005) creates a strong reporting bias and leads to an over-representation of certain regions or groups (Fung 2011).

Secondly, the problem of "noise" from low-quality reports always exists, as many sources (SMS reports, twitter messages, RSS news feeds etc.) pile up. They might create redundant or irrelevant reports. Furthermore, spoiling or data-poisoning (deliberate insertion of false reports) also influences the *signal-to-noise ratio* negatively. Both elements will decrease public trust in the project and reduce incentives to participate.

The final and perhaps most important bias of crowdsourced election monitoring is its *lack of vetting* of incoming information. Consistent with the philosophy of probabilistic truth, such vetting should actually not occur. The sheer number of incoming reports will, in its entirety, approximate a picture of the truth, i.e. the amount of election irregularities. Nevertheless, it is the premier criticism leveled against crowdsourced election monitoring and can therefore not be easily dismissed. Again, the quality of reporting as a whole hinges on the number of incoming reports and their geographic representativeness. This leads to a discussion of what role the mobilization of civil society plays for the two approaches.

c) Civil society mobilization

Traditional international EMOs operate mostly without overt involvement of civil society. They publish a report about the freeness and fairness of elections after the fact. Civil society mobilization might happen as domestic organizations make use of this report and campaign with its findings at a later stage. The situation for domestic EMOs is very different. They are dependent on a host of volunteers whom they can train as local observers and dispatch to as high a number of polling stations as possible. They therefore require a large organizational network and the mobilization of volunteers prior to the observation mission.

The mobilization of civil society goes even further for crowdsourced initiatives. As seen, the success of crowdsourced election monitoring is strongly dependent on mobilizing people to act as citizen reporters. The more the merrier. This mobilization needs to be an ongoing

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[14] This was the case in all of the six crowdsourced initiatives in Southeast Asia (see Tab.1). All projects claimed independence but the political opposition was usually quick to praise the contributions of crowdsourcing in their respective countries, while the governments were usually skeptical.

proactive effort before, during and after elections. Citizens have to be made aware of the existence of the project, need to be convinced of its usefulness, and persuaded to invest time in reporting via SMS or other means. These outreach efforts (if successful) can constitute an extensive mobilization of civil society, which in turn is expected to unfold positive effects for democracy (Coleman 1999; Hague and Loader 2002). Some observers see citizens playing a much stronger and more direct role in demanding accountability and transparency through the use of ICTs (Verclas & Mechael 2008; Clark & Aufderheide 2009), even up to the formation of a "fifth estate" in addition to the fourth estate of the mainstream media (Sasaki 2010). Among other things, crowdsourced election monitoring includes "communicating with and demanding accountability from elected representatives, [and] monitoring official conduct" (Diamond & Morlino 2004:24), because election monitoring reports ultimately are expected to influence the incentives of political actors. Much of this emerging field is summarized under the rubric "mobile governance" (M. Poblet 2011). From the view of the study of social movements, activists are using ICTs, mobile technology and crowdsourcing to mobilize, to realize new political opportunities, and to frame their discourse in the public sphere (Garrett 2006; van de Donk et al., 2004).

This is obviously highly relevant for the purported positive effects of election monitoring on democracy (see mechanism IV and V in section 4). The mobilization of civil society is a critical success factor for crowdsourced monitoring efforts, because only this mobilization will guarantee a large number of reports. At the same time, due to this mobilization, the project will generate positive effects on the external embeddedness of democracy, namely by strengthening civil society. "Spontaneously-created organizations and movements form the core of [...] a sensitive civil society. They 'find, absorb, condense, and pass on' public problems 'to the political arena like an amplifier'" (Merkel 2004:47, referring to Habermas 1997:443). This spontaneous and uncoordinated cooperation of citizens through crowdsourcing has been described as "cognitive stigmergy" elsewhere (Marsden 2012) and strengthens the public sphere while also facilitating an engaged and active public, i.e. social capital.

d) Outputs

A very crucial difference between traditional and crowdsourced election monitoring lies in the outputs they produce. While the former usually results in the publication of a report that evaluates the conduct of the elections, the latter produces no such report but rather a geographic visualization of the received citizen reports in the form of a map. The advantages and disadvantages of both approaches are evident.

