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ELECTORAL ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

A Tool to Assess Needs, Define Objectives, and Identify Program Options

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Voting in Sierra Leone 2018 elections.

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ACRONYMS

ANFREL	Asian Network for Free Elections
AU	African Union
CAF	Conflict Assessment Framework
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil society organization
DoGP	Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations
DoP	Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
DRL	State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDR	Electoral dispute resolution
EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
EMB	Electoral management body
ENEMO	European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations
EPP	Elections and political processes
EPT	Elections and political transitions
EU	European Union
FSN	Foreign service national
GNDEM	Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors
GONGO	Government-organized nongovernmental organization
GOTV	Get out the vote
ICAF	Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IEOM	International Election Observation Mission
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
INL	State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union

IRI	International Republican Institute
LER	Learning, Evaluation, and Research
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OSCE/ODIHR	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
PEA	Political economy analysis
PITA	Participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability
PR	Proportional representation
PVT	Parallel vote tabulation
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SBO	Sample-based observation
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy
VAWE	Violence against women in elections

PHOTO: IFES, KENYA, 2017.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Elections are complex processes. They involve multiple stakeholders performing different functions over a substantial period of time, culminating in voters coming together to select their representatives on election day. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s electoral assistance has evolved from discrete programming in political party development, election administration support, and election observation in the mid-1980s to a full portfolio of integrated programming. As elections cut across governance, rule of law, civil society, media, and human rights, a well-designed electoral assistance project presents unique opportunities to promote democratic development. USAID's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) Center developed the *Electoral Assessment Framework: A Tool to Assess Needs, Define Objectives, and Identify Program Options* to help field officers plan impactful strategies, formulate policy solutions, and design programs that strengthen a country's capacity to conduct genuinely democratic elections.

The *Electoral Assessment Framework* is intended to assist USAID DRG officers and other relevant United States Government (USG) personnel first and foremost in assessing and prioritizing the challenges in the sector, and then developing a strategy to identify the best program options to promote credible elections. The guide helps prioritize investment of US taxpayer dollars and align assistance strategies with diplomatic strategies. Integral to this guide is USAID's philosophy that technical assistance should continually build a country's capacity to address its own development challenges, advancing it along its Journey to Self-Reliance.[1]

Using this framework involves four steps: (1) assessing the country context; (2) assessing the electoral context; (3)

[1] For elaboration of USAID's approach to the Journey to Self-Reliance, see https://www.usaid.gov/selfreliance; Roadmaps of individual countries may be found at https://selfreliance.usaid.gov/.

defining objectives and developing an elections and political processes assistance strategy; and (4) identifying priority programs. At the end of each sub-section in the country context and electoral context assessments, the framework provides a checklist of key questions that can be used to guide the assessment of that particular topic. The four steps include the following:

Step 1: Assess the Country Context: Assessing the country context is the first step in understanding and identifying the key political, foundational, and conflict-related factors that can impact opportunities and create risks to credible elections. This step draws on USAID's *DRG Strategic Assessment Framework*[2] and introduces elements of political economy analysis[3] as it examines power dynamics, as well as key actors' political will to support or undermine credible elections and democratic processes and their ability to influence change.

- **Regime type and political system:** Assessing a country's regime type and political system, including factors such as consensus, rule of law, government responsiveness and accountability, inclusion, and competition, provides insight into the country's overall commitment (or lack thereof) to holding genuine elections, as well as into the status of the core democratic principles and freedoms that provide a foundation for credible elections. This also involves examining power dynamics, identifying key actors, and assessing their commitment or opposition to democratic reforms, as well as their capacity to implement or influence changes.
- **Foundational factors:** This includes factors that are slow to change or fix, such as economic, cultural, demographic, historical, and social considerations. Assessing foundational factors provides insight into how a country's power structures, social and historical alignments, cleavages, and alliances influence political culture and norms, which can illuminate areas of opportunity and risk for promoting credible and inclusive elections.
- **Regional political dynamics and foreign actors:** The assessment also considers regional political trends, the history of relations between neighboring countries, and key regional developments, such as natural disasters, famines, regional conflicts, or pandemics, that may affect the elections. It also assesses the motivations and actions of malign foreign actors, who have become increasingly involved in influencing elections and political transitions through disinformation campaigns, cyber attacks, fake election observers, and support for illiberal political actors, among other tactics.
- **Conflict and security environment:** It is essential to analyze conflict dynamics and how they are likely to impact the electoral process. While this is particularly important in countries with active or recently-concluded armed conflict, these factors should be assessed in all contexts. For example, national or transnational organized crime, dominant business interests, chauvinistic gender norms, or corrupt elites may trigger election violence and impact the integrity of the electoral process.

Step 2: Assess the Electoral Context: After assessing the country context, the second step is to focus on the strengths, challenges, opportunities, and constraints in each electoral component. The assessment framework provides guidance on assessing the following nine components of the electoral environment:

1. Legal framework and electoral reform;
2. Election management;
3. Political parties and candidates;
4. Voter education and information;
5. Election observation;
6. Media ecosystem;
7. Electoral security and conflict;
8. Electoral justice; and
9. Post-election and political transitions.

[2] USAID, *DRG Strategic Assessment Framework (*2014): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Master_SAF_FINAL%20Fully%20Edited%209-28-15.pdf

[3] See USAID, *Applied Political Economy Analysis (PEA) Field Guide* (2016): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2496/Applied%20PEA%20Field%20Guide%20and%20Framework%20Working%20Document%20041516.pdf

After assessing the country context and electoral environment, DRG officers should have a broad understanding of the most significant gaps, capacity needs, and degree of political will for holding credible elections among key stakeholders, as well as domestic and regional factors that may impact the electoral process. More specifically, DRG officers should have identified the key challenges to electoral integrity, the institutions and actors who can be drivers of change, as well as the opponents or "spoilers." This will inform the next steps—developing a strategy and considering programming options.

The framework also incorporates three overarching ***analytical approaches*** to inform the assessment. These three approaches should be drawn upon and applied throughout Step 1 (country context) and Step 2 (electoral context):

1. **Electoral cycle:** The electoral cycle approach depicts elections as a continuous, integrated process made up of building blocks that interact with and influence each other, rather than as a series of isolated events. This approach considers the needs, opportunities, and risks that will emerge or change at different times in the electoral cycle and electoral calendar.
2. **Democratic principles and obligations:** This approach considers the extent to which international and regional principles and obligations for democratic elections are adhered to in the host country, as well as the level of commitment and capacity that electoral stakeholders demonstrate to upholding and promoting these principles.
3. **Rules of the game and power dynamics:** This approach, which incorporates political economy analysis, takes into account the incentives, interests, and alliances among the key political and economic stakeholders in either promoting or undermining credible elections and broader political processes and democratic reforms. This approach ultimately helps identify factors that could threaten or enhance electoral integrity.

Steps 3 and 4 cover strategy development and programming considerations. Complementing the detailed guides previously published and supported by USAID on topics including election administration; political party development; electoral security; election observation and results verification; political participation and inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities; and electoral justice,[4] Steps 3 and 4 move the analysis from the problems and opportunities identified in the assessment to the development of an elections and political processes (EPP) assistance strategy and prioritization of program options.

Step 3: Define Objectives and Develop an Elections and Political Processes Strategy: The third step involves defining and prioritizing the EPP challenges and opportunities based on the assessment findings, developing one or more strategic objectives and a theory of change, and taking into account broader USG priorities and the existing or planned USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). It also addresses a number of considerations, including scenario planning; operational considerations, such as timing, budget and staffing constraints; and donor mapping.

Step 4: Identify Priority Programs: This step briefly describes programming options based on the objectives and priorities identified in the previous steps. This section provides an introduction to the most common types of USAID's elections and political processes programming based on different needs and objectives. The section is divided into nine components that are aligned with the nine components in *Step 2: Assess the Electoral Context*, so that challenges identified in the assessment can be more easily and directly linked to programming options in each subsector.

Using this guide should result in recommendations for an elections and political processes sectoral strategy and programming options that most effectively address a specific country's major electoral integrity challenges.

[4] See USAID's EPP technical publications here: https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/democracy-human-rights-and-governance/technical-publications

PART I.
FRAMEWORK PURPOSE, METHODOLOGY, AND APPROACHES

PHOTO: VICTOR DRACHEV/AFP, UKRAINE, 2007

PHOTO: VICTOR DRACHEV/AFP, KYRGYZSTAN, 2010

WHY AND HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

For most people, election day is an event—often a celebration—with millions of voters coming together to cast ballots, many proudly displaying their participation with inked fingers or stickers to neighbors and friends as a symbol of their commitment to democracy. Observers, party agents, and poll workers deploy to polling stations throughout the country to conduct or watch the voting and tabulation. What is less visible are all the activities conducted in the years and months prior that make election day possible. An intricate network of laws and regulations are passed, security risks assessed, and budgets secured. Electoral commissions are established, voters registered, and ballots designed and distributed. Political parties register, define their platforms, and select and register candidates. All of these complex actions must come together prior to election day to result in a peaceful and legitimate process.

Among the pioneers in electoral assistance, USAID has supported electoral programming since the mid-1980s. Starting with observation, election administration support, and political party assistance, USAID now supports a full spectrum of elections and political process assistance programming. Drawing upon USAID's expansive and diverse experiences, the *Electoral Assessment Framework: A Tool to Assess Needs, Define Objectives, and Identify Program Options* provides guidance in the constantly evolving global electoral environment.

When designing an electoral assistance strategy, it is crucial to assess the strengths, opportunities, challenges, and areas of highest risk to prioritize where assistance can have the most impact. International assistance may not be

necessary, or appropriate, for every aspect of the electoral cycle. Funding is rarely sufficient to provide assistance to most or all parts of the electoral process. Designing an effective strategy also depends on a deep understanding of how the country context influences electoral dynamics. In addition, it is essential to take into account the extent to which the host government demonstrates a commitment to holding credible elections and the type of electoral strategy and program options that are appropriate for each context. A nuanced understanding of the interests and motivations of electoral stakeholders, leading to an understanding of the key threats to election integrity, contributes to the design of an effective electoral assistance strategy.

Although much of USAID's electoral assistance is focused on long-term strengthening of capacity and self-reliance, USAID officers are also often asked to provide nimble and targeted support in crises and rapidly changing political environments. Given the high stakes and politically-sensitive nature of elections, these environments present complex challenges.

This is particularly the case in transitioning, conflict-affected, or post-conflict environments, where there is often a push to support holding elections as quickly as possible, even if there is not sufficient time to build underlying political consensus and/or capacities necessary. This highlights the need to undertake strategic planning for electoral support within a longer-term democratic development context well in advance of a given election. Generally, the earlier a plan is developed, the more strategic options are available for electoral support. If there is very little time left before election day, strategic options are limited, and rushed, ill-planned interventions can cause more harm than good. In addition, to the extent that short-term interventions are used, they should be tied to a longer-term approach.

The *Electoral Assessment Framework* is intended to assist USAID officers and other United States Government (USG) personnel responsible for developing and managing elections and political processes (EPP) programming to navigate these complex challenges.[5] The assessment framework incorporates a holistic approach to analyzing and identifying key democracy challenges in the EPP sector. The strategy development portion of the guide describes how to use the assessment findings to identify objectives and programming priorities in different contexts. Integral to this guide is USAID's philosophy that technical assistance should continually build a country's capacity to address its own development challenges, advancing it along its Journey to Self-Reliance.[6]

Additionally, as USAID DRG officers are often key members of policy teams within the U.S. Embassy or as part of the interagency process in Washington for high profile elections, peace processes, and political transitions, the assessment framework is also meant to provide a lens through which to analyze a country's overall situation and inform a whole-of-government electoral strategy, corresponding assistance portfolios, and diplomatic and public affairs efforts. Thus, this guide can be used not only by USAID but also by the interagency to generate the information and approaches required for a coordinated USG response.

NEW CHALLENGES IN SUPPORTING ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PROCESSES

Democracy assistance and electoral assistance more specifically have evolved significantly over the past three decades. In the 1990s, international support for democracy was shaped by optimism following the rapid collapse of authoritarianism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as well as burgeoning transitions to multi-party democracy in a number of countries across sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. U.S. democracy assistance greatly expanded to assist these countries in building institutions, establishing the rule of law, and informing and educating the citizenry. Electoral assistance focused on the many elements that must come together for an election to be credible—including a legal framework aligned with international norms and standards, a capable election management body (EMB), representative political parties, registered and informed voters, and election observation. This assistance tended to focus more on building technical capacities without fully taking into account the nature of in-country political dynamics.

[5] This guide is complementary to, and should be used in conjunction with, other resources available at: https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/democracy-human-rights-and-governance/technical-publications

[6] For elaboration of USAID's approach to the Journey to Self-Reliance, see: https://www.usaid.gov/selfreliance

Since the mid-2000s, the global environment for democracy assistance has changed significantly. What was once believed to be an inevitable global advance toward liberal democracies has been called into question with the rise of resurgent authoritarianism, new security threats, democratic backsliding, identity politics, disillusionment with established political parties, and challenges related to the spread of new technologies. Incumbents, particularly in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian environments, have wielded increasingly sophisticated strategies to tilt the playing field well in advance of election day. This includes manipulating legislative, judicial, or referenda processes to exceed or remove term limits, limit competition, muzzle independent voices, and/or curb basic rights. Even in more democratic environments, as economic inequality increases and political and economic interests become more closely intertwined, these vested interests view democratic polls as a threat to their power and dedicate significant resources to entrenching their power by manipulating elections.

Foreign actors, beyond democracy assistance providers, have become more engaged in elections and political processes, both overtly and covertly. Big data, social media, and other technological advances have created more opportunities for malign actors to manipulate and control political processes. Malign foreign actors, including authoritarian regimes, have sought to exert their influence across borders to undermine emerging democracies. These efforts are certainly not new, but they are increasing in intensity and scope. This includes using "hybrid warfare" tactics of: espionage and surveillance; disinformation campaigns; cyber attacks; financing of fringe or co-opted political parties, leaders, and think tanks; coercive economic measures and energy policies; extrajudicial attacks and killings; supporting fake election observer groups; and covert and overt military actions. The scope and scale of resources that malign foreign actors dedicate to these tactics often far exceeds those provided by the democracy assistance community.

What was once believed to be an inevitable global advance toward liberal democracies has been called into question with the rise of resurgent authoritarianism, new security threats, democratic backsliding, identity politics, disillusionment with established political parties, and challenges related to the spread of new technologies.

While technological advances present new opportunities, they also pose new complex challenges in the election realm. Electoral stakeholders such as electoral management bodies, political parties, and civil society are increasingly turning to technology in an attempt to improve efficiency and accessibility and to prevent certain types of fraud. For example, some EMBs have adopted electronic results transmission, digital voter registration, and SMS-based voter information. However, advances in technology have a darker side, since they can also be used to undermine the security and transparency of the process. Voters may not trust the technologies, particularly in contexts where trust in state institutions is already low. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and political actors may be subject to electronic surveillance. Electronic voting and results transmission systems can be hacked unless robust security measures are in place. Internet connectivity may not exist in many parts of the country or, in more closed contexts, could be shut down around elections to dampen communications. Digital IDs come with significant privacy challenges.

The global phenomenon of disinformation has been strongly linked to undermining electoral integrity, with a destabilizing impact that can also threaten national security. As the deliberate creation and dissemination of false information occurs in order to manipulate public opinion, disinformation is not a new phenomenon, yet it has reached a new level of intensity and impact as a result of the use of new technologies. It undermines the right to seek, receive, and impart information, because it purposefully deceives voters, creating confusion, exacerbating polarization, and undermining trust in the electoral process itself. Disinformation can tilt the electoral playing field when it targets one candidate or party disproportionately. It can also threaten core freedoms if regulations and sanctions targeting disinformation are not carefully balanced against freedoms of expression and opinion. Social media allows misinformation and disinformation[7] to spread at greater speeds than ever before. Dangerous speech and deliberately falsified information can erode the limited supply of public trust in divided societies. Thus any assessment should take into

[7] "Disinformation" is false information that is intentionally shared to cause harm. "Misinformation" is false information that is shared without the intention to cause harm.

consideration the potential impact of disinformation on voters and contestants in a given context.

While the challenges have grown more complex, numerous opportunities and positive developments also exist that can be built upon in supporting credible elections. Consensus has emerged around global norms and standards for democratic elections, which are derived from public international law, including human rights treaties and instruments. In many countries, a new generation of politicians and young leaders has emerged to challenge entrenched elites, and civil society has become well-established and vibrant. Global and regional civil society networks have emerged to bolster solidarity and exchange best practices across borders. Voters have higher expectations that their voice should matter, that elections should reflect their will, and that their governments should be accountable.

In a number of countries, EMBs have significantly increased their professionalism and capacity. The open government movement[8] has influenced the electoral arena, as there is widespread recognition of the important need for greater transparency in elections (including open election data) and, as a consequence, greater accountability. The fields of nonpartisan international and domestic election observation have spread, evolved, and launched principles that define credible election observation. In addition, the DRG community has demonstrated a greater recognition of, commitment to, and focus on addressing barriers to participation for women and marginalized groups.[9]

Amid these emerging challenges and opportunities, the election assistance community has taken a more nuanced and politically-minded approach to supporting democratic elections. With this approach, understanding the social, economic, regional, and political dynamics in a country; identifying the key actors and their interests; and knowing the formal *and informal* rules of the game are as important as assessing the specific components of the electoral environment. Thus, while the assessment framework takes into account the degree to which the host country upholds democratic principles and standards for elections, it also calls for an in-depth analysis of the country's political dynamics and of the key electoral stakeholders' level of commitment to credible elections as well as their capacities.

OVERVIEW OF THE ELECTORAL ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY DESIGN PROCESS

Using this guide involves four steps: (1) assessing the country context; (2) assessing the electoral context; (3) defining objectives and developing an EPP strategy; and (4) identifying program priorities. The four steps involve the following:

Step 1: Assess Country Context: Assessing the country context is the first step in understanding and identifying the key political, foundational, and conflict-related factors that can impact opportunities and risks to credible elections. At the end of each sub-section, there is a checklist of key questions that can be used to guide the assessment of that particular topic.

