



International Scientific and Practical Conference on Ensuring Observation and Expertise of Electoral Processes

Conference proceedings

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Monitoring and Expert Evaluation of Electoral Processes

A. INTRODUCTION

Monitoring and expert evaluation of electoral processes are vital to uphold democratic integrity, fostering trust among policymakers, electoral officials, and democracy advocates by showing their crucial role in ensuring elections are free, fair, transparent, and credible. At the global level, electoral monitoring is the systematic collection of information using established methodologies, followed by impartial assessment and reporting. Further, this includes domestic citizen monitoring and international observation missions led by organizations such as the United Nations. Expert evaluation offers a more technical assessment. Electoral experts analyze compliance with national laws and international standards. Missions such as those deployed by the European Union provide independent, technical recommendations to improve electoral frameworks and administration.

B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Monitoring and expert evaluation have evolved as key safeguards against electoral fraud, lack of transparency, and political interference. International and regional bodies have since developed normative frameworks and methodologies to guide election observation. Modern electoral monitoring expanded significantly after the Cold War, as many countries transitioned to multiparty democracy. Organizations such as the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Union began deploying structured observation missions to assess electoral integrity. Expert evaluation complements electoral processes observation by offering evidence-informed analysis of electoral systems, technology, and administration. Evaluation also informs contemporary and emerging areas in electoral processes management, such as digital voting, campaign finance, and cybersecurity. Expert missions often produce recommendations that help countries align with global democratic standards.

C. THE KENYAN CONTEXT

In Kenya, electoral monitoring and expert evaluation have developed alongside major constitutional reforms and the establishment of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), demonstrating a strong legal foundation that reassures international observers and democracy advocates of the country's commitment to credible elections. The Constitution of Kenya 2010 establishes the IEBC under Article 88, tasking it with conducting or supervising elections in a manner that is free, fair, transparent, accurate, and accountable. Article 81(e) further requires that elections be conducted by an independent body to safeguard integrity. The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission Act (No. 9 of 2011) explicitly includes facilitation of "observation, monitoring and evaluation of elections" among the IEBC's functions. The Elections Act (2011) and the Elections Offences Act (2016) empower the IEBC to investigate electoral offences, regulate campaign spending, and enforce codes of conduct—key reference points for observers and experts. Following the 2007–08 election crises, electoral reforms led to the creation of the IEBC in 2011 and opened space for broader domestic and international observation. The IEBC has institutionalized mechanisms such as dispute resolution, codes

of conduct, and post-election evaluation reports, which provide structured feedback for continuous improvement. Domestic observer groups (civil society coalitions) and international bodies routinely accredit and deploy observers, guided by IEBC accreditation procedures. Kenyan experience shows that observer participation positively affects perceptions of electoral quality and influences international acceptance of election outcomes. The IEBC's post-election evaluation reports document strengths and weaknesses in logistics, technology, dispute management, and security. These reports form a formal record used by experts and reform advocates to recommend legal and administrative changes that turns into a continuous cycle of improvement.

D. THE GLOBAL ARENA AND BEST PRACTICES

Electoral monitoring and evaluation have become standardized global practices, with countries implementing international standards through frameworks like the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, guiding how assessments are conducted to ensure they are comprehensive, evidence-based, and transparent. The modern framework was solidified with the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, endorsed by major intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations at the United Nations. The Declaration affirms that states may invite observers, which missions must be impartial, and that assessments must be comprehensive, evidence-based, and transparent. Global election monitoring involves three main clusters of actors: Multilateral Organizations: The United Nations, European Union, African Union, and Organization of American States regularly deploy observation missions and provide electoral assistance; International Non-Governmental Organizations: The Carter Center, National Democratic Institute, and International Foundation for Electoral Systems deploy technical expert teams and civic observer programs; and Regional and Domestic Networks: Regional coalitions and local observer groups work alongside international missions, strengthening domestic oversight.

E. CHALLENGES IN ELECTORAL MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Despite their critical role, electoral monitoring and evaluation face several persistent challenges: Political Interference and Restricted Access: Governments may limit observer accreditation, movement, or access to critical stages, undermining transparency and credibility; Resource and Capacity Limitations: Effective monitoring requires substantial financial, technical, and human resources. Domestic observer groups and electoral bodies often face constraints that limit their reach and depth; Inconsistent Methodologies: Different organizations apply varying methodologies, indicators, and reporting standards, leading to inconsistent assessments; and Security Risks: In fragile or conflict-affected states, observers face threats, intimidation, and violence, particularly when electoral competition triggers unrest.

F. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR STRENGTHENING MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A forward-looking approach is needed to enhance credibility, efficiency, and adaptability: Harmonization of Global Standards: Aligning observation frameworks, indicators, and

reporting formats would improve the comparability and reliability of electoral assessments; Strengthened Cooperation among International Bodies: Joint missions, information-sharing, and coordinated reporting can reduce duplication and ensure consistency; Adoption of Innovative Monitoring Tools: Digital data collection, real-time reporting, data analytics, and geospatial technologies are essential. Monitoring online campaigns and disinformation is increasingly critical; and Continuous Professionalization of Electoral Experts: Ongoing training, certification, and capacity-building are essential for maintaining the competence of observers and experts.

G. CONCLUSION

Advancing electoral monitoring and evaluation requires a coordinated global effort focused on standardization, collaboration, innovation, and capacity building. In addition, aligning international practices, leveraging technology, and strengthening professional expertise, makes the global community enhance credibility, transparency, and integrity of elections in an emerging complex democratic arena.





Sebastian Lopez Calendino

Director of Center for Electoral and Political-Institutional Studies of the National University of La Plata

Who Observes the Observers?

Good morning. Buenos días. Доброе утро. My name is Sebastián López Calendino. I am Director of the Observatory for Electoral and Political-Institutional Studies at the National University of La Plata, in Argentina. For more than a decade, I have taken part in international election observation missions in Latin America and in other regions of the world. Today I come with a question that may sound provocative, but one that arises from the deepest respect for this discipline: Who observes the observers? There are indices to measure electoral integrity. There are metrics to assess democratic quality. There are protocols to certify the legitimacy of an electoral process. But to this day, there is no systematic, standardized, and scientifically validated instrument for measuring the credibility of those who observe these processes. Susan Hyde documented how election observation moved from being an exception to becoming a universal expectation. However, her analysis shows that the mere presence of observers does not guarantee the quality of observation. The question Hyde left open is precisely the one this paper takes up: who certifies the certifier? Judith Kelley empirically demonstrated that election observation does not always produce the expected effects, and that its results depend largely on the quality, training, and independence of the observers themselves. This is the theoretical starting point of our proposal. To understand what is missing, we must first understand what we already have.

Existing Indices

Contemporary political science has produced remarkably sophisticated tools for measuring the quality of electoral processes. Pippa Norris's Electoral Integrity Project, the Varieties of Democracy project at the University of Gothenburg, The Economist's Democracy Index, and Freedom House all answer the same question: how good was the election? These are valuable, rigorous, and academically excellent tools. But there is a systematic omission in all of them. None asks: how credible, trained, and methodologically sound were those who observed and certified that election? The quality of the input - the observer - is never questioned. There is an implicit assumption in the entire architecture of international election observation: that the observer is, by definition, a neutral, competent, and legitimate actor. This assumption, which Thomas Carothers already questioned in the 1990s, remains firmly and comfortably embedded in institutions. Carothers was one of the first to point out that the proliferation of observation missions had created an industry in which the appearance of legitimacy could replace real legitimacy. Simpson and Donno showed that poorly executed electoral monitoring can, paradoxically, legitimize fraudulent processes. The quality of observers matters - and the absence of control over them matters even more. If we know that observers can fail, that they can be instrumentalized, and that we have no metrics to assess them, what do we propose? We propose measuring them.

The Observer Credibility Index

The Observer Credibility Index - which we will call the OCI - is an original methodological proposal that seeks to systematize, through verifiable indicators, the level of preparation, independence, operational capacity, and methodological rigor of election observers. It does not evaluate the electoral process

being observed: it evaluates the person who observes. The OCI proposes five analytical dimensions. First: accredited education and training - educational level, training in electoral law, previous missions, and hours of certified training. Second: independence and impartiality - absence of party ties, transparency in mission financing, and verified neutrality. Third: methodological rigor - use of standardized instruments, consistency of protocols, and traceability of the reporting chain. Fourth: contextual competence - knowledge of the local language, understanding of the country's political history, and knowledge of the electoral geography of the territory. Fifth: communication and institutional transparency press protocol, social media management, and response to disinformation and fake news.

The Training Model

An index without a training process is an empty label. The cornerstone of the OCI is training. And that training must be rigorous, progressive, and mandatory. The model is structured in two stages. First, a virtual phase before the mission, which standardizes baseline knowledge. Second, a mandatory in-person phase on the ground, which cannot be replaced by any virtual component, however sophisticated it may be. The virtual training includes seven modules: the political history of the observed country; electoral geography and voting cartography; the electoral legal framework; security and risk management; disinformation and social media; management of forms and observation instruments; and relations with the press. The in-person training takes place in the observed country and region in the days leading up to election day. Its objective is practical contextualization and operational simulation: visits to polling centers, role-playing exercises for critical situations, meetings with local authorities, and real-time security briefings.

Application and Validation of the OCI

Training without assessment is incomplete. The OCI does not only propose what should be learned: it proposes how to measure whether that learning translates into effective practice in the field. The OCI is not an entrance exam. It is a process of continuous assessment throughout the entire mission cycle, structured around three moments. First, an ex ante assessment: review of the candidate's profile, certification of completed training, approval of the in-person examination, and verification of institutional independence. Second, an in situ assessment: supervision of the quality of forms, consistency of reports, territorial coverage, and incident management. Third, an ex post assessment: analysis of consistency between individual reports and the mission's final report, review of public communications, and compliance with institutional protocols. Each observer's final OCI score is built from these three weighted moments and is integrated into their historical record for future missions. The major election observation organizations have developed high-quality training materials. Their manuals and methodologies are valuable technical references. However, none has implemented a system for assessing individual observer performance that produces an aggregate, comparable, and cumulative indicator. The OCI does not compete with these models: it complements them with the evaluative dimension they lack.

Conclusion

What we are proposing today is not only an index. It is a paradigm shift. We move from asking, «Was the election good?» to also asking, «Was it well observed?» And that second question changes everything. Election observation is now a global institution. It channels expectations, grants legitimacy, and forms a constitutive part of what we understand as procedural democracy in the twenty-first century. But every institution that certifies must itself be certified. That is the gap the OCI seeks to fill. This is not about distrusting observers. It is about making them more credible. An observer with a high OCI is an observer whose voice carries greater weight, whose report generates greater confidence among international actors and local citizens. An observer with a low OCI should not be disqualified: they should be trained. The OCI is a tool for continuous improvement, not exclusion. Election observation needs to be observed. That is why we make three concrete proposals. First: establish an international working group to design the pilot version of the OCI. Second: implement it experimentally in at least three missions during the 2026-2027 electoral cycle. Third: develop a certified digital training platform accessible in multiple languages. The OCI is our proposal for beginning to build this. I invite you to join us. Thank you very much. Muchas gracias. Большое спасибо.





**Srđan
Mazalica**

Member of National
Assembly of the
Republic of Srpska

Trust, Legitimacy, and Institutional Resilience in Electoral Processes

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Organizers, Dear Colleagues, It is a great honor for me to address this conference dedicated to the monitoring and expert assessment of electoral processes. I represent Republika Srpska, one of the two constitutional entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country with a highly complex political architecture established by the Dayton Peace Agreement. Today, I would like to share a comparative perspective on electoral processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Russian Federation, with a particular focus on the issues of trust, legitimacy, and institutional resilience. Bosnia and Herzegovina formally possesses a democratic electoral system. In practice, however, it faces serious challenges related to public trust and political stability. Particular attention should be paid to the work of the Central Election Commission. In recent years, its composition has been formed under circumstances that have raised concerns regarding the transparency of the selection process and its political neutrality. Moreover, disputes concerning the Commission's decisions regularly arise within the socio-political sphere, particularly with regard to repeat voting at individual polling stations. Notably, such situations most frequently occur in Republika Srpska, which is often subjected to destabilizing pressure from Western embassies and the political establishment in Sarajevo through the actions of the Central Election Commission. It should also be noted that the appointment of Christian Schmidt as High Representative was not approved by the United Nations Security Council. Nevertheless, he introduced more than one hundred amendments to electoral legislation and adopted a number of other decisions that, in our view, constituted unlawful interference in electoral processes and democratic governance. Digitalization and the modernization of elections are, in principle, positive developments. However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina this process remains the subject of considerable debate. The issue is that technological solutions are being introduced at an accelerated pace, under substantial external pressure and without achieving full public consensus regarding security standards, data protection, and the transparency of public procurement procedures. As a result, questions arise not only about the technical readiness of the system but also about public confidence in future electoral outcomes. Another distinctive feature of Bosnia and Herzegovina's electoral system is its high degree of political fragmentation. The low electoral threshold and the current seat-allocation formula facilitate the emergence of a large number of small political parties. On the one hand, this broadens political representation. On the other hand, such a structure makes the political system less stable and more vulnerable to external influence. Within the expert community, potential reforms are increasingly being discussed, including raising the electoral threshold and revising the method of seat allocation as instruments for strengthening political stability. As a consequence of these factors, virtually every electoral cycle in Bosnia and Herzegovina is accompanied by significant political disputes. Following elections, it is common for:

- election results to be challenged;
- the legitimacy of the process to be questioned;
- political tensions to intensify.

As a result, elections do not always fulfill their primary function of stabilizing the political system. Against this backdrop, the experience of the Russian Federation is particularly noteworthy. I had the opportunity to observe the parliamentary elections in 2021 and the presidential election in 2024. During these missions, I met with representatives of various political parties as well as representatives of electoral candidates. I would like to emphasize an important observation: none of my interlocutors, regardless of their political affiliation or position, expressed doubts about the integrity or fairness of the electoral process. This is an important indicator of institutional trust. The Russian Federation actively employs modern technologies, including:

- electronic voting;
- video surveillance;
- technical vote-counting systems.