A published report includes a normative judgment about the quality of the observed election. It can be used for advocacy, the evaluation of democratic progress, putting pressure on fraudulent governments and many other purposes. It represents a much clearer and definitive output than the host of unedited observations that appear on the map of a crowdsourced project. At the same time, it takes time and money to aggregate and edit the reports of STOs and LTOs, so that final reports are usually published weeks or even months after the election.

A crowdsourced map on the other hand works in near real-time. Reports are visualized as they are received. The timeliness of crowdsourcing is vastly superior when compared to conventional EOMs. Media and expert observers can use crowdsourced reports immediately (as they happen) to investigate incidents further and to add their own expertise to the reporting.

In addition, the mapping itself is a feature that neither international nor domestic EMOs typically use. Maps are easily understood and give an overview of complex circumstances in one glance. Mapping is therefore well-suited to inform the public on irregularities and draws

attention to problematic constituencies or regions for further investigation. Advocacy based on visualization is also more potent than one based on text.

While the contribution of crowdsourced election monitoring usually ends with observation and mapping of events, most traditional EMOs engage in other activities as well. From voter education to training of political parties or capacity-building for EMBs they try to contribute to the wider environment of the electoral regime and political rights in a country. Through these activities they hope to achieve gradual normative as well as institutional change. In the same direction goes the publication of policy advice or recommendations for governments prior to holding elections. In practice, many EMBs already work together with EMOs and receive crucial knowledge and skills through their training.

e) *Legitimacy and Mandate*
The outputs produced by traditional and crowdsourced election observation are closely related to the question of their legitimacy or mandate. Traditional EMOs are required to produce summaries and reports because they are mandated by international organizations and mostly depend on their funding. A report is the required output to secure further funding. And substantial funding is necessary to pay for training and dispatchment of observers. The costs of crowdsourced initiatives on the other hand are negligible. A large number of reports can be harvested with minimal costs as the examples from Southeast Asia show.[15] Therefore, crowdsourced initiatives are to a large extent independent of donors and do not have to conform to their standards of outputs.

But the fact that traditional EMOs are mandated certainly adds to the legitimacy of their findings. Furthermore, they are invited by governments or at least accredited by the relevant EMBs. Their outputs therefore bear more weight than the findings of crowdsourced initiatives. The latter might face restrictions in getting their message across when it comes to publicizing their findings, because they do not have the weight of an established monitoring organization behind them.

Yet, this same issue of legitimacy might also be an advantage for crowdsourced initiatives. They derive their legitimacy directly from the logic of citizens' political rights, without being dependent on accreditation or invitation. Crowdsourcing is only an extension of the argument that any citizen has the right to monitor political processes, without other bodies as an intermediary. This, and the fact that in practice crowdsourced projects are mostly initiated spontaneously by internet activists or similar groups, means that such initiatives can function under restrictive circumstances where traditional monitoring fails. The 2010 elections in Myanmar are an example of this. While there was no significant presence of international or even domestic election observation, a crowdsourced initiative existed and recorded election irregularities (see Tab.1).

6. Conclusion: Impact of crowdsourced election monitoring on embedded democracy

Through a comparison of the methodologies of traditional and crowdsourced election monitoring within the analytical framework of embedded democracy I have attempted to identify several mechanisms through which both methodologies should potentially strengthen the partial regimes and external embeddedness of democracy. These mechanisms are: incentives for vertical accountability, incentives for horizontal accountability, domestic

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[15] The total budget for www.thaielectionwatch.net for example amounted to US$ 650.

normative change, accumulation of social capital, strengthening of the public sphere, and international normative change.

