



Event report

Protecting Elections: Expert Group Meeting

Stockholm, 14–15 March 2023

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In partnership with
Canada



Acknowledgements

International IDEA would like to specially thank all expert participants and peers for their invaluable contributions throughout the workshop proceedings, inputs to the report and expressed interest for continuous engagement with the project. Thanks also go to all International IDEA colleagues who supported the project team before, during and after the Expert Group Meeting, including but not limited to: Tendai Chinamora-Jönsson and Suado Shire, for impeccable administrative and logistical support; the project interns, Anne-Lin Vervaet and Seval Salman, for hard work with taking notes and preparing session transcripts; Midori Kosaka for translation; Fletcher Cox for providing important conceptual insights; and Therese Pearce Laanela, Erik Asplund and Oliver Joseph, for continuous support and contributions during the meeting and report writing.



Summary

The integrity of elections is declining worldwide. In response, International IDEA is working to advance, promote and protect sustainable democracy. Along these lines, the Institute has devised an integrated framework for protecting elections (hereafter referred to as the ‘Protecting Elections Framework’ or the ‘Integrated Framework’), which promotes the use of risk management, resilience-building and crisis management methods in elections. This conceptualization has been inspired by International IDEA’s work on electoral risk management, democracy resilience and the conduct of elections during the Covid-19 pandemic, through which the Institute learned about country-specific challenges and practices in dealing with risks, threats and crises situations. In 2023, the Institute received a grant from the Government of Canada to further develop and promote the use of the Protecting Elections Framework to support Boundary Partners in their efforts to protect the integrity of electoral processes in their specific contexts.

As the initial milestone of International IDEA’s three-year project on Protecting Elections, an Expert Group Meeting was organized, on 14–15 March 2023, at International IDEA’s headquarters in Stockholm. The meeting was attended by 26 experts from electoral management bodies (EMBs), international organizations and academia, including International IDEA.¹ The main objective was to obtain experts’ views and input on key concepts and implementation steps proposed by the project.

Throughout the sessions, the participants shared and discussed examples and experiences relating to country-specific challenges and best practices, all of which helped to connect the project’s concept with the situations experienced by key electoral stakeholders. Along these lines, experts from different countries/regions pointed to various **risks to electoral integrity** and measures taken to counter them. For example, risks included armed conflicts, natural hazards, pandemics, exclusion of women and/or marginalized people, misuse of power, corruption, the timing of elections, fake news and disinformation, lack of professionalism, violence and more. Although participants pointed to the challenges of assessing and mitigating these risks, there was a general agreement that strengthening **risk management** processes is a good practice for EMBs to prevent risks from materializing. For some EMBs it was key that these practices were formalized and systematic, while others underscored the importance of staying flexible and making sure that risk management did not become too cumbersome or superficial. The importance of considering risks holistically and contextually was an essential takeaway from the discussions.

When it came to **resilience-building**, the discussions pointed to multiple ways in which EMBs exhibit resilience, either by withstanding, adjusting or transforming in the face of electoral stresses and shocks.

¹ Participating experts included: Sebastian Bay (Election Security team at Swedish Election Authority), Davidetta Browne Lansanah (National Elections Commission of Liberia), Oleh Didenko (Central Election Commission of Ukraine), Thomas Fann (Bersih—Coalition for Free and Fair Elections, Malaysia), Patrik Gilbert (Planning and International Cooperation at Élections Québec), Carin Göransson Cederstrand (Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), Swedish agency for peace, security and development), Denis Kadima (Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) of the Democratic Republic of Congo), Hisham Kuhail (Central Elections Commission Palestine), Kyle Lemargie (Democratic Resilience and Innovation at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)), David Levine (German Marshall Fund), Jean Mensa (Electoral Commission of Ghana), Declan O’Brien (Kofi Annan Foundation), Salvador Sánchez (Institute for Democratic Studies (INED), Electoral Tribunal of Panama), Shubhra Saxena (Election Commission of India), Dharmendra Sharma (India International Institute of Democracy and Elections Management (IIDEM)), Gerson Uaripi Tjihenua (Electoral Commission of Namibia), Katuska Valencia (National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE), Peru), Ellen Weintraub (US Federal Election Commission). The International IDEA team included: Massimo Tommasoli, Therese Pearce Laanela, Sead Alihodžić, Tendai Chinamora-Jönsson, Julia Thalín, Erik Asplund, Peter Wolf and Fletcher Cox (University of Uppsala).



Several participants drew on their experiences of conducting elections during the Covid-19 pandemic to demonstrate how their EMB had shown flexibility and adapted to the new situation. Technology and social media had been key in many of these cases. Even though it was clear that being resilient could mean different things in different countries, some common elements emerged through the discussions. These included timing of electoral events, the need to be agile and transparent, sufficient funding, a strong mandate, and a flexible legal framework and procedures. The importance of collaboration between organizations that have/share mandates and interests to protect electoral integrity was also underlined as critical.

Moreover, the presentations and discussions shed light on various **crises** that electoral management bodies may face. These included natural disasters, technological failure, pandemics, political crises, among others. Multiple strategies and efforts taken to deal with electoral crises emerged throughout the presentations and discussions. While these differed between countries, several examples highlighted the importance of contextual and situational awareness and ensuring that EMBs are trusted, engaged, active and proactive in the community. Another common feature of such efforts is the distinction between the sphere of control and the sphere of influence of EMBs.

Finally, the presentations provided multiple examples of efforts taken by EMBs to promote **gender equality in electoral processes** and deal with gender-based electoral discrimination and violence. These included, for example, the adoption of gender equality policies and gender quotas, and collaboration with other stakeholders. Despite efforts being taken, challenges—such as gender-based electoral violence, discriminatory laws and practices, and lack of institutional ownership—persist. Altogether, systematic integration of gender equality into EMBs’ activities and processes was underscored as crucial to strengthening and protecting electoral processes. Adopting a gender-sensitive and inclusive lens could reveal and address inequalities and discriminatory practices.

The event reaffirmed the relevance of project outputs for electoral stakeholders and confirmed the feasibility of the project roadmap towards delivering such results. Expert discussions, relating to challenges and good practices, helped to further enrich, elaborate and anchor risk management, resilience-building, crisis management and gender sensitivity in the experiences of EMBs around the world. Altogether, the discussions helped validate the project’s broad conceptual framework and establish a network for engagement throughout the project (including entry points for tests and pilots).

On average, participants evaluated the event highly. Of the 15 participants who filled in the event evaluation form, 12 rated the overall workshop as ‘excellent’ (highest score) and 2 as ‘good’ (second highest score). All participants who filled in the evaluation form expressed interest in staying engaged with the project to some extent. The evaluation summary and data can be found at the end of the report.



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Background

There is evidence that the cleanliness of elections is declining worldwide; a decline that is related to the deteriorating democratic environment in which the elections occur (International IDEA 2019², V-Dem 2021³, International IDEA 2021⁴). When electoral risks materialize, they can generate domestic political crises, trigger violent conflicts and violence against women and girls in all their diversity, and undermine governments' domestic and international legitimacy. These complex and multi-level challenges necessitate persistent work on strengthening approaches to the protection of electoral integrity. While it is necessary to continue to develop specific remedies for the contemporary challenges that electoral processes face, it is as important to devise frameworks that can unlock synergies between them.

International IDEA is implementing a project on Protecting Elections through its work on Electoral Processes and utilizing the Government of Canada funding. The overall project objective is to deliver a set of gender-sensitive knowledge resources, training materials and assessment tools—organized in a Protecting Elections Framework—that can inspire, enable and empower electoral management bodies (EMBs) and other stakeholders (such as other government bodies and agencies, regional EMB networks, civil society organizations, and national and international electoral assistance providers) to safeguard the integrity of electoral processes. In pursuing this objective, the Electoral Processes team will conduct several expert discussions, compile original comparative case studies, develop framework resources, test and pilot them in different country contexts, and share the final products as global public goods.

The Expert Group Meeting was the initial milestone of the Protecting Elections project. The specific meeting objectives included:

- discussing critical concepts proposed by the project;
- exploring synergies between existing national practices, research and electoral assistance efforts; and
- discussing criteria and contexts for conducting test and pilot exercises.

Overall, the expert discussion aimed to be beneficial for the project implementation team in ensuring that the project is adequately calibrated in terms of the method, comparative scope and outputs it delivers.

