
A Strategic Assessment of Electoral Networks and Their Roles

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ABSTRACT

Electoral networks are important for helping electoral managers around the world cope with the pace of change in the environments in which elections take place. At both the regional and national levels, an increasing number of electoral practitioners are working together through well-established networks to find solutions to common problems and build innovations through the sustained sharing of information, ideas and experience. There is an advantage to examining certain electoral issues at the global level, and setting the stage for adaptation at the regional or national levels. These issues could include improved cost effectiveness in electoral administration, principles and good practices in electoral management, the effectiveness and affordability of new electoral technologies, legislative frameworks for elections and referendums, and mechanisms for strengthening electoral justice. Electoral networks foster capacity development among electoral managers and serve as useful forums to address common concerns such as EMB independence, EMB funding or the use of technology in elections. Electoral managers need no longer operate in isolation from each other and without any external support to improve their knowledge and skills.

KEY WORDS: Electoral Management Body, Networks, Electoral Supports.

INTRODUCTION

An EMB is an organization or body that has the sole purpose of, and is legally responsible for, managing some or all of the elements that are essential for the conduct of elections and direct democracy instruments—such as referendums, citizens’ initiatives and recall votes—if those are part of the legal framework (Gabrielle, 2013). These essential (or core) elements include:

- a. determining who is eligible to vote;
- b. receiving and validating the nominations of electoral participants (for elections, political parties and/or candidates);
- c. conducting polling;
- d. counting the votes; and
- e. Tabulating the votes.

If these essential elements are allocated to various bodies, then all bodies that share these responsibilities can be considered EMBs. An EMB may be a standalone institution, or a distinct management unit within a larger institution that may also have non-electoral tasks.

What Are Electoral Networks and Why Do They Matter?

According to Kelly (2012), globalization has brought rapid and dynamic changes to organizational management, including electoral administration, and such changes are encouraging EMBs to move away from the hierarchical structures and routines of the past. At both the regional and national levels, an increasing number of electoral practitioners are also working together through well-established networks to find solutions to common problems and build innovations through the sustained sharing of information, ideas and experience. Kelly (2007) noted that, electoral networks foster capacity development among electoral managers and serve as useful forums to address common concerns such as EMB independence, EMB funding or the use of technology in elections. Electoral managers need no longer operate in isolation from each other and without any external support to improve their knowledge and skills.

National Electoral Networks

Lagueny, (2011) identified the various Electoral Networks in different nations:

In the UK, all senior electoral administrators (returning officers) belong to the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA). The AEA conducts regular training and education for electoral administrators, acts to safeguard their interests, and serves as a network of resources and expertise for its members. It offers professional qualification courses, which are mandatory for appointment to electoral-related positions in UK local authorities, which are governmental EMBs.

In the United States, the National Association of State Election Directors and the National Association of Secretaries of State serve as useful forums for electoral managers to exchange views and improve their capacities and performance. The International Association of Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers (IACREOT) holds regular electoral professional development courses for its members, and annual trade shows for electoral-related equipment and supplies. The National Association of Clerks and County Recorders (NACRC), the Election Center and the National Association of Counties also organize events for local election officials.

The Electoral Council of Australia, a consultative forum comprising national and state electoral commissioners and chief electoral officers, meets regularly. Its main objectives are to ensure the quality of the electoral registers for all elections in Australia and to improve Australian electoral administration in general. The Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina Election Officials (AEOBH) consists of electoral officials from the three entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina and holds conferences, seminars and other consultations to promote democratic, open, transparent elections. Similar activities are carried out by the Federal Forum of Provincial Electoral Bodies of Argentina, which brings together subnational EMBs to exchange experiences, legislation and case law in electoral matters.

Regional EMB Networks

During the 1980s and 1990s, regional cooperation between EMBs intensified, and a number of regional associations were established to facilitate and sustain cooperation. The objectives of the early regional electoral associations that were formed in the 1980s, however, were so general as to be little more than a framework pointing to desirable goals with little specific commitment. The Association of Electoral Bodies of Central America and the Caribbean (known as the Tikal Protocol), established in Guatemala in 1985, was a representative body of electoral organizations designed to achieve cooperation, exchange information and facilitate consultation. Its recommendations were not binding on its member organizations. The Association of South American Electoral Organizations (the Quito Protocol) was formed in 1989 along similar lines.