Observers are able to monitor the process in real time, which significantly enhances transparency and confidence in the results. When comparing the two systems, several observations can be made. In the Russian Federation:

- there is a high level of organizational efficiency;
- electoral procedures benefit from technological transparency;
- participants in the process demonstrate confidence in electoral institutions.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- organizational efficiency remains low;
- electoral legislation is not the product of broad political consensus;
- the election commission lacks sufficient legitimacy;
- the electoral process contributes to political instability rather than mitigating it.

Dear Colleagues, The main conclusion is straightforward: the legitimacy of elections depends not only on formal procedures but also on the trust of participants in the political process. Without trust, no political system can achieve long-term stability. Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to search for a balance between internal development and external influence. For this reason, international dialogue and the exchange of experience remain of critical importance. Thank you for your attention.



**David
Alejandro Toro
Ramírez**

Member of House of
Representatives of
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Republic of Colombia

Independent Election Observation and Sovereignty in Latin America

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the invitation to participate in the International Scientific and Practical Conference on the Monitoring and Expert Assessment of Electoral Processes, organized by the Center for International Interaction and Cooperation. It is in forums such as this, alongside leading experts in the field, that we must engage in the critical discussions required by the complex challenges democracies face today. In Latin America, we are experiencing firsthand the consequences of the profound transformation of United States foreign policy. While it would be naïve to believe that Washington has ever viewed the region as anything other than its sphere of influence, the increasingly aggressive manner in which it seeks to assert that dominance is pushing the boundaries of state sovereignty- a fundamental principle of the international system. In the electoral sphere, this dynamic becomes especially dangerous. Elections represent the most direct and intimate expression of a people's will. When an external power seeks to influence or manipulate them, it infringes upon the democratic choice of millions of citizens. We have already witnessed instances in which Washington has played a regrettably active role in electoral and political developments across the region. In Honduras, for example, the Trump administration ordered the release of former President Juan Orlando Hernández, who had been imprisoned in the United States on drug trafficking and corruption charges. This decision was not driven by legal considerations; rather, it served as a political signal aimed at reshaping alliances in Central America, demonstrating that justice can become negotiable when geopolitical interests are at stake. As Colombia approaches its 2026 presidential election, we have also seen opponents of the current national government actively lobbying in Washington in an effort to encourage U.S. institutions to make unfounded allegations against President Gustavo Petro and presidential candidate Iván Cepeda. From this platform, I want to be absolutely clear: Colombia will not tolerate any form of interference in its electoral process. We will not allow threats or pressure to dictate the will of our people. Colombia is a sovereign state, and Colombians will choose their leaders freely, without pressure from any foreign power, regardless of its size or influence. Against this backdrop, independent international election observation is not an academic luxury—it is an instrument for safeguarding sovereignty. Rigorous, professional, and technically grounded observation, free from the geopolitical biases of major powers, is one of the strongest guarantees that peoples can exercise their right to choose their representatives without external interference. Through my participation in election observation missions in Russia, I have personally witnessed electoral processes organized with a level of logistical efficiency and citizen participation that many countries often presented as democratic models would do well to acknowledge. The issue is not always the technical quality of elections. The real question is who has the power to shape the narrative surrounding them. In an increasingly multipolar world—and that world is already a reality - election observation must also become multipolar. It cannot remain the exclusive domain /of organizations that effectively serve the interests of a single power. We must build an international community of observers that operates

according to shared professional standards, remains independent of geopolitical agendas, and is capable of defending the legitimacy of electoral processes across the Global South. Peoples have the right to choose their own future. That right deserves to be protected.





**Manantsoa
Thierry
Rakotonarivo**

Chairman of
Independent National
Electoral Commission
of the Republic of
Madagascar

International Observation and the Experience of Madagascar

Distinguished guests, with due respect to your ranks and titles and in full observance of protocol, Ladies and gentlemen, It is with great pleasure that I extend to you my sincere greetings. It is both an honor and a privilege for me to address this distinguished assembly today at the opening of this conference and to consider the topic "The Importance of International Observation of the Electoral Process: The Experience of Madagascar." This is a very broad subject, one that cannot be reduced to a seven-minute speech, as it covers everything from basic principles to geopolitics. First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the organizers for giving me this rare opportunity to take part in this conference. Your Excellencies, distinguished participants, In many countries, the issue of citizens' trust in institutions lies at the heart of discussions on the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process. This trust, especially in the body responsible for conducting elections, remains fragile. Nevertheless, it is precisely this trust that encourages citizens to participate actively in elections and ensures recognition of the electoral process. In this regard, various tools have been developed to restore lost trust. Election observation occupies a central place among these mechanisms. International election observation has become an important mechanism for ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and assessing its legitimacy. Indeed, international observation is not limited to simple external monitoring, a symbolic presence, or a formality accompanying the democratization process in a given country. Over time, it has become one of the key instruments for verifying compliance with the international standards and norms to which countries have committed themselves. It contributes significantly to increasing confidence in the process, reassures citizens, deters possible fraud, and strengthens acceptance of the results by both political actors and the international community as a whole. Every stage of the process - from election preparation to the announcement of results - is therefore subject to close and rigorous scrutiny in accordance with the principles, norms, and international standards enshrined in the relevant conventions to which the country has acceded. Over the past decades, both nationally and internationally, demand for the observation of electoral processes has increased. In Madagascar, international observation is accepted, facilitated, and even encouraged; it has become established practice, even though elections fall within the sphere of «national sovereignty.» The example of Madagascar is illustrative. From 2013 through the most recent elections in 2024, observation missions have been deployed continuously - both short-term missions on election day to monitor the conduct of voting and medium-term missions extending up to the announcement of preliminary results. In addition to representatives of partner countries with diplomatic missions in Madagascar, organizations such as the African Union, the European Union, SADC, and the International Organization of La Francophonie regularly participate. Since 2018, the presence of so-called non-traditional and non-state observers representing civil society from Europe and Africa, accredited by the electoral commission, has also been noted. Statistics for the period from 2018 to 2024 demonstrate the active involvement of the international community in observing

elections in Madagascar. The number of associations and organizations accredited by Madagascar's Central Election Commission to observe elections increased from 54 during the 2018 presidential election to 133 during the 2024 parliamentary elections. In all cases, their work strengthens citizens' trust, promotes international cooperation, and helps identify and implement necessary improvements on the basis of their recommendations. This contributes to consolidating best practices and strengthening respect for fundamental legal principles such as human rights, equality, transparency, freedom of expression, and, more recently, inclusiveness and gender equality - and therefore good electoral governance in the interests of the democratic process. Of course, international observation has its limitations: it cannot be triggered automatically, nor can it directly impose sanctions on a state. Nevertheless, it remains an indispensable tool for supporting democracy, especially in contexts where democracy is still in the process of consolidation, as is the case in Madagascar. One of the most frequent criticisms of international observation in Madagascar is that it turns into a form of «electoral tourism»: observers arrive only a few days before voting and cover only selected major cities of their choice. In this regard, for international observation to be effective, several conditions must be met: sufficient duration of the mission, full territorial coverage, qualified observers, and adequate resources. Ladies and gentlemen, democracy is not only a civic commitment; it is also a collective one. Observation, especially international observation, is not a passive gaze. It is a partnership, a form of support, assistance, and a guarantee that every vote will be protected and genuinely taken into account. Let us therefore make this instrument effective and adapted to the cultural specificities and context of each country in an era of rapid technological development. Strengthening cooperation and exchanging best practices is one way to achieve this goal. I am convinced that the purpose of the meeting to which we have been invited is precisely to develop such interaction and to work together on solutions. I already look forward to the fruitful and constructive discussions that await us over these two days, and I wish everyone successful work. Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, Distinguished participants, thank you for your attention.



**Vito
Grittani**

Founder of
International
Diplomatic
Observatory

International Election Observation in the Context of Sovereignty and Dialogue

Analysis of Practices of External Interference in Elections: Actors, Technologies, and Countermeasures

Actors

The «collective West» and its structures The United States The European Union Individual Western countries Western satellite states, including Ukraine Western intergovernmental structures, such as NATO, PACE, and the OSCE/ODIHR Western non-governmental structures, such as the Soros Foundation Western corporations, political parties, and other actors

Ideology

Neocolonialism Globalism The idea of limited sovereignty, «the end of history,» the «triumph of liberal values,» and the «export of democracy» «The commitments we have made to our own people and to one another will not only strengthen our democracies - by standing against autocracy, fighting corruption, and supporting human rights for all - but will also help prepare fertile ground for democracy to flourish around the world.» Joe Biden «For many years, Western ideologues and politicians have been telling the whole world over and over again: 'There is no alternative to democracy.' True, what they meant was precisely the Western, so-called liberal model of democracy. All other forms and models of people's rule they dismissed with contempt and - I want to emphasize this - with arrogance and condescension.» Vladimir Putin

Objectives

To support a political force loyal to an external actor, or to remove from power a political force that is not loyal to that actor To change the foreign-policy orientation of the target country To change the ideological orientation of the government of the target country To limit or deprive the target country of its sovereignty To weaken the target country To destroy or break up the target country

Technologies

An «electoral revolution» Information attacks, discrediting the authorities or individual politicians, and accusations of corruption Financing political forces Financing media outlets and public organizations during the pre-election period «International observation missions,» including the OSCE/ODIHR

Countermeasures

Developing legislation against foreign agents Countering information attacks through state regulation of the information space, including the social media space - information and digital sovereignty Preventing politically biased international observers from participating in electoral processes Creating a system of national observers Creating a system of international observers representing sovereign states

Country Cases

Georgia

Parliamentary elections of October 26, 2024 The United States introduced a «broad range of measures» to hold accountable a number of Georgian civil servants and other individuals who, according to Washington, were «undermining democracy in Georgia and violating the human rights of the people of that country.» «The U.S. Treasury Department, without any evidence or arguments, imposed sanctions against the head of

the Special Tasks Department of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs and his deputy. The U.S. Department of State also announced visa restrictions against senior officials of the government and municipalities, members of parliament, and members of their families. During the pre-election period, such actions by a foreign state constitute interference in the election process and an attempt to influence the will of voters,» said Givi Mikanadze, a member of the parliamentary majority. He described the visa restrictions imposed on Georgian government and municipal officials, parliamentarians, and members of their families as an «attempt to influence the will of voters.» Earlier, the EU stated that it was ready to suspend visa-free travel for Georgian citizens in response to the allegedly anti-democratic actions of the Georgian authorities and their anti-Western rhetoric. Foreign funding is used in Georgia for political purposes. According to Irakli Kobakhidze, unprecedented external interference was recorded during these elections, including through foreign money. The Prime Minister added that one example of external interference was the opposition's pre-election rally and concert, which took place in Tbilisi six days before the elections. Kobakhidze stated that the event was supported by non-governmental organizations receiving funding from abroad.

Romania, 2024-2025

The presidential campaign of 2024-2025 became an example of the complete collapse of democratic norms. The Constitutional Court of Romania annulled the results of the first round of the election, in which Eurosceptic candidate Călin Georgescu had won, after which he was banned from running again. The French Ambassador personally met with the President of the Constitutional Court and traveled through the regions, persuading voters to support the pro-Western candidate. Telegram founder Pavel Durov publicly stated that the head of French foreign intelligence had asked him to block channels belonging to Romanian conservatives. Russian Ambassador to Bucharest Vladimir Lipayev said on the Rossiya 24 television channel: «There was indeed foreign interference in the Romanian elections, but not from Russia. The fact that there was interference in the elections at Macron's level is beyond doubt; it is undeniable, because literally two days before the election Macron actively communicated with Nicușor Dan and expressed his full support and solidarity.» Manfred Weber, leader of the European People's Party - the largest group in the European Parliament - launched sharp attacks against Simion and his supporters. Weber also strongly criticized the decision of Romania's Social Democratic Party to withdraw support for the «pro-European» candidate Nicușor Dan ahead of the elections scheduled for May 18.

Moldova

Parliamentary elections of 2025

The admission made by the head of Moldova's Central Election Commission, Angelica Caraman, on Jurnal TV was so striking that it is worth quoting in full: «I will explain. There is a major difference between the European Union and other states. Moldova is already one step away from becoming an EU member, so interference by a country such as France in our elections is not considered external interference. Even when it

involves direct financing of political forces, we do not regard it as a form of electoral corruption. It is normal when neighbors care for one another and support the development of democracy.» The Judiciary Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives published a report accusing the European Commission of interfering in elections in a number of countries, including Moldova. The document states that, through the Digital Services Act, Brussels exerted pressure on online platforms ahead of elections by restricting political content. The 2024 presidential election in Moldova was mentioned separately. According to the report, one month before the vote, the EU held meetings with platforms and authorities, raising questions about conflicts of interest and the legality of applying the DSA in a country that is not an EU member state.

Argentina, October 26, 2025

An interesting geopolitical phenomenon occurred during the midterm congressional elections held in Argentina on October 26. A significant number of Argentinians, knowing that if the party of the eccentric President Javier Milei, La Libertad Avanza, won, U.S. President Donald Trump had promised to provide the country with a loan of USD 40 billion, voted for that very party. Argentinians hope that this money will help lift the country out of the chronic financial and economic crisis that primarily affects broad segments of the population. After more than 99% of ballots had been counted, La Libertad Avanza received 40.8% of the vote nationwide. The Peronist, socialist opposition bloc Fuerza Patria received 31.7%. Washington interfered in Argentina's election campaign by promising Argentinians, two weeks before the vote, a USD 20 billion swap arrangement for exchanging Argentine pesos and an additional USD 20 billion in private investment. Both were conditional on victory by supporters of President Javier Milei. «If he loses, we will not be generous with Argentina. I am with this man because his philosophy is right. He may win, or he may not - I think he will win. And if he wins, we stay with him; if not, we leave,» said the U.S. President.