Participants and the method

The event brought together a group of 26 experts, including: representatives of national EMBs and regional electoral networks; International IDEA staff; specialists from academia, policy and practice spheres, including gender experts; and experts from peer organizations. The International IDEA team invested considerable effort in ensuring diversity and gender balance among participants. Although the initial round of invitations was sent to an equal number of women and men, a full gender balance was not

² International IDEA, Global State of Democracy 2019, Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise: (Stockholm International IDEA, 2019) <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/global-state-of-democracy-2019>

³ V-Dem Institute, Autocratization Turns Viral, Democracy Report 2021 (Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, 2021), https://www.v-dem.net/documents/12/dr_2021.pdf

⁴ International IDEA, Global State of Democracy Report 2021, Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2021.91>



achieved due to transfers and allocations within participating organizations,⁵ reflecting the reality of elections being a male-dominated field, especially at the senior-level positions.⁶ For a full list of participants, see Annex 1. As a result of the constructive discussions and feedback provided by experts, the project team will further increase their efforts to ensure gender balance and diversity at future events (see page 21).

Once experts were confirmed, each was assigned one or multiple roles, which included the presentation of experiences relating to the organization of elections or research, the facilitation of discussions, or summarizing discussions. Each expert was encouraged to contribute throughout the event by sharing ideas and by pointing to resources that could contribute to building a better understanding of the issues and ways forward in protecting elections.

The event included nine sessions (see agenda in Annex 2). Four sessions were designed to obtain experts' opinions and get additional insights about the conceptual thinking and steps in implementing International IDEA's Protecting Elections project. These sessions were:

- Session 1: Protecting elections: conceptual discussion
- Session 2: The project outline and research plan
- Session 5: Protecting elections in conflict-prone societies: the evolution of international responses
- Session 9: Project-related tests and pilots

The content of these sessions was introduced by International IDEA project staff and an academic fellow. Gender sensitivity was integral in all sessions.

Five sessions were designed to stimulate exchange and learning about specific aspects of broader efforts to protect elections. These sessions were:

- Session 3: What do elections need protection from?
- Session 4: Risk management in elections
- Session 6: Resilience-building in elections
- Session 7: Crisis management in elections
- Session 8: Ensuring gender-sensitive and inclusive efforts to protect elections

Each of these five sessions included several short introductory presentations by national experts. It was highlighted that the country cases presented would be further elaborated during the Q&A session. However, presenters who felt overly constrained by the short time assigned were invited to provide written submissions on their topic and beyond. More details about each session are provided below.

⁵ In some instances, when female invitees were unable to accept the invitation, they delegated male colleagues. After consultation within International IDEA, the decision to accept such an arrangement was made on an individual basis. Also, all non-sponsored participants, who were representing peer organizations interested in attending and contributing to the meeting, were male. Ultimately, it led to a 1:2 gender imbalance.

⁶ Research by International IDEA shows that only 22 per cent of EMBs across the world are being led by women. Asia records the lowest numbers (10 per cent), followed by Oceania (11 per cent) and Africa (19 per cent). Europe (24 per cent) is slightly above the global average, while the Americas (36 per cent) has the highest percentage of women chairs of EMBs of all regions (International IDEA (2022), Few women at the top of electoral management bodies worldwide, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/few-women-top-electoral-management-bodies-worldwide>)



Photo: Participants of Expert Group Meeting

The event

Welcome and opening remarks

Moderator: Therese Pearce Laanela, Head of Electoral Processes, International IDEA

Opening remarks: Kevin Casas-Zamora, Secretary-General, International IDEA

Therese Pearce Laanela opened the meeting and welcomed participants. Before handing over to International IDEA's Secretary-General, Kevin Casas-Zamora, for opening remarks, Ms Pearce Laanela gave a short introduction on International IDEA's work on Electoral Processes. The Protecting Elections project is part of a broader shift within International IDEA, which involves moving from the idea that it is enough to organize elections well to ensure electoral integrity. While moving into this new Protecting Elections phase, the project staff need to make sure that the conceptual framework and the programming works well. The purpose of this meeting is therefore to explore and discuss what protecting elections means, what we are protecting, from who we are protecting it and how we are doing it.

In his opening remarks, Mr Casas-Zamora gave context to why we are protecting elections and why International IDEA is involved in this work. He raised three main points. Firstly, he alluded to why protecting elections is critical to protect democracy globally. In short, credible elections are the pillar of



democratic practice and democratic integrity—threats to elections thus threaten democracy itself. As recent developments show, we cannot take elections for granted, neither in transitional nor in well-established democracies. There is thus an urgent need to protect elections globally. This need has been reflected in International IDEA’s new strategy, which includes a specific commitment to protecting democracy rather than advancing democracy. Secondly, Mr Casas-Zamora described how the Protecting Elections project, funded by Canada, is part of this shift. This Expert Group Meeting is the first milestone of the project and has convened a diverse range of experts from the field with the purpose of exchanging experiences and insights. The goal is that the discussions will benefit the work of the experts, as well as the design of the project resources.

As a final point, Mr Casas-Zamora underscored the importance of adopting a holistic approach—looking at prevention, resilience and recovery—in order to successfully protect elections. A useful analogy is the way in which we protected ourselves and our societies during the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, we had to put in place measures to prevent contamination (analogy: wearing masks, washing hands and maintaining distance). In parallel, we had to build resilience, by boosting our immune system (analogy: getting vaccinated). Last but not least, when we end up in an acute condition, we should know how to recover and regain health (analogy: taking medication or being hospitalized). As lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic show, we must ensure that the measures taken at all stages in a crisis integrate gender and inclusivity. If not, we risk adopting measures that are gender-blind and that unintentionally worsen the status quo for women and marginalized individuals. Moving forward with the discussions on protecting elections, this analogy would be useful to keep in mind.

Session 1: Protecting elections: conceptual discussion

Introduction and moderation: Sead Alihodžić, Senior Advisor, Electoral Processes, International IDEA

The objective of this session was to introduce and invite experts to critique the Protecting Elections concept devised by International IDEA⁷. The concept will be further developed, tested, piloted and launched through the project cycle. Specifically, the aim of the introductory presentation was:

- to introduce the conceptual thinking on which the project builds;
- to check the extent to which experts can connect their professional experiences with fundamental concept premises; and
- to establish a shared understanding between experts concerning subsequent event discussions.

The session was opened with two acknowledgments. One was that the ‘*protecting elections*’ discussion could take many shapes and forms, all of which may be genuine for advancing the protection elections effort. The second was to acknowledge the complexity of shaping discussion in a way that will effectively utilize the enormous wealth and variety of experiences brought in by experts.

⁷ International IDEA (2021), Protecting Elections – An Integrated Framework, <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/protecting-elections-%E2%80%93-integrated-framework>



The presentation provided the background to the protecting elections global debate and the project. It explained the rationale for the project's main objective to '*unlock synergies between different remedies for protecting electoral integrity*', which goes beyond focusing on individual challenges (or comprehensive mapping of challenges and remedies for protecting elections, which will form part of the project).

Through a series of statements and questions for experts, the concepts and the relationship between electoral risks, electoral threats and electoral crises were discussed. Consequently, methods of risk management, resilience-building and crisis management were introduced. Along these lines, the two key definitions/statement included:⁸

'Protecting elections may be defined as efforts to prevent, withstand or recover from negative occurrences that may undermine the integrity of electoral processes and results.'

'Efforts to protect elections should be led by national organizations that are well versed in applying risk management, resilience-building and crisis management methods to this end.'

The presentation was followed by a discussion covering a broad spectrum of issues related to the conceptual framework, as well as the implementation of methods of risk management, resilience-building and crisis management in electoral processes. Several participants pointed to difficulties regarding proper assessments of risks in electoral processes. This had been evident not least in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana (J. Mensa). The experience from Sweden is that—given the complexity of risk assessment methods and limited exposure to electoral challenges in the past—the EMB focuses on the *vulnerabilities* of different parts of the electoral process. In this way, the EMB can build the capacity to prevent and withstand risks in different areas (S. Bay). Moreover, the importance of systemic solutions (S. Saxena); building allies and networks (T. Pearce Laanela); and a multi-level approach targeting both national and regional actors/networks (D. Levine, H. Kuhail, S. Alihodžić) were mentioned as cornerstones for protecting elections.

Although the experts' inputs reflected a variety of perspectives and experiences, the project's broad conceptual framing was validated during the session. Overall, the discussions helped achieve a shared understanding of the protecting elections approach and the fundamental project premises relating to prevention, resilience and recovery.

⁸ Elaborated in the International IDEA draft discussion paper: *Protecting Elections: Risk Management, Resilience-Building and Crisis Management*, forthcoming 2023; draft shared with participants.



Session 2: The project outline and research plan

Introduction and moderation: Erik Asplund, Senior Programme Officer, International IDEA, and Julia Thalín, Associate Programme Officer, International IDEA

During the second session, Erik Asplund and Julia Thalín gave a presentation on the Protecting Elections project outline and research plan. Mr Asplund described the project's two main objectives:

1. Deliver a set of gender-sensitive global public goods, shared as the Integrated Framework, that can inspire, enable, and empower EMBs and other stakeholders in protecting the integrity of electoral processes.
2. To improve the capacity and practices of EMBs and other stakeholders in countries that test, pilot and use the Integrated Framework to protect electoral integrity in the face of various risks.