Step 2: Assess Electoral Context: This step focuses on identifying the key challenges to and opportunities for promoting electoral integrity in each of the below nine electoral components. At the end of each sub-section, there is a checklist of key questions that can be used to guide the assessment of that particular topic. The components are:

1. Legal framework and electoral reform;
2. Election management;
3. Political parties, candidates, and campaigns;
4. Voter education and information;

[8] The Open Government Declaration and related Open Government Partnership (OGP) process are a demonstration of this broader movement. See https://www.opengovpartnership.org/

[9] Marginalized groups refer to people who are typically denied access to legal protection or social and economic participation and programs, whether in practice or in principle, for historical, cultural, political, and/or other contextual reasons. Such groups may include, but are not limited to, women and girls, persons with disabilities, LGBTI people, displaced persons, migrants, indigenous individuals and communities, youth and the elderly, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, people in lower castes, and people of diverse economic class and political opinions. They may also be described as "underrepresented," "at-risk," or "vulnerable". From USAID, *Suggested Approaches for Integrating Inclusive Development Across the Program Cycle and in Mission Operations* (2019): https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/additional_help_for_ads_201_inclusive_development_180726_final_r.pdf

5. Election observation;
6. Media ecosystem;
7. Electoral security and conflict;
8. Electoral justice; and
9. Post-election and political transitions.

The assessment framework's methodology is based on three analytical approaches, which should be applied throughout Step 1 (country context) and Step 2 (electoral context):

1. **Electoral cycle:** The electoral cycle approach depicts elections as a continuous, integrated process made up of building blocks that interact with and influence each other, rather than as a series of isolated events.
2. **Democratic principles and obligations:** This approach considers the extent to which principles and obligations for democratic elections are adhered to in the host country, as well as the level of commitment and capacity that electoral stakeholders demonstrate to upholding and promoting these principles.
3. **Rules of the game and power dynamics:**[10] This approach, which incorporates political economy analysis, takes into account the incentives, interests, and alliances among the key political and economic stakeholders in either promoting or undermining credible elections. Such an analysis should include transnational stakeholders. This approach ultimately helps identify factors that could threaten or enhance electoral integrity.

After assessing the country context and electoral environment, DRG officers should have a broad understanding of the most significant gaps, capacity needs, and degree of political will for holding credible elections among key stakeholders, as well as domestic and regional factors that may impact the electoral process. More specifically, DRG officers should have identified the key challenges to electoral integrity, the institutions and actors who can be drivers of change, as well as the opponents or "spoilers." This will inform the next steps—developing a strategy and prioritizing programming options.

Step 3: Define Objectives and Develop EPP Strategy: The third step involves moving from the challenges identified in the assessment to: defining and prioritizing the key problems to be addressed, as well as considering windows of opportunity; developing one or more objectives and a theory of change; and taking into account broader USG priorities and the existing or planned USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). It also addresses a number of considerations, including scenario planning; operational considerations, such as timing, budget and staffing constraints; and donor mapping.

Step 4: Identify Priority Programs: This section provides an introduction to the most common types of USAID's elections and political processes programming, with insights into how they can be adapted to address different needs. The section is divided into nine components that are aligned with the nine components in Step 2: Assess the Electoral Context, so that challenges identified in the assessment can be more easily and directly linked to programming options in each subsector. Each subsection highlights program best practices and options for different contexts.

Using this framework should result in recommendations for a USAID EPP strategy, as well as potential programming options, that most effectively address the country's major electoral integrity challenges.

[10] USAID's *Thinking and Working Politically through Applied Political Economy Analysis* (2018) defines "rules of the game" as the formal and informal institutions (rules and norms) that shape the quality of governance and influence actors' behavior, incentives, relationships, power dynamics, and capacity for collective action. See: https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/pea_guide_final.pdf

Electoral Assessment Framework

Step 1: Assess Country Context

1. Regime type and political system
2. Foundational factors
3. Regional political dynamics and Foreign actors
4. Conflict and security environment

Step 2: Assess Electoral Context

1. Legal framework and electoral reform
2. Election management
3. Political parties, campaigning, and candidates
4. Voter education and information
5. Election observation and oversight
6. Media ecosystem
7. Electoral security and conflict
8. Electoral justice
9. Post-election transition

Analytical Approaches

- Electoral cycle approach
- Democratic principles and obligations
- Rules of the game and power dynamics

Step 3: Define Objectives and Develop EPP Strategy

1. Prioritize the problem(s) to be addressed
2. Consider existing USG priorities and programs
3. Map other donors
4. Consider timing and resource constraints
5. Develop EPP assistance objectives and strategy

Step 4: Identify Priority Programs

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS[11]

When to Conduct an Assessment

USAID Missions should aim to conduct an electoral assessment before every major election cycle to design and implement programs that address the EPP challenges identified by the assessment. If the objective is to consider a full range of EPP support options, the assessment should ideally be conducted at least two years before the targeted elections. Alternatively, an assessment may be needed if the political context changes significantly, the critical assumptions that underpin a current strategy no longer hold, U.S. foreign policy objectives in the country change significantly, or there is a major change in available resources. In these cases, an assessment can reassess the political and electoral environment, emerging challenges and opportunities, and any strategic and programmatic adjustments that are needed. This can help determine if there is a need to significantly reorient an existing EPP portfolio. If conducted prior to the development or updating of a CDCS, the electoral assessment can provide useful analytical and strategic input for the DRG component of the CDCS.

Process and Level of Effort

The process outlined in this guide is designed to be flexible and can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the USAID Mission's objectives, available time and resources. This includes full, in-depth electoral assessments, which look at all or nearly all components of the electoral environment, or limited assessments, which may, for example, focus on only a few components of the electoral environment or select a limited number of questions from each component to assess. In-country DRG officers and other Mission colleagues can also use this guide without fielding a formal assessment team. In certain circumstances, such as during a pandemic (e.g., COVID-19), some or all of the assessment may need to be conducted virtually.

Standard assessments: Standard assessments, which are more comprehensive and in-depth in nature, focus on assessing all or nearly all electoral components and developing a more holistic EPP strategy. These assessments take place over approximately three months. This includes time for developing and finalizing the assessment work plan, preparing for and conducting fieldwork, and drafting and reviewing the final report. A standard assessment team generally ranges from two to four members — one to two contracted international experts, one to two USAID participants, and a contracted local country expert. A contracted local logistician is also helpful. The size and composition of the team will depend on needs and available resources.

Prior to the fieldwork, the assessment team conducts preparatory research, holds initial key informant interviews with U.S.-based experts, and creates a list of people to interview in the field, in consultation with the Mission. The team typically conducts two to three weeks of in-country[12] fieldwork, including key stakeholder interviews, briefings and consultations with USAID and Embassy representatives, and beginning to draft the final report. Whenever feasible, final reports should undergo an independent peer review. A suggested report template is provided in Annex 2.

Limited assessment models: Limited assessments, which can be completed in a shorter period of time with a smaller assessment team or solely by Mission-based DRG officers and other personnel, can be conducted in a variety of ways. For situations that are urgent (i.e., less than a year before election day), limited assessments can focus on the highest priority electoral components that can still feasibly be addressed through EPP programming. Alternatively, an assessment can focus on determining whether programs need to be amended to address changing circumstances.

Missions can carry out an assessment fully in-house, or in combination with USAID Washington staff, domestic consultants, or international contractors. A Mission may desire to more narrowly assess one or two electoral components that have recently emerged as a high priority. This guide does not target each electoral component

[11] The overall framework for this section is informed by the methodology used for USAID DRG Assessments, which is detailed in the USAID *DRG Strategic Assessment Framework* (2014) and has been developed, updated, and improved since 2000. See: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Master_SAF_FINAL%20Fully%20Edited%209-28-15.pdf

[12] In-country fieldwork is the preferred option whenever possible, but in unusually challenging conditions, such as during pandemics (when travel restrictions and other safety measures may be in place), virtual fieldwork could be an option to allow a Mission to move forward with an assessment in a timely manner.

in full detail, so other resources and tools may need to be applied if a more detailed sub-component assessment is necessary.

Methodology

The framework requires the assessment team to collect data from a number of sources, including through key informant interviews, group discussions, desk studies, election observation reports and media reports, academic studies, social media, and existing public opinion research. Most of the in-country fieldwork consists of key informant interviews and group discussions with host country government officials, legislators, election management body officials, security sector officials, political leaders, political party representatives, civil society organizations, domestic and international election observers, civic technology activists, women and youth leaders, disability activists, private sector actors, marginalized community representatives, journalists, academics, USG implementing partners, international donors and diplomats, and USAID and Embassy staff. For more comprehensive assessments, the assessment team should conduct interviews in the U.S. prior to starting the fieldwork, including with country experts, relevant U.S.-based implementing partner staff, and USAID and other U.S. Government officials.

Illustrative questions to guide the assessment and key informant interviews are included at the end of each subsection in Step 1 (country context assessment) and Step 2 (electoral context assessment). Key informant interviews should reflect diversity in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, geographic location (to the extent feasible), political perspective, and other demographic factors relevant to the country. Representatives of groups should not be compartmentalized and asked *only* about their group (e.g., women should not just be asked about the experiences of women).

Following "do no harm" principles, special risk-mitigating arrangements should be made in countries where there is significant backsliding or where interviews may present a risk to those being interviewed. In such situations, virtual interviews can be conducted, and it is also worth considering whether a desk study is a better option than an on-the-ground EPP assessment. Furthermore, all assessments should factor in and mainstream consideration of gender and social inclusion, including the differing barriers faced by individuals in the country context, due to their overlapping identities: gender, sex, age, ethnic, racial, and religious minorities, caste, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities.[13]

The assessment team should also review international and citizen (domestic) election observer reports, relevant academic studies, briefing documents provided by the Mission, and activity reports. They should make use of quantitative data as much as possible, particularly existing country-specific and cross-national data, including DRG-specific indicators, such as those published by Freedom House,[14] Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem),[15] Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI),[16] Minorities at Risk,[17] Polity,[18] Transparency International,[19] International IDEA election data tools,[20] Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU),[21] and others. The team should also make use of non-DRG indicators, such as the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index,[22] the Gender Gap Index[23] (includes political empowerment), USAID's IDEA Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality[24] (which has gender-based violence data), and the World Bank's World Development Indicators.[25] Along with other available qualitative indicators, these quantitative indicators provide a useful reference at the initial stage of the assessment to situate the

[13] These principles draw on the methodology for conducting a DRG assessment outlined in the USAID *DRG Strategic Assessment Framework* (2014).
[14] Freedom House *Freedom in the World*: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world
[15] V-Dem: https://www.v-dem.net/en/
[16] Bertelsmann Transformation Index: https://bti-project.org/en/index/political-transformation.html
[17] University of Maryland's *Minorities at Risk Project:* http://www.mar.umd.edu/
[18] Center for Systemic Peace's *Policy Project:* http://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html
[19] Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index:* https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/overview
[20] International IDEA data and tools: https://www.idea.int/data-tools
[21] IPU's New Parline monthly ranking of the percentage of women in parliament: https://data.ipu.org/content/parline-global-data-national-parliaments
[22] United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Index:* http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi
[23] World Economic Forum's *Gender Gap Index:* https://www.weforum.org/reports
[24] USAID's Women's *Economic Empowerment and Equality (WE3) Dashboard:* https://idea.usaid.gov/women-e3
[25] World Bank's *World Development Indicators:* https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/world-development-indicators

country context and to identify macro-level trends. The assessment team should also use available data from public opinion surveys to help understand the political and electoral context and to reflect the priorities of everyday citizens in the assessment.

When feasible, assessments should include an independent peer review of the final report, which should be conducted by an outside expert with country or regional expertise who has not been involved in the assessment. The assessment framework involves three overarching analytical approaches that should be drawn upon and applied throughout the assessment: the electoral cycle approach; democratic principles and obligations; and rules of the game and power dynamics.

PHOTO: ASMA BEN AICHA/USAID, TUNISIA, 2017

ANALYTICAL APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING ELECTORAL NEEDS

The assessment framework involves three overarching analytical approaches that should be drawn upon and applied throughout the assessment: the electoral cycle approach; democratic principles and obligations; and rules of the game and power dynamics.

THE ELECTORAL CYCLE APPROACH

The first analytical approach, the electoral cycle approach, is commonly embraced by the election community and donors, who build assistance portfolios around it.[26] Each election cycle can be best understood as a process comprised of building blocks that interact with and influence each other over time, rather than as a series of isolated events. The breakdown of one part of the process affects other parts, such as resources, costs, security, and potentially, the credibility of the election itself.

An assessment team should consider how the needs and interests of electoral stakeholders, as well as the potential risks to electoral integrity, might change as the process progresses. A host country's internal and regional dynamics, risks and opportunities are not static; they evolve over time. Tensions often rise in the pre-electoral period, giving rise to particular threats and opportunities at different stages of the electoral process, such as voter or candidate

[26] This approach was initially developed by the European Commission and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), and completed with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assistance and guidance.

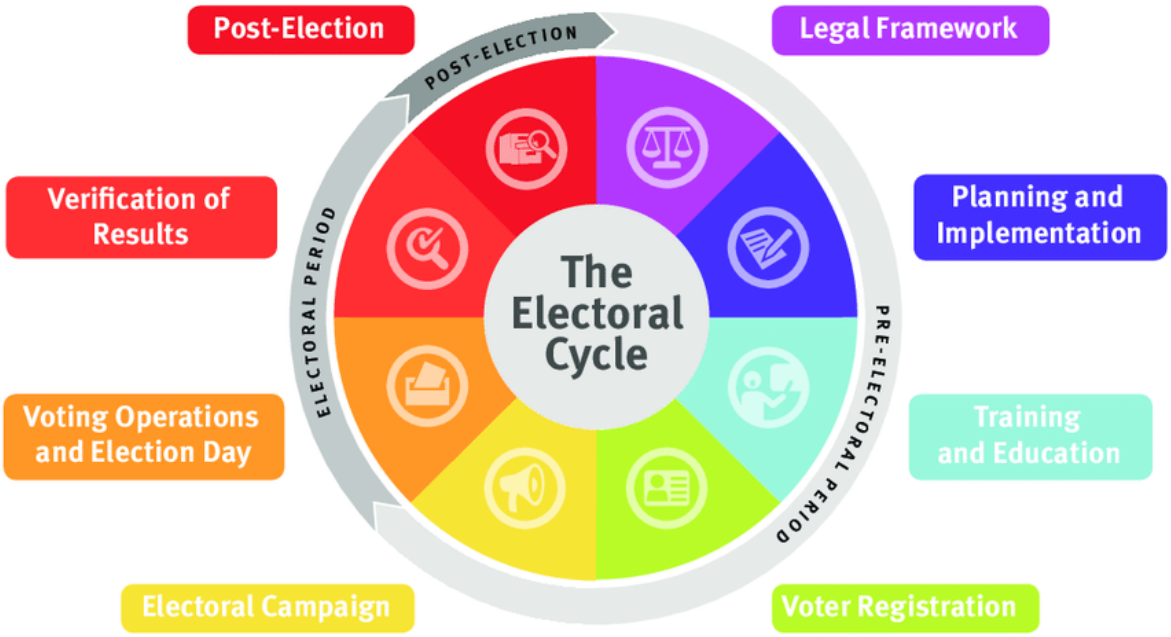
registration, campaigning, or election day itself. The tactics and motivations of political actors, and the needs of the electorate, change as the electoral process moves to a new phase.

Technical needs also are tied closely to an electoral timeline. The electoral cycle depicts the many activities that contribute to a successful election and categorizes them into three temporal periods: pre-electoral, electoral, and post-electoral (see Figure 1 below). Some activities, such as electoral dispute resolution (EDR), may span all three periods.

- **Pre-electoral:** Begins with legal framework reform (when relevant), planning, and budgeting, and extends to activities such as training EMB members and staff, training poll workers; informing prospective voters; and registering parties, candidates, voters; and conducting pre-election observation. This also includes the period of electoral campaigning (whether officially designated or not).
- **Electoral:** Covers the actual voting process, the counting, tabulation, and certification of results, as well as election day observation, media coverage immediately surrounding election day, and electoral dispute resolution.
- **Post-electoral:** Commences with the announcement and validation of official, final results, and continues with the assessments and analyses of the entire process and identification of outstanding needs, which can then be addressed through reforms to improve successive elections.

The post-electoral period and early pre-electoral period usually afford the best opportunity for reform and capacity building, as there is often less intense political pressure compared to the later phases of the pre-electoral period. However, in some contexts, the immediate post-electoral period may be marked by one or more of the contestants rejecting the results, which can also trigger post-election protests, leading to a new election or a recount. In worst-case scenarios, no peaceful transition of power occurs, but instead there is an outbreak of violence and/or gross violation of human rights, which in some cases can lead to the breakdown of the democratic civilian order. Many countries in such situations would need a peace agreement before a new election can be held, which poses difficult questions related to the timing of elections and the new electoral cycle.

Figure 1: The Electoral Cycle[27]



[27] Several depictions of the electoral cycle exist, some with more elaborated activities and depicting a longer post-election period that includes several of the activities listed in the pre-electoral period. The graphic used here is drawn from the International IDEA's *Online Electoral Cycle:* https://www.idea.int/data-tools/tools/online-electoral-cycle

Throughout the assessment of the country context and electoral environment, it is important to consider where a country stands within the electoral cycle at the time of the assessment; any needs, opportunities, and risks that will emerge or change at different times in the electoral cycle; and whether a country is in the middle of overlapping election cycles. Therefore, the assessment framework includes questions regarding the country's electoral timeline/calendar, key milestones, and any opportunities and risks over the course of the electoral cycle. Electoral calendars/timelines include technical and logistical activities, as well as legal and political activities. In post-conflict or conflict-affected countries, electoral timelines also contain benchmarks and tasks related to peace agreements and other aspects of peacebuilding.

While the electoral cycle approach should be applied when assessing a particular election cycle, it does not imply that the same EPP support activities should be repeated over multiple cycles. USAID aims to foster greater host country self-reliance. Because it often takes years to foster political will, consolidate political reforms, and build core electoral capacities, EPP support activities will likely be required for several election cycles. However, as self-reliance progresses, in subsequent election cycles EPP support should evolve to reinforce progress and to adapt to changing threats and opportunities on the ground. Progress is evident when assistance in every electoral cycle evolves to more advanced functions and when local actors demonstrate increased core capacities.