Serbia

Municipal elections in Serbia, March 29, 2026

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić stated that representatives of Western embassies interfered in the election campaign ahead of the municipal elections on March 29. «Foreigners from Western embassies divided themselves among different municipalities and went there to help the opponents of the authorities. They wrote addresses to the people for them, for example in Dragačevo. A foreigner comes, speaks Serbian, is paid by a CIA-linked office to do dirty work, and lectures them on what to do,» Vučić said late Thursday night on TV Prva. According to him, representatives of five different Western embassies traveled to the municipality of Bor in the east of the country alone in order to damage the Chinese-Serbian company Zijin, which mines and processes non-ferrous and precious metals. «But they forgot that Serbs decide for themselves,» he said.

Hungary

April 12, 2026

The Patriots for Europe group, the third-largest faction in the European Parliament, accused the European Commission of interfering in elections in Hungary, according to a statement by the group. «The Patriots group also expresses its concerns about interference by the European Commission in national political processes, since such developments risk undermining trust in European institutions and the integrity of democratic decision-making,» the document states.





**Marina
Violeta
Urrizola**

Executive
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**Raphael
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Professor of
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International Electoral Observation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Returning to the concepts mentioned in the article General Elections in the Republic of Honduras: Expression of Will under External Influence, this study raises the importance of guaranteeing and protecting state sovereignty, combating foreign interference, and the need to review, contribute to, and develop international standards for electoral observation that help guarantee the sovereignty of peoples and their expression through free and democratic elections. We begin from the agreed principle that it is states that are responsible for carrying out electoral processes. Therefore, the control and legitimization of these processes belong to the institutions created for that purpose, as well as to those authorized by the legislation of each country. To this initial approach, we add our perspective from Latin America and the Caribbean on the controversial term «international electoral observation.» For this purpose, it is necessary to mention the most relevant bodies and civil society organizations in the electoral field that have influence in our region. Their statutes and documents contain fundamental concepts such as international electoral observation, international electoral accompaniment, and international electoral oversight, together with their initial implications and their current treatment. At this point, and in order to establish a certain structure, electoral observation can be divided into:

- national electoral observation;
- international electoral observation.

As stated in the title, this paper addresses only international electoral observation in our region. It should first be noted that in South America, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay do not have the concepts of international electoral observation or electoral accompaniment, either implicitly or explicitly, in their current legislation. Historically, the prevailing understanding has been that observation is a form of «oversight» and is therefore reserved for national political actors, specifically political parties. This may take the form of party monitors, as in Argentina, or participation in the composition of vote-receiving boards or polling stations, as in Uruguay and Paraguay. In the case of Brazil, the legal reasoning would require further clarification. In the countries mentioned above, the participation of authorities from regional electoral bodies and foreign public figures has legally taken place within international guest programs. This category does not imply obligations regarding pre-electoral and post-electoral reports, observation plans, territorial deployment, or the issuance of recommendations or suggestions. In the case of the Argentine Republic, in recent years, following specific authorizations granted by the National Electoral Chamber, there has been a significant increase in organizations carrying out activities that they present as Electoral Observation Missions. This is a category not recognized by current legislation, but one that has a strong impact in media statements. In the case of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, its current legislation includes the term international electoral accompaniment. This was temporarily modified by Resolution No. 210930-0078 of September 30, 2021, in order to exceptionally allow the presence of foreign bodies and organizations as international observers. This requirement had been imposed by the electoral divisions of the European Union and the United Nations to

ensure their participation in the 2021 regional and municipal elections. In Central America, it should be noted that since 2007 Nicaragua has partially restricted the concept of international electoral observation. For a clearer understanding, international electoral observation may be grouped as follows. International organizations with areas related to electoral cooperation and assistance. These are associations of states that work together under a permanent structure and treaties in order to achieve common objectives. In this region, the following have a significant presence: the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization of American States, the Union of South American Nations, the Caribbean Community, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. The following sections set out the most substantial elements concerning the structure of the relevant areas in this field.

United Nations

The United Nations, commonly referred to simply as the UN, is the largest existing international organization, made up of 194 countries. Its highest authority is the General Assembly, its main deliberative body, which plays a role similar to that of a «parliament of nations.» In 1992, at the request of member states, the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division was created as part of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs, with the aim of enabling the organization to participate in different ways in the electoral processes of member countries that requested such assistance. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the organization's participation generally takes the form of technical assistance to electoral bodies and financing for civil society organizations to implement projects on training, gender, and democratic strengthening. These are largely channeled through UNDP and monitored by local and regional offices of the organization. Even so, international electoral observation is a highly visible role of the United Nations. In order to be formally accepted by the relevant division, the following requirements must be met:

- the request must come directly from government authorities or, where autonomous, from electoral authorities;
- the mission must be authorized by the appropriate body of the organization;
- the mission must cover the electoral process as a whole, meaning comprehensive observation involving the formation of long-term and medium-term electoral missions.

These conditions derive directly from the Charter of the United Nations, as well as from various General Assembly resolutions that guide the organization's work in the electoral field, including Resolutions 44/146, 44/147, 45/150, 45/151, and 46/139, among others. At the plenary session of the General Assembly in 1991, two resolutions directly related to electoral matters were adopted: «Enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections» and «Respect for the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States in their electoral processes» - Resolutions 46/137 and 46/130. At the declarative level, Resolution 46/130 specifically emphasizes the full sovereignty of states in the conduct of their electoral affairs, the rejection of any foreign interference in the internal affairs of a state, and the sovereign right of each state.

European Union

It was with the Treaty on European Union, signed in Maastricht in 1992, that this association of states declared that democracy is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. For this organization, electoral observation must make it possible to verify the regularity of an electoral process, adherence to the rules of governance, and fairness in competition. At the declarative level, European Union Election Observation Missions observe without interference, assisting in the formulation of recommendations within a framework of respect for the development of political processes and thereby increasing voters' confidence in those processes. The European Union also attributes to itself, where appropriate, a role in conflict prevention or resolution, as well as the formulation of recommendations and advice to electoral authorities for the improvement of processes, the review of electoral legislation, and the promotion of technical assistance. The European Union does not observe elections in its member states. It deploys observation missions in the Americas, Asia, and Africa according to a schedule approved by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, commonly referred to as the High Commissioner, in consultation with member states. The legal, technical, and logistical aspects of EU Election Observation Missions are implemented through specialized companies. In our region, the visible composition of EU missions consists mostly of diplomats and Members of the European Parliament. At the same time, the EU limits its own activities in countries where the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, through its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, operates in close cooperation with the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, a United States government agency.

Organization of American States

Electoral observation conducted by the OAS has undergone transformations over the years. Initially, it consisted simply of the presence of internationally recognized figures, primarily of symbolic significance, based on the idea that international presence had a positive impact on the processes observed. At the declarative level, beginning with the Cartagena Protocol of 1985, the Charter of the organization was amended to include among its objectives the goal of «promoting and consolidating representative democracy, with due respect for the principle of non-intervention.» It was in the regional context of the 1990s that international observation acquired greater importance in terms of its scope. Through the Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation, the OAS implements the operational work required for the development of its Electoral Observation Missions. According to its own statements, this department develops and maintains a permanent and professionalized service for electoral observation and technical cooperation, applying methodologies that cover not only rules and procedures, but also the analysis of the independence of electoral authorities and the confidence shown by the different actors in the process. These concepts had already been questioned and reached their most critical point after the OAS became the instrument that led to the 2019 coup d'état in Bolivia, based precisely on a report concerning preliminary vote-count data that lacked technical foundation.

Union of South American Nations

UNASUR was initially established as an intergovernmental organization made up of the twelve countries of the South American region: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela. It was officially created on May 23, 2008, in Brasília, Brazil, with the signing of its Constitutive Treaty by the heads of state of twelve South American countries. Although the treaty entered into force in March 2011, the 2008 summit marked the formal beginning of the organization. In 2010, the organization's General Secretariat was established, which was fundamental in streamlining and enabling the actions to be carried out in each area. The Electoral Council of UNASUR was formed by all the electoral bodies of the South American countries that signed the so-called Declaration of Asunción, which proposed its creation. This declaration was later

approved at the Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of UNASUR in Buenos Aires on August 23, 2011. The Statute of the Electoral Council of UNASUR defines it as «a consultative, functional, and technical body for cooperation, coordination, research, exchange of experiences, organization of Electoral Missions, and promotion of citizen participation and democracy within the framework of the Constitutive Treaty of UNASUR.» The Electoral Council of UNASUR carried out significant activity until 2017, when several of its member countries withdrew from the regional organization, in some cases through «informal» procedures. This gave impetus at the time to the so-called Lima Group and other initiatives with a clear ideological orientation, while also disregarding all decisions and documentation issued by the Electoral Council. That documentation had been preceded by broad debate and agreement among all its members, since opposition from even one member could veto any action. At the declarative level and in its own practice, its activity was always governed by the document proposing and approving the Criteria and Regulations for Electoral Observation and Accompaniment, approved by the Council of Heads of State and Government of UNASUR. This document is based on respect for sovereignty and international human rights standards, respect for the laws of the country and the authority of electoral bodies, and the maintenance of strict political impartiality and non-obstruction of electoral processes. The Council's documents established that participants in Electoral Accompaniment Missions were required to act impartially, carrying out the tasks assigned to them with objectivity and independence from local actors, while respecting the principle of non-interference.

Caribbean Community

The Caribbean Community is a grouping of twenty countries: fifteen member states and five associate members. It extends from The Bahamas in the north to Suriname and Guyana in South America. With the exception of Belize in Central America and Guyana and Suriname in South America, all members and associate members are island states. Among its stated objectives are the affirmation of collective identity and the facilitation of social cohesion among the peoples of the Community, ensuring that the principles of good governance are enshrined in legislation and integrated into practice, with respect for the rule of law. This organization actively participates in regional electoral processes and has specific areas within its structure related to Community electoral observation and technical advice.

Community of Latin American and Caribbean States

The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States is a regional intergovernmental mechanism that promotes the integration and development of Latin American and Caribbean countries. It is made up of the 32 sovereign countries of Latin America and the Caribbean: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela. It was created in 2010 during the Latin America and Caribbean Unity Summit in Playa del Carmen, Mexico. The Pro Tempore Presidency is its institutional, technical, and administrative support body. Despite isolated efforts by some countries, the organization does not have a specific area devoted to electoral matters, nor has it participated in observation missions. International electoral observation involving regional legislative blocs MERCOSUR Parliament The MERCOSUR Parliament, or PARLASUR, is the parliamentary assembly that functions as the deliberative and consultative body of MERCOSUR. It is composed of parliamentarians from Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Venezuela, which is currently suspended, and Bolivia, which is in the process of accession. The Democracy Observatory of the MERCOSUR Parliament was created in 2008 by Resolution No. 26/2008 and regulated in 2009 by Resolution No. 7/2009, consolidating itself as a specialized body of PARLASUR for the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights. Since its establishment, it has been closely linked to the principles of

the Ushuaia Protocol on Democratic Commitment, guiding its actions toward strengthening electoral systems and ensuring the full functioning of democratic institutions in MERCOSUR states. The Observatory has accompanied electoral processes in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela through short-term and long-term Electoral Observation Missions, always carried out at the invitation of national electoral authorities. It has also participated in observation, accompaniment, and foreign visitor programs organized by electoral bodies in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, and Uruguay, with the aim of learning about their electoral systems and electoral engineering and promoting the exchange of good practices. After each mission, the Observatory submits reports to the plenary of PARLASUR containing technical evaluations, analyses of strengths and weaknesses, and specific recommendations aimed at improving regulations and procedures. All its activities are carried out in strict compliance with the national legal frameworks of the observed states and in accordance with international standards and good electoral practices, ensuring at all times the independence, objectivity, transparency, and strict impartiality of the observation process. The Observatory also acts in situations of political and humanitarian crisis, providing support to the Board of PARLASUR. In such cases, its work focuses on coordinating external missions and preparing reports that record facts, identify institutional impacts, and present recommendations to the competent parliamentary bodies. International electoral observation involving electoral bodies and related organizations Inter-American Union of Electoral Organizations In 1991, a joint meeting was held in Caracas between the members of the Tikal and Quito Protocols, where it was agreed to establish the Inter-American Union of Electoral Organizations, known as UNIORE. It defines itself as a non-governmental association whose purpose is the exchange of information, cooperation, and consultation among its members. It highlights the «participation of representatives of the association's member bodies as observers of elections at the invitation of the country in which they are held.» UNIORE created a routine practice of electoral observation that is distinguished precisely by the composition of its observation missions, which are made up only of members of the electoral bodies of the countries that belong to it. However, the organization and functioning of these missions fall to its Executive Secretariat, which is exercised by the Center for Electoral Assistance and Promotion, known as CAPEL, belonging to the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights. Association of Women Electoral Magistrates of the Americas This is a non-governmental civil organization created in 2016 within the framework of the Seventh Meeting of Women Electoral Magistrates of Ibero-America, where it was agreed to create a regional network of women in electoral justice and the Brasília Declaration was issued. One year later, in 2017, the Constitutive Act of AMEA was signed. It was amended in 2022 and states that the association is composed of women who hold or have held magistracies and/or senior administrative positions in the electoral bodies of the Americas. Its mission is to promote women's political participation by advancing equality, justice, and gender parity, and by defending political rights in an environment free from discrimination and violence. Among its objectives is the promotion of the presence and participation of AMEA members in international observation missions with a gender perspective. Since its initial statute, it has been established that the Technical Secretariat of the Association is to be held by the Center for Electoral Assistance and Promotion, which is responsible for implementing the programs and projects approved by the Conference and for carrying out other activities agreed upon in consultation with the presidency. The Technical Secretariat is responsible for the administration and operational management of AMEA. On the basis of the above, CAPEL, with funding from UN Women and Eurosocial, manages the association's website and publications, as well as the Regional Observatory on Parity Democracy and Political Violence. It also manages the Electoral Training School for Women, with funding from UNDP, International IDEA, and cooperation from Spain, Germany, and Canada. According to Article 10 of the statute, the Association's budget is administered by the Technical