The main activities towards this end will include expert discussions, commissioning original case studies, development of resources (knowledge products, training and assessment tools), testing and piloting them in three or four countries, lesson learning, consolidation of different remedies and resources, and availing them as a global public good. The research activity (consisting of a literature review and case studies) is being implemented at this stage of the project implementation. Mr Asplund alerted to the three focus areas of the case studies⁹ and the considerations for country selection. At this stage, 23 countries¹⁰ were being considered (based on regional diversity, recommendations from International IDEA regional programmes, etc.), of which a minimum of 10 will be selected for case studies.

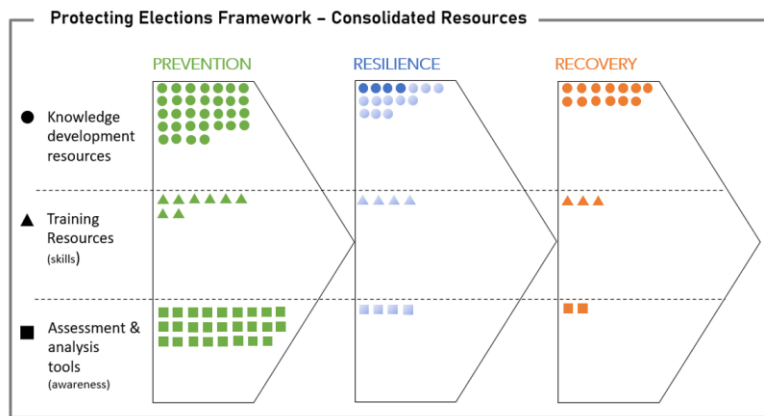
Ms Thalín further informed the participants about the literature review effort. The aim of the literature review is to establish an understanding of the extent to which the concepts of prevention, resilience and recovery are applied in existing electoral management literature, and the extent to which gender and inclusivity are integrated in these resources. Initial findings were presented (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

⁹ Prevention: How do national stakeholders assess and prevent electoral risks from materializing? The case study will investigate evidence—or lack of it—related to policies, practices and situations in which prevention was successful or failed. Resilience: How do national stakeholders deal with materializing risks (sustain stresses and shocks)? The case study will investigate evidence—or lack of it—where national stakeholders demonstrated—or failed to demonstrate—resilience in the face of emerging threats. Recovery: How do national stakeholders manage crises (deal with acute situations to return to normalcy). The case study will investigate evidence—or lack of it—where national stakeholders demonstrated—or failed to demonstrate—the ability to effectively deal with crises that undermine the integrity of the electoral process (as a whole or some of its elements).

¹⁰ Potential case study countries: *Americas*: Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico, Paraguay, United States; *Middle East*: Iraq, Lebanon; *Africa*: Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia; *Asia*: Australia, Fiji, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Timor–Leste; *Europe*: Albania, Moldova, Turkey.

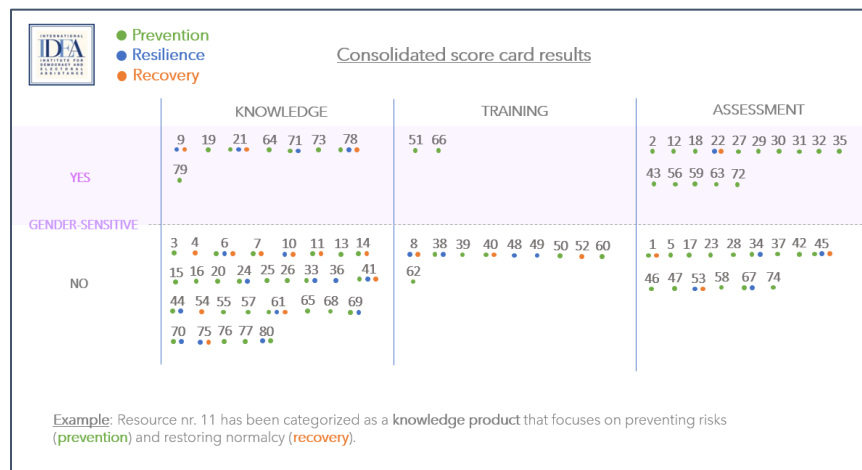


Figure 1: The prevalence of the remedies (prevention, resilience, recovery) in the different types of products (knowledge, training, assessment)



Note: Prevention (green) is the most common in the identified resources. Gender-sensitivity is not captured.

Figure 2: The spread of the identified resources across types of product and types of remedies



Example: Resource nr. 11 has been categorized as a knowledge product that focuses on preventing risks (prevention) and restoring normalcy (recovery).

Note: The numbers represent the identified resources. The coloured dots represent the remedies included in the resource. The placement of the numbers across the different columns reflects what type of resource the number represents and if it is gender-sensitive or not.¹¹

The figures shows that the concept of prevention appears to be the most prevalent, while resilience is the most difficult concept to capture in the literature. This is partly due to the lack of adequate synonyms for the term resilience and the difficulties of distinguishing specific resilience-building efforts from general business management practices. The concept of recovery was also less prevalent. Most of the resources identified are not gender-sensitive. Participants were invited to contribute with relevant resources.

¹¹ Note that the findings presented in the figures are initial and can be subject to revision.



Following the presentations, the floor was open for questions and comments. In relation to case studies, three main points were addressed. First, Poland was recommended as a case for looking into crisis management and resilience-building dynamics (D. Levine). Second, Thailand was recommended with reference to the current state of democracy in the country, as well as the upcoming elections (T. Fann). Third, several participants enquired about the possibility of conducting case studies at a regional level. Moreover, and as a last point, the importance of avoiding a binary approach to gender equality with a view to capturing non-binary persons was underlined (D. Levine).

Besides providing the project team with concrete suggestions with regard to the case studies and the importance of ensuring the adoption of an intersectional gender approach, the session helped to validate the project outline and research plan.

Session 3: What do elections need protection from?

Moderation: Declan O'Brien, Head of the Elections and Democracy Programme, Kofi Annan Foundation

The objective of this session was to learn about and discuss experiences and country-specific examples of what elections need protection from. Four experts (three EMB representatives and one representative of a non-governmental organization (NGO)) presented various risks and threats to electoral integrity, some of which appeared to be common in different electoral contexts. In summary, the presentations and the following discussion showed that elections need protection from:

- War/conflict (O. Didenko, D. Kadima)
- Dictatorship, authoritarianism and undemocratic values (O. Didenko)
- Pandemics, including Covid-19 (S. Saxena)
- Natural hazards (S. Saxena)
- Terror threats (D. Kadima)
- Politicians' misuse of power, corruption and criminal activity among candidates (O. Didenko, D. Kadima, S. Sánchez, S. Saxena)
- Fake news, misinformation and disinformation (D. Kadima, S. Sánchez, S. Saxena, J. Mensa)
- Misuse of technology, including cyber-attacks (D. Kadima, S. Sánchez, S. Saxena, J. Mensa)
- External actors imposing anti-democratic values (O. Didenko)
- Actual or perceived impartiality and professionalism of EMBs (D. Kadima)
- Internal sabotage, including information leakage (D. Kadima)
- Late funding of EMBs to run elections (D. Kadima)
- Late appointment of the election commission (D. Kadima)
- Political finance, including unregulated candidate funding (S. Sánchez)
- Inadequate timing of elections (S. Sánchez)
- Inadequate staffing and/or lack of professionalism among electoral staff, including due to recruitment and training challenges (S. Sánchez)
- Delayed Supreme Court decisions on electoral law processes (S. Sánchez)
- Violence and attacks (S. Sánchez, S. Saxena)



- Exclusion of women and/or marginalized people, including persons with disabilities, the elderly, LGBTQ+ persons, among others (S. Saxena)
- Physical barriers to accessibility of polling stations (S. Saxena)

Moreover, the presentations and discussions pointed to various actions that EMBs and other actors can take to counter risks and threats. Experts from India highlighted the importance of constitutional backing, having an adequate judicial and legal framework, seeing elections as a continuous process, and integrating risk management into the electoral process, as well as dealing with physical and other barriers to participation (such as linguistic and geographic barriers). Ensuring women's equal participation, and recognizing marginalized groups as voters and ensuring their inclusion in the electoral process, are both also crucial to protecting electoral integrity. In India, multiple measures exist to ensure that marginalized people, such as trans people, elderly people and people with disabilities, are given equal access to voting, including through special voting arrangements (i.e., proxy voting, postal voting, mobile box voting, etc.). Separate access and security checks for women at polling stations were mentioned as crucial measures to improve women's political participation in India (S. Saxena). Moreover, in the case of Panama, a systematic approach was taken to address threats and vulnerabilities identified during the previous electoral process. An electoral law was currently being developed for these purposes (S. Sánchez).