For example, early in the journey to self-reliance, electoral assistance may include direct support for election administration and logistics, such as printing ballots, planning polling station locations, and transporting supplies, to fill core capability gaps. As capacity develops over time, assistance should transition to more advanced EMB skills, such as strategic management and leadership, enhanced external communication, and cybersecurity. Similarly, support for citizen election observation may initially focus on building core capacities among observer groups, such as training and mobilizing long- and short-term observers and issuing evidence-based reports. This support often progresses to more advanced capacities (e.g., official election data analysis and effective external communication) and more systematic forms of observation, such as parallel vote tabulation.

PRINCIPLES AND OBLIGATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

Assessing the needs and priorities for EPP assistance must be based on a common understanding of the principles, norms, and obligations that define credible, democratic elections. These provide clear benchmarks for what the ultimate aim of EPP programming should be. They also help identify the most significant electoral integrity threats (including manipulation and fraud) and gaps in the country being assessed.

The most fundamental principles of democratic, credible elections are that they must be **genuine and periodic** and must **reflect the free expression of the will of the people**. The phrase "free and fair" is often used to define democratic elections. At the broadest level, this means that elections should uphold the following norms:

- **Transparency:** Each step in the process is open to scrutiny. Stakeholders, such as political parties, election observers, the media, and voters, can independently verify whether the process is conducted honestly and accurately.
- **Inclusiveness:** Elections provide equal opportunities for all eligible citizens to participate as voters in selecting their representatives and as candidates.
- **Accountability:** Elections provide effective remedies for violations of election-related rights, administrative accountability for those organizing elections, and timely procedures to bring to account those who violate election-related rights.
- **Competition:** Elections provide reasonable and equitable opportunities for candidates and parties to compete to be elected in a periodic manner, as well as for voters to cast ballots free from intimidation, illegal influence, or violence.

These norms are buttressed by a number of key fundamental rights and freedoms, each of which derive from public

international law found in international and regional treaties and instruments.[28] While there are a growing number of human rights instruments that form the basis for principles and obligations for democratic elections, the two most fundamental statements are Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Universal Declaration)[29] and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).[30]

Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 21.3

The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 25

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2[31] and without unreasonable restrictions... To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.

Most countries where USAID works are signatories to the Universal Declaration and the ICCPR, and thus have committed themselves to upholding the fundamental principles underlying genuine electoral processes. Other key instruments with international obligations related to participation and inclusion in elections include the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)[32]. Signatories to region-specific instruments have made additional commitments.[33]

The core **election-related international obligations**, detailed in Annex 1, include:

- universal and equal suffrage,
- periodic elections,
- secrecy of the ballot, and
- the prevention of corruption.

The **fundamental rights and freedoms** that help underpin democratic elections, detailed in Annex 1, include:

- right and opportunity to participate in public affairs;
- freedoms of association, assembly, and movement;
- freedom of opinion and expression;
- equality of women and men, freedom from discrimination, and equality before the law;

[28] More details, including a more comprehensive list of these documents, can be found in Annex 1 and in the following resources: *The Carter Center's Election Obligations and Standards: A Carter Center Assessment Manual* (2014): https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/democracy/cc-oes-handbook-10172014.pdf
NDI's *Promoting Legal Frameworks for Democratic Elections* (2008): https://www.ndi.org/publications/promoting-legal-frameworks-democratic-elections, and
International IDEA's *International Obligations for Elections: Guidelines for Legal Frameworks* (2014): https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/international-obligations-elections-guidelines-legal-frameworks

[29] See https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/

[30] See https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx

[31] These distinctions include: race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

[32] See CPRD at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html and CEDAW at: https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/

[33] Examples of regional instruments include charters and resolutions for the Africa Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Council of Europe, and the European Union (EU). Political commitments are also laid out by the OSCE in the Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the OSCE, and the European Commission on Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) (1990): https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/14304

- transparency and the right to seek and receive information;
- right to security of the person; and
- right to effective remedy and to a fair and transparent hearing.

Political leaders and bodies often limit fundamental freedoms for political gain. While not all of these rights are absolute, care must be taken to ensure that any restrictions are in the public interest and/or necessary to preserve public safety. Legitimate reasons for restrictions are prescribed in international and regional human rights instruments and include reasons such as preventing violence or promoting public health. Legitimate restrictions on freedom of expression, for example, include genuine matters of public safety, national security, and privacy. At the same time, it is important to carefully assess any restrictions from both legal and political perspectives and to assess whether such restrictions are in line with the country's international and regional commitments. Governments may use public safety or national security to justify curtailing rights, but their underlying motivation may be to close political space and tighten their grip on power.

To ensure that the principles and obligations for democratic elections are considered in the assessment, key indicators of these principles and obligations are integrated within the key questions at the end of each subsection of the Country Context (Step 1) and Electoral Context (Step 2) sections below.

International and regional bodies with treaties and instruments related to elections:

- United Nations (UN)
- the African Union (AU)
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- Organization of American States (OAS)
- League of Arab States
- Council of Europe (CoE)
- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
- Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

RULES OF THE GAME AND POWER DYNAMICS

The third analytical approach for assessing the electoral landscape focuses on identifying rules of the game and power dynamics.[34] It aims to identify factors that can undermine electoral integrity (risks), as well as factors that can enable a democratic electoral process (opportunities). In taking this approach, the overall power dynamics, as well as the incentives, interests, and alliances among the key political and economic stakeholders, should be considered. This analytical approach emphasizes recognition of the accepted, *de facto* rules of the game, which are often informal and may differ significantly from the formal, legal rules of the game. The issues and questions that can be considered through this analytical approach are expansive; thus, in conducting the assessment, some issues will demand greater attention in certain countries and less in others.

USAID has also long recognized the influence that power dynamics and economic and social forces have on the political sector and has encouraged the incorporation of political economy analysis (PEA) into program design and implementation.[35] While it is not always feasible to conduct a comprehensive PEA, it is nonetheless important to consider the country's internal power dynamics, economic factors, foundational factors (e.g., history, geography, demographics, gender norms), the impact of recent events, and the formal and informal institutional framework. As

[34] See USAID, *Thinking and Working Politically through Applied Political Economy Analysis* (2018): https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/pea_guide_final.pdf

[35] See USAID, *Applied Political Economy Analysis Field Guide* (2016): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2496/Applied%20PEA%20Field%20Guide%20and%20Framework%20Working%20Document%20041516.pdf

discussed in more detail below, understanding these factors and how they impact incentives and interests of electoral stakeholders in a host country helps assess the most significant electoral integrity risks and opportunities.

Among the factors that can promote or undermine democratic elections, the political will (or commitment) of electoral stakeholders for holding credible elections, along with power dynamics, is often more important than resource or technical capacity deficits. Therefore, it is essential to identify key electoral stakeholders and map out their motivations, commitment, capacity, and interests, as well as to consider how different actors, both international and domestic, may promote their interests through the electoral process. As detailed below, electoral stakeholders include a wide range of institutions and individual actors, from election management bodies to political parties and candidates, civil society organizations and activists, the judiciary, international actors, business groups, and media, among others.

The political will of electoral stakeholders for holding credible elections, along with power dynamics, is often more important than resource or technical capacity deficits.

Electoral Stakeholders: The most common electoral stakeholders typically include:

- Executive bodies;
- Legislative bodies;
- Election management bodies;
- Political parties and candidates;
- Voters;
- Civil society, including NGOs, groups representing women; youth; persons with disabilities; traditional, religious, ethnic, and indigenous groups; human rights organizations, LGBTI groups, and others;
- Nonpartisan citizen (domestic) election observers;
- Media outlets and actors;
- Commercial, business, and professional communities;
- Security sector, such as police, armed forces, and intelligence bodies;
- Other relevant state ministries and bodies, such as those responsible for foreign affairs, civil registries, registration of civil society organizations, electoral boundary delimitation, out-of-country voting, and regulation of the internet and/or social media;
- Judicial bodies;
- International community, including donors, international implementers, intergovernmental bodies, and international election observation missions; and
- External state and non-state actors, such as foreign governments and multinational companies.

Despite their stated objectives, many actors are not committed to promoting transparent, inclusive, competitive, and accountable elections. In fact, those in power (or those aspiring to gain power) often dedicate significant resources to *undermining*, not promoting, democratic elections. Some domestic actors may have strong incentives to defend their economic and political interests in ways that can distort political processes, tilt the playing field in their favor, support illegitimate elections, and hamper the participation of those who challenge their rule. For example, in countries where the economy is dependent on state-owned sectors such as energy and mining, political factions may be willing to manipulate or even rig elections to retain access to these lucrative resources. Increasingly, international state and non-state actors are entering the fray, sometimes in overt ways, and more often in the shadows. These "spoilers" may include state and state proxies, political parties, business interests, criminal organizations, foreign governments, and insurgents, among others.

Thus, in assessing the risks and threats to electoral integrity, it is essential to identify the actors that may seek to undermine the electoral process, assess their motivations, and attempt to anticipate the tactics they may use. To address this, each component of the assessment framework includes questions that consider the motivations and tactics of these malign actors.

To anticipate the tactics of malign actors, the assessment should consider historical patterns of electoral fraud, manipulation,[36] and other threats to electoral integrity. Malign actors can commit electoral fraud and manipulation at any point in the electoral process, and there are a wide variety of ways to categorize electoral fraud and manipulation.[37] Common types include deception (e.g., illegal voting, ballot box stuffing, manipulating the voters list and/or election results, reducing transparency); coercion (e.g., vote buying, voter intimidation, obstructing observers); violence (e.g., violence targeting specific groups, theft or destruction of election materials, cyber attacks); and failures or refusals to act (e.g., intentional disruptions or delays for some groups of voters).[38]

Other, less visible forms of fraud and manipulation include manipulating the legal framework (e.g., regulations that make it difficult for opposition candidates and parties to gain ballot access); wielding partisan influence on key institutions such as EMBs, security bodies, and the judiciary (e.g., biased election administration or enforcement of laws and regulations); curbing political and civil rights to gain electoral advantage and/or erect barriers to participation for certain groups; manipulating the traditional and social media (e.g., biased state-controlled media, disinformation campaigns); illegal campaign contributions; and abusing state resources to tilt the playing field, among many other types of fraud and manipulation.

Throughout all steps of the assessment, it is vital to consider power dynamics and the political and economic incentives of different actors. This sheds light on the potential motivations of key stakeholders, their capacities and resources, and, most critically, their likely tactics for defending their interests.

The assessment framework integrates questions about the above threats to electoral integrity into each component and, in addition, provides a worksheet for summarizing these threats in Step 3: Define Objectives and Develop and EPP Strategy. By doing so, the assessment framework helps address these key questions: What are likely to be the most common types of electoral fraud, manipulation, and other electoral integrity threats experienced? Which types could have the most impact on electoral integrity, and what type of impact would each have? Who are the main perpetrators of each type of fraud and malpractice, and what are their motivations? Who have been the main victims?

In sum, the assessment team can gain a clearer sense of the rules of the game at play by considering the interests and incentives of electoral stakeholders. Throughout all steps of the assessment, it is vital to consider power dynamics and the political and economic incentives of different actors. This sheds light on the potential motivations of key stakeholders, their capacities and resources, and, most critically, their likely tactics for defending their interests, which may include influencing or manipulating the electoral process. This analysis helps identify the greatest threats and risks to electoral integrity and, as a consequence, informs the selection and design of electoral assistance programming.

[36] For the purposes of the assessment framework, electoral fraud and manipulation are defined as deliberate wrong-doing that distorts the individual or collective will of the voters (IFES, *Assessing Electoral Fraud in New Democracies: Refining the Vocabulary,* 2012).

[37] For example, see Creative Associates, *Electoral Malpractice Primer: Insights and Priorities* (2012): http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/531723839/52093951/Creative-Electoral-Integrity-Framework-Project.pdf and IFES, *Assessing Electoral Fraud in New Democracies: Refining the Vocabulary* (2012): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/assessing_electoral_fraud_series_vickery_shein_0.pdf

[38] Adapted from categories used by the United States Electoral Assistance Commission. Drawn from Fischer, Jeff. "International Policy and Practice: Session 9 - Electoral Malpractice (Presentation)," Georgetown University, and Creative Associates, *Electoral Malpractice Primer: Insights and Priorities* (2012).

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PART II. CONDUCTING AN ELECTORAL ASSESSMENT

PHOTO: CAROL SAHLEY/USAID, ZAMBIA, 2015

PHOTO: CHRYSALIS, SRI LANKA, 2018

STEP 1: ASSESS THE COUNTRY CONTEXT

The first step in developing an elections and political processes assistance strategy involves assessing country context, which is critical to understanding the overall electoral process. In-depth analysis of the political economy, power structures, and societal alignments and cleavages will help identify opportunities and risks to holding democratic elections, flag potential triggers for violence, and inform programming decisions. In rare instances, such as highly insecure environments or countries with hostile or restrictive governments that reject external assistance, the context may preclude programming altogether.

Elements of Country Context Assessment

- 1.1 Regime Type and Policial System
- 1.2 Foundational Factors
- 1.3 International Dynamics and Foreign Actors
- 1.4 Conflict and Security Environment

1.1 REGIME TYPE AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

A country's regime type and political system have significant implications for designing EPP programs, as these factors take into account the host government's overall level of capacity and commitment (political will) to carrying out democratic reforms; the status of the underlying democratic principles and freedoms that give elections meaning; and the level of commitment to credible electoral processes. For example, in contexts where there is sufficient political will and a positive trajectory, assistance can entail a partnership with the electoral management body to build leadership and capacity and/or to focus on substantive electoral reform issues. In more autocratic contexts,

priority would be given to the more "demand-side" approaches including monitoring elections, carrying out other watchdog functions, protecting civic voice and space, and bolstering accountability mechanisms.

Assess Adherence to Democratic Principles

To help identify the country's regime type and understand the nature of its political system, the assessment should consider the extent to which the country upholds core democratic principles. While there are different ways to categorize these principles, USAID's *DRG Strategic Assessment Framework* outlines five key elements: competition and political accountability, rule of law and human rights, consensus, inclusion, and government responsiveness and effectiveness.[39]

- **Competition and political accountability:** Competition provides citizens the ability to choose who has the right to govern on their behalf. Political competition and the ability to hold public officials accountable are essential for democracy. Credible, competitive elections are the primary means of political accountability and for giving elected officials an incentive to respond to citizens' preferences. An assessment should evaluate the degree of genuine and meaningful competition within the political system. Some questions to consider include the following:
    - Is there meaningful multi-party competition with a genuine opportunity for transfer of power?[40]
    - Is the political arena accessible to all political parties and actors?
    - Is there universal and equal access to the electoral process, including for women and traditionally marginalized groups to vote and compete?
    - To what extent are diverse viewpoints and constituencies represented in governance?
    - Are the official rules for electoral competition, laid out in the legal framework, based on consensus and designed to enable free and fair elections?

  Competition and political accountability go beyond elections. The assessment should consider the extent to which there are strong mechanisms (such as parties, watchdog CSOs, and investigative journalists) to hold public officials accountable for their actions. Democracy also involves the competition of ideas and public policies. The assessment should consider the degree of pluralism in civil society, freedom of information, transparency of government decision making and performance, and level of media freedom. These are all essential to fostering a competition of ideas and holding the government accountable.

- **Human rights, political freedoms, and rule of law:** The assessment should consider the extent to which civil rights and political freedoms, enshrined in international and regional human rights commitments, are upheld and respected.[41] For example, are all citizens able to exercise freedoms of association, movement, expression, and peaceful assembly? Are citizens free from discrimination? Can citizens exercise their right to seek and receive information? Do citizens have effective protections of their human rights and civil liberties? These fundamental freedoms and rights enable genuine political engagement by citizens and meaningful competition among candidates and political parties. When these rights are significantly restricted, elections cannot be considered democratic or reflecting the true will of the people.

  Related to this, the assessment should consider the extent to which rule of law is respected. Rule of law refers to when citizens, corporations, and the government itself obey the law, and the laws are derived from a democratic consensus.[42] It consists of five essential elements:

    1. order and security, including personal security and property rights;
    2. legitimacy (perception of law as legitimate and worthy of adherence);
    3. vertical and horizontal checks and balances;

[39] While these five elements are summarized here, for more details on assessing these elements, see: USAID *DRG Strategic Assessment Framework* (2014): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Master_SAF_FINAL%20Fully%20Edited%209-28-15.pdf

[40] For a more detailed discussion of political party systems, see Political Parties and Campaigns section in Chapter 4.

[41] The fundamental freedoms and rights underpinning democratic elections are detailed in Annex 1.

[42] USAID, *Guide to Rule of Law Country Analysis: The Rule of Law Strategic Framework* (2010): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADT593.pdf

4. fairness, including equal application of the law and access to justice; and
5. effective application and enforcement of the law.[43]

- **Consensus:** A defining feature of a democracy is consensus among political actors that peaceful and democratic elections are the primary means by which political power will be contested. There is a consensus on the basic rules for political competition, as well as on the fundamental structure and rules that govern the state. Finally, there should be some form of agreement on the basic rules governing how political disagreements are addressed and a commitment to accept the outcome of democratic processes, including dispute resolution processes.
- **Inclusion:** A country's formal rules and informal practices should be inclusive of all segments of the population. All citizens must be free and have equitable opportunities to participate in decision-making processes and access government services. Women's participation is fundamental to democracy. A country where half the population is excluded—in law or in practice—from civic and political life is fundamentally undemocratic.[44] The assessment should consider whether and why certain parts of the population are excluded, formally or informally, from meaningful political, social, or economic participation; and the extent to which there is discrimination based on race, ethnicity, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language, caste, tribe, socioeconomic status, or geography.
- **Government responsiveness and effectiveness:** Governments should respond and deliver to public needs and delivers public services impartially and fairly to all citizens. The assessment should consider the level of government corruption; to what extent government institutions are responsive to public needs or to other interests; and whether there are meaningful mechanisms for citizen feedback on government performance. In addition, the assessment should consider whether there are strong mechanisms to hold government institutions accountable and guard against corruption and waste.