Through the theoretical rule of proportion we can conclude that there should be added value of crowdsourcing in regards to some of these mechanisms, while its contribution in some areas is less clear or negligible. These tentative conclusions are summarized in Tab.3.

	Partial regimes			External embeddedness		
	I Incentives for vertical accountability	II Incentives for horizontal accountability	III Normative change (domestic)	IV Social capital	V Public sphere	VI Normative change (Int'l)
Impact of crowdsourcing	mixed/unclear	mixed/unclear	low	high	high	low

Tab.3: The added impact of crowdsourced election monitoring on embedded democracy.

Regarding *incentives for vertical and horizontal accountability* (mechanisms I and I), crowdsourced monitoring can potentially amplify traditional monitoring. But its effects are clearly dependent on the number of reports and the amount of legitimacy that a crowdsourced project can amass. Incentives are like sticks and carrots. If the stick does not hurt or the carrots are too small, incentive structures will not change. This means that crowdsourced monitoring will only become relevant if the number of reports reach a critical mass and draw media attention. In the cases of crowdsourced monitoring that have served as mini-survey for this article (see Tab.1), this was clearly not the case. In other instances, such as the Lebanese initiative Sharek 961[16] the number of reports might approach the critical threshold. This was not least due to the fact that this initiative worked closely with other civil society organizations to mobilize citizen reporters. These co-operations also increased the projects legitimacy and drew media attention.

If the crowdsourced project is integrated with traditional monitoring from the very beginning and thus serves as an additional component within the established methodology of an EMO, the effect on incentive structures of political parties and governments should be amplified. It would then include the best of both worlds: timeliness, visualization and wisdom of the crowd as well as a vetted methodology and legitimacy. Visualization and real-time publication is important because the information is immediately publicly available and actionable. Because of this publicity, crowdsourcing should increase the costs of cheating for parties or increase the incentives for EMBs to investigate reports of misconduct. This is reinforced through mainstream media investigations based on the crowdsourced reports. Through this mechanism, crowdsourcing is expected to enhance vertical and horizontal accountability. But only if significant numbers of reports are reached, and legitimacy is strengthened by cooperating with traditional EOMs.

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[16] www.sharek961.org/

The added effects of crowdsourcing on *domestic and international normative change* (mechanisms III and VI) should be negligible. The main argument here is that gradual normative change happens through long-term engagement and activities that go beyond the monitoring and reporting of irregularities during the election. The mechanisms might work for traditional monitoring because it often includes capacity-building, voter education and other forms of intensive engagement. None of the known crowdsourced initiatives include such activities.

Furthermore, traditional EMOs have the access to EMBs, governments and political parties that is clearly necessary to affect any kind of normative change through dialogue and norm diffusion. Here, it is relevant to note that even if a crowdsourced project included such outreach and training, the epistemology of crowdsourcing is likely to cause defensive reflexes from governmental institutions. The mistrust of the "crowd" and its wisdom will likely discredit any organization that employs crowdsourcing vis-à-vis state agencies. Especially election commissions seem to have an allergic reaction towards any attempts of what is perceived as an infringement into their territory. Capacity-building or recommendations offered by EMOs that employ crowdsourcing are likely to be disregarded. Yet, election commissions would be the ideal third partner for comprehensive election monitoring. They usually have the most extensive network, reaching down to every constituency. Their established channels for complaints are also a great source of information on irregularities. At the very least, crowdsourced reports could serve as another source of information for possible investigations. In an expanded co-operation, a crowdsourced platform might even be used by the election commission to announce results of investigations, to draw attention to their hotlines, or to disseminate other election-relevant information. In turn, co-operation with election commissions will lend legitimacy to crowdsourced initiatives. So far, governments in Southeast Asia seem somewhat reluctant to work with new ICT initiatives. It seems rather that they want to keep citizens at a distance. But instead of being fearful of the "uncontrollable crowd" and criticizing the drawbacks of crowdsourcing, ASEAN governments would be well-advised to embrace new social media. Citizens throughout Southeast Asia will use new technologies and new channels for information-sharing anyway, whether endorsed by their governments or not. So, governments might as well engage with ICTs and crowdsourcing proactively.