Secretariat and financed by: a. contributions from its members and from the electoral bodies they represent; b. funds requested from external sources by the Technical Secretariat or by any of its members; c. other contributions from sources approved by the Presidency or the Conference. Inter-American Institute of Human Rights According to its own presentation, the Institute was created in 1980 through an agreement between the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Republic of Costa Rica. The Inter-American Institute of Human Rights is an autonomous international academic institution dedicated to teaching, research, and the promotion of human rights. It facilitates dialogue between the various actors of the human rights movement and state authorities. It does not denounce human rights violations, nor does it submit formal petitions or issue statements on states' non-compliance with international obligations. The Institute's headquarters, as well as the headquarters of the Center for Electoral Assistance and Promotion, are located in San José, Costa Rica. It also has a regional office for South America operating in Uruguay. Center for Electoral Assistance and Promotion The Center for Electoral Assistance and Promotion institutionally depends on the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights as part of a program implemented in 1983 with the aim of helping strengthen the electoral bodies responsible for conducting electoral processes in Latin America. Its participation, although discreet, is decisive in the processes of the region. It not only acts as the Executive Secretariat of UNIORE, organizing its electoral observation missions, but is also contracted by many of the electoral bodies that are part of UNIORE to provide technical assistance and audit the processes requested of it. Current examples include the technical audit of software for preliminary counting, vote tabulation, consolidation, and national publication of results, contracted by the National Registry of Colombia for the upcoming presidential elections of May 29, 2026. Another example is the technical audit of the software and hardware of the electronic single-ballot system to be used on October 4, 2026, in Paraguay's municipal elections. This center also serves as the Technical Secretariat of the Association of Women Electoral Magistrates of the Americas, with the functions described above, including financing and project management, as well as the organization of electoral observation missions characterized by a gender perspective. Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, known as International IDEA, is an intergovernmental organization with international membership. It was founded in 1995 in Stockholm, where its headquarters are located. Its founding statute was amended in 2003 and 2008. It currently has 30 member states: Australia, Barbados, Belgium, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, the Philippines, Finland, France, Ghana, Germany, India, Indonesia, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Namibia, the Netherlands, Norway, Panama, Peru, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, and Uruguay. Japan has observer status. International IDEA presents itself as a reliable source of knowledge and impartial analysis, offering a balanced view of global technological opportunities and challenges and the tailored application of that knowledge in specific country contexts. Of particular interest is the institute's own definition of what an observation mission represents. In its manuals, it describes such a mission as a political activity with technical content which, in compliance with the basic norms of observation, verifies the existence, access, and effective and timely functioning of electoral bodies and procedural guarantees enshrined in law in the face of arbitrary restrictions on political rights and party or electoral conflicts. In our region, IDEA does not deploy electoral observation missions. It has a strong connection with the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights and the Center for Electoral Assistance and Promotion. Final Remarks By way of conclusion, and following the description of the international organizations and civil society organizations with the greatest presence in our region, as well as a critical review of their founding statutes and their current activity, it can be seen from the pre-electoral and post-electoral reports presented in several countries of the region that these principles often remain merely declarative and are not reflected in practice. An

electoral mission is a diplomatic and political activity with technical content. It must be carried out within the parameters of each country's current legislation, with respect for its institutions, making contributions in the pre-electoral period - generally of a technical nature - accompanying election day through specific and high-quality data-collection instruments, and concluding in the post-electoral stage with agreed reports based on verifiable methodologies, rather than merely on the subjective impressions of mission members or instructions issued by external bodies. It must also close the agreed agenda or, through the proper channels, create post-electoral mechanisms where required by the host country or organization. It is in this context that we observe a clearly interventionist trend in these reports, where several issues stand out. First, the "recommendations" made to electoral bodies in preliminary reports acquire the character of orders to be fulfilled and subsequently evaluated. Also of concern is the low standard of some technical audits contracted by electoral bodies and implemented by the organizations mentioned above, such as the technical audit of transmission and vote tabulation in the 2024 presidential elections of the Dominican Republic. At this point, it is essential to place the issue in context. In Latin America, with the exception of Brazil, Venezuela, and some processes in Peru, all mechanisms for vote tabulation, transmission, aggregation, and publication of results, including preliminary counts - some of which are incorporated directly into the final count, as in Honduras in 2025 - are fully outsourced through tenders or direct awards to private companies. The companies operating in the region are well known. It is important to mention this outsourcing of processes because what electoral bodies contract are closed solutions. Although these solutions should meet the requirements set by the electoral body, it is not possible to audit the source code of each process, as in the recent case of the 2025 general elections in Honduras and the ongoing presidential process in Colombia in May 2026. With regard to the organizations listed in this paper, it is important not only to conduct a thorough review of the real objectives of their participation in the region's electoral processes, but also to highlight the direct interconnection between the electoral bodies participating in UNIORE and AMEA, their executive secretariats, and certain civil society organizations. As for regional integration organizations, we urge a return to the founding concept of UNASUR, which is also replicated by the Democracy Observatory of the MERCOSUR Parliament: the principle of non-interference, quality, and high standards in the systematic analysis of each area included in the work plans of electoral observation or accompaniment missions. Finally, from the analysis of the structures of the organizations and bodies mentioned above, certain common characteristics emerge. Viewed retrospectively, these characteristics have allowed some organizations to survive and expand their activity, to the detriment of others that have unfortunately lost, or have not achieved, the level of prominence desired for the region:

- they do not require consensus among all countries or members for decision-making;
- they include within their organizational structure a specific area related to electoral matters;
- they incorporate the figure of an Executive Secretariat, which facilitates the implementation of actions;
- they diversify their funding sources and delegate their management to the Executive Secretariat, subject to prior approval and subsequent accountability.





**Mehmet
Dogan**

Secretary general of
Ombudsman
institution of Türkiye

International Election Observation as a Tool for Trust and Transparency

Distinguished Participants, First of all, I respectfully greet you all. Elections are the fundamental means through which the will of the people is expressed freely and fairly. The effectiveness of democratic governance is directly proportional to the extent to which the genuine preferences of the people are reflected in elections. In this regard, the inclusiveness, transparency, and credibility of elections are indispensable criteria. The purpose of international election observation is to promote and strengthen these criteria. In other words, international election observation primarily aims to increase citizens' trust, encourage participation and transparency, and deter irregularities in order to ensure that fair elections can be conducted. International observation mechanisms should be seen not only as instruments of oversight but also as tools for building trust. Indeed, the monitoring of the process by independent observers significantly increases the acceptability of the results. In this context, international observation standards are fundamentally based on universal values such as the rule of law, protection of human rights, justice, and principles of good administration. In terms of establishing common principles for international election observation, the "Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation," adopted in 2005 with the contributions of numerous international organizations, particularly the United Nations, is of great importance in setting core values such as impartiality, independence, transparency, and professionalism as common standards. Standards and guidelines developed by institutions such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe have translated these principles into practice. One of the key principles is respect for the sovereignty of the country where elections are held and for the human rights of its people. As a matter of fact, each country has its own unique history, culture, political and legal system, and social dynamics. In this case, the direct and rigid application of international standards may at times conflict with local realities. Therefore, a flexible and adaptable approach that takes national characteristics into account, without compromising universal principles, is required. If international standards are applied rigidly without considering these differences, this may lead to a perception of "external interference" and undermine the legitimacy of observation processes. On the other hand, moving away from universal principles under the pretext of national characteristics also poses serious risks in terms of transparency and trust. Therefore, the issue of "balance," which is the subject of this session, comes to the forefront. In this search for balance, ombudsmen emerge as actors with significant potential to contribute. Ombudsman institutions are independent and impartial bodies that serve as a bridge between the administration and citizens. Ombudsmen listen to the demands of the public and examine their complaints. They contribute to the establishment of good governance principles—therefore to a transparent and accountable governance approach—and, in this context, to strengthening citizens' trust in the state. Transparency, accountability, and trust, which are among the most fundamental criteria of democratic elections, are also among the primary objectives of ombudsmen. For this reason, the experience of ombudsman

institutions can provide an important perspective for international election observation. The fundamental characteristics of ombudsmen—impartiality and independence—enhance public trust and contribute to making observation activities more legitimate and acceptable. Ombudsmen can add value to the process not only from a technical perspective but also through a holistic approach based on principles of good governance. On the other hand, ombudsmen can also contribute by serving as a bridge in achieving the balance we have mentioned. They are closely familiar with their own countries' administrative structures, legal systems, and social dynamics. At the same time, due to the universality of human rights, ombudsmen are also well-versed in international standards. Thanks to their knowledge of both national systems, past experiences, and the rationale behind practices, as well as their familiarity with international standards, ombudsmen have the capacity to contribute to balanced and realistic assessments. Furthermore, if citizens encounter problems related to elections, they can directly bring these issues to the ombudsman. Therefore, ombudsmen are able to receive direct feedback from citizens and, in this sense, provide an important source of data and analysis for international election observation. As the Ombudsman Institution of Türkiye, we are also able to contribute to international election observation upon invitation. As a recent example, we participated in the observation of the parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan in 2024. During election periods in our own country, we also host international observation delegations and share our knowledge and experience with them. In summary, establishing a sound balance between international observation standards and national characteristics is essential. Ombudsman institutions, in this context, are among the key actors capable of building a bridge between universal principles and national characteristics. This approach can transform international observation from being merely an evaluation mechanism into a constructive dialogue process. For this reason, we believe that the role of ombudsman institutions in international election observation will both strengthen international cooperation and reinforce trust in democratic processes. On this occasion, I would like to express my gratitude to all those who contributed to this organization for inviting us to this valuable meeting. I would also like to emphasize that, as the Ombudsman Institution, we are always open to cooperation. Thank you for your attention.



Raffaele Palmieri

Head of the Press
Service of
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Electoral Observation, Media Narratives, and Public Trust

Dear colleagues, dear friends, We live in an era in which international standards tend toward universality, while the world to which they are applied remains profoundly diverse. And it is here, in my view, that the central issue of our discussion today lies. The problem is not whether common standards for assessing elections exist. They certainly do exist, and they play a crucial role. The real question is how these standards are applied in specific countries, with their own history, legal culture, and social traditions. International observation cannot be a mechanical process. It requires an understanding of context. True democracy is not merely a set of procedures; it is the living fabric of society. At the same time, we must make a clear distinction: there are principles that cannot be called into question. The secrecy of the vote. Honest and transparent vote counting. Equality among participants in the electoral process. These are the foundations without which any election loses its legitimacy. Alongside these principles, however, there are elements that can and should be adapted. The ways in which election commissions are formed, organizational procedures, turnout thresholds - all of these may reflect national specificities without undermining the essence of the democratic process. It is precisely here that the risk of two extremes arises. The first is the drive toward absolute uniformity, when the same models are mechanically applied to all countries, ignoring their unique characteristics. The second is the opposite extreme: when practices that undermine the integrity of elections are justified under the pretext of a «special path.» Both extremes lead to the same outcome: a loss of trust. That is why we need a different approach - one that could be called harmonious. A common standard must exist: as a point of reference, as a horizon toward which national systems should strive. But this standard must not become a rigid mold. It should leave room for reasonable adaptation, provided that such adaptation does not undermine the core principle: the integrity of elections. Ultimately, the criterion for assessment can be stated quite simply. If a particular feature of an electoral system helps citizens exercise their right to vote more easily, broadens participation, and strengthens trust, then it is a step forward. But if it creates an unfair advantage for certain candidates or political forces, violates equality, and undermines transparency, then it is a step backward, regardless of the arguments used to justify it. Today, international observation should be understood not as an instrument of control, but as a mechanism for building trust: trust between states, trust within societies, and trust in democratic procedures themselves. And perhaps it is through such an approach - through balance, respect, and clarity of principles - that we can move closer to what I would call a new international order. An order in which opinions are not imposed, but shaped through dialogue. An order that places the emphasis not on uniformity, but on social harmony. Thank you for your attention!





Esteban Luís Perié

Chairman of Center for Integration and Cooperation of Russia and Latin America

Specific Features of International Election Observation in Latin America

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished officials, fellow international observers, representatives of electoral bodies, and members of civil society, It is an honor to address you at this international conference and to share a reflection that we consider necessary and, in many respects, still insufficiently explored: the specific features of international election observation in Latin America and, within this framework, the emerging and distinctive role that international public diplomacy organizations can play. I will focus on the experience of the Center for Integration and Cooperation between Russia and Latin America — CICRAL — an international, non-profit civil society organization of a civic, cultural, and academic nature, which has been building bridges between Russia and the Latin American region from a multipolar perspective and with unwavering respect for the sovereignty of peoples.

1. Specific Features of Electoral Observation in Latin America

Latin America is not a homogeneous bloc, but it does share certain characteristics that any electoral observation mission must understand in depth. First, it has a history marked by coups d'état, authoritarian regimes and, more recently, processes of deinstitutionalization that generate public distrust in traditional mechanisms of representation. Second, it is characterized by strong political polarization, which often turns international observation into a field of dispute: some perceive it as a guarantee, others as interference. Moreover, electoral systems vary profoundly from country to country: from electronic voting with biometric verification to entirely manual processes with high levels of community participation. This technical diversity requires observers trained not only in generic standards, but also in concrete local realities. However, the deepest challenge is not technical, but political and cultural. In several Latin American countries, there is legitimate distrust toward missions coming from traditional organizations that have historically responded to external geopolitical interests. This is where public diplomacy acquires its true relevance.

2. The Role of International Public Diplomacy Organizations

Unlike institutional technical observation missions, such as those of the OAS, the EU, or the UN, public diplomacy organizations operate from a different position: they do not represent governments, but rather networks of academic, cultural, and social cooperation. Their main capital is not political power, but trust built over time through sustained projects, continuous presence, and horizontal dialogue. In the case of CICRAL, our electoral observation work does not begin on election day. It begins years earlier, in seminars on regional integration, academic mobility programs between Russian and Latin American universities, and forums on multipolarity and sovereignty. This prior presence, free from interventionist agendas, allows us to reach territories and communities where other missions are not welcomed or simply do not have access. Our observers are not career international officials, but professionals, teachers, researchers, and activists who already work on the ground in areas such as human rights, transparency, and institutional strengthening. This gives us

two key advantages: social legitimacy, because communities recognize us as part of their ecosystem, and institutional continuity, because our work does not end with the post-electoral report, but feeds into new cycles of cooperation.