Identify Regime Type

The above democratic principles help assess a country's regime type. There are innumerable gradations on the autocracy-democracy spectrum, and social scientists have categorized country typologies using different terminology.[45] USAID has referenced country types as regimes (authoritarian or hybrid) and democracies (developing or liberal/consolidated) in prior guidance.[46] For the sake of thoroughness, ease, and consistency, this guide adopts the Varieties of Democracies (V-Dem) Regimes of the World approach, categorizing states into one of four regimes.[47] V-Dem publishes an analysis of 200 countries dating back to 1789 on an annual basis,[48] thus facilitating regional comparisons as well as trend analysis. Both current and historical categorization of regime types is readily accessible through V-Dem's annual data publication.[49]

V-Dem's four regime categories are defined as follows:

- **Closed Autocracy:** The chief executive is either not subjected to elections or there is no meaningful, *de facto* competition in elections.
- **Electoral Autocracy:** The country holds multiparty elections, but they fall short of democratic standards due to significant irregularities, limitations on party competition, freedom of expression and association, and access to information, or violations of other requisites for democracies, including vesting policy authority in elected officials.
- **Electoral Democracy:** The country holds credible multiparty elections and achieves a sufficient level of institutional guarantees of democracy, such as freedom of association, universal suffrage, and freedom of expres-

[43] USAID, *Guide to Rule of Law Country Analysis: The Rule of Law Strategic Framework* (2010).
[44] USAID *DRG Strategy Assessment Framework,* p. 13.
[45] See the Economist *Intelligence Unit Democracy Index* and Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* Index.
[46] See USAID's *DRG Strategic Assessment Framework* (2014) and USAID DRG Strategy (2013).
[47] V-Dem *Regimes of the World:* https://www.v-dem.net/files/5/Regimes%20of%20the%20World%20-%20Final.pdf
[48] For an in depth explanation of V-Dem's methodology and indicators, see https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/84/a8/84a880ae-e0ca-4ad3-aff8-556abfdaff70/v-dem_codebook_v71.pdf
[49] V-Dem Dataset Version 10 (2020): https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-10/

sion. However, it may still lack sufficient institutional checks and balances among the branches of government, full protection of human rights, and/or well-established rule of law.

- **Liberal Democracy:** In addition to the characteristics of an electoral democracy, the country has effective legislative and judicial oversight of the executive, as well as protection of individual liberties and the rule of law.

Most of the countries in which USAID works fall within the hybrid categories of electoral democracies and electoral autocracies. Within each of these broad categories, however, there is a wide degree of variation in the degree of political competition that may exist. The degree of political competition, strength of checks on the executive, and respect of political freedoms and rule of law set the main parameters of the political system within which the electoral contest occurs. A system that has experienced alternations of power in prior elections is a key indicator.

The degree of political competition, strength of checks on the executive, and respect of political freedoms and rule of law set the main parameters of the political system within which the electoral contest occurs.

It is also important to take into consideration a country's trends over time as a way to anticipate further EPP developments. The trajectory of a country may reveal improvement, stasis, or backsliding. The opportunities, needs, and program responses in a backsliding or recent post-conflict country are different from those of a country that is in the midst of a democratic transition. The length of time a country has been in a given regime category can also be informative. A recent electoral democracy may be more vulnerable to backsliding than a society that has demonstrated a practice of holding free and fair elections over several electoral cycles, even if some problems in judicial oversight and rule of law persist. Conversely, several years without progressing toward a more robust democracy may indicate limited political will by major political actors.

Consider Rules of the Game

The next step is to drill down into the specific political and power dynamics that will ultimately shape how the electoral contest plays out. Using the "rules of the game and power dynamics" analytical approach introduced earlier, there are several key questions that should be considered regarding the country's regime type and the nature of its political system.

The assessment should consider which groups and actors are the most influential stakeholders in political and electoral processes, including both positive and malign actors. This includes not only formal political actors directly involved in the process, but also other influential actors, such as business elites, organized crime, religious or ethnic groupings, and/or the military. The assessment should consider the main motivations, power dynamics, and tactics of these stakeholders regarding their participation in the political process.

As mentioned above, the assessment should consider the extent to which there is consensus among political actors that peaceful and fair elections are the only legitimate means to obtain political power. The rules that actually govern political behavior generally follow a set of unwritten norms that may be at odds with the legal framework. For example, even in constitutional democracies there may be an implicit acceptance of certain levels of violence, nepotism, illicit activities, and/or electoral manipulation as a means of achieving and holding on to political power.

1.1 Regime Type and Political System: Illustrative Assessment Questions[50]

- ✓ What is the country's regime type? For how long has it been this type of regime?
- ✓ To what extent are core democratic rights and freedoms protected and respected, including freedoms of assembly, association, and expression?
- ✓ How strong are the checks and balances (in law and practice) between different levels and branches of government?

[50] For a more extensive set of questions, refer to USAID *DRG Strategic Assessment Framework* (2014): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Master_SAF_FINAL%20Fully%20Edited%209-28-15.pdf

- ✓ To what extent is there genuine and meaningful competition among parties, leaders, and/or candidates with a genuine opportunity for transfer of power? Is the political arena accessible to all political parties and actors?
- ✓ How transparent and accessible is information on the decisions and performance of public officials?
- ✓ To what extent is pluralism allowed or encouraged in civil society and the media? To what extent is media free to provide information, analysis, and a forum for the competition of ideas?
- ✓ To what extent is rule of law respected? Does the government hold itself accountable for adhering to the rule of law? Do citizens have access to effective legal redress when their rights are violated? Is the law enforced fairly and equally by the executive and is independently adjudicated by the courts?
- ✓ Are there meaningful mechanisms for all citizens to provide constructive feedback on government performance?
- ✓ Are parts of the population excluded, formally or informally, from meaningful political, social, or economic participation? Are parts of the population discriminated against based on race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion, language, ethnicity, caste, tribe, socioeconomic status, or geography?
- ✓ Is there consensus among political actors that peaceful and democratic elections are the primary means by which political power will be contested?
- ✓ To what extent have there been peaceful alternations of power as a result of elections?
- ✓ What is the recent trajectory regarding political space and political competition? Is there backsliding or progress overall, and in what specific areas?
- ✓ Which groups and actors are the most influential stakeholders in political processes?
- ✓ What are the main motivations, power dynamics, and tactics of these stakeholders in participating in the political process?

1.2 FOUNDATIONAL FACTORS

Historical roots, social norms, demographic makeup, and geography are important elements of the country context. These deeply-rooted factors can shape the structure of political and economic institutions and influence the political culture and norms in a society in significant ways. Foundational or structural factors refer to those characteristics that are fixed or slow to change.

It is beyond the scope of an election assessment to conduct a robust review of all foundational factors that impact the political process. Yet, it is important to scan the landscape to determine which, if any, of these factors will affect the electoral process in significant ways. Often, historical factors, unresolved conflict, economic trends, or demographics have had a strong impact on the choice of electoral systems, political party development, inclusivity, and the norms of political behavior.

Some examples of common structural issues include the following:

- **Gender barriers:** Although formally women may enjoy the right to vote and to stand for election in most countries, a significant gender gap in participation as candidates, party activists, elected representatives, election officials, and voters persists in most countries. Factors such as illiteracy, low education levels, and the lack of access to information and resources tend to affect women and girls disproportionately. This in turn limits their ability to be informed on issues and party platforms, reducing their enthusiasm for voting, as well as their willingness and ability to become candidates themselves. Additionally, lack of freedom of movement, sociocultural and religious norms, and/or gender-based violence and harassment create barriers to women's political participation, affecting their ability to register to vote, attend political rallies, become candidates, serve on electoral commissions, act as observers, or turn out to vote on election day.
- **Youth bulge:** Another key factor in many developing countries is the rapidly growing youth population. This notable demographic trend can have differing impacts on political processes in different contexts. Youth may become disinclined to participate peacefully in electoral processes where political actors ignore this constit-

uency. Conversely, in some countries this marginalization can spark new life into political processes as youth begin to demand their rightful place in politics, and can be a source of creativity and renewal if constructively harnessed. Regardless, youth's role in the political life of a country needs to be carefully assessed.

- **Marginalization of ethnic, religious, or social groups:** Groups that are commonly marginalized and experience discrimination—often on the basis of ethnicity, language, religion, disability, sexual identity and orientation, or other traits—will often also face a variety of barriers to electoral participation. These barriers often span the electoral process, including difficulty registering to vote, accessing voter information, participating in political campaigns, running as candidates, and accessing voting centers on election day. Careful analysis is needed to identify groups most at risk of being excluded from the political process, as well as persistent trends that can undermine a country's entire social contract. USAID personnel often work in post-conflict environments characterized by exclusion of certain groups, where the success of electoral assistance depends on ensuring political inclusion.
- **Deep political polarization:** Social constructs, as well as the presence of historical grievances, can result in a divided society with a deeply polarized political system. This may be reflected in the country's political parties and political party system as a whole, as well as in the style and content of political discourse—further reinforcing these social or ethnic divisions. The risk of conflict in these societies may be higher, with the potential for constructive policy compromise lower. Risks and vulnerabilities related to polarization are important to identify as part of the assessment.
- **Economy:** The nature and structure of a country's economy can significantly influence political and electoral processes. Sources of state and private sector revenue, the poverty level, and level of inequality affect the political system and the motivations of political actors. Strong economic interest groups often shape policy through compacts with political elites. These elite compacts may affect the nature of political competition by limiting meaningful access and influence over political elites and candidates, and by narrowing policy options. Poverty and economic hardship can present significant barriers to political and electoral participation. If the country has recently faced or is facing an economic crisis, this could have implications for the risks and opportunities presented during elections.
- **Geography:** A country's geography can make the already complex process of election administration even more challenging. Elections are inherently a demanding logistical and operational process, starting from voter registration and voter information, to identifying polling station sites in the pre-election period; to the tasks needed for election day itself, including the delivery of election materials, recruitment of poll workers, and transfer of ballots to tabulation and results centers. A large physical expanse, difficult terrain, and limited transportation and communications infrastructure—all resulting in isolated communities—are among the impediments found in many developing countries.
- **Education:** The citizenry's level of education will influence the types and amounts of civic and voter education needed to ensure an informed electorate. A country with a high illiteracy rate presents different challenges than a country where basic education standards for most eligible voters have been met.

1.2 Foundational Factors: Illustrative Assessment Questions

Historical, Cultural, and Demographic Factors

- ✓ What are the key historical factors (colonial, conflict-related, and others) that affect elections and political processes? What challenges and opportunities do these have on the potential for credible elections?
- ✓ What are the most important cultural, social, gender, and religious norms that impact politics and elections in the country, and what effect do those have? How do these norms affect participation of women and marginalized populations?
- ✓ What impact do the country's main demographic features (ethnic, linguistic, religious, age groups, etc.) have on politics and the electoral process?
- ✓ Which populations/groups are formally and/or informally excluded and disenfranchised from meaningful political participation and influence? What are the key challenges those groups face with exclusion and marginalization?

- ✓ How does the country's education level (and differing levels among sub-populations) affect political and electoral processes?
- ✓ Is there a significant diaspora population? If so, how are they involved in (or excluded from) the political and electoral environment, and what is the impact?
- ✓ Are there any ongoing or recent crises (such as natural disaster, violent conflict or pandemic) that might affect the elections? If so, what impact will that have and on which groups/populations?

Economic Factors

- ✓ How have the structure of the economy and sources of state revenue shaped links and accountability relations between the state and different groups in society? To what effect?
- ✓ How does the distribution of wealth in the country impact political and electoral processes, including the motivations and tactics of parties/candidates?
- ✓ Are there identifiable economic interests and financial groups that heavily influence the political dynamics and political parties?
- ✓ To what extent is the country able to pay for its own elections? If significant international support is provided, which donors are providing that support?

1.3 INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS AND FOREIGN ACTORS

In an interconnected world, it is also important to examine events taking place throughout the region and globally. Elections are, of course, national events that are designed to allow citizens to choose their leaders. Political dynamics within countries, however, can be influenced by regional political trends and the history of relations with other countries. Tracking the political developments in the region may reveal issues, grievances, or conflicts that can influence national elections. Economic, trade, ethnic, or other tensions with neighboring countries may be inflamed during campaigns as candidates seek to mobilize supporters by reviving simmering grievances. Regional powers with geopolitical interests in the country may attempt to influence electoral outcomes.

Foreign influence in elections is not a new phenomenon. However, in the current context, regional and global actors have adapted their methods of influencing elections, sometimes with malign intent. Often, this is in cooperation with incumbents and/or opposition actors within a country receptive to illegal or irregular assistance from foreign governments. Foreign actors are increasingly conducting disinformation campaigns and cyber attacks designed to help preferred candidates or parties or simply to sow confusion and mistrust of democratic processes.

For example, China and Russia's methods of political coercion and co-optation have supported a set of authoritarian practices that seek to help illiberal regimes stay in power and weaken democratizing countries by directly subverting democratic institutions and indirectly mimicking and corrupting democratic processes. They intentionally aim to lower the bar for democracy in a myriad of ways, using tactics that are rapidly evolving. Key methods include the following:

- supporting sham election observers (often termed "zombie observers") who seek to legitimize non-competitive elections and denounce democratic elections;
- promoting corrupt EMBs;
- exploiting weak political finance systems;
- funding government-affiliated NGOs and media;
- launching disinformation campaigns in social media;
- exporting modern surveillance tools to restrict freedoms; and
- championing "anti-corruption" models that serve as a veneer for expunging political rivals.

Detecting and counterbalancing this influence requires a full understanding both of the host country and regional environments, as well as being able to draw a clear distinction between these malign activities and activities legiti-

mately aimed at supporting credible elections.

Many other regional developments can impact a country's prospects for credible elections. Natural disasters, famine, conflict, a rise in transnational criminal groups, economic turmoil, or sudden economic gains in one country can trigger spikes in migration, limit mobility, or cause instability, impacting the politics, economy, and security of another country. Pandemics and other health crises can also impact how campaigns are conducted, as well as putting demands on the electoral administration to protect public health while maximizing participation. Disease outbreaks, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic and the Ebola crises in West Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, warrant special accommodations to allow for safe participation of all electoral stakeholders.

1.3 Regional Political Dynamics and Foreign Actors: Illustrative Assessment Questions

- ✓ What effect does the country's relationship with its neighbors have on politics and elections?
- ✓ Are there current regional issues or crises that will have a significant impact on the credibility of the electoral and political process?
- ✓ Is the country particularly vulnerable to external intervention? Is the country dependent on external sources of aid or illegal sources of income?
- ✓ Who are the main foreign actors and countries with strong interest in the political and electoral process? Are there motivations to undermine or support democratic elections? What tactics do they use to achieve their goals, and how influential are they?
- ✓ Is there significant inflow or outflow of migrants and/or refugees that has an impact on the political environment and electoral process?

1.4 CONFLICT AND SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Given the prevalence of past or ongoing violent conflict in many countries where USAID works, it is essential to analyze the conflict dynamics and how they are likely to impact the electoral process. This section will also help determine what level of emphasis to place on assessing more specific electoral conflict and security issues in the Electoral Conflict and Security section of Step 2.

War or an active armed conflict often involves a complex picture of armed groups, military forces, foreign fighters, and other dynamics that require a careful analysis for election assistance planning in conflict-affected environments. In countries with a history of violent conflict, the origins of some political parties may be traced back to combatant groups.[51] In post-conflict environments, the international community often plays a particularly important role in scheduling and conducting elections, often as part of a peace agreement. The timing and credibility of such elections is especially important, as is consideration of the potential for the elections to contribute to an escalation of violence.[52] In such circumstances, policy and assistance discussions are tightly connected, and donor coordination is essential.

Even in contexts without widespread conflict, instability and election violence can be triggered by national or transnational organized crime, dominant business interests, deep political polarization, and/or corrupt elites who undermine the integrity of the electoral process. This is particularly common in countries with systemic political corrup-

[51] While commonly thought to exacerbate tensions, in some situations ethnically-oriented political parties have been found to strengthen a national, albeit diverse, identity, or to be a ruse for other causes of electoral violence. See Flesken, Anaïd. "Ethnic Parties, Ethnic Tensions? Results of an Original Election Panel Study," *American Journal of Political Science,* 62(4) (2018): https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ajps.12385 and Wambua, Muema. "The Ethnification of Electoral Conflicts in Kenya. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 2017(2) (2017): https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/ethnification-electoral-conflicts-kenya/.

[52] For a thorough study on the relationship between elections, electoral assistance and conflict, see USAID, *Theories of Democratic Change Phase III: Transitions from Conflict* (2019): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TKJC.pdf

tion intertwined with economic and/or criminal interests and state capture. For example, cartels fighting to maintain territory can render whole regions unstable. In some areas, cartels have become so strong that they have effectively supplanted formal security mechanisms. Having corrupted public officials to facilitate their operations, cartels have a vested interest in the outcome of elections, which can increase instability. The same may be true for private sector actors in countries where the economy is dominated by corrupt business interests that wield significant influence over politicians.

In cases where elections are very likely to trigger and/or be significantly impacted by violence, it is advisable to conduct a separate assessment using USAID's *Conflict Assessment Framework* (CAF),[53] the *Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework* (ICAF),[54] and/or USAID's *Electoral Security Framework*.[55] The regime type, as well as other contextual elements in this assessment, including political, economic, historical, social, and regional factors, will also greatly influence the security environment.

1.4 Conflict and Security Environment: Illustrative Assessment Questions[56]

- ✓ Has the country experienced prior widespread armed conflict? If so, what was it about and how did it end?
- ✓ What have been the main fault lines and root causes of violent political conflict? How have these been transformed or remained entrenched over time?
- ✓ Has a history of conflict shaped the norms of political behavior?
- ✓ Are elections likely further exacerbate tensions and/or trigger additional violence?
- ✓ Is the government effectively in control of all areas of the country? Are there areas of the country in which elections cannot be held (or may not be held) due to security concerns? How large or politically significant are these areas?
- ✓ Do criminal organizations employ violence to achieve political objectives?
- ✓ Are ideology-based insurgencies active in the country?
- ✓ Are security forces widely trusted as impartial actors, or are they politicized?

[53] USAID, *Conflict Assessment Framework* (2012): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnady739.pdf

[54] USG Interagency Reconstruction and Stabilization Policy Coordinating Committee, *Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework* (2008): https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/187786.pdf

[55] USAID, *Electoral Security Framework* (2010): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAEA453.pdf

[56] Specific election-related conflict and security issues are addressed in the Electoral Conflict and Security section of Step 2: Assess the Electoral Context.