Other successful examples of protecting elections came from Ghana. When efforts had been made by the opposition to undermine the Election Commission through fake news, misinformation and disinformation, the Commission had, according to Ms Mensa, successfully responded by strengthening its communication strategy. Public education, and a transparent engagement with multiple stakeholders (including traditional authorities, media, civil society and development partners) throughout the electoral cycle, had been crucial in the Ghanaian Commission's effort to regain trust and credibility (J. Mensa). In a similar way to the case of Ghana, participants from India and Panama pointed to technology and social media as useful tools to develop quick responses to fake news (S. Saxena, S. Sánchez). However, as stated by S. Saxena, technology could be seen as a double-edged sword—it was both an enabler and a threat to elections. The latter was not least true when candidates did not act in good faith, using social media as a tool to undermine the electoral process (S. Saxena, S. Sánchez, T. Pearce Laanela). To counter these efforts, examples from India showed how disclosure could be a powerful policy instrument. By making it mandatory for political parties and candidates to declare to the electorate if they have any criminal records, they leave it to the citizens to decide if they want to elect a criminal or not (D. Sharma).

Finally, the case of Ukraine underscored the importance of protecting elections as a *value*. Russia's invasion is not only a war to claim territory but just as much a war on the values of freedom, democracy, and free and fair elections. In fact, many experts believe that it was the democratic progress of Ukraine that posed a threat to Russia and triggered the invasion. In addition, the situation in Ukraine illustrates how the protection of elections can no longer be considered a national and local matter but rather a global challenge that requires global solutions. Hitherto, responses from the global community have been insufficient. One example was when Russia organized parliamentary elections on the territory of Crimea just after the illegal annexation in 2014. Over 1 million additional votes were included in the voters' lists, without legal grounds, which significantly distorted the election results. This had raised concern among the global community, but responses were insufficient. Moving forward, it is important that the global



community send proper signals and protect elections from dictatorship and authoritarianism (O. Didenko).

In summary, the experiences and views shared by the participants resulted in a better understanding of what elections need protection from—one anchored in reality. This list of key issues generated from the discussion, together with the testimonies of best practices and actions taken by EMBs to counter risks and threats, constitutes an important reference for ensuring the proper calibration and scope of the project.

Session 4: Risk management in elections

Background: *Risk is the likelihood of negative occurrence. Electoral risk management is a systematic effort to improve knowledge about and situational awareness of internal and external risks to electoral processes in order to initiate timely preventive and mitigating action. There are many ways in which risks can be managed. Still, common denominators of formal risk management processes include: 1) risk identification; 2) risk assessment; 3) risk analysis and evaluation; 4) risk communication; and 5) risk treatment (see Annex 3: Guidance Note).*

Moderation: David Levine, Elections Integrity Fellow for the Alliance for Securing Democracy, German Marshall Fund of the United States

Three experts gave presentations, followed by a broader discussion. The purpose was to learn about experiences from different countries in terms of dealing with electoral risks. In particular, focus was on policies and practices relating to the five elements of common risk management processes.

Presentations pointed to a large number of risk factors. Fake news (K. Valencia) and interference by undemocratic foreign or domestic/local groups (S. Bay) were highlighted as external risk factors. The case of Namibia brought attention to several internal risk factors, including the fact that the autonomy of the Commission—which is granted by the Constitution—is limited to the functions of the Commission and not its institutional independence (G. Tjihenuna).

The presentations furthermore pointed to different examples of risk management methods and strategies used by EMBs.¹² For example, in 2022, the Peruvian National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) developed a knowledge management platform that incorporates risk management activities. The risk cycle at ONPE included four stages: 1) identification; 2) analysis and evaluation; 3) treatment; and 4) residual risk assessment. Several benefits have been identified with this approach, including providing a solid basis for planning and decision-making (K. Valencia). Another example was the vulnerability approach taken by the Swedish Election Authority. Rather than focusing on risks and likelihoods of their materialization, the Swedish Election Authority had moved towards focusing on vulnerabilities and consequences. This decision stemmed partly from the fact that assessing risks in electoral processes, which in the past have been implemented smoothly, had proven difficult. On top of this, the vulnerability assessment was a standardized method used by the Swedish Security Services and could thus easily be translated to an electoral context (S. Bay). In the case of Namibia, the Electoral Commission adopted a

¹² See the Electoral Commission of Namibia's Risk Management Strategy (2022); the Swedish Election Authority's vulnerability approach; and the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) in Peru's knowledge management platform on risk management.



Risk Management Strategy in 2022. Although coupled with operationalization challenges (see below), the Namibian experience was that having a formalized approach to addressing risks was imperative and that risk management was a critical component in ensuring credible elections.

Experts pointed to several practical challenges of conducting a risk assessment in electoral processes. In Namibia, these include the lack of risk management tools for monitoring and evaluation, insufficient human capacity, and the lack of trained units and staff (G. Tjihenuna). Another challenge that emerged in the Peruvian case was the difficulty of integrating the risk assessment with other management systems, such as occupational health and safety, anti-bribery, eco-efficiency (K. Valencia). The Swedish case demonstrated the challenges of assessing the likelihood of risks in electoral processes altogether (S. Bay).

The expert discussions raised several questions and concerns, all which reaffirm, contextualize and deepen the thinking of the project. In summary, the experts advised the project team to think holistically and contextually about risk management. Another important takeaway from the experts' inputs was the importance of remembering that elections happen in a social, cultural and political context and, therefore, are not mechanical operations. Indeed, experts underscored that effective electoral risk management will ensure that challenges do not overwhelm the mainstream electoral management work. In this regard, a systematic approach to identifying risks and vulnerabilities is vital to mitigating them. A final important point raised was the need to ensure that risk management is conducted in an inclusive way and that resources are allocated to the process.

[Session 5: Protecting elections in conflict-prone societies: the evolution of international responses](#)

Presentation by Fletcher Cox, academic fellow at Uppsala University

The session's objective was to explore the conceptual linkages between the premises of protecting elections as devised by International IDEA, and that of a peace and conflict perspective. The presentation was divided into three parts, all situating the concepts of prevention, resilience and recovery in the broader peace research. The first part focused on Galtung's triangle of violence and the concepts of negative and positive peace. Linkages were made between the concept of protecting elections and 'positive peace'. Similarly, many of those challenges that elections face could be found in the concept of 'negative peace'.

The second part brought attention to theoretical perspectives of conflict prevention throughout the electoral cycle. The civil war model of 'need—creed—greed' was a particular focus. In short, this model had been developed as a response to the debate about the root causes of armed conflicts, revolving mainly around whether civil war was caused by *need* or *greed*. This model could be useful in understanding electoral violence and political resolution (protected, resilient electoral cycles). It was particularly important to understand need, creed and greed as interrelated causes. One example was the escalation of political conflicts based on identity.



The last part adopted a historical perspective on the evolution of norms through five generations of United Nations peace operations. The overall question addressed was how the Protecting Elections project fits into the bigger picture of norm evolution. More recently, there is a tendency to shift from ‘prevention’ to ‘resilience’.

In summary, the session provided important insights for the project’s conceptual thinking, in terms of understanding the potential to better link the work of electoral assistance providers with broader peacebuilding efforts and communities.

Session 6: Resilience-building in elections

Background: *Resilience denotes the capability of a system or its elements to withstand pressures. Electoral resilience may be defined as the ability of electoral institutions and processes to maintain continuity in the face of stresses and shocks. It can mainly be exhibited through three types of behaviour: 1) sustaining stresses and shocks without the need to change how things are done; 2) adopting some flexibility in how things are done to absorb stresses and shocks which are occasional; or 3) transforming yourself to be able to deal with new realities (see Annex 3: Guidance Note).*

Moderation: Kyle Lemargie, Senior Global Advisor for Democratic Resilience and Innovation, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)

Four experts gave presentations, focusing on how their organizations build and display resilience.

The presentations pointed to multiple ways in which EMBs exhibit resilience either by withstanding, adjusting or transforming in the face of electoral stresses and shocks. Examples from Ghana showed how the Commission managed to withstand stresses without changing how things were done. When the Commission had decided to prepare a new biometric voter register, due to major flaws in the previous one, it was faced with strong resistance from the opposition party. As the Commission was convinced that the new voter register was essential to a credible and fair election, they stood by its decision. To reinforce their position and transparency, they responded with an information campaign and an online platform to inform citizens, and address misinformation, disinformation and fake news. The platform allowed the Commission to engage with citizens and remove the secrecy surrounding their work. Altogether, these measures helped the Commission maintain its citizens’ trust, allowing for a successful registration exercise (J. Mensa).