3. The Specific Case of CICRAL

Allow me to bring this to a concrete example. In recent electoral processes in countries such as Bolivia, Venezuela, and Honduras, CICRAL has deployed accompaniment missions that are not limited to verifying records or counting votes. Our approach prioritizes three dimensions: protecting citizen participation from external pressure, verifying the non-interference of foreign actors, and disseminating results through non-hegemonic information channels. What is most distinctive, however, is that we do not present ourselves as “neutral observers” in the positivist sense of the term — a myth that no observation mission can fully achieve — but rather as solidarity-based observers, committed to the self-determination of peoples and to the right of each country to organize its elections according to its own legislation and political culture. Our final report is not limited to a list of irregularities. It proposes viable paths, adapted to each national reality, to strengthen public trust in the future: from improvements to electoral registers to mechanisms for arbitrating post-electoral conflicts, as well as recommendations on transparency in campaign financing.

4. Lessons Learned and Future Challenges

CICRAL's experience teaches us that electoral observation in Latin America cannot be effective if universal, decontextualized formulas are applied. Instead, it requires a long-term approach, local rootedness, and permanent dialogue with national actors: electoral authorities, political parties, social movements, and Indigenous communities. The main challenge we face today is how to scale this model without losing its essence: how to remain an agile, horizontal organization based on trust, in the face of pressure from certain states and organizations that seek to standardize observation practices according to their own geopolitical interests. Distinguished colleagues, Public diplomacy, embodied by organizations such as CICRAL, demonstrates that respectful, relevant, and legitimate international electoral observation is possible. Not the kind that imposes conditions from a supposed position of technical superiority, but the kind that accompanies from a place of proximity, shared history, and mutual respect. Latin America does not need more missions that arrive every five years with a manual under their arm and leave the next day with a press release. It needs observation that stays, that understands its cultural and political fabric, and that cooperates honestly in building stronger, more transparent, and sovereign democracies. This is the path we have chosen at CICRAL. And it is this path that I humbly share with you today. Thank you very much for your attention.



**Ulrich
Singer**

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Challenges of Modern Electoral Systems - Postal, Electronic, and Mobile Voting

1. Introduction

Established democracies (Germany, Europe, USA) are often seen as benchmark systems. However, there are structural weaknesses in electoral practice. Key question: Which standards should be applied when evaluating elections?

2. Core dilemma

Fundamental trade-off between: Accessibility (voter participation, convenience) vs. Electoral integrity (control, verifiability). Increasing accessibility may reduce the level of control.

3. Comparative analysis of three voting models

(a) Postal voting – example Germany. Advantages: high accessibility increased voter turnout. Risks: limited control over voter authentication, potential third-party influence, reduced verifiability, structural opportunities for misuse. «Analog black box». (b) Electronic voting. Advantages: efficiency, convenience. Criticism: limited transparency, dependence on technical systems, difficulty of independent verification. «Digital black box». (c) Mobile voting (door-to-door voting). Application: limited to specific groups (e.g. immobile or seriously ill voters), typically upon request. Advantages: improved accessibility in individual cases. Limitations: not scalable, high administrative effort, potential influence in direct interaction, risk of social pressure. Targeted but limited solution.

4. Key comparative finding

All three models: enhance accessibility, introduce specific integrity risks. Need for consistent evaluation criteria across systems.

5. Organizational challenges

Even traditional voting systems are prone to errors. Electoral integrity depends on practical implementation. Examples from Germany: insufficient ballot papers at polling stations, organizational overload and logistical failures, errors in manual vote counting (including misclassification of ballots). Conclusion: Errors may occur in both manual and technical systems.

6. Trust vs. control

All systems rely on institutional trust. At the same time: limited full verifiability, potential “dark figure” (unreported cases).

7. Conclusion (including Germany)

Even in Germany: there are structural weaknesses, particularly in postal voting. These issues are often underrepresented in international discussions. Electoral assessment should be consistent and system-neutral. Final thought: The key question is not which system is considered exemplary, but whether we are willing to apply the same standards to all electoral systems.





Raisa Sher

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the Republic of
Kazakhstan

Preparation and Conduct of the Republican Referendum in Kazakhstan

Although I am not a member of the Central Election Commission, but rather a representative of an independent public human rights institution, I would nevertheless like to present some brief information on the preparation and conduct of the referendum. The overall organization and conduct of the republican referendum in our country, probably as in yours, were entrusted to the Central Election Commission, as well as to territorial and precinct election commissions. To improve the professionalism of referendum organizers, the Central Election Commission developed a training and methodological package on the legal foundations for organizing the work of territorial and precinct commissions, taking into account the specific features of the referendum process. A Calendar Plan of key activities and procedures was approved, covering the preparation of voter lists - 12.48 million eligible voters - the production of ballots, and the accreditation of foreign and international observers. Measures to ensure accessibility and the electoral rights of persons with disabilities remained under constant monitoring, including the monitoring of polling stations with the participation of NGOs, as well as the testing of new technological solutions using Braille for independent ballot completion. A new approach included placing the text of the draft Constitution at polling stations with audio support, as well as providing accessible taxi services and sign language interpretation. Dear colleagues, Today, new digital technologies are increasingly becoming tools not only for business and everyday tasks, but also for organizing state processes. One such solution was a new online service that helped our citizens quickly find their polling station. Citizens could find out the number and address of their polling station using their individual identification number through the e-government portal gov.kz, as well as on the dedicated websites referendum2026.gov.kz and referendum.gov.kz. It was enough to enter the individual number to receive information about the voting location. The online service also allowed precinct commissions, upon a citizen's written request through eGov, to confirm their place of registration for inclusion in the voter list. In major cities, call centers and Telegram bots also operated, enabling residents to clarify their details and check whether they were included in the voter lists. The key digital technologies currently used in the Republic of Kazakhstan include the following. Biometric identification: many polling stations used systems to verify voters' identities, which not only accelerated the process but also eliminated the possibility of fraud. Electronic voter lists: automated systems ensured data accuracy, real-time updating of voter lists, and prevention of double voting. Digital information infrastructure: journalists actively used digital platforms to promptly inform citizens. During the referendum, enhanced requirements for process transparency were established, including online broadcasts from polling stations in a number of regions and voter hotlines. At the regional level, call centers and Telegram bots operated, and measures were taken to ensure the participation of students who had arrived from other regions, citizens working on a rotational basis, and residents of urban agglomerations. Door-to-door visits were conducted, during which personalized invitations with QR codes were distributed. A carefully developed system for notifying and informing

citizens was also implemented through SMS messages, push notifications in eGov Mobile, mobile applications of second-tier banks, and the placement of information materials and banners on the EPIR and eGov portals. The following question was included on the ballot for the republican referendum: «Do you accept the new Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the draft of which was published in the mass media on February 12, 2026?» Voters could vote only on the document as a whole - either to support it or reject it. The answer options were «YES, I accept» and «NO, I do not accept.» Requirements were also established for the level of ballot security, including the use of printing security elements. Speaking about the use of digital technologies, they were mainly aimed at automating processes - electronic lists and biometrics - rather than online voting. The main voting format remained offline, since the use of digital technologies requires legislative changes and security guarantees. Current legislation provides for an offline voting format, meaning that a citizen must personally come to the polling station on voting day and fill out a ballot while preserving the secrecy of the vote. Of course, the issue of introducing electronic voting is widely discussed in our society today. At present, there is no unified position on this matter. Among the factors generating debate are cybersecurity concerns, risks of personal data leaks, and trust in the voting procedure. Notably, these risks are often raised by young citizens who actively use digital technologies. According to the Central Election Commission, what is important today is not the introduction of new mechanisms merely for the sake of implementation, but the continued study of international experience and possible models for organizing voting. At the same time, paper voting currently costs approximately ten times less than electronic voting. As international experience shows, the introduction of electronic voting requires considerable time. According to information received from foreign colleagues, at least six years may pass from the beginning of development to the full-scale launch of such systems. As is known, around 40 countries worldwide have used electronic voting to some extent. At the same time, current practice in most countries still shows that online voting is used extremely rarely, even in a mixed format with offline voting. In countries such as the United States, countries of Southeast Asia, and European states, online voting is practically not used. In concluding my remarks, I would like to emphasize that the campaign work carried out through open discussions, street events, online webinars, social networks, and traditional media made it possible to achieve maximum audience reach and establish a meaningful dialogue. The result of this active information and awareness-raising work was a high turnout of 73.12% and an overwhelming share of votes in favor - 87.15%. Overall, the referendum demonstrated a sufficient level of citizens' political engagement. It showed that society is ready to participate in discussions on issues related to the fundamental principles of the state's structure. According to official data from the Central Election Commission, on voting day, more than 45,000 representatives of 256 accredited public associations and non-profit organizations, as well as 1,817 representatives of the mass media of the Republic of Kazakhstan, observed the voting

process at polling stations. In addition, 359 international observers from 38 states and 11 international organizations were accredited, along with 206 representatives of foreign media. According to international observers, the referendum was conducted in accordance with the national legislation and international obligations of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Thank you all for your attention!





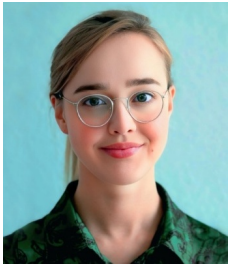
Eliseo Bertolasi
Journalist

Election Observation and the Multipolar World

Voting in Wartime: Security Strategies for Voters Eliseo Bertolasi I would like to present my first-hand testimony as an observer of the referendum held on September 23-27, 2022, on the accession of the Donetsk People's Republic, the Lugansk People's Republic, as well as the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions, to the Russian Federation. At that time, I was already in Donetsk working as a journalist. As the representative of the DPR in Italy, I was approached by Natalia Nikonorova, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPR, who, while awaiting the arrival of other observers, invited me to become an observer the following day. I agreed, and therefore I was the first and only observer on the first day of the referendum. This gave me the opportunity to see first-hand how the vote was conducted and organized. After receiving the necessary accreditation, I visited three polling stations: one in Donetsk, in the Budyonnovsky district, and two in the city of Makeevka. The distinctive feature of this process was the deployment of mobile teams of polling station staff, who moved from a central location between residential buildings and courtyards, and even directly to the apartments of those with limited mobility, in order to give all eligible voters the full opportunity to cast their vote. The advantage of this approach was that voters did not need to make long journeys outside or wait for extended periods of time. In practice, the process became much safer, more convenient, simpler, and faster. Local authorities, concerned about the safety of their citizens, adopted this decision primarily in order to reduce the risk of possible retaliatory shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces in places where people might gather. Crowded polling stations could have become an easy target. People still clearly remembered the tragedy and the number of civilian casualties caused by the shelling of the previous days: on September 19, when a food kiosk was attacked, and on September 22, when a covered market was struck. During those days, as a reporter, I witnessed that bloodshed and wrote articles about it. After presenting my accreditation to the heads of the mobile polling teams, I was able to film, take photographs, and personally observe how people were voting. I encountered no obstacles or refusals; everything appeared to me to be as calm and peaceful as possible. The mobile polling station staff were equipped with lists of eligible voters, checked their documents, and then issued ballots. After voting, the voter placed the ballot in special transparent containers that could be carried by hand. Based on my observations, I can only confirm that no coercion or pressure was used: those wishing to vote met these mobile polling teams near their homes, while those unable to come outside called and waited for them at home. The referendum question on the ballot was clearly formulated, without any linguistic tricks: in essence, it was a «Yes» or «No» to joining Russia. People said, «Let's go home,» meaning that they would soon return to Russia. I saw people literally voting «with tears of joy» for the opportunity to become part of Russia. Turnout was extremely high. I will cite the official data of the Central Election Commission of the DPR: The number of voters was 2,187,691. Turnout was 2,133,326 people, or 97.51%. Votes in favor amounted to 99.23%; votes against - 0.62%. During those days, in those territories, a page of history was being written. Everyone understood this; emotions were

intense, and expectations were enormous. For eight years, the people of Donbass had been waiting for that day, convinced that this was the only path toward fulfilling their destiny - returning to their beloved homeland. In those days, Western media reported about a «fake referendum» in the occupied territories of Ukraine, claiming that residents of the DPR had been forced at gunpoint to vote in favor of joining Russia. This was an absolutely false version of events, which I was able to refute thanks to my presence there both as an observer and, more importantly, as a journalist. The version promoted by Western media is absurd, because people who have lived under shelling for eight years cannot wish to return to those who bombed them. I express my gratitude to the leadership of the two Donbass republics, who were able to hold the referendum under such difficult conditions while taking into account the safety of the people.





Anna Andersen

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From Monitoring to Meaning-Making: Election Observation in the Age of Digital Hegemony

Central Thesis

Modern international election observation was developed as a tool for monitoring the procedural integrity of the twentieth century. Today, however, it no longer corresponds to the real architecture of political influence in the twenty-first century. The key struggle over electoral outcomes increasingly takes place not on election day itself, but in the digital environment - through platform algorithms, content personalization, moderation practices, and the management of the visibility of political narratives. The Problem: Election Observation Is Looking in the Wrong Direction Classical electoral observation has historically focused on the physically observable part of the electoral process. Yet the modern voter makes their decision long before arriving at the polling station. The decisive stage in the formation of political choice has moved from the institutional sphere into the digital one. The New Architecture of Power: From Censorship to the Management of Attention Control over political communication has changed its form. Platforms now function as political intermediaries, as Shoshana Zuboff argues. In other words, power is shifting from control over information to control over the conditions under which information is perceived. The Concept of Epistemic Power The key concept here is epistemic power. It refers to the capacity to determine:

- what becomes visible;
- what is considered credible;
- which topics are amplified;
- which topics disappear;
- which narratives acquire political legitimacy.