PHOTO: CAROL SAHLEY/USAID, SIERRA LEONE, 2018

STEP 2: ASSESS THE ELECTORAL CONTEXT

After assessing the broader country context, the next step is to assess the electoral context and the component parts of the electoral process. The three overarching analytical approaches (the electoral cycle, democratic election principles and obligations, and rules of the game and power dynamics) should also be applied to each component of the electoral process.

Electoral Context Assessment Components

While there are a variety of ways to categorize the main elements of the electoral processes, below are the most common elements that need to function properly for a credible election to take place and around which programs can be developed:

- 2.1 Legal framework
- 2.2 Election management (including voter registration)
- 2.3 Voter education and information
- 2.4 Political parties, campaigning, and candidates
- 2.5 Election observation
- 2.6 Media ecosystem
- 2.7 Electoral security
- 2.8 Electoral justice
- 2.9 Post-election transition

A robust electoral assessment examines the strengths, challenges, opportunities, and constraints in each of the above nine areas, as well as which elements are the most important to address. Alternatively, if it becomes clear

from the country dynamics analysis and/or desk review of resources in advance of an assessment that there are specific functional areas that are particularly problematic or offer a window of opportunity, the assessment team should focus mostly on those areas while providing a clear rationale for their choices.

When assessing each electoral component, it is important to consider the key stakeholders, as well as their interests, incentives, and capacity to affect electoral integrity in a positive or negative way. The most common electoral stakeholders typically include voters; election management bodies; political parties and candidates; civil society organizations and activists, including those representing women and other traditionally marginalized populations; international and citizen election observers; the judiciary; the executive; the legislature; the security sector; other relevant state bodies; the media; international actors; business groups; and non-state militias.

As discussed in Analytical Approach 3: Rules of the Game and Power Dynamics, while some stakeholders may have incentives to behave in a democratic manner that supports credible elections, many or even most actors may have strong interests in undermining, or not promoting, electoral integrity. For example, in more closed environments, security forces that, on paper, have a mandate to ensure peaceful elections and protect security may instead be used as a means of suppressing opposition and intimidating voters not in favor of the ruling regime. Likewise, while in a democratic society the media should play a key role in helping voters make informed choices, media bodies that are under the control or influence of the state or politically-biased private sector actors instead can be used as a tool for disseminating pro-government or partisan propaganda and disinformation campaigns.

2.1 LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL REFORM

Legal Framework

The legal framework encompasses the full set of rules enabling genuine elections. From the broadest elements of ensuring fundamental rights and defining the electoral system, to details like voting hours and posting precinct tabulation results, the legal framework is a multi-level collection of constitutional provisions, legislative acts (including those obligations stemming from ratified or signed international instruments), administrative regulations, and internal operating procedures. The constitution should enshrine the fundamental rights underlying a democratic system, as described in Analytical Approach 2: Principles and Obligations for Democratic Elections. In addition, the most foundational aspects of an electoral legal framework are typically enumerated in the constitution, including the electoral system; composition, authority, and degree of independence of the EMB; frequency of elections; dispute resolution processes; and standards for electoral boundary delimitation.

In some countries, the electoral legal framework is elaborated in a unified election code, while in others there are discrete laws distinguished by type of election and/or by topic. Topics addressed in such laws commonly include: campaign finance; thresholds for legislative seats; quotas for legislative candidates/seats; registration requirements for parties, candidates, and voters; redistricting parameters; voter eligibility and identification rules; access to information and the media environment; campaigning rules; results certification criteria; public safety; and accessibility accommodations. Other laws include those on media, political parties, and police. Administrative regulations govern the operations of government agencies, including the EMB, that are responsible for implementing the electoral laws. Finally, codes of conduct and operating procedures that apply to the internal workings of commissions, political parties, and international and citizen election observers are sometimes incorporated into the legal framework.

In assessing the legal framework for elections, the assessment team should consider to what extent the framework upholds the principles of transparency, inclusiveness, accountability, and competition, which are outlined in more detail in Analytical Approach 2: Principles and Obligations for Democratic Elections.[57] The legal framework should also be assessed to identify gaps, problems, and inconsistencies, which are sometimes unintentional. Legal frameworks are complicated, and changes in one area typically impact other sectors. Thus, in some cases, particularly in environments where there is clearly demonstrated political will by decision makers to hold credible elections, inconsistencies in a legal framework may suggest a lack of capacity to conduct a legislative impact analysis and to harmonize the laws accordingly, rather than an intentional effort to sow confusion.

[57] For further details, see: *Election Obligations and Standards: A Carter Center Assessment Manual* (2014), NDI's *Promoting Legal Frameworks for Democratic Elections* (2008), and International IDEA's *International Obligations: Guidelines for Legal Frameworks* (2014).

Even where fundamental rights are ostensibly guaranteed in the legal framework, incursions upon those rights may be indirect. Accordingly, the assessment should look to other sections of the legal framework to consider how they impact any deficiencies identified by Analytical Approach 2 (Democratic Principles and Obligations). For example, the right to participate politically may be restricted by electoral systems that impose excessive eligibility criteria for candidates and voters, set high threshold standards or candidate/party registration fees that deter new entrants, or impose minimum voter turnout levels, effectively undermining the will of the voters.[58] Criteria such as high candidate registration fees often disproportionately impact female candidates and those from other traditionally marginalized groups, due to their more limited access to financial resources.

If structural factors present barriers to participation by certain populations, such as women, minorities, and other marginalized groups, legislative reforms can help even the playing field and promote more inclusive participation.

On the other hand, if foundational (structural) factors present barriers to participation by certain populations, such as women, minorities, and other marginalized groups, legislative reforms can help even the playing field and promote more inclusive participation. For example, in post-conflict situations, and in countries with considerable income disparity, the high cost of campaigns can effectively exclude emerging political parties. Campaign finance legislation can contribute to more competitive and inclusive elections by ensuring equitable access to public resources and limiting the impact of wealthy individuals, businesses, or international actors by capping private donations and expenditures. Where discrimination is historically entrenched, special measures, such as quotas, may be used to increase opportunities for groups whose participation might otherwise be limited.[59]

Electoral System: A country's electoral system is one of the most important and influential features of the electoral legal framework. It is important for DRG officers to understand not only the way the electoral system works but also its impact on the country's political process, political incentives and alliances, the number and size of political parties in the legislature, representation of women and other marginalized groups, and citizens' rights.

Any change to the electoral system is an enormous and highly political undertaking. It might require a complete overhaul of the electoral districting system (boundary delimitation) and raises other important issues for public debate, among them: voter eligibility criteria; limiting restrictions to age, citizenship and residency; out-of-country voting and representation; definitions about the right to seek election, and nondiscrimination; and clear procedures for the filing of electoral complaints. As discussed further below, electoral reform processes, particularly those involving changes to electoral systems, should be conducted in an inclusive and transparent manner that seeks to gain consensus among the key electoral stakeholders. Too often, however, electoral systems are adopted or revised without strategic, informed consideration of the options or to gain partisan advantage.

While there are many types of electoral systems for legislative bodies, there are two main types, with many variants and hybrids: plurality/majority systems and proportional representation (PR) electoral systems.[60]

Plurality/majority systems have one main feature: after all the votes have been counted in an electoral district (for single national positions such as the presidency, the district is often the country as a whole; for other positions, the district is a much smaller constituency), the candidate or political party with the most votes (or an absolute majority, depending on the system) wins that particular constituency.

- Proponents of plurality/majority systems point to the benefits of the system in fostering: greater accountability of legislators to their constituents; ease of implementation and voter understanding; greater legislative stability; an increased chance of electing a clear governing majority; and greater potential for the formation of a coher-

[58] An overview of different electoral systems may be found at: Overseas Development Initiative, *Why Electoral Systems Matter* (2011): https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7367.pdf

[59] While quotas and reserved seats are most often provided for in the legal framework, they may also be voluntarily established by political parties in forming their candidate lists.

[60] For detailed information on electoral system choices and consequences, see: International IDEA, *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook* (2008): https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/electoral-system-design-the-new-international-idea-handbook.pdf.

ent opposition that can act as a counter-balance to the majority.

- As potential negative consequences of plurality/majority systems, critics most often cite the lower degree of representation, including the strong possibility of the development of a two-party system (resulting in the exclusion of smaller parties), the exclusion of minority candidates and interests, and fewer women in elected executive and legislative offices.

Proportional representation systems aim to minimize the disparity between a party's share of the district vote (however a district is defined) and the number of seats it wins in legislative bodies to represent that district. For example, if three parties win 40 percent, 20 percent, and 10 percent of the national vote, respectively, a PR system seeks to allocate roughly the same proportion of seats in the national legislature.

- Proponents of PR systems cite several characteristics that PR is more likely to facilitate: fewer "wasted" votes (i.e., votes for losing candidates); the easier establishment of new political parties; access to political power for smaller parties; increased political participation and representation of women, youth, minorities, and other disadvantaged groups; and coalition-building within the legislature, which incentivizes compromise.
- PR systems also have potential drawbacks that affect representation and accountability. These systems are often more difficult to implement and for voters to understand, particularly if the formulas for translating votes into seats are complicated. PR can reduce the direct link of accountability between voters and representatives (who often feel more beholden to their party leaders for nominating them and placing them in a certain position on the candidate list) and lead to fragmentation of the party system. PR can reinforce social cleavages as parties develop along ethnic, religious, or other cleavage lines. Some also argue that PR can provide extremist groups with an easier entry into politics.

In addition to electoral systems for legislatures, there are also **electoral systems for the executive branch**. These options include first-past-the-post (a plurality system); a two-round system, in which a run-off is required if a threshold (e.g., a majority of votes) is not obtained in the first round; preferential voting (a ranking system); and distribution requirements whereby regional thresholds of votes are established. As with legislative electoral systems, each executive system produces different vote-seeking strategies, alliances, and coalitions.

The key principle of equal suffrage—one person, one vote—must be protected in the legal framework. However, in electoral systems with subnational districts, the equal suffrage principle can be violated indirectly via the boundary delimitation (districting) process. An imbalance in ratios of voters to representatives across districts gives voters from smaller districts disproportionate influence. This can happen inadvertently in countries experiencing domestic migration due to urbanization, conflict, natural disasters, or the discovery of natural resources, unless the districts are regularly updated. Even where districts are periodically updated, care must be taken to prevent "gerrymandering," which is the practice of deliberately defining electoral districts to favor one party or group. This is often done to preserve incumbent power either by concentrating opposition strongholds into a few districts, or by dispersing opposition voters, seeking to dilute their voting power by positioning them as the minority in many districts. In some situations, however, redistricting may aim to strengthen minority representation, or correct past practices of malapportionment. Thus, care must be taken to understand historic voting patterns, and the intention and impact of district delimitation.

Electoral Reform Processes

Electoral reform processes are often just as important as the legal framework itself, and thus—in countries with recent or ongoing electoral reform processes—the manner in which those processes were/are conducted should be carefully assessed. Electoral reform processes are an important indicator of whether the party and/or leader in power has the political will to hold democratic elections or instead aims to undermine electoral integrity to entrench their power. Electoral reform processes are never strictly technical exercises; they are highly political and should always be assessed through a "rules of the game and power dynamics" lens (Analytical Approach 3).

Electoral reform processes are never strictly technical exercises; they are highly political and should always be assessed through a "rules of the game and power dynamics" lens.

When conducted democratically, electoral reform processes should reflect the principles of transparency, inclusiveness, accountability, and competition. Various stakeholders, including EMBs, the legislative branch, ministries, political parties, civil society, voters, and underrepresented groups should be involved in advocating for, drafting, and/or commenting on specific reforms. Each of these stakeholders comes to the table with their own set of interests, and, given the high political stakes involved in electoral reform, political actors in particular are more focused on their own self-interest than in developing a democratic legal framework. Thus, it is essential for electoral reform processes to provide a genuine opportunity for all prospective electoral contestants and the public to participate and directly express their interests, so that the framework can be based on open dialogue and broad consensus. Without such consensus on the rules of the game for conducting elections, the prospects for stakeholders to accept the election results and consider the elections democratic are greatly diminished.

Those seeking to entrench their power have increasingly used electoral reform to tilt the playing field in their favor. Laws are often drafted behind closed doors and are passed by pro-government legislatures (which may have been elected through flawed elections). In other cases, an official electoral reform process may be set up but is not carried out in an inclusive or transparent manner. These are warning signs of electoral reform being used for anti-democratic purposes. Likewise, rejection or excessive delay of reforms consistent with international norms, particularly those suggested in post-election assessments or election observation reports, may reveal a lack of commitment to reform. Timing is also important to consider. Legislative changes that impact the immediate electoral cycle are not recommended, as this can create last-minute changes to the rules of the game or enable a government to amend the legal framework to facilitate its continued hold power.[61]

2.1 Legal Framework and Electoral Reform: Illustrative Assessment Questions

Legal Framework

- ✓ Is the legal framework consistent with democratic election principles and obligations?
- ✓ Are there major gaps or inconsistencies in the framework? If so, what impact could those have on the prospects for credible elections?
- ✓ Does the legal framework facilitate participation without discrimination?
- ✓ Does the legal framework provide guarantees for equality between men and women, including temporary special measures if necessary?
- ✓ Are electoral districts determined in a way that ensures equal suffrage (one person, one vote) regarding the ratio of citizens to legislative representatives?
- ✓ What is the impact of the electoral system on inclusion, participation, representation, accountability, and conflict mitigation/social cohesion?

Electoral Reform Process (if relevant)

- ✓ If changes are needed to the electoral system and the legal framework, is there sufficient time for an inclusive, transparent reform process to be completed well ahead of election day?
- ✓ What is the likely impact of any proposed electoral reforms on the power balance/competition, consensus, accountability, representation, and inclusion?
- ✓ If election laws were reformed recently, to what extent was the reform process transparent? To what extent was the process genuinely inclusive of key electoral stakeholders, including parties across the spectrum, civil society, and voters?
- ✓ How have parties, civil society organizations, and the public responded to the electoral law changes? Is there a high level of controversy or broad-based support? To what extent are citizens aware of the changes?

[61] For example, the Venice Commission recommends not making legislative changes within one year prior to elections. See Section II.2.b of the European Commission for Democracy through Law *Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters* (2002): https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2002)023rev2-cor-e

2.2 ELECTION MANAGEMENT

Election management is a broad term that includes all aspects of administering the electoral process. EMBs are responsible for administering the elections, which typically includes recruiting, training, and supervising election staff; interpreting the law and developing relevant regulations; registering voters, parties, candidates and observers; political finance enforcement; managing political party pacts; informing voters about the process; monitoring media; procuring and transporting election materials and equipment; setting up and running polling stations; counting and tabulating votes; and, in many countries, adjudicating complaints. In some countries EMBs are also responsible for electoral boundary delimitation. The right to participation requires that there are equal opportunities for women and traditionally marginalized groups to serve as electoral authorities and that the services provided, including registering voters, candidates, and observers, are inclusive and offered on an equal basis.

EMB Independence and Impartiality

As EMBs play a central role in the electoral process, it is essential that they are free from interference, and consequently that they conduct—and are *perceived* to conduct—elections in an impartial manner. As such, EMBs are often analogized to the referee in a sporting match, ensuring a level playing field among competitors. EMB independence can be viewed from two perspectives. There should be *structural* independence for the institution enshrined in the legal framework, as well as *behavioral* independence for the members in their decision making.

A typical EMB hierarchy includes a national-level body managing national, regional, and district tiers (or independent bodies at each level), with temporary commissions established for individual polling stations in advance of elections. Some countries have multiple EMBs, each responsible for different aspects of election administration. While most countries have permanent EMBs, some countries have temporary EMBs that only function during the electoral period.

In determining members of the EMB, countries may follow a professional model, where the EMB is composed of civil servants and other neutral experts. Alternatively, a multi-partisan model may be used, in which the legislature, the executive branch, political parties, and/or civil society appoint members. The appropriateness of each model depends upon the country context. The professional model allows for more technical expertise, but a multi-partisan commission may provide more checks on competing political factions, may facilitate inclusion of competing political factions, and may foster a culture of shared responsibility across partisan divides. To capitalize on the advantages of both, many countries now use a hybrid model consisting of both civil servants and political appointees.

Regardless of the model used, the assessment should gauge whether EMBs are independent and—in particular—free from formal and informal interference.[62] This includes determining whether the EMB has demonstrated clear political will to conduct elections impartially and effectively, as well as whether key electoral stakeholders, including parties across the spectrum, civil society, voters, and independent media, view the EMB as independent and impartial. This assessment of an EMB's political will has a significant impact on the potential electoral assistance programming options. For example, electoral assistance would be misplaced if it aims to build the technical capacity of an EMB that is widely perceived to be partisan and/or does not demonstrate political will to conduct elections in an impartial manner.

Election administration oversight by governmental bodies: The assessment should also consider the extent to which election administration oversight is built into the governance structure. In addition to monitoring conducted by nongovernmental actors such as media, civil society, and parties, it is important that one governmental or official independent body be responsible for official oversight of election administration. The oversight body can be a separate office within the election management body (such as an inspector general or auditor) itself or a separate institution, such as a legislative committee, judicial court, or commissions (such as the Bawaslu in Indonesia). Where these bodies are empowered and effective, they can help strengthen the transparency and accountability of the

[62] Some countries follow a governmental EMB model, in which a government ministry (such as the Ministry of Interior) or local authorities administer elections; or a mixed EMB model, which includes one or more implementing EMB bodies within the government and an independent supervisory or policy body. For more details, see International IDEA *Electoral Management Design* (2014): https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/electoral-management-design-2014.pdf

electoral process. Depending on their designated powers, they can help identify systemic deficiencies, fraud, and vulnerabilities and can act on complaints made by employees or others related to misconduct, illegal activities, bribery, theft, gross waste of funds, or abuse of authority.[63]

EMB Capacity

The assessment should identify the EMB's main capacity strengths and deficiencies in recent elections, as well as any steps taken to address past deficiencies since the last elections. These can be identified through internal EMB reports, audits, strategies, and plans, as well as through the views of other key electoral stakeholders, particularly political parties and election observers. If the EMB has a strategic plan in place, the assessment team may draw on it as a blueprint and assess implementation challenges against it.