The Inter-American Union of Electoral Organizations (UNIORE) was established in 1991 to promote cooperation between the electoral organizations and associations created under the Tikal and Quito protocols. It extended the potential scope of cooperation to provide support and assistance, as far as practicable, to member organizations that requested it. The Costa Rica-based Center for Electoral Promotion and Assistance (CAPEL), established in 1983, acts as the executive secretariat of these networks (Laguëny, & Dérose, 2010). Although the elements of information exchange, cooperation and consultation still featured prominently in the objectives of associations formed in the 1990s, there was greater focus on broad common goals such as the promotion of free, fair and credible elections, independent and impartial EMBs, and transparent electoral procedures. Specific common regional goals were emphasized, such as cooperation in the improvement of electoral laws and practices; the promotion of participation by citizens, political contestants and non-partisan NGOs in electoral processes; and the establishment of resource centres for research and information. These associations also stressed the development of professional electoral officials with high integrity, a strong sense of public service, knowledge and experience of electoral processes, and a commitment to democratic elections.

Some of the associations that typify these dimensions according to Lijphart, (1984), are:

- The Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO), established in 1991;
- The Association of African Election Authorities, established in 1997;
- The Association of Asian Election Authorities, established in 1998; and
- The Association of Caribbean Electoral Organizations, established in 1998.

Although the mandates of these networks differ in detail, they all aim to promote the free flow of information among election practitioners and to provide electoral assistance to their member EMBs. For example, noted in López Pintor, (2000), the objectives of the ACEEEO include the following:

- promoting open and transparent elections through an exchange of experiences and information relating to election law and procedure, technology, administrative practice and voter education;
- promoting training and further education of election officials and international observers;
- promoting the principle of independent and impartial election authorities and administrators;

- developing professional election officials with high integrity, a strong sense of public service, knowledge of electoral practice and commitment to democratic elections;
- promoting the principle of participation in electoral processes by citizens, political contestants and non-partisan civic organizations; and
- Developing resources for election-related information and research.

Other regional networks were created around the same time, including the Pacific Islands, Australia, New Zealand Electoral Administrators Network (PIANZEA) and the ECF of the SADC. The following decade saw the establishment of more regional networks such as the Andean Electoral Council of the Andean community, the Commonwealth Electoral Network (CEN), the Electoral Council of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBSA), the Forum of National Electoral Commissions of the East African Community, the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), and the Network of Francophone Electoral Authorities (RECEF) (Makulilo, 2009). The potential benefits of regional cooperation through associations of electoral organizations are considerable. New EMBs can draw on the support and experience of more established electoral authorities, accelerate their capacity building by exchanging personnel, and may even be able to borrow electoral materials at relatively short notice.

According to McMillan (2012), the development of EMB networks is constrained in practice by two issues that affect individual EMBs:

Lack of resources to participate in the association's activities and fear of compromising their perceived independence. Some EMBs shy away from active participation because they fear that depending on the government for resources for travel, research or other programmed activities might compromise their independence.

Resource constraints also restrict the activities of the associations themselves, which have to depend mainly on outside funding.

Global Electoral Networks

The development of regional associations of electoral organizations and the increasing internationalization of elections through advocacy of international standards for democratic elections led to the establishment of a global forum for discussion of EMB collaboration. The conference of the Global Electoral Organization (GEO) Network, which was first convened in Ottawa in April 1999, is a worldwide meeting of regional associations of electoral officers. Subsequent conferences were held in Mexico (2003), Hungary (2005), the United States (2007), Botswana (2011) and South Korea (2013). GEO conferences provide an opportunity for associations of electoral officials to meet in a global professional network and serve as a forum for identifying areas of need in electoral governance, and programs that can be developed to respond to those needs.