Today, elections are a struggle over:

- cognitive space;
- attention;
- the interpretation of political reality.

The European Case: The DSA as an Infrastructure of Digital Governance In the European context, this logic is being institutionalized through the Digital Services Act, or DSA. The DSA creates an infrastructure for assessing systemic risks and moderating political content with the participation of trusted flaggers. The DSA is not a neutral mechanism of transparency. It is also a mechanism for managing the information environment and securitizing the digital space, with the possibility of accelerated intervention during election periods. Rapid-response mechanisms allow for swift intervention in the information flow during an electoral period. But who defines the criteria of risk? Who labels something as disinformation? Who checks the moderators? How do the algorithms work? And how do external audit mechanisms function? The Core Problem: The Opacity of Digital Influence A traditional observer can see the proverbial ballot box. But how can they assess the influence of personalized political feeds? This creates a fundamental gap: we observe only the consequences of influence, while, in essence, we do not observe the mechanisms through which political choice is formed.

VI. Cases of Political Platform Power

Hungary: Ahead of the elections, the European Commission activated a rapid-response mechanism and requested that platforms address disinformation. The degree of intervention cannot be externally verified. Bulgaria: A similar instrument

was also used there, pointing to a trend toward recurring institutional practice. France: The case of Jordan Bardella demonstrates a new dependence of politics on platform visibility. Political advantage today is therefore shaped through accessible formats such as shorts and through algorithms. This means that control over visibility on platforms has become a factor of electoral competitiveness. Critique of Existing International Missions Institutions such as ODIHR were created for a different historical era. Their methodology assumes that processes are observable and can be physically verified. But the digital environment is less transparent and is personalized by algorithms. It has also been privatized by major actors - transnational corporations. As a result, the offline model of observation systematically lags behind digital reality. Observation 2.0: A New Model We need to move from observing procedure to observing the infrastructure through which political choice is formed. This could include, for example, auditing reach - especially transparency and researchers' access to data; ensuring transparency of moderation - who makes decisions, according to which stated criteria, and who appoints trusted flaggers; and analyzing personalization through algorithms, including the amplification or suppression of narratives. The Geopolitical Conclusion Digital infrastructure is a space of international power. Therefore, election observation also raises the question of:

- digital sovereignty;
- cognitive security;
- control over the public sphere;
- the distribution of epistemic power.

Conclusion

The modern international observer still assesses the integrity of the polling station, but not the architecture of the digital environment in which the voter has already been politically shaped. If in the past the struggle was over the fairness of vote counting, today the struggle is over the conditions under which political choice itself is formed. The conclusion is clear: international observation trapped in the offline paradigm is systematically losing the struggle over epistemic power. To end with a metaphor: the international observer is like a restaurant critic. But who wrote the menu?



Vincent Emmanuel Angelin Meriton

Chairperson of
Seychelles Russia/
ex-USSR Friendship
Association

Best Practices in Organising Electoral Processes: The Seychelles Perspective

Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, Colleagues, It is a privilege to take part in this discussion on best practices in organising electoral processes, particularly at a time when the credibility of elections continues to shape confidence in democratic systems globally. Seychelles approaches this discussion from the perspective of a small island state, where institutions are close to the people, and where the integrity of electoral processes is not an abstract principle, but something that is felt directly in public trust and national stability. Over the years, we have learned that strong elections are not defined by scale, but by consistency—consistency in law, in administration, and in the application of rules. In that context, I will briefly share the key elements that have guided Seychelles in organising elections that are structured, credible, and increasingly responsive to modern challenges. These elements reflect practical choices we have made across the electoral cycle— from the legal framework, to administration, to the use of technology and oversight mechanisms.

1. Strong Constitutional and Legal Foundation

In Seychelles, elections are firmly grounded in the Constitution and supported by the Elections Act, which governs the full electoral cycle—from pre-election preparation to post-election processes. This clarity matters. For example: Presidential elections require more than 50% of the vote, with provision for a second ballot if this threshold is not met. and proportional representation, ensuring both local accountability and national balance. A key lesson here is that credibility begins with rules that are clear, known, and consistently applied.

2. Independent Electoral Management Body with Clear Mandate

The Electoral Commission of Seychelles is constitutionally mandated to: conduct and supervise elections, manage voter registration, review electoral boundaries, and oversee campaign practices, including finance and media. This breadth of responsibility ensures coherence across the entire electoral system. Importantly, the Commission also has the mandate to review electoral laws and recommend reforms, allowing the system to evolve over time. Best practice here is institutional: an empowered, independent body with both operational and oversight functions.

3. Continuous Legal and Administrative Reform

In preparation for the 2025 elections, Seychelles undertook a comprehensive review of electoral legislation between 2022 and 2025. This resulted in several practical reforms, including: introduction of online voter registration and mobile registration, pre-registration for 17-year-olds turning 18 before elections, provisions for citizens abroad to register, clearer rules on candidate nomination and withdrawal, and legal prohibition of mobile phones at polling stations. These reforms respond to real operational challenges. The lesson is simple: best practice is not static; it is iterative and evidence-based.

4. Accurate and Transparent Voter Register

A credible election depends on a credible voters' register. In 2025: Seychelles certified its Register of Voters twice in the election year—on 31 March and 18 August, ensuring accuracy ahead of polling. The final register included 73,627 voters, with clear demographic breakdowns. The process also included: public inspection periods, multiple registration centres, and

verification of transactions before certification. This reflects a key principle: transparency and verification at every stage of voter registration.

5. Well-Structured and Inclusive Voting Process

Elections in Seychelles are conducted over three days, allowing: access for outer islands, special voting arrangements, and reduced congestion on the main polling day. Voting is conducted: from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., with counting done at the station level, and results transmitted centrally before official announcement. This decentralised counting strengthens transparency, while central consolidation ensures consistency.

6. Investment in Human Resources and Logistics

The scale of election operations is often underestimated. For the 2025 elections: the Electoral Commission mobilised over 1,166 staff for the first ballot, and 1,153 staff for the second ballot, ensuring full coverage of all polling stations. These included: electoral officers, technical teams, logistics personnel, and support staff. In addition, the Commission engaged private service providers to support operations. The lesson is operational: credible elections require serious investment in people, training, and logistics.

7. Training, Stakeholder Engagement, and Coordination

The Commission conducted extensive training and coordination across stakeholders, including: electoral staff at all levels, political parties and candidates, media organisations, law enforcement and emergency services, civil society and observers. This ensured: shared understanding of procedures, preparedness across institutions, and reduced risk of conflict or confusion. Best practice here is clear: elections are not managed by the Commission alone— they are a whole-of-system effort.

8. Use of Technology to Enhance Transparency and Efficiency

The 2025 elections marked a significant step forward in technology adoption: online registration portal for voters, voter tagging system to track participation in real time, and asset management systems to track election materials. For example, voter tagging allowed: real-time monitoring of turnout, improved statistical reporting, and stronger safeguards against irregularities. Technology, when carefully implemented, becomes a tool for confidence, not complexity.

9. Financial Transparency and Political Party Regulation

An often overlooked aspect of electoral integrity is political finance. In Seychelles: political parties are required to submit audited financial statements annually, and the Electoral Commission conducts compliance reviews under the law. In 2025, the Commission achieved 100% compliance in submission of audited financial statements for the 2024 financial year. This contributes directly to: transparency, accountability, and fairness in the political process.

10. Adequate and Transparent Funding of Elections

The cost of elections is openly accounted for. For 2025: SCR 21.5 million was allocated for the first ballot, and SCR 11.7 million for the second ballot. This transparency strengthens

public trust and demonstrates that credible elections require adequate financing. Distinguished colleagues, The experience of Seychelles shows that credible electoral processes are built deliberately, over time, through institutions that are trusted and systems that are continuously improved. What matters most is not the size of a country or the complexity of its systems, but whether the process is clear, transparent, and consistently applied from start to finish. In our case, this has required sustained attention to the fundamentals-law, administration, accountability, and inclusion-while also adapting to new challenges such as technology, voter expectations, and evolving political dynamics. These are not one-off achievements. They require ongoing effort, reflection, and reform. If there is one message we would share, it is this: organising credible elections is not a single event-it is a continuous process of strengthening trust between institutions and citizens. Thank you





**Andriaharivola
Reine
Ramananjahary**

Member of
Association
«LIBERTY 32»

Electoral Processes and International Observation

Good Practices in the Organization of Electoral Processes Inclusive and Peaceful Elections in a Transitional Context: The Strategic Role of Civil Society Organizations in Rebuilding Citizens' Trust Mr. Moderator, Distinguished participants, Honorable guests, in your respective ranks and capacities, I sincerely thank you for this invitation and for the opportunity to contribute to this conference devoted to issues that are essential for our democracies. In Madagascar, during the most recent elections, fewer than one in two voters went to the polls. This figure does not merely reflect abstention. It reveals a deeper reality: a crisis of trust. In this context, it is worth recalling that, according to Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, «the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government.» This will, therefore, can be fully expressed only through elections that are credible, inclusive, and accepted by all. Elections are often perceived as a technical process. Yet above all, they are everyone's concern. They are certainly political, but they are also profoundly civic. From this perspective, according to the United Nations Development Programme, trust in electoral processes is an essential pillar of democratic governance. Therefore, the real challenge is not merely to organize elections, but to ensure their credibility, inclusiveness, and acceptance. This ambition is based on internationally recognized standards. For example, the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, as well as the work of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems and the Carter Center, emphasize fundamental principles such as transparency, integrity, and independence. In Africa, these principles are further reinforced by the SADC guidelines and by the vision of the African Union through Agenda 2063, which promotes inclusive and participatory democratic governance. Within this framework, civil society organizations emerge as an essential third force. They do not replace electoral institutions, but they play a complementary and strategic role. In transitional contexts, such as Madagascar, this role becomes even more crucial. Mistrust exists, but it is accompanied by a new dynamic: mobilized young people, engaged women, and a growing desire for participation. In this regard, initiatives such as "Not Too Young To Run" illustrate this evolution. Youth and women's civil society organizations play a key role in structuring this energy and transforming it into civic engagement. Thus, civil society organizations are involved at every stage of the electoral cycle. First, before elections, they help improve the electoral framework and strengthen inclusiveness. In Madagascar, a consultation framework was established, bringing together institutions, political parties, civil society organizations, and technical partners. In addition, since 2013, citizen election observation platforms have been supported with assistance from the United Nations Development Programme and the European Union. Civil society organizations also play a key role in voter education: registration, participation, and the fight against disinformation. They also serve as guideposts for political actors, particularly through codes of conduct. Then, during elections, they provide independent observation, monitor the media and violence, and establish early warning mechanisms. In several African countries, these mechanisms have helped prevent tensions

and improve transparency. They also play an essential mediation role, particularly on election day. Finally, after elections, they contribute to evaluating the process through recommendations, audits - including audits of the voter register - and a logic of continuous improvement. Furthermore, the role of international NGOs and regional networks is decisive. Organizations such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems and the Carter Center contribute to the sharing of experience, capacity-building, and the harmonization of practices. However, challenges remain. Despite the existence of many electoral networks, civil society organizations are still insufficiently represented within them, their role sometimes remains limited, and their funding continues to be fragile. By way of illustration, during the 2024 legislative elections in Madagascar, 457 cases of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation were detected in just one month, around 80% of which were disinformation. Among this content, 27.4% targeted candidates and 9.4% targeted election management bodies, focusing mainly on the organization of the vote, political dynamics, and electoral participation. These figures show that the battle for credible elections is also fought in the realm of information and trust. The strength of civil society organizations lies in their proximity to citizens. They translate international standards into local realities and transform mistrust into participation. In conclusion, inclusive and peaceful elections rest on three pillars: strong institutions, clear standards, and engaged citizens. Civil society organizations are at the heart of this dynamic. Investing in their role means investing in trust, stability, and the democratic future. Ramananjahary Andriaharivola Reine is a BRIDGE facilitator-consultant - Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections - and a LEAD facilitator in leadership and electoral conflict management. She is a co-founding member of the association Liberty 32. Liberty 32 is a Malagasy non-profit volunteer organization that practices engaged research focused on citizens' civic and political participation. It promotes effective governance and the rule of law, the empowerment of women and young people, and a culture of volunteerism. Founded in 2011, it began observing elections in 2013. Moscow, April 14, 2026





**Sayyora
Khodjaeva**

Director of Commission on the Protection of Constitutional Rights and Freedoms, member of NGO «Institute of Democracy and Human Rights»

Specific Features of the Organization of Elections in Uzbekistan

In recent years, the Republic of Uzbekistan has carried out large-scale reforms of its electoral system aimed at ensuring openness, transparency, and compliance with international standards. Today, Uzbekistan, as a full-fledged subject of international relations, has acceded to more than 80 international human rights instruments covering generally recognized principles and norms of international law. Through the implementation of the state's international obligations and international electoral standards contained in the documents of leading international organizations such as the United Nations, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and others, Uzbekistan's national electoral system has been shaped, and the legal regulation of elections and international observation of them has been developed. These instruments include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the UN Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, the Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, the Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, and others. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in its new edition, recognizes the priority of generally accepted norms of international law. The legal regulation of the status of international observers at elections in Uzbekistan, including the accreditation procedure, the list of rights, obligations, and restrictions applicable to international observers, is governed by the Electoral Code and the Regulation of the Central Election Commission on Observers from Foreign States and International Organizations Participating in Elections in the Republic of Uzbekistan. In particular, Article 33 in Chapter 6 of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan is devoted to the institution of observers. According to this article, observers from political parties, citizens' self-government bodies, as well as from other states and international organizations, carry out their activities on the basis of mandates issued by the relevant commissions. The Electoral Code provides that observers from other countries and international organizations may participate in all activities related to the preparation and conduct of elections, as well as be present at polling stations and during the counting of votes on election day. The CEC Regulation, in turn, defines in detail the procedure for the activities of observers from foreign states and international organizations at elections. Uzbekistan actively participates in the work of international organizations and engages in constructive cooperation in implementing international electoral standards. These organizations include the United Nations, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the Organization of Turkic States. Since 2013, the Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan has also been a member of the Association of World Election Bodies, and since 2014, of the