Assessing EMB capacity requires more than reviewing public-facing activities. Effective implementation of those tasks depends upon performing a bevy of underlying tasks within a short, fixed timeframe, including training commissioners, staff and, poll workers, consulting and communicating effectively with electoral stakeholders, procuring materials, designing and distributing ballots and other polling materials, and adjudicating complaints. Naturally, completing these tasks requires the ability to plan effectively. Failure to accurately estimate the time and budget necessary to complete essential operational tasks risks disenfranchising voters, skewing the election results, undermining confidence, and potentially triggering violence. While some time constraints and budget limitations may be beyond an EMB's control, it is important to assess its capacity to make timely and accurate projections, as well as whether preparations are adequate under the circumstances.

The assessment should consider the extent to which EMBs have the capacity and will to undertake measures to facilitate broad and inclusive voter participation, particularly for marginalized populations. This includes whether the EMB carefully and strategically assesses the differing barriers facing each marginalized group, and whether those findings are reflected in administration of elections. For example, the EMB should strategically determine the number and geographic distribution of voter registration centers and polling stations to ensure their accessibility. It may be advisable to establish out-of-country voting in other countries where significant numbers of the home country's citizens are living, whether by absentee ballot or by allowing polling at consulate offices.

Absentee balloting or voting-from-home (such as by mobile ballot box) options can accommodate older voters, those with chronic health conditions, students, migrant laborers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and voters with disabilities. In addition, accommodations must be made to ensure persons with disabilities are able to vote without undue barriers. For example, vision-impaired voters may be accommodated with tactile ballot guides, braille ballots, or by allowing them to bring someone of their choice (or a designated poll worker) into the voting booth to assist them in marking their ballots. Further, countries with high illiteracy rates or where minority languages are spoken should be prepared to offer ballots with party symbols or in the relevant languages.

The assessment should also consider whether there are multiple elections occurring at the same time (such as executive and legislative), and what additional risks and complications that introduces. If the EMB is temporary, the assessment should pay particular attention to significant gaps in capacity and institutional memory that are important to address. In addition, while the primary responsibility for managing elections rests with EMBs, they rely upon cooperation with other government entities, such as the civil registry, public safety, courts, ministry of finance, and other institutions for the proper administration of elections. Therefore, it is also important to assess various stakeholders' specific functions, given that contestants, civil society, media, voters, and the international community sometimes complement the EMB in roles in areas such as civic and voter education and access to information.

Voter Registration and Voters List

Voter registration and maintaining the voters list are key components of election administration. Without an effective system of maintaining accurate, complete, and up-to-date voter lists, voters can be disenfranchised. Legitimate voters may be turned away on election day if the lists are not maintained properly, often disproportionately impacting marginalized populations. Opportunities for fraud are increased, as deceased voters' names or duplicate names on the voters list can be used by fraudulent actors to cast illegal votes. In authoritarian contexts, the EMB

[63] ACE Electoral Knowledge Network: http://aceproject.org/main/english/ei/eig01.htm

may manipulate the voters list by, for example, purging voters without due cause in opposition strongholds or by intentionally dedicating fewer resources to registering voters in opposition areas. In war-torn countries, maintaining existing voter lists or creating new ones from scratch is severely challenged by changes in the population including migration and mortality, geography, climate, literacy, availability of technology, and security.

The system and method of creating and maintaining a voter list can take different forms. The appropriateness of each method depends upon both the capacity to maintain and share information and the degree to which the public trusts its government with such information.[64]

- **Time period:** Voter lists can be constructed or updated in advance of each election during a specific registration period (periodic registration), or they can be continually updated (continuous registration).
- **Responsibility for initiating registration:** While the ultimate responsibility for generating and maintaining voter lists typically rests with the EMB, the process of who initiates voter registration varies depending on the country. In some cases, the EMB conducts a door-to-door campaign to create or update the voter list (state-initiated registration). In other cases, the voter list is drawn from a separate database, such as a civil registry (passive or automatic registration). Other countries may place the onus upon voters to register themselves (active or individual-initiated registration).
- **Voluntary or mandatory:** Some countries make voter registration mandatory, while others have voluntary systems in which voters can choose whether to register or not.

In countries that do not have automatic registration, communications to inform stakeholders of timing and procedures associated with registration should be reasonably calculated to reach all stakeholders evenly. In some countries, this requires producing materials in multiple languages; in others, radio and television public service announcements and visual depictions may be necessary to reach an illiterate population. Messaging through social media may be more effective for younger voters.

The assessment should consider barriers that may exist to registration, particularly for traditionally marginalized populations. For example, if registering voters at a centralized office presents unreasonable burdens for those living in rural or isolated areas, including displaced populations, the procedures themselves may have to be adapted. In addition, in countries with portions of the population who lack registration documents typically required (such as IDPs or in some cases large segments of the population whose birth was not automatically registered and/or who were not born in hospitals), EMBs will need to determine special procedures, measures, and/or documents needed to ensure these populations can get registered without undue burden. In addition, in many countries, transgender persons face challenges obtaining an ID that corresponds with their gender identity, which can lead to them being denied the right to vote if their appearance does not match the gender on their ID.

In addition to EMBs, many other stakeholders are responsible for enhancing and/or monitoring the voter registration process, such as political parties, civil society, and media. Electoral contestants and their supporters work to ensure that their prospective voters are registered and informed of how, when, and where to register.

Open Election Data

The assessment should consider the extent to which the EMB fosters transparency by providing open election data.[65] Information and data relating to all stages of the electoral cycle should be made available and accessible to citizens and other electoral stakeholders in an open manner, including through open meetings, responding to legitimate document requests, providing free and online access to information and data, and providing registered observers and pollwatchers the opportunity to monitor each stage of the process and to have access that is sufficient to meaningfully verify the results.

EMBs should publish their structure, functions, powers, decision-making processes, decisions, revenues, and expenditures. Information on district delimitation should be readily available so that observers can serve as a check against partisan manipulation of districts. Public and private campaign finance data (including: sources, amounts, and dates

[64] For a brief elaboration of the advantages and disadvantages of each system, see Administration and Cost of Elections Projection (ACE) Electoral Knowledge Network: http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/vr/onePage

[65] For more details, see NDI, *Open Election Data Initiative:* https://www.openelectiondata.net/en/

of contributions; campaign expenditure data; and data on public campaign finance resource disbursements) should be made open, although the extent to which this data is available depends on the country's legal framework and degree to which campaign finance laws are enforced. EMBs should publicize the list of polling stations sufficiently in advance of elections to ensure voters know where to vote. Access to preliminary voter lists allows citizens to verify their information, and access to final voter lists is important for all polling station commissioners, voters, and party agents on election day.

EMBs should also make election results publicly available in a timely, complete manner at the level at which ballots are counted (usually the polling station or precinct level). In addition, the body responsible for electoral dispute resolution should provide open data on the EDR process so that contestants can ensure they receive equal treatment before the law, and so that observers can assess the credibility of the process. In some countries, there may be limitations on providing some types of election data (such as full voter list data) in a public manner, particularly when balancing privacy and data-protection concerns with transparency.

Technology in Election Administration

The most common electronic technologies used in administering elections include:

- digitized voter registries and biometric voter registration;
- online and/or biometric voter authentication at polling stations on election day;
- electronic voting machines in polling stations and, less commonly, internet- and mobile-based remote voting;
- electronic counting; and
- electronic results transmission and tabulation.

It is essential to assess the use of technology given its increased use and its mixed record when it comes to elections. New technologies should be considered only in response to an existing problem and assessed alongside other potential solutions. The decision-making process should aim to build public confidence through inclusive and transparent discussion with electoral stakeholders. Discussions should identify specific electoral problems that should be addressed, consider potential solutions, and assess the feasibility of available technologies. In the cost-benefit analysis, maintenance and obsolescence factors are important to consider. Finally, political will must be considered. The failure to address electoral problems is sometimes a choice, not the result of a lack of technology. Technologies do not fundamentally change incentives that impact these political calculations.

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The use of biometric technology[66] in voter registration and subsequent identification of voters on election day highlights these key considerations. Biometric technology is widely used in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, though more often for registration than identification of voters. While it offers the potential of reducing various forms of election fraud, enhancing inclusivity, and reducing disenfranchisement of voters who arrive at the polling station without the requisite identification, biometric kits are expensive. Even more costly and arduous is the process of training election officials to maintain and use the equipment and to deploy and collect biometric data. Voters need to be well-educated on the technology and its purpose, so that they are more likely to trust it. All eligible voters need to be reached in-person, and they need to consent to providing fingerprints or being photographed. This can be especially challenging in countries where voter participation is already low, signifying high rates of apathy, mistrust, or lack of information. There may also be resistance to submitting such information, whether on concerns of privacy, cultural objections, or a fundamental mistrust of technology.

Once collected, biometric data needs to be stored and secured, requiring substantial data storage facilities and cy-

[66] Biometric technology is the use of unique physical traits to identify or verify a person's identity. Fingerprint and face recognition systems are most commonly used in the electoral context, though eye (iris) recognition is also possible.

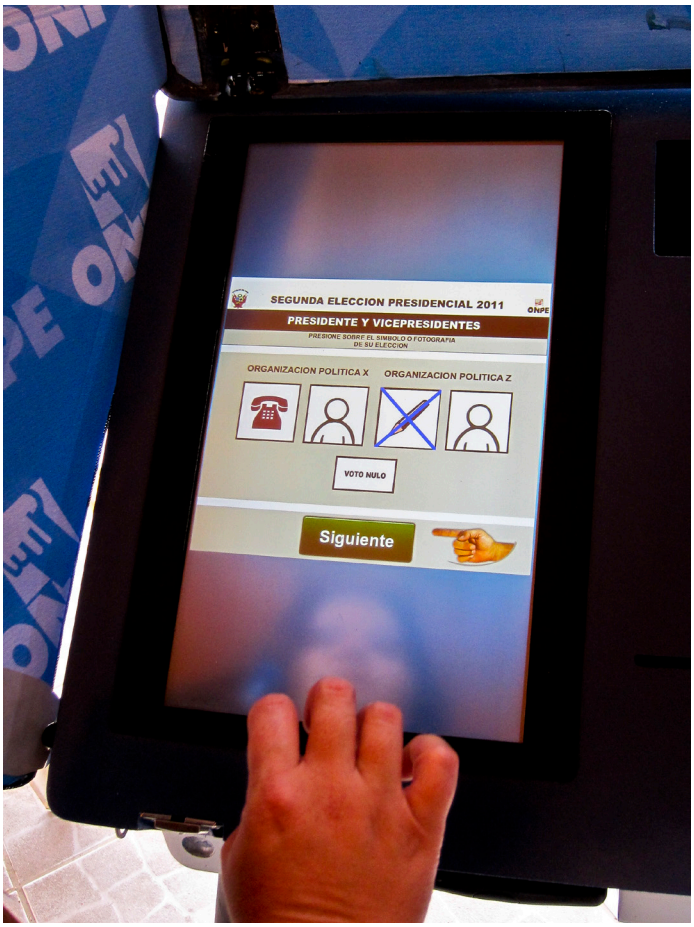

PHOTO: CAROL SAHLEY, USAID

ber security measures. Finally, although biometric data can often reliably confirm identity,[67] the person's eligibility to vote must still be verified. The very existence of biometric data on all eligible citizens is a huge risk in autocratic or semi-autocratic environments. Even in open democratic environments, cyber security risks are such that domestic and foreign malign actors can use the data for harmful purposes, micro-targeting voters or causing system failures on election day. Finally, irrespective of the quality of the biometric instruments and data, as well as its implementation, such technology is sometimes met with profound mistrust among voters and other election participants. In such cases, their use can actually undermine the legitimacy of the results.

Electronic voting is another technology that has the potential to make voting more accessible to special needs voters or those speaking a minority language and to decrease the number of mismarked and spoiled ballots. Yet, it has the potential to undermine the election if voters do not trust the systems, if machines malfunction in significant numbers, or if the voting machines are hacked. The only means of verifying an electronic vote count is to have a provisional paper backup or built-in voter-verified paper audit trail. This demonstrates that technology can create new vulnerabilities to manipulation, unless additional measures are put in place.

Decisions on the procurement and use of technology in elections are often made by legislatures or executives in an opaque manner, under the influence of international vendors who are not accountable to voters. Observers have a unique role in trying to understand, document, and report how the procurement process is conducted and how those vendors handle the sensitive data that they have been entrusted with. In Kenya's 2017 general elections, the procurement and implementation of election results transmission, storage, and security technologies were not transparent. This contributed to undermining public trust in the process.

In addition, technology can be expensive, not only to implement but also to maintain. Software and hardware upgrades will need to be factored into future budgets. If the software or hardware are proprietary, the sustainability of the company providing and supporting it needs to be assessed as well. If the software or hardware is open-source, there needs to be an examination whether there is appropriate documentation and ongoing development and support provided for the product. Because computer and scanning equipment can be sensitive and may require storage in climate-controlled environments, a long-term maintenance plan is needed, including the sourcing of parts in case of repair.

Electoral assessments should consider the local capacity to use and maintain the equipment and protect the system from cyberattacks. EMBs should test hardware in the field for appropriateness, including considerations of electricity and internet needs, and sensitivity to climatic issues. Information technology also requires considerable training of

[67] While biometric identification is more reliable than many other forms of voter identification, it is not 100 percent reliable or accurate. The person's fingerprint or facial structure can change over time or with injury. The technology is also dependent upon the quality of the equipment used, the quality and quantity of data, and ambient conditions. Eye recognition is the most reliable and the most expensive method. Fingerprinting is more reliable than most face recognition systems, and its reliability increases with the number of prints used. However, the equipment is more fragile, as it requires physical contact and will become damaged by dust and finger oils over time. Of course, biometric identification systems also depend upon the data collector performing the job properly.

both the data collectors and the election officials responsible for using it. Inevitably, the use of technology demands some degree of information technology expertise by all electoral stakeholders. In addition, a significant amount of time is needed to adequately test and prepare for new technologies. If done well, the process takes years, not months.

Technological solutions should be aimed at increasing accuracy, security, efficiency, and inclusion in elections. The reality, however, is that technology raises the risk of cyberattacks from within and outside of the country, technological failures, procurement related corruption, and contradictions between the narrow corporate interests of the vendors and public interest of voters can greatly undermine the trust of citizens in the process. Thus, in some cases, the use of technology in elections could negatively impact the integrity of the process, undermine trust in the process, and even trigger violence.

In countries where new technologies are being considered, the assessment team may recommend a feasibility study focused on the use of a particular technology in its specific context.

2.2 Election Management: Illustrative Assessment Questions

EMB Independence and Impartiality

- ✓ Is the election management body independent by law and is it legally required to act in an impartial manner?
- ✓ Was the election management body appointed in a transparent and inclusive manner that earned the confidence of parties and the public?
- ✓ How and when is the EMB funded, and what impact does this have on its ability to be independent and free from partisan pressures? Does the EMB have a separate operating budget and electoral budget?
- ✓ Do parties and other actors have concerns about the election commission's independence?
- ✓ Are women and other traditionally marginalized groups equitably represented as election officials, including at leadership levels? If not, what barriers do they face?
- ✓ Do mid-level (regional) and local commissions execute their responsibilities impartially?
- ✓ How far is the EMB on its journey to self reliance, and how can donors assist that process?

Overall EMB Capacity

- ✓ What do most electoral stakeholders consider to be the capacity strengths of the EMB?
- ✓ Does the EMB have a long-term, strategic vision or a strategic plan, publicly discussed with all stakeholders?
- ✓ What are the most significant concerns that most electoral stakeholders (particularly parties and observers) have about the EMB's technical capacity and level of preparation?
- ✓ Does the EMB have adequate resources to fulfill its mission? Are those resources being provided in a timely fashion?
- ✓ Has the election commission undertaken preparations for the election in a timely manner? If not, why not?
- ✓ Does the EMB have a sufficient strategy and capacity to address and/or counter disinformation during the elections?

Addressing Vulnerabilities to Fraud and Malpractice

- ✓ Does the EMB demonstrate a clear commitment to assessing and preventing electoral fraud and manipulation?
- ✓ What is the EMB's capacity to identify, anticipate, and mitigate potential threats to electoral integrity by domestic and foreign actors?
- ✓ Is there a governmental or official independent body(ies) responsible for election administration oversight? If so, to what extent does it help protect against fraud, waste, abuse, and misconduct by the EMB?

Election Administration

- ✓ Is the procurement of election materials and equipment, including any electronic technologies, conducted in a transparent, competitive, and impartial manner?

- ✓ How effectively does the EMB coordinate with other bodies that play a role in the elections, such as security bodies?
- ✓ To what extent are measures in place to ensure the security of sensitive materials, including ballots and any technology used for voting, counting, results transmission, and tabulation?
- ✓ To what extent are measures in place to ensure the secrecy of the vote?
- ✓ To what extent do women, youth, minorities, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized populations, face undue or discriminatory obstacles to casting their vote? What are the most significant barriers and for which groups?
- ✓ Do citizens, including women, marginalized groups and opposition supporters, expect that they will be able to cast their ballot free from intimidation?

EMB External Outreach

- ✓ To what extent have electoral authorities conducted outreach activities to raise the public's awareness of its work?
- ✓ Are there regular and consistent mechanisms for the EMB to hold two-way, open dialogue with parties and other key electoral stakeholders?

Voter Registration/Voter List

- ✓ Has there been a recent audit or analysis of the voters list? If so, is the voters list up to date, complete, and accurate?
- ✓ Is there confidence among parties and the public in the voter registration process and in the integrity of the voter list?
- ✓ Are eligible voters, including women, youth, minorities, and persons with disabilities, able to register without undue burden, or barriers? Are there special procedures in place to allow IDPs to register, if needed?
- ✓ Are voters able to check the accuracy of the list? To what extent do they take advantage of this opportunity?
- ✓ Has voter registration been conducted according to schedule? Is there sufficient time before elections for the EMB to make revisions to the list following voters' and parties' review of the preliminary list?

Open Election Data

- ✓ To what extent does the EMB make information and data relating to all stages of the electoral cycle available and accessible to electoral stakeholders in an open and timely manner?
- ✓ Does the EMB make election results publicly available in a timely, complete manner at the level at which ballots are counted?