The National Election Commission of the Republic of Korea initiated and led the launch of the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB), which held its inaugural assembly during the sixth GEO conference in October 2013. A-WEB is an international organization created with a vision to foster efficiency and effectiveness in conducting free, fair, transparent and participative elections worldwide. Membership in A-WEB is open to national EMBs. Regional associations of

EMBs may join A-WEB as associate members, while international election-related organizations may become partners (Merloe, 1997).

The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, which is a continuation and transformation of the original Administration and Cost of Elections (ACE) Project, is the result of a collaborative effort between International IDEA, EISA, Elections Canada, the INE of Mexico, IFES, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), UNEAD, The Carter Center and UNDP. According to Okello (2006), the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network is a dynamic, online knowledge service that provides comprehensive and authoritative information on elections, promotes networking among election-related professionals and offers capacity development services. It features information on nearly every aspect of elections, with an emphasis on cost, sustainability, professionalism and trust in the electoral process. Its networking component, the ACE Practitioners' Network, provides online access to a network of election professionals from all over the world to professional advisory services. It encourages election practitioners to collaborate on common issues and challenges and to generate, share and apply knowledge; help build common methods; and improve the professionalism of those engaged in activities related to credible, sustainable, peaceful and cost-effective elections Mozaffar (2002).

According to Norris, Frank, & Martinez (2014), the growing use of social networks has also facilitated contacts between election professionals, and numerous groups and forums dedicated to elections have sprung up on Facebook, LinkedIn and similar social media. Such networking creates additional opportunities for sharing experiences, identifying expertise and promoting election-related resources. There is an advantage to examining certain electoral issues at the global level, and setting the stage for adaptation at the regional or national levels. These issues could include improved cost effectiveness in electoral administration, principles and good practices in electoral management, the effectiveness and affordability of new electoral technologies, legislative frameworks for elections and referendums, and mechanisms for strengthening electoral justice.

Electoral Support Networks

According to Neufeld (1995), in many parts of the world, national or regional electoral support networks have been formed that comprise CSOs such as democracy promotion organizations, media organizations, human rights organizations, women's organizations, religious-based groups and other community-based organizations. Examples include the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and the faith-based People's Voter Education Network (JPPR) in Indonesia at the national level, and the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) and the SADC Electoral Support Network at the regional level. While some electoral support networks specialize in election monitoring or observation, many support EMBs in areas such as research on electoral matters, training, and voter education and information.

Gabrielle (2013), who carried out a case study on "Haiti: A Crisis of Credibility" discovered that Haitian elections face a profound crisis of public credibility and confidence. Although Haitians consider elections to be an important instrument of political and social change, there is a widespread belief that neither the electoral process nor the political leaders are conducive to voter participation. He concluded that the first step toward emerging from the ongoing crisis will be the creation of the constitutionally mandated, permanent CEP with financial and

administrative autonomy. Neutrality of electoral dispute resolution must be guaranteed, and an exit strategy and transfer of professional capacity is necessary to end the longstanding dependence on external actors for electoral activities. To meet its constitutional requirements and international obligations, the permanent CEP must reverse its course on women's political participation. Improved management of external communications and responsive voter education can help improve transparency and faith in the process. As Haiti emerges from the challenges of recent years, credible electoral administration will be a key factor in building a better future.

Conclusion

1. National associations of electoral administrators, such as those in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the UK and the USA, can play a significant role in professional development, information exchange and as a lobby group for electoral reforms.
2. Regional EMB networks provide opportunities for EMBs to assist each other by drawing on the experience of longer-established EMBs, personnel exchanges, pooling of research and information, and equipment sharing.
3. Global electoral networks, such as the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, the GEO Network and A WEB, offer collaborative opportunities for EMBs and electoral associations to share knowledge and improve electoral governance.

Recommendations

1. Community-based electoral support networks can help EMBs disseminate information and provide additional resources for activities such as training and voter education.
2. Electoral support networks can be effective partners for EMBs, using links to local communities and access to funds—particularly donor funds in emerging democracies—to augment their skills base and enhance information flows to and from them.
3. Electoral networks promote information exchange and improvement in electoral processes, providing opportunities for EMBs to share experiences and good practices.

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