Association of Asian Election Authorities. It actively cooperates on electoral issues with such international organizations as the OSCE/ODIHR, the International Institute for Monitoring Democracy Development, Parliamentarianism and Suffrage Protection of Citizens of the CIS Member States, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan, and UNDP. According to the established practice of international election observation in Uzbekistan, invited international, or foreign, observers may be conditionally divided into three groups. The first group consists of observers from international and intergovernmental organizations that carry out international observation on the basis of international documents, including those with varying degrees of international legal force. These include such international organizations as the OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, the CIS, the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, the SCO, the OIC, the OTS, and the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-Speaking Countries. The second group of invited international observers consists of specialized bodies and organizations, including international organizations that do not have intergovernmental status, whose main objectives in the field of international observation of elections and referendums are defined in their statutes or regulations. This refers primarily to national electoral bodies, or commissions, which, in accordance with national legislation on elections and referendums, are professionally engaged in organizing elections and referendums, as well as other bodies whose functions include the conduct of electoral procedures, including national ministries. It also includes associations and organizations professionally engaged in scientific and practical issues of national elections and referendums, such as the Hague Conference on Private International Law, the Association of World Election Bodies, the Association of Asian Election Authorities, the International Institute for Monitoring Democracy Development, Parliamentarianism and Suffrage Protection of Citizens of the CIS Member States, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, and others. The third group of international observers includes expert specialists in electoral law, lawyers, human rights defenders and political scientists, scholars and researchers who are invited by Uzbekistan as foreign observers and who observe elections in line with their professional interests. After the beginning of an election campaign is announced, the CEC, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sends invitations to electoral bodies of foreign states and international organizations, which must submit their response to this invitation and the accompanying documents no later than ten days before voting day. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs submits a request to the CEC, attaching the documents of observers from the relevant foreign states and international organizations. The CEC adopts a resolution on accreditation within five days. The list of accredited international observers is published on the official website of the CEC. At the same time, in accordance with our legislation, accreditation may be refused in cases where the documents submitted for accreditation do not meet the established requirements; where documents are submitted after the prescribed deadline; or where the activities of an international observer, or of the

organization that nominated the observer, contradict national legislation or pose a threat to the sovereignty, security, or national interests of the Republic of Uzbekistan. An accredited international observer is issued a mandate by the CEC, which serves as the basis for carrying out international observation activities during the period of preparation and conduct of elections. Rights and Obligations of International Observers In Uzbekistan's electoral practice, a model of a specific legal status for international observers has developed, under which the rights and obligations of international observers are defined by the state through a legally binding act, thereby guaranteeing a unified practice of creating conditions for their work. The participation of international observers in events and processes not related to the preparation and conduct of elections is carried out upon prior agreement with the CEC. In recent years, Uzbekistan has gradually implemented a number of ODIHR recommendations on election observation. This is clearly demonstrated by such developments as the adoption of the Electoral Code, the introduction of information and communication technologies into the electoral process, and a number of other innovations. It should be noted that paragraph 8 of the Copenhagen Document recognizes the role of international and domestic observers in the OSCE region. In particular, it states that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, may enhance the credibility of the electoral process. In accordance with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Code of Conduct for election observers, observers must maintain strict impartiality in the performance of their duties and must under no circumstances express or demonstrate bias or preference in relation to the authorities, parties, candidates, or any controversial issues arising during the elections. They must perform their duties in an unobtrusive manner and must not interfere in the electoral process. They may also ask questions of representatives of electoral bodies and draw their attention to non-compliance with rules. However, they must not give any instructions or take actions that contradict decisions of the electoral authorities. The same Code also prohibits observers from making any comments to media representatives about the electoral process or the substance of their observations. Any comments to the media must be limited to general information about the work of the mission and the role of observers. The participation of observers from foreign states and international organizations in observing elections in the Republic of Uzbekistan is evidence of our country's commitment to its international obligations in the field of preparing and conducting free, honest, and fair elections, as well as its firm determination to hold elections of deputies to the Legislative Chamber and deputies to local Kengashes in full compliance with national legislation and generally recognized international electoral standards. One example is the implementation of a recommendation from one of the latest OSCE/ODIHR reports concerning Uzbekistan's revision of restrictions on voting rights based on legal capacity, in accordance with international obligations. First of all, in July 2021, our country ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in New York on December 13, 2006. The next step was the constitutional recognition that persons with disabilities enjoy legal capacity in elections on an equal basis with others. In the most recent parliamentary elections, 605 candidates with disabilities were nominated. Of these, 210 underwent training at seminar-workshops organized by us. A total of 138 were elected, including three to the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis and five to regional Kengashes. The rest were elected to district Kengashes. The new edition of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan establishes a provision, Article 128, stating that citizens recognized by a court as legally incapacitated, as well as persons held in places of detention under a court sentence for serious and especially serious crimes, may be deprived of the right to participate in elections only in accordance with the law and on the basis of a court decision. In all other cases, direct or indirect restriction of citizens' electoral rights is not permitted. However, even with a fully developed regulatory framework, there is an objective need to improve mechanisms of public oversight. The main innovation in our legislation is the transition from a majoritarian system to a mixed electoral system. In other words, candidates from five political parties

are elected as follows: 75 through the majoritarian system and 75 through proportional representation on party lists. In addition, in accordance with Article 70 of the Electoral Code, the number of women candidates for deputy must now be at least 40 percent of the number of candidates nominated by a political party in single-member constituencies and on the party list. At the same time, at least two out of every five candidates in the sequence of a party list must be women. Previously, this figure was 30 percent. In addition, political parties are now entitled to nominate not only their own party members as candidates for deputy, but also non-party candidates. Other innovations include ballots in Braille for visually impaired voters and the new institution of observers from citizens' self-government bodies. Clearly, the significance of the institution of observation is not limited to formal presence at polling stations. Its role is comprehensive. First of all, observers perform a control function, helping to ensure compliance with electoral legislation. Their activities are aimed at identifying and preventing possible violations. International observers, like local observers, enjoy the same rights established in electoral legislation. In addition, the information function is also important. Observers form an objective picture of the course of elections, ensuring the openness of information for society and the international community. The preventive role of the institution of observation should also be emphasized. The very presence of independent observers disciplines participants in the electoral process and reduces the likelihood of violations. Analysis of the participation of international observers demonstrates sustained interest in electoral processes in Uzbekistan. For example, while 296 international, or foreign, observers participated in the 2015 presidential election, this number increased to 825 in 2019. The peak participation of international observers occurred on October 24, 2021, during the regular presidential election in Uzbekistan. These were the sixth direct presidential elections in the country's history. The number of observers reached 971. In subsequent elections and in the 2023 referendum, there was a certain decline, with the number of international observers amounting to 797. Undoubtedly, their activities help strengthen trust in elections at the international level and make it possible to assess the national electoral system in the context of generally accepted democratic standards. At the same time, in both scholarly and practical terms, the question of the effectiveness of the institution of observers remains relevant. A fundamental question arises: can observation perform its function under a merely formal approach? It is clear that the formalization of this institution reduces its significance and does not allow its potential to be fully realized. In this regard, further steps are needed to improve it. Priority areas should include ensuring the genuine independence of observers, improving the level of their professional training, and developing mechanisms for rapid response to identified violations. For example, ahead of the 2023 referendum and presidential election, our organization conducted a series of seminars in all regions of the Republic with future observers from local self-government bodies in order to explain the substance of constitutional reforms and electoral legislation. Thus, the institution of observers should be viewed not as an auxiliary element, but as an integral component of the electoral process, directly affecting its level of legitimacy. In conclusion, it should be emphasized that a modern electoral system cannot function effectively without public trust. Trust, in turn, is impossible without transparency and independent oversight. Therefore, the proposals of our Institute to introduce amendments to the Electoral Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan concerning the admission of independent non-governmental, non-profit organizations — of which there are more than 10,000 — to observe electoral processes remain relevant. It is precisely the institution of observation that serves as a link between the state and society, ensuring the openness of elections and their recognition both domestically and internationally. As is known, since the 1960s, exit polls have occupied an important place in global sociological practice as a way of studying public opinion and researching the political preferences of the population. An exit poll is not the official result of voting, but only a preliminary assessment. It helps identify a trend before the commission announces the

final results, but it may differ from the official data. Its main tasks include obtaining preliminary data on voting results and comparing them with official election results; forecasting the outcome of voting; conducting analytical research on the survey results and subsequently using them to evaluate the activities of relevant political forces, and so on. According to some specialists, exit polls inform the wider public about preliminary election results, increase interest in the electoral process, assess the difference between people's intentions and their actual behavior, and help evaluate the quality of polling station work. Approximate rules for regulating exit polls should have a statutory and legal, rather than merely local, character. We know that some CIS countries, as well as some regions of the Russian Federation, have introduced this institution for studying preliminary election assessments, but our lawmakers are not yet ready to introduce this innovation into the country's Electoral Code. Moreover, our legislation contains a provision according to which, during the five days before voting day and on voting day itself, the publication, or public disclosure, of the results of public opinion polls, forecasts of election results, and other studies related to ongoing elections is prohibited, including their publication in public information and telecommunications networks, including the Internet. Thank you for your attention.





**Elsbeth
Nomahlubi
Berlinda
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Commissioner of
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Human Rights
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The Effectiveness of the Independent Electoral Commission and the Electoral Court in South Africa

1. Introduction

South Africa is recognised as a constitutional democracy founded on values such as human dignity, equality, freedom, accountability, responsiveness, and openness. One of the most important pillars supporting this democracy is the electoral system. Elections provide citizens with the opportunity to choose their leaders and participate in governance. To ensure that elections are conducted fairly and lawfully, South Africa established institutions such as the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Court. The Independent Electoral Commission is responsible for managing elections and ensuring that they are free and fair, while the Electoral Court resolves election - related disputes and protects the integrity of the electoral process. Both institutions play a significant role in maintaining democracy and public confidence in elections. This paper evaluates the effectiveness of the IEC and the Electoral Court in South Africa by examining their constitutional mandates, achievements, challenges experienced during recent elections, and possible improvements that may strengthen democratic governance.

2. Election Observation in South Africa

2.1 Role of Election Observers Election observation plays an important role in ensuring transparency, accountability, and public confidence in democratic elections. In South Africa, election observers monitor whether elections are conducted freely, fairly, and in accordance with the law. Election observers do not manage elections but instead observe and report on the conduct of elections. Observers may include local organisations, international organisations, civil society organisations, religious groups, and human rights institutions. In terms of the Electoral Act, organisations wishing to observe elections must register and be accredited by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). Accreditation allows observers to monitor voting stations, counting procedures, and election conduct legally. One of the organisations accredited during the 2024 elections was the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). According to the SAHRC election observation report, the Commission registered and was accredited by the IEC to observe the elections across all nine provinces. The SAHRC observed elections at 165 voting stations and gathered information through real -time observation during the election process. The report also notes that many other organisations and individuals participated as observers to promote transparency and credibility in the electoral process. Election observation is important because it helps identify weaknesses, protects human rights, and improves trust in democracy.

3. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)

3.1 Establishment and Constitutional Mandate The Independent Electoral Commission was established in terms of Chapter 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. Chapter 9 institutions are designed to strengthen constitutional democracy. Section 190 of the Constitution outlines the responsibilities of the IEC, which include:

- Managing elections at national, provincial, and municipal level;
- Ensuring that elections are free and fair;
- Declaring election results within the prescribed period.

The Electoral Commission Act and the Electoral Act further regulate the functioning of the IEC. The IEC is expected to operate independently and without political interference. This independence is important because elections must be trusted by citizens, political parties, and the international community. **3.2 Functions of the IEC** The IEC performs several important functions during the electoral process: **3.2.1 Voter Registration** The IEC manages continuous voter registration and updates the voters' roll. Voters are registered according to the area where they ordinarily reside. Section 24A of the Electoral Act allows voters who are outside their registered voting district to apply to vote at another voting station under certain conditions. During the 2024 elections, some voters experienced confusion regarding Section 24A processes, and some election officials struggled to explain the procedures properly. This demonstrated the need for improved voter education and better training for IEC officials regarding Section 24A applications and voter transfers. **3.2.2 Low Voter Participation** One of the major concerns in recent elections has been low voter turnout. Many eligible citizens did not vote during the 2024 elections. Low participation may be caused by:

- Distrust in political leaders;
- Frustration with service delivery;
- Lack of political interest among youth;
- Unemployment and social dissatisfaction.

Low voter turnout weakens democratic participation because elections function best when citizens actively participate in governance. The IEC therefore faces the challenge of rebuilding public trust and encouraging more citizens, especially young people, to vote. The IEC manages voter registration and maintains the voters' roll. Citizens who are 18 years or older are eligible to register. **3.2.2 Election Administration** The IEC establishes voting stations, trains election officials, distributes voting materials, and supervises voting procedures. The IEC educates citizens about voting procedures, democratic participation, and electoral rights. The IEC ensures that political parties comply with the Electoral Code of Conduct. After votes are counted and verified, the IEC announces official election results.

