NINTH INTER-AMERICAN MEETING
OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES

CONCEPT PAPER

The Inter-American Meetings of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) aim to promote the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and best practices by electoral and justice administrations in the region. In particular, the meetings facilitate horizontal cooperation to continually strengthen these bodies' institutional capabilities and improve how elections are conducted in the Americas.

Eight Inter-American Meetings of Electoral Management Bodies have taken place to date. The most recent was held in 2012, in Montego Bay, Jamaica. It focused on how electoral authorities can strengthen processes in the region. The two main topics were: the role of electoral authorities in the selection of candidates; and vote counting and the transmission and publication of preliminary results.

At this Ninth Meeting, the dialogue opens again for representatives of the electoral institutions of the Americas to learn about and evaluate various experiences related to the following three topics:

1. Government intervention in election processes
2. Challenges to Electoral Institutionality
3. Quality management in election processes

In three plenary sessions opening with expert presentations, participants will be able to discuss their successes, their concerns, and regional trends in each of the areas addressed.

1. Government intervention in election processes

For over three decades, the region has been making significant efforts to strengthen its democracies. Today the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are more stable, with more solid institutions and more democratic governments. In this consolidation process, periodic elections are a vital way to express and validate the will of the people. Elections have arrived as the only legitimate means of access to power.

IX INTER-AMERICAN MEETING
OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES
Lima, Peru
November 24th - 25th, 2014

Organization of
American States

JNE
Desde 1931, por la Gobernabilidad y la Democracia

ONPE
OFICINA NACIONAL DE PROCESOS ELECTORALES

Canada

Electoral institutions are the bodies tasked with upholding the rules of the democratic game. Their most important tasks include supervising and monitoring the election process, particularly election campaigns. They are responsible for verifying the accounts of political parties and candidates and monitoring the flow of campaign resources. The region's electoral institutions generally have various powers to monitor activities and to prevent and punish actions that could impair the equity and transparency of elections.

Given the changing nature of election campaigns, candidates' practices can pose new challenges to their supervision and monitoring by electoral bodies. One of the region's growing issues in recent years is the increasing use of state and public administration resources for electoral ends. State intervention affects the integrity of elections because those in power can use their privileged positions to make public resources available for the benefit of specific groups with electoral aspirations. The electoral observation missions that the OAS deploys in the Hemisphere (OAS/EOMs) have observed some of these practices.

In this context, one of the key challenges identified is related to the control of government intervention in the election process. A combination of factors makes this issue worthy of greater attention. These include the tendency, in Latin American law, to favor reelection[1] and the use of media to disseminate propaganda on government actions during the election period. Supervision and monitoring by electoral institutions is limited and complicated by human and financial resource constraints, especially at the local and regional levels. Also, in countries where reelection does not apply, a lack of legislation on the matter allows those in power to use their influence to make public resources available to advance a particular political option.

The use of public resources in the election period varies in the region. It is limited by regulatory frameworks, political institutions, and different cultures. There is no consensus today on what constitutes government intervention in an election, its limits, or its scope[2].

---

[1] At present, over two thirds of the Latin American countries (14 of 18) allow reelection. However, the rules vary greatly--whether the candidate may be reelected immediately, after a term in office, on a limited basis, or indefinitely. For further information, see Zovatto, D. *"La reforma Político Electoral en América Latina"* in *"Una nueva agenda de reformas políticas en América Latina,"* Paramio, L. and Revilla, M. (Eds.). , Madrid, 2006.

[2] The OAS manual on financing provides that "Prohibiting the misuse of public resources means preventing use of the public budget, goods, or services and of granting of public positions for electoral purposes" (page 16).

To foster the necessary discussion of this issue, DECO, in partnership with Georgetown University, has developed a set of indicators to assess the likelihood that a country will allow the use of public resources in an election campaign[3]. Some of the main issues identified by these indicators are discussed below.

Certain regulations in the region limit the advertisement of government achievements in the communications media. However, the structure of the media (their concentration and ownership), as well as the rules on government advertising expenditures during elections, could facilitate government intervention. There is also the potential use of one's public position (time, resources, or power) for electoral ends. Public resources used for electoral campaign purposes include monetary and intangible resources, such as vehicle use, state assets, and social programs. As for vote-buying and patronage, despite the perennial nature of these problems in the region, great challenges still remain in terms of clearly and adequately defined mechanisms for prosecuting and punishing such practices.

Because government intervention in election processes is an important issue in the region, the Ninth Inter-American Meeting of Electoral Management Bodies provides a forum in which the various electoral institutions can discuss their experiences with such challenges and the strategies they employ to mitigate the effects of such intervention on the equity and transparency of the election. DECO places high priority on learning how authorities assess this issue and on contributing to strategies for addressing it.

2. Challenges to Electoral Institutionality

Election authorities are subject to exhaustive public scrutiny and high standards of transparency. Because trust in these institutions is vital to an election, at times certain actors have sought to undermine that trust and discredit an electoral process or create doubt as to its outcome. Such actors have tried to pressure election authorities to influence certain decisions or remove and replace their high officials.

The work of electoral institutions can be assessed by the outcome of elections and by the perception of their performance. Such evaluations are greatly flavored by the political and

---

[3] OAS – Georgetown Capstone Project, "Government Use of State Resources for Electoral Purposes: complementing the political Financing methodology of the Organization of American States (OAS)", 2014. Unpublished manuscript, submitted for publication.

short-term conditions surrounding an election. Factors that influence perceptions of their work may differ from their actual performance.

