

Election Administration Systems Index (EASI)TM



Credible and regular elections play a central role in determining the political and economic trajectory of a country. While there is popular consensus that elections should be free and fair, there has been little agreement about how to define those qualities and even less about how to measure them. RTI International has developed the **Election Administration Systems Index (EASI)**—an innovative index to gauge how well elections are administered in a country.

RTI's EASI provides a practical, multidimensional, expert-survey based mechanism for measuring election quality. EASI can help

- bring to the fore concrete benchmarks by which to measure a country's electoral reform process
- provide insight into election processes
- identify weaknesses that can be addressed through international assistance

RTI is currently in the final phases of development and considering the potential to expand EASI's application worldwide. We are seeking funding from election assistance donors that are interested in using this diagnostic and assessment tool to better understand and improve election administration.

How EASI Works

For any electoral system to be effective, three facets — 1) open participation, 2) fair competition, and 3) adherence to process — have to be maintained not only on voting day, but also in the pre-election and post-election environments. With this in mind, as reflected in the sample 3x3 matrix below for South Africa, RTI designed EASI to produce indices for assessing each of the three facets at each of the three periods of time.

	South Africa			
	Pre-Voting	Act of Voting	Post-Voting	
Participation	1.0	1.0	1.0	3.0
Competition	0.85	1.0	0.88	2.73
Process	0.75	0.83	1.0	2.58
Totals	2.60	2.83	2.88	



The index scores are drawn from a survey, based on latest scholarship and practice of election administration, with at least five experts in the target country. Survey results are tabulated for each facet and period of the election. The scores in each of the nine cells in the matrix, all having a maximum of 1.0, reflect the relative quality of the multiple electoral procedures relevant to that cell. Serious differences in scoring will be resolved through a review of the issue with the EASI staff and country experts. Percentages are to be calculated based on the total possible points in the cell, row, or column.

With EASI, the measurement of procedures is comprehensive, based on more reliable data sources, and can be more useful in diagnosing potential trouble areas than with currently available perception-oriented indices. The index is also able to capture various elements of the ballot chain of custody, which is crucial in gauging the quality of elections and something no other extant indicator does. By providing indices before, during, and after the vote, EASI allows monitors and program implementers to tailor their activities to the part of the electoral cycle most in need of assistance.

A Better Way Forward

Scholars and practitioners have devoted significant attention to elections, but approaches and objectives vary considerably. They range from descriptions of electoral institutions and practices to practical guidance for election administration or observation. Some involve forensic analysis of electoral fraud, while others focus on conceptual prototypes and pilot applications for data gathering. Work in this area tends to be either overly descriptive or highly conceptual and based on time-consuming and expensive data-gathering efforts. Some existing democracy-related indices—Freedom House's *Freedom in the World*, the *Global Integrity Index*, *Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index*, and Bertelsmann's *Transformation Index*—include election aspects, but they have a broader purpose, ignore important election issues, and employ sometimes ineffective data-gathering methodologies.

RTI believes that an index *explicitly* designed to gauge adherence to election procedures can address many of the challenges related to election administration. EASI differs from other prototype attempts, and its distinctive approach explains its value to election assistance donors. Building on conceptual insights from empirical analyses of elections, EASI assesses the key facets critical to a fair and effective electoral system, including, for example, the provision of access to the election process for adult citizens, assurance of free and fair competition between political entities, and protection of the integrity of the electoral process.

Development, Pilot Results, and Next Steps

In developing EASI, RTI has benefited from multiple rounds of expert feedback, in addition to conducting a literature review, an indicator analysis, and interviews with election assistance practitioners. The conceptual matrix and the initial survey instrument was revised based on feedback from Washington-based experts, and then tested successfully with local experts in Indonesia, Pakistan, Peru, South Africa, and Ukraine.

A second round of feedback from additional experts on the survey instrument and pilot results led to minor revisions. With full confidence in the methodology and conceptual framework, we are moving toward EASI's final development and its expanded application around the world.

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