Technologies in Election Administration

- ✓ Has there been consideration of or recent adoption of new technologies in the elections?
- ✓ If so, to what extent were key electoral stakeholders meaningfully consulted in the decision-making process?
- ✓ Was/is the decision-making process based on a needs assessment that identifies the specific electoral process problems and whether technology could help address those problems?
- ✓ And was/is the decision based on a consideration of: advantages and disadvantages; costs versus benefits; technical feasibility; EMB capacity; sufficient time to test and deploy the technology prior to the elections; and legality of using electronic technologies in elections?
- ✓ What impact has the use of technology had on the previous electoral cycles, peace and security (if relevant), and the democratic direction of the host country?
- ✓ If new technologies are being introduced, what are the EMB's capacities, needs, and gaps to effectively implement the new technologies?
- ✓ What is the source of funding for the acquisition and maintenance of the technology?
- ✓ What is the EMB's capacity to ensure that any election technologies used are secure? What are the greatest cybersecurity vulnerabilities and risks?

2.3 POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

Multi-party competitive elections provide an opportunity for diverse viewpoints and constituencies to be heard and to participate in governance. A lack of genuine opposition and meaningful competition in autocratic societies denies contestants the right to participate and deprives citizens of legitimate choices. USAID provides political party assistance to develop representative multiparty systems; foster a more level playing field (particularly in nondemocratic, dominant party systems); promote political parties' responsiveness to citizen priorities; and encourage parties to participate in political processes in an inclusive, democratic, and peaceful manner. Per USAID's *Political Party Assistance Policy*,[68] the Agency's assistance is designed to support representative, multiparty systems and does not seek to determine election outcomes. Assistance to nondemocratic parties is prohibited.[69]

The assessment should take into account challenges, constraints, and opportunities at both the party system level and individual party level.[70]

Political Party System and Context

It is important to first consider the party system as a whole, as well as the context in which parties operate. This sheds light on the extent to which the party system presents voters with a meaningful choice of political options.[71] Countries can fall on a spectrum from a single party state to a highly fragmented multi-party system.

Main Types of Party Systems

While there are several ways to categorize party systems, four main types are:

- **a dominant party state**, where one party exercises control over much of the government with limited prospects for an electoral transfer of power to another party;
- **a two-party political system**, with the genuine potential for a transfer of power;
- **a multi-party system**, with a relatively manageable and stable number of coherent political parties participating in the political process; and
- **a fragmented multi-party system**, which tends toward a chaotic system with a low barrier to entry to new political parties.

The type of party system provides an important indication as to the nature and structure of political competition, the incentives and motivations of parties, and the extent to which a diversity of interests are reflected in political processes. For example, in a more authoritarian context, intimidation or outright repression may prevent opposition parties from conducting effective outreach. In multi-party systems, parties may struggle to differentiate themselves from one another or to coalesce behind a reform agenda. In fragmented systems, a fluid political landscape may create disincentives for parties to invest in developing sustainable party structures.[72]

In addition, as detailed in the Legal Framework section above, the constitutional and legal framework set the formal rules of the game and significantly influence the party system. Thus, the assessment should consider how the governance system (presidential, parliamentary, hybrid); electoral system (PR vs. majority, quotas, single vs. multi-member districts, thresholds, closed list vs. open list); degree of centralization; and political party laws (barriers to entry, campaign oversight, etc.) shape political party incentives.

Informal rules of the game also significantly affect the party system. The assessment should consider what motivates

[68] Available at: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/200maz.pdf

[69] USAID's *Political Party Assistance Policy* outlines criteria for assessing a party's democratic credentials.

[70] For a detailed approach and tool to assessing political parties, see NDI, *Political Party Programming Guide* (2014): https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Political_Party_Programming_Guide.pdf, and its accompanying *Context Analysis Tool* (2014): https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_ContextAnalysisTool_proof_f.pdf

[71] For more on assessing political party systems and political parties, see University of Pittsburgh, *Political Party Assessment Tool* (2011): http://https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAEA111.pdf

[72] These examples are drawn from NDI *Political Programming Guide*, pp. 72-3.

influential party actors and parties, on what basis parties organize (ideology, ethnicity, religion, geography, personality), and how they are influenced by powerful groups and actors, such as business or labor elites or criminal networks.

It is also important to examine which groups are represented by parties and which are excluded. In particular, women and other traditionally marginalized groups often face formal and informal barriers to becoming party leaders, senior staff, and candidates, and their priorities are often not reflected in party platforms and policies. When parties are not inclusive or gender responsive in their policies and practices, they perpetuate inequality and ignore potentially important electoral advantages.[73]

The type of party system provides an important indication as to the nature and structure of political competition, the incentives and motivations of parties, and the extent to which a diversity of interests are reflected in political processes.

The existence of multiple parties does not necessarily ensure genuine competition. A small number of dominant, entrenched parties; multiple weak parties with ill-defined ideologies; or a number of parties that are all pro-government do not necessarily provide meaningful choices or genuine competition. The act of calling elections may trigger the emergence of several new political parties in more fluid environments, creating the illusion of a broad spectrum of options, while in reality the parties may be defined only by the ambitions of their leaders. Thus, an assessment must also consider the characteristics of the individual parties.

Individual Parties

The nature of parties has a significant impact on the potential for credible elections and democratic progress more broadly. Where parties do not effectively represent citizens' priorities, this can lead to apathy, mistrust of the political system and a protest vote for outsiders or anti-democratic populists. Where parties are weak, organizations, legislatures and, often, government institutions, are also weak, and this can precipitate backsliding or instability. Conversely, where parties are responsive to citizens' priorities, support for democracy tends to grow.

The assessment should consider several aspects of individual parties, including:

- organizational and internal democracy aspects;
- citizen responsiveness and party functions such as policy development, campaigning, outreach; and
- party behavior in terms of abiding by the law and promoting peace.

Within each of these aspects, it is important to consider the extent to which parties promote inclusion and equal opportunity for women, youth, and other marginalized populations. These efforts to promote inclusion not only broaden and deepen party support, they can also bolster the legitimacy of the political system more broadly.

Party Organization and Internal Democracy: Assessing political parties requires assessing the extent to which a party is well-organized and internally democratic. This includes assessing the gender, ethnic, and religious composition of the party's leadership, staff, and candidates. The assessment should not only consider the strengths and weaknesses of *how* a party is organized, but also the reasons *why* the party's weaknesses persist. The primary reason may be due to a lack of capacity or resources, but often it is due to lack of political will. The internal structure of a political party reflects its values, priorities, and culture. Parties that are responsive to their supporters and committed to democratic principles seek to establish structures and internal governance mechanisms that are participatory, transparent, and inclusive. They also emphasize the development and training of young, emerging leaders. This stands in contrast to political parties that are personality-based and organized around a charismatic leader, or

[73] For more information about assessing gender and political parties, see Module 6: Integrating Gender into Political Party Development Programming of the USAID *Gender Integration in Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Programming Toolkit* (2016): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2496/Gender%20Toolkit.pdf, and
NDI *Win With Women Political Party Assessment Tool* (2018): https://www.ndi.org/publications/2019-win-women-assessment-toolkit

those that focus only on the interests of a narrow elite.

It is also important to assess political parties' rules, including conditions for membership, relationships between central and branch offices, and internal dispute mechanisms. This includes considering whether parties' candidate selection processes are clear, inclusive, and transparent and whether the selection process promotes (1) candidates who reflect a cross-section of constituencies within the party; and (2) equality of opportunity for women, youth, and other marginalized populations. The assessment should apply a political economy analysis lens to understand the formal and informal reasons behind parties' candidate selection processes, and what incentives might help encourage more inclusive reforms.

Citizen Responsiveness and Party Functions: Assessing how parties function, particularly in terms of policy development, campaigning, and outreach, is crucial to identifying problems and opportunities that could be addressed or leveraged through EPP support. This includes considering the extent to which parties have the capacity, resources, and political will to establish and manage local branches; to research and develop platforms, legislation, and issue-based policies; and to propose policies that are responsive to citizens and representative of the diversity of their members' interests. It also includes looking at the structures, strategies, and methods parties put in place to campaign and conduct voter outreach. For parties with seats in the legislature, it is important to consider whether there are any significant capacity and/or political will gaps regarding coalition building, opposition-government relations, and/or caucus management.

Assessing these party functions will reveal a great deal about a party's values, strengths, and weaknesses. For example, do they meaningfully reach out to women, youth, and marginalized groups? Do they conduct or use public opinion research to more strategically tailor and target voter outreach? Do they leverage technology, including social media, effectively in their outreach? Do they resort to illegal or undemocratic methods, such as vote buying, disinformation, and hate speech?

Another key party function is conducting oversight of the electoral process. In most countries, political parties train and deploy party pollwatchers (also called party agents). These pollwatchers help protect the party/candidate's interests (including collecting evidence for and/or directly filing complaints), deter fraud, and, in some cases, collect election results data from polling stations. The assessment should consider the level of commitment, capacity, and resources that parties have to train and mobilize pollwatchers across the country and to collect pollwatchers' reports and complaints in a complete and timely manner.

Party Behavior: Closely related to this, the assessment should also consider political party and candidate behavior. Do parties and candidates demonstrate a genuine commitment to adhering to the legal rules and free, peaceful, and fair elections? Or do parties' and candidates' actions indicate that they are ready to apply any, including illegal and/or violent, means to win and influence voters and thus act as "spoilers" of the electoral process? For example, does the political party and/or specific candidates maintain active ties to an armed militia, gangs, or other criminal actors? Democratic political parties agree to accept the will of the people as expressed through legitimate elections as the basis for government. They respect and strive to adhere to the chosen electoral laws and procedures, promote inclusion of marginalized groups, and reject the use of violence as a political tool.[74] The assessment can consider, for example, whether parties have and, if needed, use mechanisms for their members to hold their candidates and leaders accountable; and whether partes take proactive measures to ensure that their activists and supporters do not instigate violent acts.

Political Finance and Abuse of State Resources

Another key issue that should be assessed is political finance (also called campaign finance), including from which sources parties and candidates obtain their funds, what they spend those funds on, and how transparent and effective the political finance oversight system is. Corruption in political finance advantages political and economic elites, malign foreign actors, and/or criminal elements, giving them undue influence on policy making and governance. It also reduces the inclusiveness of elections, as women and marginalized groups often have less access to funds to run

[74] NDI, *Minimum Standards for the Democratic Functioning of Political Parties* (2008): https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/2337_partynorms_engpdf_07082008.pdf

as candidates and fewer means to donate politically. Even the perception of corruption in elections erodes public confidence.

The assessment should identify the main challenges to ensuring that the political finance environment promotes sustainable parties and provides the opportunity to compete on a level playing field. The challenges may relate more to weak or nonexistent laws and regulations, lack of enforcement, politically-biased enforcement, or a combination of these factors. Cryptocurrencies are also emerging as both licit and illicit sources of political finance. In addition, if there is a public funding program for political parties, the assessment should consider how the distribution of such funds takes place and what effect that has on fostering or inhibiting fair competition.

In many countries, political finance is not sufficiently regulated and lacks transparency due to a lack of political will and limited capacity of oversight institutions. In contrast, sound political finance regulations, effective oversight institutions, and active campaign finance monitoring by civil society groups can create strong incentives for political parties to manage and disclose financial records in a complete and timely manner. This helps generate public confidence in parties and candidates, as well as in the political system more broadly.

A closely-related issue is the extent to which state resources (also called administrative resources) are abused for electoral advantage. Abuse of state resources by parties and/or candidates provides incumbents an unfair advantage, creating an uneven playing field. This weakens elections as a mechanism to hold elected officials accountable.

Types of Abuse of State Resources

The Open Society Institute has defined the following categories of abuse of state resources:[75]

- **coercive:** intimidation, obstruction, and harassment of opposition by law enforcement, security, and intelligence services;
- **institutional:** using state resources (material and human) for campaign purposes;
- **regulatory:** enforcing regulations in a biased way (e.g., tax inspections, deregistration);
- **legislative:** using parliamentary majority or influence to pass laws favorable to incumbents;
- **financial:** using public funds to benefit incumbents; and
- **state media:** using state-run or state-controlled media to promote incumbents.

The assessment should consider how the legal framework, enabling environment, and political will of key actors influence the risks for abuse of state resources. For example, the assessment could consider the extent to which the legal framework (1) establishes effective mechanisms to prevent public officials from taking unfair advantage of their positions to influence the outcome of elections; and (2) provides for effective and transparent monitoring by independent institutions.[76]

2.3 Political Parties and Candidates: Illustrative Assessment Questions

Political Party System and Space

- ✓ What type of political party system does the country have? Is it a dominant party state, two-party system, coherent multi-party system, or fragmented multi-party system?
- ✓ Are there sufficient options and diversity among electoral contestants/parties to offer voters a meaningful electoral choice?

[75] Open Society Institute, *Monitoring Campaign Finance: A Handbook for NGOs* (2004): https://www.justiceinitiative.org/publications/monitoring-election-campaign-finance-handbook-ngos

[76] For a detailed framework for assessing the risk of abuse of state resources, see IFES, *Abuse of State Resources Research and Assessment Framework* (2018): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/abuse_of_state_resources_research_and_assessment_framework_guidelines_for_the_democracy_and_governance_community_of_practice.pdf

- ✓ Does the party system represent the major groups in the country? Are there any major groups that are excluded?
- ✓ How does the constitutional and legal framework (including presidential vs. parliamentary, electoral system, degree of centralization, political party laws) affect the incentives of political parties?
- ✓ Revisit question from Country Context: What is/are the primary means of political support for the main political actors/parties? Ideology/policy-based? Ethnic, religious or other social cleavage? Economic? Personality-based?
- ✓ In general, what motivates political leaders to be involved in politics?
- ✓ What other factors influence party behavior, such as informal and formal rules, gender norms, restrictions by an authoritarian regime, and/or the security environment?
- ✓ What is the role of women in parties? What is the role of youth in parties?

Party Organization and Internal Democracy

- ✓ How are different parties structured internally?
- ✓ To what extent are members informed of and able to participate in party decisions?
- ✓ What is the gender composition of the party's leadership, staff, and candidates?
- ✓ What differences exist in terms of opportunities and barriers among women of varying ages, ethnic or religious groups, or urban/rural backgrounds? How does this differ for poor, disabled, indigenous or LGBTI individuals?
- ✓ To what extent do parties take proactive measures to ensure equal opportunity for women, youth, and marginalized groups as candidates, leaders, staff, and activists? What incentives (formal or informal) exist for parties to achieve this equal opportunity?
- ✓ Are parties' candidate selection processes clear, inclusive, and transparent (depending on the electoral system)? And do candidate selection processes reflect a consensus among key actors within the parties?
- ✓ Do parties have measures to promote selection of candidates that represent a cross-section of constituencies within the party, such as women, geographic regions, linguistic or ethnic communities, and/or representatives of various internal factions?
- ✓ If they exist, what role do women's and youth wings play within the parties?
- ✓ To what extent do parties have the political will and systems in place to develop the next generation of party leaders? Or is this development purposefully stifled?
- ✓ What role within the party do its elected legislators (parliamentarians, local councilors) play? To what extent do elected members seek to advance party policy priorities once in office?

Citizen Responsiveness and Party Functions, including Policy Development, Campaigning, and Outreach

- ✓ To what extent do parties have the *capacity and resources* to develop platforms, legislation, and issue-based policies? And to what extent do parties have the *political will* to conduct these tasks?
- ✓ To what extent do parties propose policies that are responsive to citizens and representative of the diversity of their members' interests?
- ✓ To what extent do parties have the structures and systems in place to campaign effectively and conduct voter outreach? Do they engage in issue-based citizen engagement activities?
- ✓ Which parties have the capacity, resources, and political will to establish and manage local branches?
- ✓ What are the most common ways that parties conduct their campaigns, and how do they communicate their messages to the electorate?
- ✓ How well does the party leverage new technologies, including social media, in party building and its outreach?
- ✓ How common is vote buying, and which parties (e.g., government and/or opposition) use vote buying more extensively?
- ✓ To what extent do parties conduct meaningful, targeted outreach to women, youth, and marginalized groups?

- ✓ To what extent do parties conduct and/or use public opinion research to more strategically tailor and target voter outreach?
- ✓ How extensively do parties and/or their proxies (such as public relations firms or consultants) engage in disinformation campaigns?
- ✓ For parties with seats in the legislature, are there any significant capacity and/or political will gaps regarding coalition building, opposition-government relations, and/or caucus management?
- ✓ To what extent do parties have the commitment, capacity, and resources to train and deploy pollwatchers across the country and to collect and analyze pollwatchers' reports and complaints in a complete and timely manner?

Party Behavior and Democratic Conduct

- ✓ Do parties have mechanisms for their members to hold their leaders accountable? If so, are these used in practice?
- ✓ To what extent are any candidates or parties advocating violence, directly or indirectly? Are parties perpetrating violence through proxies, such as youth groups, organized crime, gangs, or violent extremists?
- ✓ To what extent are parties taking proactive measures to ensure that their activists and supporters do not instigate violent acts?
- ✓ Are there any mechanisms for resolving inter-party disputes?

Party Transparency, Political Finance, and Abuse of State Resources

- ✓ What are the main sources of finance for parties and candidates—public funding, private funding, or both? What are the main sources of private funding? How do the sources and scale of party finance impact the integrity of the electoral process?
- ✓ What are the main challenges to ensuring that the political finance environment promotes sustainable parties and provides the opportunity to compete on a level playing field? Are the challenges related more to weak or nonexistent laws/regulations, lack of enforcement, or politically-biased enforcement?
- ✓ Do parties' political finance practices exacerbate barriers to women and traditionally marginalized groups, such as formal or informal requirements that candidates finance their own campaigns and fundraise for the party's campaign?
- ✓ Is there evidence or a perception that state resources are being abused in the campaign in a manner that favors one party or candidate? What are the most common forms of abuse of state resources?
- ✓ What aspects of the legal framework and enabling environment need improvement to reduce the risk of abuse of state resources?

2.4 VOTER EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Voter education and voter information are sometimes used interchangeably, although **voter information** often refers to the basic facts about election day (where, when, and how to vote), while **voter education** is used as a broader term that includes more complex information, such as outlining the roles and responsibilities of voters, explaining the link between voting and broader democratic and human rights, and helping voters make an informed choice. The term **civic education** is also sometimes used to refer to voter education, but civic education is a broader, ongoing process that includes activities that inform, equip, and empower citizens to participate in democratic processes more broadly. Civic education goes beyond the electoral period and, in some countries, falls primarily under the responsibility of education ministries, school, and civil society, rather than the EMB.