Several participants drew on their experiences of conducting elections during the Covid-19 pandemic to demonstrate the resilience of their EMBs. For example, the Electoral Commission of Ghana and the US Federal Election Commission (FEC) (which regulates campaign finance in the United States) managed to carry on with their respective activities during the 2020 election by having the flexibility to adapt to the new situation. In both these cases, technology and social media were used to ensure electoral resilience (J. Mensa, E. Weintraub). The experiences of the FEC also pointed to the importance of professionalism among staff in enabling electoral resilience during the pandemic. In addition, flexible legal frameworks can allow administrators to be flexible and creative in difficult circumstances. This can be crucial to ensure public trust in election results (E. Weintraub). Moreover, experiences from India showed how the Election



Commission of India (ECI) had used its mandate to introduce special voting arrangements to navigate the new reality during the pandemic period. The methodologies developed by ECI to deliver a free and fair election gained support in other sectors. ECI's approach became a base model for a transparent and equitable delivery and distribution of the Covid-19 vaccine (D. Sharma).

Experiences from Liberia pointed to the importance of securing early and timely funding for the National Elections Commission to build long-term resilience in electoral processes. In Liberia, the major challenge to building electoral resilience was the perpetual delay in electoral funding, creating uncertainty in both the planning and implementation processes. Further, it affects the credibility of the Commission in the eye of the general public and vendors of electoral goods and services. Given Liberia's history of civil war and fragile peace, any threats towards the credibility of elections were highly unwanted. To counter this challenge, new legislation that mandates the authorities to provide funding into an escrow account two years before an election year has been proposed. If this proposal were to be realized, the Commission would be on a steady path to build resilience in elections because of early, timely funding (D. Browne Lansanah).

In summary, the experts' experiences showed that resilience was exhibited through actions of moving forward, being adaptive and/or transformative. Although the diverse testimonies demonstrated that being resilient could mean different things in different countries, some common elements emerged through the discussions. To mention a few examples, experts pointed to the need for adequate timing, the need to be agile and transparent, and the importance of having funds, allies and a flexible legal framework. Altogether, and importantly, the experts helped to clarify, contextualize and provide specificity for the project's conceptual thinking about electoral resilience.

Session 7: Crisis management in elections

Background: *Crises combine a threat to core values, a sense of urgency and high uncertainty. Situational electoral crises may result from deep political crises, conflicts, natural disasters, failure of critical infrastructure, to name a few. Institutional electoral crises can happen when the performance of EMBs or other organizations with electoral mandates (for example, the electoral justice system) is widely and heatedly called into question, to the point when it becomes an acute situation that jeopardizes electoral integrity. Common denominators of crisis management models are preparedness, response, and recovery and learning (see Annex 3: Guidance Note).*

Moderation: Therese Pearce Laanela, Head of Electoral Processes, International IDEA

The session aimed to provide space for discussing the management of electoral crises. Three experts presented their experiences.

The presentations shed light on different types of crises that EMBs may face. International IDEA's Erik Asplund pointed out that responding to a crisis is a serious challenge because it requires decisions to be made in situations with a lack of information and severe stress. A crisis can occur at any time during the electoral cycle as a result of, for example, data theft, technological failure, a new virus or a natural disaster



(flood, cyclone, etc.). According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, the number of natural disasters, including floods and cyclones, has tripled in the last four decades. This dramatic development is consistent with the predictions of climate scientists, and it is thus highly likely that elections will more frequently be affected by natural hazards in future years (E. Asplund).

Experiences from the Malaysian NGO Bersih 2.0 demonstrated that an electoral crisis could occur due to a political crisis, as shown by the 2018 political coup in Malaysia. Although the general elections had been peaceful—resulting in the first-ever change of federal government—a political coup then overthrew the elected coalition¹³. This was partly the result of the absence of legal barriers, compounded by the presence of incentives for elected representatives to change party allegiance. Due to an unstable political environment, in which people’s collective will could be overturned, trust in the democratic process of elections was undermined. Altogether, this showed how important it is that efforts to protect elections are seen beyond the actual conduct of elections (T. Fann).

The case of Palestine provided another angle to electoral crises. A political crisis triggered the cancellation of the legislative elections of 2021 and prompted international involvement (involving an occupying force/state and international negotiations, leading to the Oslo Agreement). Due to the absence of an Israeli agreement to hold elections in Jerusalem, and the lack of alternative solutions presented by the Palestinian political leadership, the Central Elections Commission decided to cancel the election. Some argued that the Commission should have proposed options for solutions itself, given the trust it enjoys among people. It avoided doing so to ensure that it did not enter the sphere of politics. There is still an ongoing debate concerning the reasons behind the decision: some suggest it was a political manoeuvre by the Palestinian leadership to stay in power, and some say it was a political stance regarding Jerusalem (H. Kuhail).

Multiple strategies and efforts taken to deal with electoral crises emerged throughout the presentations. International IDEA’s research finds that national stakeholders should continuously improve their capacity to deal with crises through policies and practices that strengthen their preparedness, responsiveness, recovery and learning. When last-minute approaches to solve problems are necessary, decision-makers should rely less on improvisation and more on crisis management methods. This typically requires crisis leadership, coordination and communication (E. Asplund). The case of Malaysia further showed that contextual and situational awareness and sensitivity was crucial for responding to the political crisis adequately (T. Fann). The Palestine case points to the importance of EMBs being trusted, engaged, active and proactive in the community. EMBs should not hide behind the law or the fact that their mandate only extends to the power to conduct elections. EMBs must have allies from different spheres of society and use awareness and engagement as tools (H. Kuhail).

In summary, the presentations and discussions gave validation and context to the project’s conceptual thinking about electoral crises. The lived and diverse experiences of crises that EMBs face show that periods of crises—while being difficult—can also provide a momentum for implementing reforms and building social coherence. In addition, the experts provided important insights with regard to electoral

¹³ The political crisis in Malaysia began in February 2020 with the "Sheraton Move" - which some refer to as a 'political coup' - when members of parliament switched party support leading to the fall of the ruling Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition government and the resignation of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. Political instability continued throughout 2020 and 2021, exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic.



crisis management, some of which pointed to the importance of engaging multiple institutions, as well as distinguishing between the sphere of control and the sphere of influence. Overall, the diverse experiences shared by the experts will inspire the development of the project resources relating to electoral crises.

Session 8: Ensuring gender-sensitive and inclusive efforts to protect elections

Background: *While electoral integrity is a ‘means for safeguarding gender equality, human rights, and women’s empowerment, it is also an ‘end’ that can only be achieved through the participation of women and marginalized individuals as voters, electoral staff or candidates. For this reason, attempts and strategies to undermine the integrity of electoral processes are often focused on undermining gender equality and women’s empowerment. When efforts to protect elections are gender-blind, they run the risk of unintentionally worsening the status quo for women and marginalized individuals (Annex 3: Guidance Note).*

Moderation: Massimo Tommasoli, Director of Global Programmes, International IDEA

The objective of the session was to give the participants the opportunity to share experiences and discuss how gender equality and women’s empowerment are related to electoral integrity. Four experts gave presentations.

The presentations provided multiple examples of strategies and efforts adopted in different contexts to promote gender equality in electoral processes and deal with gender-based electoral discrimination and violence. A report published within the framework of cooperation between International IDEA and RECEF¹⁴ showed that 9 out of 12 members that participated in the study had undertaken gender-sensitive initiatives and included gender equality as part of their concerns, including by integrating gender when planning and writing election reports (P. Gilbert). In both Namibia and Peru, legal frameworks promoted women’s equal representation and participation (G. Tjihenuna, K. Valencia). The Electoral Act of Namibia provisioned that two out of five of the Commissioners should be women, and the Local Authority Act mandated that at least 50 per cent of the candidates should be female. In addition, the Electoral Commission of Namibia had adopted a gender policy, aiming to promote the integration of gender equality perspectives into the management, to optimize electoral and referendum processes, and to develop an institutional environment and culture that support gender equality in internal systems and practices. Altogether, these efforts have greatly improved women’s political participation in the country and a female president is likely to be elected in the next election (G. Tjihenuna).

To deal with gender-based electoral discrimination and violence, the Electoral Commission in Peru worked with political parties to make them aware of the need to incorporate a gender-sensitive perspective. The Commission had also taken measures to ensure that political parties complied with the training of women (K. Valencia). Moreover, in Puntland, Somalia, the ‘one person one vote’ approach had been piloted as an exercise of extended suffrage. As part of this approach, Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) supported the

¹⁴ RECEF & International IDEA (2021), L’égalité entre les femmes et les hommes au sein des OGE et dans les processus électoraux : défis et pistes d’action pour les organismes de gestion des élections du RECEF, <https://recef.org/2021/publication-du-rapport-legalite-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes-dans-la-francophonie/>



Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) to develop internal guidelines for gender mainstreaming, referring to women's opportunities within the institution and the EMBs' external activities throughout the electoral cycle. With support from FBA, the EMB and the political associations had also agreed on a voluntary quota, called '*the one in three model*'. This model led to a significant increase in the number of women who were elected to office in the pilot districts. Targeted support for young women's participation in electoral processes had also been important (C. Göransson Cederstrand).