Examples are found in a number of studies on the region[4]. Although electoral institutions have performed efficiently and effectively, citizens and some political actors in Latin America view them with some mistrust. According to recent LAPOP[5] surveys, the level of trust in electoral institutions is, on average, 4.3 out of a possible 7. This rating varies significantly between countries, showing the gap between actual performance and perceived performance.

Levels of trust in electoral institutions usually depend on three variables: their institutional design, the country's electoral policy context, and its political culture[6]. None of these variables alone is a deciding factor in the level of citizen confidence; it results from a combination of causes particular to each country. Still, studying certain factors yields an approximation of the prevailing confidence level: how much autonomy electoral institutions have in exercising their functions; how confident people are in their country's principal institutions; and how competitive the elections are[7]. Together, they give an idea of the complex relation between actual performance and perceived performance.

Public opinion is also influenced by how information is presented, molding the perception that is formed, and publicly discussed, of an institution's work. Although citizens' perceptions may differ from the reality, this tends to prevail. There is also the increasingly proactive role of social networks in campaigns and elections. Today, any citizen with Internet access can take an active role in social networks with the information, whether accurate or inaccurate, he or she publishes and distributes, contributing to views of the electoral institution's work.

---

[4] *"Annual Report 2013,"* http://www.latinobarometro.org/documentos/LATBD_INFORME_LB_2013.pdf,

[5] The LAPOP survey is based on 18 Latin American countries: Argentina, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Panama, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Paraguay. For further information, see http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/

[6] Barreda, Mikel; Ruíz Rodríguez, Leticia. *"La cadena causal de la confianza en los organismos electorales of América Latina: sus determinantes y su impacto sobre la calidad de la democracia."* Chile, 2013.

[7] Idem.

To bridge this gap, some of the Hemisphere's institutions have solid communications strategies, public information access tools, and mechanisms to make their internal activities transparent. Despite the challenges, electoral institutions in the region have instruments they can use to influence public opinion favorably.

To the extent that an electoral institution discloses and publicizes its actions (as in a transparency platform on its own website), it can reduce challenges to electoral institutionality. This shines light on its progress, both in managing the election process and in implementing electoral regulations, and facilitates access to information. However, in order for the publication of information to act as a means of dissuasion, information campaigns must be waged to publicize, and raise confidence in, the work of electoral institutions.

All key actors, including opinion-makers and the leading communications media, must be clearly identified, so as to mitigate the impact of information intended to discredit and delegitimize the electoral institution. Under this strategy, electoral institutions can use social networks as a valuable instrument for closer interaction with citizens and to provide a counterweight to published information.

The various electoral institutions have faced questioning of various sorts. During the Ninth Inter-American Meeting of Electoral Management Bodies, participants are expected to discuss strategies adopted in the different countries, share their instruments, and assess their applicability in other contexts. The following questions are also posed for reflection: How can an electoral institution shield itself from criticism by candidates, on the one hand, and by the media, on the other? Are social networks an effective tool for managing communications crises?

3. Quality management in election processes

The region's electoral institutions constantly face the need to improve their election services. This involves changes to organizational culture and to the processes themselves. Implementation of quality management systems (QMS) permits the adaptation of internal institutional processes to levels and standards defined in international regulations, with substantial improvements in productivity, efficiency, and efficacy.

Considering the importance of specific tools to meet this need, the OAS promoted the creation of ISO/TS (technical specification) 17582:2014, better known as the Electoral ISO, which was published in February 2014[8]. The Electoral ISO is an international management system standard developed by a group of elections experts under the auspices of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), which adapts quality management principles to the electoral arena. The Electoral ISO is based on ISO 9001, the innovative quality management standard, which has become the most successful international standard in history.

For Electoral ISO certification, the standard defines ideal performance requirements in eight essential aspects of any election: (1) voter registration; (2) registration of political organizations and candidates; (3) electoral logistics; (4) vote casting; (5) vote counting and declaration of results; (6) electoral education; (7) oversight of campaign financing; and (8) resolution of electoral disputes.

It also provides a certification system that advises electoral institutions according to clear expectations and objective judgments focused on performance evaluation. The Electoral ISO specifies the "what," but not the "how," of implementing an electoral quality management system. Although the OAS played a leading role in developing and publishing the standard, it will not have a direct role in the future certification of electoral institutions. The OAS, by creating the office of the International Electoral Accreditation Body (IEAB) within the Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO), is charged with *accrediting the certifying bodies* that will certify electoral institutions under IOS/TS 17582:2014.

OAS experience shows that electoral institutions can benefit from quality management systems, especially the Electoral ISO standard. First, the standard provides guidance on designing an effective management system that will enable an electoral institution to provide services that meet the expectations of voters, candidates, and political organizations. The technical standard is also a tool to help electoral institutions generate more transparent, effective processes, building credibility and increasing public confidence. Under Electoral ISO certification, an electoral institution commits to meeting the highest quality standards and providing citizens with reliable election services. The certification

---

[8] For further information, see: International Organization for Standardization (ISO) "ISO/TS 17582:2014" Available at http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue_detail?csnumber=60045, November 5, 2014.

process supports this commitment in an objective way, with impartial performance records compiled by independent agencies.

Lastly, establishing quality and electoral client satisfaction as essential parts of election services promotes professional management and strengthens institutions. Election systems management based on the Electoral ISO foster ongoing staff development within the electoral institution, strengthening its organizational culture and promoting excellence in management through a philosophy of continual improvement.

Given the importance of this new international electoral standard, participants in the Ninth Inter-American Meeting of Electoral Management Bodies will be able to share their experiences in implementing quality management systems, discuss the difficulties they face, and explore strategies for collaboration on successful certification processes. The meeting will also promote discussion on the utility of an electoral management standard, as well as opportunities to respond to any concerns this may elicit.