This leads to the third conclusion, the *strengthening of civil society* (mechanisms IV and V), the area where I believe crowdsourcing unfolds the most added value to traditional monitoring. Because of the very necessity to harvest a large number of citizen reports from all corners of the country in order to gain relevance, a crowdsourced monitoring project is likely to engage actively in outreach and mobilization of civil society. It makes sense to rely on civil society organizations and use their networks to spread the news about the project, thus tapping into existing channels of mobilization. The allure of crowdsourcing is the direct engagement of citizens in holding their governments and parties accountable. There is no need to organize oneself in NGOs or other formalized structures. Rather, the citizen can report his or her observations of irregularities directly and thereby gains voice. It is these voices from previously unheard citizens that constitute a huge accumulation of social capital and a direct, spontaneous mechanism of protection against electoral fraud or other abuses. All this is of course contingent on citizens being informed about the project and also the project's relevance in the eyes of the media.

Even if crowdsourced reports are not acted upon, the very engagement of citizens in the endeavor to directly make their voices heard and hold their leaders accountable widens the public sphere considerably. First, it inserts previously unknown information into the sphere of public discourse (because of the fact that crowdsourced reports potentially cover even remote areas and a longer timespan than traditional monitoring). Secondly it encourages citizens to actively engage with this information, to either dispute it, confirm it, or at least register its existence. The public sphere widens because this engagement, which takes place in the context of the local all over the country, is now taken to a wider audience by the means of mapping and

real-time reporting. This enthusiastic view might underestimate the effects of the digital divide or the apathy of the public in face of an overkill of information. However, the potential of strengthening social capital and the public sphere is certainly present in crowdsourced election monitoring.

It also becomes apparent that the theoretical framework of embedded democracy is more useful in this regard than other frameworks – either minimalist procedural democracy, or maximalist social or liberal democracy. The maximalist understanding is unnecessary in this context, because questions of equality and social justice are hardly going to be influenced by election monitoring – neither traditional nor crowdsourced. On the other hand, a minimalist understanding, focusing solely on elections would blank out the contribution of crowdsourcing that is most significant in my opinion: the strengthening of civil society through the accumulation of social capital and the widening of the public sphere.

In sum, a theoretical discussion of the possible impact of crowdsourced election monitoring on democracy has revealed that positive effects are to be expected in certain areas, while mixed or negligible effects are likely in other areas. The whole discussion was based on an ideal type of crowdsourced election monitoring – a type that has yet to emerge in this young applied field. It seems shrewd to integrate crowdsourcing with traditional monitoring and also cooperate more closely with election commissions and other EMBs in order to maximize the potential positive impacts.

These theoretical deliberations should not cloak the many criticisms of crowdsourcing. Among many others, some of the reservations regard: (a) skepticism towards veracity and truthfulness of crowdsourced citizen reports; (b) the risk of inflaming existing conflicts through hate speech or defamation of public persons, spread via uncontrolled and uncontrollable reports; (c) the lack of sufficient evidence to assess whether crowdsourcing has any added value when compared to existing methodologies/mechanisms that try to ensure transparency and accountability; (d) concerns about security and privacy of citizen reporters; (e) the wish to dissolve the somewhat antagonistic relationship between crowdsourced initiatives and state agencies.

The present article might however contribute to our theoretical understanding of the issues at hand, which is the necessary precondition for future empirical examinations of the "democratizing" effects of election monitoring in general and crowdsourced election monitoring in particular. Many questions are yet to be answered: How can the success of crowdsourced monitoring be measured? What are critical success factors? And what are best practices for integrating both approaches under the framework of democracy assistance?

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