However, despite efforts in different contexts to advance gender equality within electoral processes, the participants also pointed to multiple challenges to ensuring gender-sensitive efforts to protect elections. Experiences from RECEF showed that gender equality initiatives were often led by one person (often a woman) or a small group within an EMB. For those actions to be sustainable and effective, they must be embedded into an EMB's institutional policies and be the responsibility of all staff and management. However, the EMB's role in organizing elections and the challenges of its day-to-day work frequently take precedence over the integration of gender issues. In such instances, women find themselves alone in their organizations, trying to make gender equality a priority (P. Gilbert).

Additionally, multiple external challenges were mentioned. Some participants pointed to how laws could become barriers to women's participation in the election by being discriminatory and gender-blind (P. Gilbert, K. Valencia). For example, the case of Peru showed that women and marginalized groups often faced a different reality from what is stipulated in laws and regulations. Despite conducive legal frameworks, experiences demonstrate that women and minorities are still highly under-represented in general elections, as well as regional municipal elections. Gender-based electoral violence, offline and online, is also persistent, and the fear of retaliation is high (K. Valencia). The prevalence of gender-based violence towards women as voters, candidates, EMB officials and polling workers was mentioned in several country cases (P. Gilbert, K. Valencia, T. Pearce Laanela, C. Göransson Cederstrand, S. Bay). Moreover, discriminatory political financing was also highlighted as an obstacle (K. Valencia), exemplified through the testimony of a former female Peruvian candidate:

'I have not had any financial backing from the political party which I run in 2018. I have only used my own resources to float my campaign, I've never received anything during my political career. I had to ask for a loan from a financial fund, which I to date have been paying off with almost all my salary as a laid-off person.'

Despite remaining challenges, the presentations underlined that efforts to strengthen gender equality could have positive implications on electoral integrity, and vice versa. The integration of gender equality into EMBs' activities and processes is a crucial aspect of strengthening and protecting democracy, including through building trust and promoting the transparency, accountability and legitimacy of the electoral processes. By adopting a gender-sensitive and inclusive lens, inequalities, discriminatory practices and violence affecting certain groups, such as women, minorities and people with disabilities, will be revealed and addressed, and elections will become safe for all. Ignoring these inequalities blinds EMBs to seeing the unequal structures and dynamics embedded in the institutions, and weakens their ability to effectively tackle the challenges (P. Gilbert, G. Tjihenuna).



In summary, the presentations and discussions pointed to some lessons learned and best practices on how to ensure gender-sensitive efforts to protect elections:

- Elections are not an event but a process. Integrating a systematic gender analysis in each step of this process is an important and helpful tool. This means looking at how both women and men are impacted across the electoral cycle, in terms of access, opportunities and challenges (C. Göransson Cederstrand, P. Gilbert).
- It is important to get away from the narrative that women are a minority. Elections cannot be credible as long as half of the world's population is excluded. Hence, women's participation should not be treated as a side-track issue and mentioned in passing (C. Göransson Cederstrand).
- A strong legal framework promoting gender-equal representation and participation, an internal gender equality strategy, and/or internal guidelines for gender mainstreaming and quotas are crucial to ensuring gender-equal and inclusive electoral processes (G. Tjihenuna, C. Göransson Cederstrand, K. Valencia).
- Laws are not gender-neutral and can become barriers to the full participation of women in elections. Conducting a gender analysis of national electoral legal frameworks can allow the targeting of components that have differentiated effects on women and men, and bring forward recommendations for improvements and reforms (P. Gilbert).
- Coordination between EMBs and other stakeholders is key to bringing about change. This includes, for example, political parties, civil society, the security sector and relevant ministries (K. Valencia, C. Göransson Cederstrand). In Somalia, the EMB's collaboration with the police has been important in strengthening efforts to combat electoral gender-based violence (C. Göransson Cederstrand).
- As gender-based electoral violence is common, safe spaces and gender-sensitive electoral security efforts are key to ensuring the safety and security of women in all their diversity (P. Gilbert, T. Pearce Laanela, M. Tommasoli, C. Göransson Cederstrand, K. Valencia).
- As men see themselves as leaders more often than women do, it is important to be persistent in including women and creating opportunities for their participation as candidates. Campaign finance tools can be used to advance political participation for female candidates. For example, the USA allowed the use of campaign funds for childcare expenses by candidates while campaigning (E. Weintraub). Sex-disaggregated data and robust qualitative evidence should be used to make visible structural inequalities and allow for a better understanding of the challenges faced by women in elections (P. Gilbert, K. Valencia, C. Göransson Cederstrand, T. Pearce Laanela).
- International normative frameworks on gender equality, human rights and women's participation can be helpful in orienting, building and advancing legal and normative frameworks at national and regional levels (M. Tommasoli).
- There is a need to collect evidence on how gender sensitivity and inclusion in elections represent both the 'means' to and the 'ends' in protecting elections: a way to protect election integrity and an asset to protect (S. Alihodžić).



As a result of the constructive discussions and feedback provided by experts, the project team will further increase their efforts to ensure gender balance and inclusivity at future events. The project team recognizes that—in the male-dominated field of electoral management (not least at senior-level positions)—this requires inviting more women than men at the onset and spelling out that invitations are only transferable to other female representatives, irrespective of the level of seniority.

Session 9: Project-related tests and pilots

Introduction and moderation: Sead Alihodžić, Senior Advisor, Electoral Processes, International IDEA

The session’s objective was to inform participants about the project activity tests and pilots and allow experts to share ideas, insights and feedback.

Sead Alihodžić explained that ‘tests’ are country engagements in which the Integrated Framework or its specific parts are tried outside of the immediate electoral context. The focus may be on specific remedies only. At least three tests will be done in different countries. The purpose is to validate early drafts and prepare the project team for implementing the pilots. ‘Pilots’ are country engagements in which the Integrated Framework is tried in the actual electoral process. At least one pilot event will be done. The purpose is to investigate whether the Integrated Framework will make the intended contribution to protecting elections in the specific context. The goal is to have the draft Integrated Framework finalized by autumn this year. It will consist of:

- *Draft Protecting Elections Guide* (includes conceptual and empirical parts (comparative practices))
- *Draft Assessment Tool* (possibly, although different formats may be tried)
- *Draft Training Curriculum* (a BRIDGE type training)
- *Protecting Elections Toolkit* (a consolidated compendium of existing resources)

Through the session, the selection criteria for pilot countries were discussed and clarified, and a way forward devised. Successful pilot exercises need the involvement of committed people on the ground. Thanks to this session in particular, and the Expert Group Meeting in general, the project team now has people in diverse contexts to open these doors.

Closing remarks

Closing remarks: Massimo Tommasoli, Director of Global Programmes, International IDEA

Massimo Tommasoli commenced his closing remarks by thanking the participants for the valuable feedback provided on the conceptual framework throughout the duration of the Expert Group Meeting. He then shared some reflections and main takeaways from the two days’ discussions. One lesson learned from the experts’ contributions was the importance of staying mindful that the terminology used can have



different meanings in different contexts. This included the use of the concept ‘protect/protection’. As the project moves forward, experts have shone attention on the importance of considering what we need to protect. The discussions have shown that some elections do not deserve protection in themselves, but that it is rather the integrity of these elections that we need to protect. In these efforts, the experts have shown that it is also important to consider how we can strengthen the institutions and the institutional memory of those responsible for the elections, namely the electoral commissions and the EMBs. Distinguishing between the sphere of influence and the sphere of control could be helpful in this regard. Another takeaway is related to the interlinkages between the concepts of risk management, resilience-building and crisis management. Experts pointed to the importance of looking into how the concepts are linked, rather than seeing them as isolated. In addition, experts underscored that we must be clear on how gender equality connects to electoral integrity. Given that electoral gender-based violence and discrimination are common concerns across regions, Mr Tommasoli suggested that we could consider looking at how preventative efforts have a different impact on women/men/non-binary people, to assess the effectiveness of these efforts. Special attention could also be given to global normative frameworks and how they can be helpful to guide reform/change at the national and regional levels. Finally, participants were invited to stay engaged in this newly established network, as well as continue sharing insights, experiences and resources.