4. Effectiveness of the IEC

The IEC has achieved several successes since the first democratic elections in

1994. South Africa has consistently conducted peaceful democratic elections.

International and local observers have generally regarded South African elections as credible. According to the South African Human Rights Commission report on the 2024 elections, the elections were overall considered free and fair despite some shortcomings. **4.1 Professional Election Management** The IEC has successfully managed complex national and local elections involving millions of voters across all provinces. The SAHRC report noted that many IEC officials were professional, respectful, and knowledgeable during the voting process. The IEC contributes to democratic participation by encouraging citizens to vote and educating the public about electoral rights. South Africa's proportional representation system allows both large and small political parties to participate in elections fairly. **4.2 Technological Improvements**

The introduction of voter management devices and electronic systems has improved voter verification and reduced opportunities for electoral fraud. 5.Challenges Faced by the IEC Despite these achievements, the IEC has experienced several challenges. During the 2024 elections, many voting stations experienced connectivity issues with voter management devices. These technical failures caused delays and frustration among voters. Some voters waited many hours to cast their ballots. Delays negatively affected voter experience and participation. 5.1 Accommodation of Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities South African elections aim to ensure inclusivity for vulnerable groups such as older persons, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities. During the 2024 elections, several measures were introduced to accommodate older persons and persons with disabilities. Many voting stations allowed elderly persons and pregnant women to receive priority in queues. The SAHRC report found that approximately 87% of voting stations had measures in place to accommodate older persons and pregnant women. Special voting procedures are also available for individuals who cannot physically travel easily to voting stations. However, challenges still existed. Some older persons who arrived during special voting days without prior registration for special voting were turned away and required to return the next day. Persons with disabilities also faced accessibility problems at some voting stations due to:

- Lack of ramps;
- Poor infrastructure;
- Difficult access for wheelchair users.

The SAHRC further observed that visually impaired voters often depended on assistance from others when using the Universal Ballot Template system. This created concerns regarding the secrecy and independence of the vote. Although South Africa has made progress in accommodating vulnerable voters, additional improvements are still necessary to ensure full equality and dignity during elections. 5.2 Accessibility Issues Some voting stations lacked ramps and facilities for persons with disabilities, limiting accessibility and independence. In some voting stations, voters were not properly informed about delays or procedures, leading to confusion. Certain election officials lacked adequate training in managing large voter turnout and resolving procedural problems. 5.3 Public Distrust Some citizens have lost confidence in political institutions, which contributes to lower voter turnout, especially among young people. 6.Evaluation of the IEC's Effectiveness Overall, the IEC has been effective in conducting elections that are generally free, fair, and peaceful. The institution has maintained democratic stability since 1994 and has gained recognition both nationally and internationally. However, operational challenges such as technological failures, infrastructure problems, and accessibility issues demonstrate that improvements are still necessary. The effectiveness of the IEC can therefore be described as strong but not perfect. Continuous reform and investment are required to strengthen efficiency and public confidence. 6.1 The Electoral Court The Electoral Court was established in terms of the Electoral Commission Act. It is a specialised court responsible for resolving election -related disputes and ensuring that electoral laws are correctly applied. The court operates independently and has powers similar to those of the High Court. The Electoral Court performs several important functions. The court hears disputes between political parties, candidates, voters, and the IEC. If a political party or individual believes that the IEC acted unfairly or unlawfully, they may approach the Electoral Court. The court ensures that electoral laws are followed and that elections remain credible. The court may impose penalties or issue orders where electoral laws or codes of conduct are violated. 6.2 Effectiveness of the Electoral Court The Electoral Court protects democracy by ensuring that electoral disputes are resolved lawfully and fairly. The court operates independently from political influence, which strengthens public trust in the electoral process. The court ensures that both political parties and the IEC remain accountable to the law. By resolving disputes peacefully through legal processes, the Electoral Court prevents political instability and violence. 6.3 Challenges Facing the Electoral Court Many citizens do not fully understand the role of the

Electoral Court or how to access it. Some electoral disputes require urgent decisions. Delays can affect the credibility of election outcomes. In highly contested elections, the court may face public criticism and political pressure. Some smaller political parties and independent candidates may struggle to afford legal representation. The Electoral Court has generally been effective in protecting the legality and fairness of elections in South Africa. Its existence strengthens constitutional democracy by ensuring that electoral disputes are resolved through lawful and peaceful mechanisms. Although the court faces challenges relating to accessibility and public awareness, it remains an important safeguard for electoral justice and democratic accountability.

7. Recommendations for Improvement

The IEC should invest in stronger network systems and backup technology to avoid connectivity failures. Election officials should receive continuous training on communication, conflict management, and election procedures. Voting stations should be fully accessible to persons with disabilities . Clear communication systems should be introduced to keep voters informed about delays and procedures. The IEC should expand civic education programmes to encourage voter participation, especially among youth. Citizens should be educated about the role and functions of the Electoral Court. Election disputes should be resolved quickly to maintain confidence in election outcomes. 7.1 Improve Access to Justice Support should be provided for smaller political parties and independent candidates who may lack financial resources. Court decisions should be communicated clearly and publicly to improve trust in the judicial process. 8.Conclusion The Independent Electoral Commission and the Electoral Court are essential institutions in South Africa's constitutional democracy. The IEC has successfully managed democratic elections since 1994 and has generally ensured that elections are free, fair, and credible. However, operational challenges such as technological failures, accessibility concerns, and communication problems indicate that reforms are still needed. Similarly, the Electoral Court plays a critical role in protecting electoral justice, resolving disputes, and ensuring accountability within the electoral system. Despite challenges relating to accessibility and public awareness, the court remains an important safeguard for democracy. Overall, both institutions have been effective in promoting democratic governance in South Africa. Strengthening these institutions through improved technology, training, transparency, and public participation will further enhance the credibility and fairness of elections in the future.

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By Nomahlubi Khwinana South African Human Rights Commission



**Siraj
Moosa**

Former member of
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Practical Lessons from Electoral Processes in the Maldives

Good afternoon I'm Moosa Siraj from the Maldives. I've served as a Member of Parliament and as Minority Leader of Parliament. Over the years, I've been involved in elections in different roles — as an observer, a candidate's agent, a campaign manager, and also as a candidate myself. So I'll just share a few practical points based on what actually works.

Number One: Get the voter list right.

Everything starts there. In the Maldives, the voter list is published nationwide at the same time. People can check their details and request corrections within a clear deadline. After that, it's finalized. It sounds simple but it's critical. If people trust the voter list, they're much more likely to trust the final result.

Number Two: Make voting easy.

We're a country spread across many islands, and people don't always live where they're registered. So we allow voters to re-register where they're currently staying — whether that's another island or even abroad, where arrangements exist. There are deadlines for re-registration. This makes a big difference. When voting is easy, participation goes up. And higher participation strengthens legitimacy. Number Three: Allow observation at every stage. At polling stations, candidates can have their own representatives. There are also local and international observers. They can watch both voting and counting. In Maldives we count each single ballot paper manually. Observers and monitors can see the ballot paper when counting. This openness matters. When people can see what's happening, trust increases. Number Four: Keep campaign rules clear and fair. The basics are straightforward:

- no intimidation
- no vote buying
- no misuse of state resources

But the key is enforcement. The rules must apply equally to everyone. If the playing field isn't fair, people will question the outcome. Number Five: Keep election day simple and disciplined. Polling day should be predictable and well managed. Officials check identity, issue ballots, protect secrecy, and allow observers to do their job. Even small details matter, like not allowing phones inside voting booths. These things protect the integrity of the vote. I'd also like to briefly share my experience observing the recent presidential election in Russia in 2024. What stood out to me was how well-organized the entire process was. Polling stations were efficiently set up and easily accessible for voters. There were cameras in all polling stations, allowing central monitoring, which adds an extra layer of transparency. I also saw observers present at polling stations, contributing to overall confidence in the process. Overall, it appeared structured, independent, transparent, and professionally managed. So if I had to sum it up: Good elections aren't about complicated systems. They're about doing the basics well, clearly, openly, and fairly. And from my experience: When people understand the process, when they can see it, and when they feel included they accept the result. Thank you.





Paul Nsapu Mukulu

President of National Human Rights Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Human Rights-Based Monitoring of the Electoral Process in the DRC

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Allow me, first of all, to thank the organizers of this important conference for the honor extended to the National Human Rights Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo - the CNDH-RDC - by inviting it to share its experience. My remarks will highlight a specific approach developed by the CNDH-RDC during the 2023 electoral process in the DRC: human rights-based monitoring of the electoral process, distinct from classical election observation.

1. An innovative approach: human rights-based monitoring

Unlike traditional citizen observation, which is generally focused on the technical regularity of the vote, the CNDH adopted a broader approach based on international human rights standards, particularly civil and political rights. This approach consists of monitoring the electoral process in all its phases -before, during, and after the vote - with particular emphasis on:

- respect for the right to vote and to stand for election;
- freedom of expression, assembly, and demonstration;
- equal access to the electoral process, including for vulnerable groups;
- prevention of abuses of power, particularly by security forces.

2. Observation extended to all actors in the process

The CNDH's monitoring was not limited to voters. It covered all stakeholders:

- the Independent National Electoral Commission, or CENI, as the organizing authority, was monitored in terms of its capacity to guarantee the fundamental rights of voters and candidates;
- candidates and political parties, with regard to their respect for democratic rules and the rights of others;
- security forces, in order to prevent abuses and ensure a peaceful environment;
- national and international observers, with particular attention to respect for national sovereignty;
- the media, in their role of providing responsible information. This comprehensive approach made it possible to understand the electoral process as an ecosystem of rights and shared responsibilities.

3. An electoral context marked by tensions

The 2023 electoral process in the DRC took place in a particularly sensitive context, marked in particular by:

- deep divisions within the political class;
- criticism from civil society;
- concerns regarding compliance with the electoral calendar;
- tensions surrounding the participation of certain actors.

In response, the CNDH played the role of a facilitator of dialogue, meeting with stakeholders to promote calm and prevent violence, thereby contributing to a climate more conducive to the holding of elections.

4. Monitoring results: documentation and accountability

The monitoring made it possible to identify several types of violations and irregularities, including:

- arbitrary arrests and violations of public freedoms;
- restrictions on press freedom;

- difficulties in access to voting for certain groups, particularly persons with disabilities;
- irregularities in voter lists.

In accordance with its mandate, the CNDH:

- systematically documented these violations;
- processed complaints and referred victims to the appropriate channels;
- transmitted the most serious cases to the judicial authorities;
- issued recommendations to state institutions for structural improvements.

This approach strengthens the accountability of actors and helps prevent the recurrence of violations.

5. The added value of the human rights-based approach

The experience of the CNDH-RDC demonstrates that human rights-based monitoring has several advantages:

- it allows for a qualitative reading of the electoral process, beyond the results;
- it strengthens citizens' trust in institutions;
- it helps prevent conflicts by identifying tensions in advance;
- it fosters a democratic culture based on respect for fundamental rights.

In short, this approach usefully complements classical election observation by adding an essential human and normative dimension.

6. Prospects and recommendations

Drawing on this experience, it appears essential to:

- strengthen the capacities of National Human Rights Institutions in electoral monitoring;
- institutionalize mechanisms for cooperation between NHRIs, electoral bodies, and civil society;
- develop early warning systems for violations;
- guarantee the logistical and financial resources necessary for effective deployment.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, The experience of the DRC illustrates that credible elections are not limited to their technical organization. Above all, they rest on the effective respect of human rights. The CNDH-RDC remains committed to promoting this approach, convinced that it is an essential lever for inclusive, transparent, and peaceful electoral processes. Thank you for your kind attention.



**Petros
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Chairman of Federal
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The Challenge and Prospects of Ensuring Electoral Observation in Africa and Developing Countries

I. History of State Formation

It is the historical process of centralizing authority, creating administrative bureaucracy and establishing defined territories. It is driven by conflict, economic necessity and social organization. This evolution occurred differently across regions. It occurred through various mechanisms like:

A. Force theory - consolidation through conquest

B. Evolutionary theory - gradual development from family or clan structure

C. Social contract theory - voluntary agreement for protection

Anyhow, state formation remains a topic of active academic debate.

II. Purpose/Objective of Electoral observation

To assure the election is fair, free and democratic To ensure the active participation of citizens To check and counter-check the absence of cheating of the votes

III. Challenges: From Outside (Former Colonizers)

In whatever way (coup d'état or democratic election), once leaders come to power and start doing good for their country, the colonizer does not see it positively. They only want a puppet leader who serves their needs. To this end, what they did and are doing up to now is assassination (killing or removing those enlightened leaders). Because Africa as a whole is endowed with natural resources - arable land, gold, oil, platinum, diamond, cobalt, etc. If the leader is strong, those resources will be nationalized and used to change the economic situation of the owning country, which deprives the colonizers from exploiting Africa's resources. Therefore they support the rebel groups and seek to remove those brilliant leaders from power- Nikur Umar, Thomas Sankara, Muammar al-Gaddafi, Patrice Lumumbu, to mention very few. Since the purpose of electoral observation is putting the right person in the right place through democratic means, external powers exert their effort to avoid such institutions for their own advantage. Thus, this remains a challenge.

From Inside (Within the Country)

To be elected as president or prime minister in Africa and other developing countries means controlling the economy and all aspects of a given country. It is the gate way to getting rid of poverty. In such countries, what matters is counting, not voting. The voters can elect whom they want to lead them. The leaders are concerned about counting. With such selfish experience Africa has, it is difficult to bring the democratic institution we are looking for.

IV. Prospects: From Outside

There are countries like Russia who are in favour of democratic elections. There are also some NGOs like Human Rights Watch and others. Their presence and support are given top priority to bring democratic elections to Africa and other developing countries. So, such contribution from outside will ensure the realization of electoral observations.

From Inside

Nowadays, the current generations are fully engaged in the political, economic and social affairs of their own country. They began to ask Socratic questions like why, how, when, where, etc. Such an enlightened generation will not see "business as usual." They can fight for their right to appoint whom they believe and trust to be their leader. This is a golden opportunity to ensure electoral observation.

V. Conclusion

State formation has different characters in different parts of the world. States have their own ups and downs. This is the 21st century. It is hardly possible to look back. The future should be bright for the coming generation. To lead one country for 40 or 45 years should stop somewhere because it is ridiculous. There should be periodic, fair, free and democratic elections.

VI. Recommendations

A) Teaching and educating the current generation is mandatory B) Establishing institutions like electoral observation is obligatory C) Developing a curriculum that deals with electoral observation is necessary For the realization of electoral observation institutions, strong collaboration and genuine involvement from governmental organizations is required. Thank you. Petros Woldegiorgis From Ethiopia