Summary of participants’ meeting evaluation

The participants were asked to evaluate the quality of the overall workshop, expert discussions, the relevance of themes/topics, the quality of presentations, the format of the workshop, and the logistics and administration. On all of the above, all of the participants who filled in the form (15 out of 18) selected options ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ (on the scale: excellent, good, average, below average and poor). See evaluation data below. Participants were explicitly asked if they believed that IDEA’s Protecting Elections project would contribute to improving existing policies and practices for protecting elections (including in terms of gender sensitivity). All participants who filled in the form answered yes to this question. Among those who provided more extensive feedback, most participants agreed that there is a need to consider and deal with risks, threats and crises, and that EMBs need to be equipped with tools to address these issues. Some evaluations specifically pointed to the need for systemic approaches and the potential for the project to contribute in this regard. The need to address gender issues in a clear and systematic way throughout the project was also brought up. One participant commented on the terminology of ‘protecting’ elections, suggesting that the term ‘defending’ would be a better fit. Finally, most participants expressed interest in receiving further information and were open to discussing involvement in tests and pilots. Finally, most experts indicated that their organization would be interested in capacity development opportunities following the launch of the Protecting Elections Framework.

Participants’ evaluation data

Number of participants who filled in the evaluation form: 15 out of 18

Gender balance: 10 men, 5 women

Gender balance among those who did not fill in the form: 2 men, 1 woman

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	AVERAGE	BELOW AVERAGE	POOR	OMITTED ANSWER
Overall workshop	12	2				4
Expert discussions	11	3				4
Relevance of themes/topics	12	3				3
Quality of presentations	10	5				3
Format of workshop	12	3				3
Logistics and administration	10	5				3

Do you believe that International IDEA’s Protecting Elections project will contribute to improving existing policies and practices for protecting elections (including in terms of gender sensitivity)? If yes, how? If no, why?

- Number of participants answering yes: 14 (one participant answered ‘I hope so’).
- The participants’ answers on ‘how’:



- ‘Incredibly important conversation to be having now. Our sector is at a pivot point and developing these new models are critical in moving forward. Need to think through/analyse gender implications.’
- ‘I think it will produce an impactful public good regarding methods and good/best practices.’
- ‘The current trend globally is a pushback against democracy and more and more elections are being undermined by political actors who have little regard to democracy. We need to identify the threats and risks.’
- ‘I believe it will, since it entails awareness, capacity building, regional perspectives, testing and piloting. It is a holistic approach to a common issue.’
- ‘By providing tools to EMBs that they badly need.’
- ‘I think that the various themes of the project vis-à-vis risk management, resilience guiding, gender sensitivity and crisis management are essential to the entire electoral process and electoral integrity.’
- ‘Yes, though would stop the use of the term “protecting”.’
- ‘By institutions endeavouring to adapt the concepts in strengthening existing policies where present and initiatives were non-existent.’
- ‘It was an eye opener in so many ways.’
- ‘Although the subject is often discussed, it’s not done in a consequent manner. Therefore, consulting a comprehensive tool regarding the issues discussed will be helpful.’
- ‘There is a huge need for systemic approaches that could be developed by the project as it contributes to practical implementation and sustainability of project outcomes.’
- ‘The gender issue needs to be clarified, but there is clear potential. Providing the type of support and knowledge we discussed will be utterly important at a time when EMBs are under increasing pressure.’
- ‘As an electoral organization it is very important to consider the integrity of the elections as our main responsibility. Understanding this view is essential for the actual design of the care that we must consider before risks, threats, or crises.’

Number of participants wanting to be involved in receiving further information on the project:

15

Number of participants wanting to be open to discuss involvement in tests and pilots:

13 (1 omitted answer, 1 must check with authorities)

Number of participants whose organization would be interested in capacity development opportunities following the launch of the Protecting Elections Framework:

13 (1 omitted answer, 1 open to discuss)



Final Agenda

Protecting Elections: Expert Group Meeting

Stockholm 14-15 March 2023

Day 1, 14 March 2023

09:30 - 09:45	Welcome and opening remarks Moderator: Therese Pearce-Laanela, Head of Electoral Processes, International IDEA Opening remarks: Kevin Casas-Zamora, Secretary General, International IDEA
9:45 - 10:00	Introductions – tour de table Moderator: Therese Pearce-Laanela, Head of Electoral Processes, International IDEA
10:00 - 10:45	Session 1: Protecting elections: Conceptual discussion Introduction and moderation: Sead Alihodzic, Senior Advisor Electoral Processes, International IDEA
10:45 - 11:00	Coffee/Tea Break
11:00 - 11:30	Session 2 The project outline and research plan Introductions and moderation: Erik Asplund, Programme Officer, and Julia Thalin, Associate Programme Officer, Electoral Processes, International IDEA

Speakers are grouped to provide regional and context diversity. Order is always alphabetic per country.



11:30 – 12:30	<p>Session 3</p> <p>What do elections need protection from? Moderator: Mr. Declan O'Brien, Head of the Kofi Annan Foundation's Elections and Democracy Programme</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mr. Denis Kadima, President of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) of the Democratic Republic of the Congo- Mme. Shubhra Saxena, Director of the Election Commission of India- Mr. Salvador Sánchez, Director of the Institute for Democratic Studies at the Electoral Tribunal of Panama (INED)- Mr. Oleh Didenko, Chairman the Central Election Commission of Ukraine
12:30 – 13:45	Lunch
13:45 – 15:15	<p>Session 4</p> <p>Risk management in elections Moderator: Mr. David Levine, Elections Integrity Fellow for the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mr. Gerson Uaripi Tjihuna, Commissioner of the Electoral Commission of Namibia and ECF SADC- Mme. Katuska Valencia, Advisor at the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE), Peru- Mr. Sebastian Bay, Team Leader for the Election Security team at The Swedish Election Authority
15:15 – 16:15	<p>A tour at the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) Guided tour by Eva Östlund, Senior Parliamentary Advisor of IDEA's INTER PARES Programme, Brussels. Seconded to International IDEA from the Swedish Parliament</p>
18:30 – 21:30	Conference dinner



Day 2 - 15 March

09:00 - 09:15	Recap of day one
09:15 – 09:45	Session 5 Protecting elections in conflict-prone societies: the evolution of international responses Introductory presentation and moderation: Fletcher Cox, University of Uppsala
09:45 – 11:00	Session 6 Resilience-building in elections Moderator: Mr. Kyle Lemargie, Senior Global Advisor for democratic resilience and innovation, IFES Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mme. Jean Mensa, Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Ghana and the President of the Association of African Electoral Authorities- Mr. Dharmendra Sharma, Senior Deputy Election Commissioner of the Election Commission of India and Director General of the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM)- Mme. Davidetta Browne Lansanah, Chairperson of the National Elections Commission Liberia and Vice Chair of ECONEC- Mme. Ellen L. Weintraub, Commissioner at the U.S. Federal Election Commission
11:00 – 11:15	Coffee/Tea Break
11:15 – 12:30	Session 7 Crisis management in elections Moderator: Erik Asplund, Programme Officer Electoral Processes, International IDEA Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mr. Thomas Fann, Chairperson of the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (BERSIH), Malaysia- Mr. Hisham Kuhail, Chief Executive Officer at the Central Elections Commission Palestine, and Chair of the Arab EMBs Executive Office
12:30 – 13:45	Lunch break



13:45 – 15:00

Session 8

Ensuring gender-sensitive and inclusive efforts to protect elections.

Moderator: Massimo Tommasoli, Director of Global Programme, International IDEA

Speakers:

- Mr. Patrick Gilbert, Director of Research, Planning and International Cooperation at Élections Québec (co-founder of RECEF), Canada
- Mr. Gerson Uaripi Tjihuna, Commissioner of the Electoral Commission of Namibia and ECF SADC
- Mme. Katuska Valencia, Advisor at the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE), Peru
- Mme. Carin Göransson Cederqvist, Women, Peace and Security Specialist at the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), Sweden

15:00 – 15:30

Session 9

Tests and pilots

Introduction and moderation: Sead Alihodzic, Senior Advisor, and Julia Thalin, Associate Programme Officer, Electoral Processes, International IDEA

15:30 – 15:45

Coffee/Tea Break

15:45 – 16:00

Closing remarks

Massimo Tommasoli, Director of Global Programme, International IDEA



Participants List

Protecting Elections: Expert Group Meeting

Stockholm 14-15 March 2023

NAME	DESIGNATION AND ORGANISATION
Mr. BAY Sebastian	Team leader for the Election Security team at the Swedish Election Authority
Mrs. BROWNE LANSANAH Davidetta	Chairperson of the National Elections Commission (NEC) of Liberia and the Vice Chair of ECONEC
Mr. DIDENKO Oleh	Chairman of Ukraine's Central Election Commission
Mr. FANN Thomas	Chairperson of the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (BERSIH), Malaysia
Mr. GILBERT Patrik	Director of Research, Planning and International Cooperation at Élections Québec
Mrs. GÖRANSSON CEDERSTRAND Carin	Women, Peace and Security specialist at the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA)
Mr. KADIMA Denis	President of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Mr. KUHAIL Hisham	Chief Executive Officer at the Central Elections Commission Palestine, and Arab EMBS Executive Office Chair
Mr. LEMARGIE Kyle	Senior Global Advisor for Democratic Resilience and Innovation at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
Mr. LEVINE David	Elections Integrity Fellow for the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the German Marshall Fund
Mrs. MENSA Jean	Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Ghana and the President of the Association of African Electoral Authorities
Mr. O'BRIAN Declan	Head of the Kofi Annan Foundation's Elections and Democracy Programme
Mr. SÁNCHEZ Salvador	Director of the Institute for Democratic Studies, Electoral Tribunal of Panama (INED)
Mrs. SAXENA Shubhra	Director of Election Commission of India
Mr. SHARMA Dharmendra	Director General of the India International Institute of Democracy & Election Management (IIIDEM)



Mr. TJIHENUNA Gerson Uaripi	Commissioner of the Electoral Commission of Namibia and the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries (ECF-SADC)
Mrs. VALENCIA Katuska	Advisor at the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE), Peru
Mrs. WEINTRAUB Ellen L.	Commissioner at the U.S. Federal Election Commission
INTERNATIONAL IDEA	
NAME	DESIGNATION
Mrs. PEARCE LAANELA Therese	Head of Electoral Processes Programme
Mr. CASAS-ZAMORA Kevin	Secretary-General
Mr. ALIHODZIC Sead	Senior Programme Manager in the Electoral Processes Programmes
Mr. ASPLUND Erik	Senior Programme Officer in the Electoral Processes Programme
Ms. THALIN Julia	Associate Programme Officer in the Electoral Processes Programme
Mr. COX Fletcher	Visiting Researcher at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University, and an Associate Professor with tenure in the Political Science Department at William Jewell College
Mrs. ÖSTLUND Eva	Senior Parliamentary Advisor of the INTER PARES Programme, Brussels
Mr. TOMMASOLI Massimo	Director of Global Programmes and Permanent Observer for International IDEA to the United Nations



Guidance Note for Expert Participants and Speakers

Protecting Elections: Expert Meeting

Stockholm, 14-15 March 2023

This event will focus on key concepts and approaches to protecting elections.

Each participant is encouraged to contribute throughout the event by sharing experiences and ideas and by pointing to resources that can contribute to building a better understanding of issues and ways forward in protecting elections. The event consists of nine sessions.

Four sessions are designed to obtain experts' opinions and get additional insights about the conceptual thinking and steps in implementing International IDEA's Protecting Elections Project. These sessions are:

- Session 1: Protecting elections: Conceptual discussion
- Session 2: The project outline and research plan
- Session 5: Protecting elections as part of international peace and security scheme (tbc)
- Session 9: Project-related tests and pilots

The content of these sessions will be introduced by International IDEA project staff and academic fellow (see agenda). Gender sensitivity will be integral in all sessions.

Five sessions are designed to stimulate exchange and learning about specific aspects of broader efforts to protect elections. These include:

- Session 3: What do elections need protection from?
- Session 4: Risk management in elections.
- Session 6: Resilience-building in elections.
- Session 7: Crisis management in elections.
- Session 8: Ensuring gender sensitive and inclusive efforts to protect elections

Each of the five sessions will include several short introductory presentations by national experts. To provide sufficient time for focused discussions, each presenter will:

- limit the initial presentation to 5-7 min,
- focus on a specific question (or, given limited time, one aspect of it), and
- adopt a gender-sensitivity approach and include gender-disaggregated data, whenever possible.

Please note: Country cases presented can and will be further elaborated during the Q&A session. However, if presenters feel overly constrained by the short time assigned, we



welcome written submissions on their topic and beyond. We will distribute such contributions to participants before or during the event.

Questions and guidance for session-specific presentations are below. Additional insight and details about conceptual thinking can be found in the *Draft Discussion Paper on Protecting Elections* (shared as part of this package).

Session 3: What do elections need protection from?

In 5-7 minutes, please indicate your thinking and experiences about protecting elections in your country. We acknowledge that presenters can take different perspectives. For example, contributions may focus on views and experiences relating to electoral integrity threats and vulnerabilities. Another approach may be to focus on the main actors that elections need protection from and their incentives. Possibly, presenters can point to the main risk factors – internal (process-related) and external (context-related) - that can undermine electoral integrity.

Given limited time and the wealth of experiences and views you may have, consider limiting your presentation to one of the issues mentioned above. We welcome your written contribution of any length.

Session 4: Risk management in elections.

Risk is the likelihood of negative occurrence. Electoral risk management is a systematic effort to improve knowledge about and situational awareness of internal and external risks to electoral processes in order to initiate timely preventive and mitigating action. There are many ways in which risks can be managed. Still, common denominators of formal risk-management processes include: 1) risk identification, 2) risk assessment, 3) risk analysis and evaluation, 4) risk communication and 5) risk treatment.

In 5-7 minutes, please point to your experiences with the five elements of common risk management processes. Consider explaining whether the risk management process is formal (elaborated in policy or strategic documents and if it has dedicated staff and resources), whether it is part of general management or whether it happens intuitively. Is risk management applied to all work areas or focused on specific issues? Does the risk management process include a gender analysis? Consider sharing stories of both successes and challenges. Given the limited time and the wealth of experiences and views you may have, consider limiting your presentation to only one of the issues mentioned above. We welcome written contributions of any length.



Session 6: Resilience-building in elections

Resilience denotes the capability of systems or its elements to withstand pressures. Electoral resilience may be defined as the ability of electoral institutions and processes to maintain continuity in the face of stresses and shocks. It can mainly be exhibited through three types of behaviours: 1) sustaining stresses and shocks without the need to change how things are done; 2) adopting some flexibility in how things are done to absorb stresses and shocks which are occasional; or 3) transforming yourself to be able to deal with new realities. Electoral resilience-building, may include the combination of: strengthening electoral management bodies, modelling institutional collaboration, and strengthening social cohesion to protect elections.

In 5-7 minutes, please point to your experiences in dealing with electoral stresses and shocks. Share details about instances when your organization displayed resilience without making a significant effort to adjust, and/or when you adjusted by introducing temporary measures to deal with a specific situation, or when you had to transform to adapt to new realities. Refer to mandates of and collaboration with other state and non-state agencies and consider sharing stories of successes and challenges. Given the limited time for your presentation and the wealth of experiences you might have, consider limiting your presentation to one of the issues mentioned above. We welcome your written contribution of any length.

Session 7: Crisis management in elections.

Crises combine threats to core values, a sense of urgency, and high uncertainty. *Situational* electoral crises may result from deep political crises, conflicts, natural disasters, failure of critical infrastructure; to mention a few. *Institutional* electoral crises can happen when the performance of electoral management bodies or other organizations with electoral mandates (for example electoral justice system) is widely and heatedly called into question to the point it becomes an acute situation that jeopardizes electoral integrity. Common denominators of crisis management models are: Common denominators of crisis management models are: preparedness, response, and recovery and learning.

In 5-7 minutes, please point to your experiences in dealing with electoral crises. Consider explaining whether the crisis management process is formal (elaborated in policy or strategic documents, is dedicated as the responsibility to specific staff, if such ad-hoc body exists etc.), whether it happens as part of general management, or whether it happens intuitively. Consider sharing whether the crisis management process is gender-sensitive. Consider sharing stories of both successes and challenges in dealing with the electoral crisis. Given the limited time and the wealth of experiences and views you may have, consider limiting your presentation to only one of the issues mentioned above. We welcome written contributions of any length.



Session 8: Ensuring gender-sensitive and inclusive efforts to protect elections.

While electoral integrity is a ‘means’ for safeguarding gender equality, human rights and women’s empowerment, it is also an ‘end’ that can only be achieved through the participation of women and marginalized individuals as voters, electoral staff, or candidates. For this reason, attempts and strategies to undermine the integrity of electoral processes are often focused on undermining gender equality and women’s empowerment. When efforts to protect elections are gender-blind, they run the risk of unintentionally worsening the status quo for women and marginalized individuals.

In 5-7 minutes, please share your thoughts on and experience of how gender equality and women’s empowerment relate to electoral integrity. Reflect upon if you have experienced the often-disadvantaged position of women and marginalized groups being exploited to undermine electoral integrity (e.g. through gender-based electoral violence, undermining of women’s possibility to run for office, vote etc.). Give examples of how you have been dealing with gender-based electoral discrimination and violence and consider if your efforts have been ad-hoc or formal (e.g. elaborated in policy or strategic documents, adequately resources and dedicated as the responsibility to specific staff etc). Reflect upon whether efforts taken to strengthen gender equality in your country/region has shown positive implications on electoral integrity and vice versa – i.e. if efforts to strengthen electoral integrity has shown positive implication on gender equality and women’s empowerment. Please share both your best practices and challenges of including a gender analysis in your efforts to strengthen electoral integrity. We welcome written contributions of any length.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have further questions.