Voter education and information activities seek to ensure voters understand why and how to exercise their rights, and therefore promote meaningful participation. Voter education may also be used to inform voters about issues, candidates, and their respective positions on the issues, so their votes reflect their informed opinions. While such

activities are often conducted by the contestants themselves, objective information on referendum questions, publishing party platforms, or conducting inclusive debates should be supported by EMBs, civil society, media, or donors.

EMBs often have primary responsibility for conducting voter education efforts. In addition to the EMB, civil society organizations, political parties, the media, the private sector, and sometimes international entities (particularly in cases where they are playing a role in organizing elections, such as the UN in a post-conflict situation) may conduct activities that inform voters and encourage participation. This could include helping to disseminate official voter education content from the EMB, as well as independent voter education campaigns. In countries with impartial and independent EMBs, civil society groups often coordinate with the EMB on voter education activities, and in many cases may help disseminate EMB-produced voter education content and materials. In addition, civil society groups often produce their own voter education content. In countries that are less democratic and/or have more partisan EMBs, credible CSOs that produce their own content are often more objective sources of voter education than the EMB.

The assessment should consider whether voter education is conducted in a strategic manner that takes into account (1) which demographics (based on gender, rural/urban, ethnicity, religion, language, geography, and abilities) are most in need of election-related information; and (2) how these different populations usually access and consume information.[77] For example, if most voter education is conducted online and in the country's main language, this could present major barriers for voters who are poor, rural, women, displaced, linguistic minorities, or disabled. In addition, deeper social constructs, including those that limit freedom of movement, access to information, and expression among women or create intimidating environments for minorities, could limit access to election-related information for certain populations.

Voter education campaigns are particularly important when significant changes are made to the voter registration and/or voting processes, such as when new technologies are introduced or voting procedures are adjusted in response to a pandemic.

Voter information and education campaigns are particularly important when significant changes are made to the voter registration and/or voting processes, such as when new technologies are introduced or voting procedures are adjusted in response to a pandemic. In addition, effective voter information is crucial in active (individual-initiated) voter registration systems, so voters know how, when, why, and where to register and how to verify that their registration is accurate. It is also important in countries with more stringent voter identification requirements, where there is a greater risk of disenfranchising voters who show up without the proper documents on election day. Low voter turnout, especially in the context of high numbers of voters showing up at the wrong polling stations, without proper documentation, or without being on the registry, may suggest that voter information campaigns were not conducted effectively. Likewise, a high percentage of spoiled ballots may be an indicator that further voter information on properly marking ballots is needed.

In addition, civil society organizations and political parties may conduct "get out the vote" (GOTV) campaigns that target a particular underrepresented group in specific contexts, such as youth, rural women, or ethnic or religious minorities. These activities offer opportunities to use targeted research and innovative GOTV messages. It is appropriate, therefore, to also assess the scope and impact of such campaigns in previous elections in order to plan better for the next election cycle. Low voter turnout in the face of significant outreach may indicate a lack of trust in the process, or point to other important issues, such as safety and security concerns, that are not remedied by education campaigns.

[77] Ensuring inclusion with respect to voter education is discussed in more detail in the Voter Education and Information section of Step 4: Identify Program Priorities.

2.4 Voter Education: Illustrative Assessment Questions

- ✓ What are the main challenges regarding voter participation and knowledge: low turnout, uninformed voters, or large numbers of "errors" (spoiled ballots, going to the wrong polling station, etc.)? What are the main reasons behind these challenges?
- ✓ To what extent are eligible voters informed about how to register to vote, how to confirm their registration, and how to make corrections to their registration if needed?
- ✓ To what extent are voters informed about when, where, and how to vote, as well as about the ballot options to make an informed choice?
- ✓ To what extent can the EMB be trusted to provide voter education in an impartial and inclusive manner?
- ✓ Do voters have credible, sufficient and easily accessible information about candidates' and parties' platforms and performance records (i.e., are they able to make an informed choice)?
- ✓ Are voters aware of their rights and how to file a complaint/seek remedies if needed?
- ✓ Are there significant differences among different demographics in voter turnout rates? What are the likely reasons for this?
- ✓ Is voter education conducted in a strategic manner that takes into account how different types of people (gender, ethnicity, language, geography, etc.) usually access and consume information?
- ✓ To what extent are women and marginalized populations, as well groups with special voting procedures, such as the military, prisoners, the infirm, and out of country voters, provided targeted voter information?
- ✓ Are there plans and resources for voter education to be conducted well enough in advance of election day to ensure voters are well-informed?
- ✓ Can civil society and media conduct their own voter education without undue restrictions?

2.5 ELECTION OBSERVATION

Election observation is an important practice developed over the last three decades that serves many important functions. USAID's guide *Assessing and Verifying Election Results*[78] identifies observation as the primary means of assessing the credibility and legitimacy of election results.

When conducted credibly, election observation can help achieve several goals. Observation builds trust and confidence in the electoral process where it assesses the process as credible and provides an objective assessment of a country's electoral process. It can promote electoral accountability, inclusion, and transparency, including deterring fraud and exposing problems and irregularities, which are particularly vital in less democratic contexts. It also provides targeted recommendations for improving the process in the next election, which civil society groups can use in their advocacy efforts and can form the basis for a electoral reform process. Observation may also independently verify the official tally through a parallel vote tabulation.

Objectives and Types of Election Observation

To inform decisions regarding support for election observation, it is essential to first identify the highest priority electoral problems and vulnerabilities through Steps 1 and 2 of the *Electoral Assessment Framework*. This helps an observation effort target those aspects of the electoral process that are most important to observe, and determine the types of observation that are most appropriate. While more details on election observation strategy, objectives, and types are included Step 4.5, the main types are:

- **Nonpartisan citizen (domestic) election observation** is organized and conducted by local, nonpartisan civil society organizations or coalitions of the host country, and the observers are citizens of the host country.

[78] USAID, *Assessing and Verifying Election Results* (2015): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00KGWR.pdf

Depending on the context, citizen election observation can help accurately and impartially assess electoral integrity; promote public confidence in electoral processes (if warranted); bolster citizen participation and engagement; expose and deter fraud; and enhance governmental accountability during and beyond a given election cycle.

- **International election observation** is organized and conducted by intergovernmental and international (including regional) nongovernmental organizations and associations. International observation can bring international scrutiny and attention to a specific country context; demonstrate international support for peaceful, credible elections; and provide a comparative perspective on the extent to which elections adhere to international principles and obligations.
- **Partisan pollwatching** is organized and conducted by political parties and candidates. Party and candidate pollwatchers (also called party agents) are trained and mobilized to monitor electoral processes to protect the party/candidate's interests (including collecting evidence for and/or directly filing complaints), deter fraud, and promote electoral accountability.

In addition, **diplomatic observation** is organized by US Embassies and other embassies, which involves deploying accredited members of the diplomatic staff to conduct short-term (election day-focused) observation. In several countries, Embassy personnel also observe other parts of the electoral process, such as voter registration. Diplomatic observation can contribute to the transparency of elections and inform USG's election statements, assessments, and policy decisions.

The assessment should take stock of the electoral problems and vulnerabilities that could have the most impact on electoral integrity. This helps target those aspects of the electoral process that are most important to observe, as well as determine the types of observation that are most appropriate.

International and citizen election observation involve both long-term and short-term (election day) election observation. Election day monitoring of voting, counting, and tabulation is the most visible activity. However, election observation efforts should also include long-term observation activities throughout the electoral cycle. The focus of long-term observation depends on which aspects of the electoral process are the most vulnerable and/or significant in each particular country context. This can include monitoring: voter registration processes; voters list accuracy, completeness and currency (through voters list audit); candidate nomination and registration processes; party congresses and/or primaries; campaign activities and environment; campaign finance; traditional media and social media; electoral violence, including early warning signs and violence against women in elections; electoral dispute resolution; and political transitions. In more restrictive environments (i.e., authoritarian or conflict-affected contexts), the assessment should also take into account the extent to which long- and short-term observation activities are feasible.

The assessment should also take into account the degree to which observers have access to electoral processes. Observing voting and counting from inside polling stations, as well as monitoring the tabulation process inside tabulation centers, usually requires formal accreditation from the EMB. Accreditation may be accorded to journalists, representatives of political parties or candidates, non-partisan citizen observers, and international observers. EMBs should also provide observer access to EMB decisions and information, staff trainings, EDR processes, and observation of the voter registration process. Accredited observers should also have access to a broad array of data and documents, including regulations, voter lists, campaign finance data, polling station-level balloting records, territorial and regional-level results data, documentation of irregularities and complaints, decisions from EDR mechanisms, and training materials. When electronic technologies are used, observers should have access to additional data, including procurement, testing, certification, auditing, and the source code, to ensure that these technologies are not "black boxes."

Capacity and Credibility of Election Observer Groups

The assessment should consider the overall capacity of civil society (particularly citizen election observer groups) to effectively assess the electoral process, as well as which citizen observer groups and international observation missions are considered the most credible, objective, and professional. A global movement of both international observation and nonpartisan citizen election monitoring has collectively mobilized millions of citizens around the world to participate as election observers. A cohort of international and intergovernmental organizations that monitor elections[79] has united to develop and adhere to a common set of standards for credible international observation.[80] For their part, more than 250 citizen election observer groups in almost 90 countries have formed the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM)[81] and have developed their own set of standards for conducting credible citizen election observation.[82]

However, not all observation groups and missions adhere to these standards, creating confusion and controversy and in many instances. Less credible international monitoring groups, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Commonwealth of Independent States, have been criticized for not using sound methodologies and for being under the influence of China and Russia, respectively, rendering their conclusions highly suspect. In addition, so-called "zombie" monitors are organized specifically to discredit democratic elections or positively assess rigged elections, witnessed around the world from Zimbabwe to Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Mozambique, Ukraine, and Ecuador. Similarly, authoritarian and hybrid regimes are increasingly mobilizing government-organized NGOs, or GONGOs, to conduct domestic election observation with the apparent intention of contradicting the conclusions of more reputable observation groups and missions.

PHOTO: CAROL SAHLEY, USAID

With this in mind, although observation reports can be excellent assessment resources, the assessment team should confirm that the observing entity is a signatory to the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* (if international)[83] or the *Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observation* (if domestic)[84] and is not funded through partisan or malign foreign entities to avoid inadvertently countenancing what could be unsubstantiated or biased conclusions.

Results Verification

The assessment should consider whether there is a high-priority need to independently assess or verify the election results, including the accuracy of the tabulation process. For example, are there concerns about (or a past history of) manipulation of results? Is there a strong need to reduce uncertainty and build confidence in results?

Independent verification of official election results in countries where USAID works is most commonly done by parallel vote tabulations (PVTs), or quick counts.[85] As described in more detail in Step 4.5 below, exit polls and election forensics may also help inform analysis and verification of election results, depending upon the electoral context, intended purpose, local capacity, risks, and costs.[86] Unlike an exit poll, which relies on asking citizens how they

[79] These include the European Union, OSCE/ODIHR, The Carter Center, International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, African Union, Commonwealth Secretariat, and Organization of American States.

[80] See the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation (DoP)* (2005) and information about its implementation process here: https://electionstandards.cartercenter.org/at-work/collaborative-efforts-towards-standards/ and www.ndi.org/DoP.

[81] See www.gndem.org

[82] *Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations (DoGP)* (2012): www.gndem.org/declaration-of-global-principles/

[83] A list of DoP endorsers can be found here: https://www.ndi.org/declaration_endorsing_orgs

[84] A list of GNDEM members (all of whom have endorsed the DoGP) can be found here: https://gndem.org/members/

[85] PVTs are also referred to as "sample-based observation" (SBO) in some countries.

[86] USAID, *Assessing and Verifying Election Results* (2015): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00KGWR.pdf

voted, a PVT involves systematically assessing election day processes and, by independently tabulating data collected by observers at polling stations, projecting what honest official election results should be.

PVTs are usually conducted by deploying trained observers to a random, representative sample of polling stations, although in some cases observers are deployed to all polling stations. If based upon a sufficient sample size and appropriate sampling methods, aggregated results data from the sample of polling stations covered by PVT observers can verify the officially-reported results within a small margin of error.[87] A PVT may verify, or confirm, that results were tabulated accurately, which can help promote confidence in the results, or it may be an indication of tabulation fraud if the polling station-level results are not tabulated accurately during the results aggregation process.

It is important that a PVT be accompanied by an assessment of election day processes, in addition to a focus on estimating results. A wealth of statistically-representative data about election day opening, voting, and counting processes can be collected alongside a PVT. This data on election day processes can help determine whether the results estimated by the PVT can be trusted. However, PVTs and election day observation will not capture manipulation that may have occurred before election day.

PVTs require a high level of capacity to carry out successfully. Since there is a great deal of pressure on ensuring the PVT findings are credible, the assessment should consider whether there is domestic capacity for conducting a PVT and/or whether there is sufficient time and resources to sustainably build such capacity. In addition, the assessment should consider whether the potential citizen observer group conducting a PVT is viewed as neutral and independent. In more closed environments, it is becoming increasingly common for governments to shut down communication networks on election day to prevent communication among observer groups and publication of PVT or exit poll findings. An assessment should also consider whether government efforts to thwart PVT projections are likely.[88]

2.5 Election Observation: Illustrative Assessment Questions

Election Observation Strategy

- ✓ Considering the entire electoral cycle, which issues, problems (e.g., barriers to participation, types of fraud, types of electoral violence), and processes could have the most impact on the credibility of the electoral process? Which aspects will be less important to monitor?
- ✓ At what points in the electoral cycle do these issues, problems, and processes occur and, thus, need to be monitored?
- ✓ Is there a high-priority need to independently assess or verify the election results, including the accuracy of the tabulation process?
- ✓ What role could election observation play in mitigating electoral violence, including violence against women in elections? How likely is observation to help deter fraud and encourage voter turnout?
- ✓ Is there a clear strategic role that international observation could play in promoting credible elections? If so, what aspects of the process would benefit most from international observation? Given the context, would a regional or international organization have more influence in promoting credible elections through an observation mission, or would both be highly valuable?

Observer Access

- ✓ Are accredited nonpartisan citizen election observers, party pollwatchers, and international observers permitted to observe all aspects of the electoral process, and do they have access to relevant information and data?
- ✓ Does the EMB provide accreditation to citizen observers, party pollwatchers, and international observers without discrimination or unnecessary restrictions?

[87] PVTs are an independent check on official results; they do not replace the authority of the EMB in announcing official results.

[88] For more details on assessing the feasibility of supporting a PVT, see the Election Observation section in Step 4: Identify Priority Programming.

- ✓ Are observers able to conduct their work without undue interference or impediments? Are there any areas of the country that cannot be observed, for example, due to security issues?
- ✓ Do election observers have the unimpeded right to release public findings (including results verification), or are there restrictions?
- ✓ Are there any restrictions against PVTs and/or likely government efforts to thwart PVT projections? Can observers fully monitor voting and counting processes?
- ✓ What risks do election monitors face in restricted or conflict environments, and are there risk mitigation plans in place?

Election Observer Credibility and Capacity

- ✓ How are international observers perceived in the country? How are nonpartisan citizen observers perceived?
- ✓ Which observer groups are considered the most credible, objective, and professional?
- ✓ Which groups are not credible (GONGOs, zombie observers, etc.)?
- ✓ Are there citizen observer groups and/or coalitions that have (or with technical assistance could build) the capacity to effectively monitor the most important aspects of the elections? Which groups? What gaps and needs do they still have, if any? If a PVT is considered, is there a reliable local partner who can conduct it (with some technical assistance)?
- ✓ What is the level of public awareness of citizen election observers? Does their presence or absence seem to affect public confidence in elections?
- ✓ To what extent do citizen observers and party pollwatchers involve women and marginalized populations as observers, staff, and leaders?
- ✓ To what extent do citizen observer groups focus on monitoring and exposing barriers to the participation of women and marginalized populations?
- ✓ Do the government and electoral authorities discuss and meaningfully consider the findings of party agents, citizen and/or international observers?

2.6 MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

Candidates, parties, EMBs, and the public may share and exchange information through both traditional media outlets as well as social media. By providing mediums through which party platforms and candidate philosophies are reported and shared, traditional and social media can help voters make informed choices. Moreover, reporting on the elections helps hold institutions, parties, and other electoral stakeholders accountable. To fulfill these responsibilities, journalists must be free from censorship and intimidation and have unfettered access to foreign news sources and information. For their part, voters and election contestants must have unimpeded access to media on a non-discriminatory basis.

To fulfill these roles, public and private media should operate in a manner that upholds core journalistic ethics and standards of accuracy, fairness, objectivity, and accountability. In public or state media, candidates and parties should have equitable access to free airtime to inform voters of their ideas. Even private media outlets often must adhere to specific requirements regarding news and election coverage as a condition of their broadcast license. As a matter of journalistic ethics, other than in editorials or other opinion pieces, media actors should respect rules of impartiality and fairness in news coverage and must verify information in order to avoid dissemination of false or misleading information. However, in a number of countries, media outlets are increasingly demonstrating political bias, and the rigor of verifying facts before reporting seems to be deteriorating.

Assessing media in the electoral context starts with an analysis of the extent and quality of media coverage of the campaign period and campaign activities of major parties and candidates, and whether the media enjoys protection of fundamental freedoms. The assessment should evaluate the level of access and freedom of the press, including whether journalists have access to EMB and political party meetings, court hearings, polling stations, and relevant

documentation, and whether they are free to report on any shortcomings and issues. Further, the assessment should consider media capacity and level of resources as potential reasons for shortcomings in coverage. Competent electoral coverage requires an understanding of the intricacies of the electoral process, sound adherence to professional standards, and sufficient funding and resources.

Biased reporting is often the result of intimidation or corruption by malign actors either within or external to the government. Since credible elections can take place only if there is an even playing field, media monitoring can help detect biased coverage. Even if the amount of time spent covering various candidates is equal, subtle differences may inadvertently or deliberately result in bias. In contexts where pro-government bias is consistent across media outlets, it may be due to governmental direction or self-censorship in response to threats.

Media ownership can have a significant impact on whether an outlet reports impartially or whether it is biased in its electoral coverage. For example, a news outlet owned by a businessperson with close links to the ruling party may serve more as a mouthpiece of the government rather than as an objective source of news. While public media are obliged to provide parties and candidates with direct access free of charge on an equitable basis, private media has more flexibility.[89] Therefore, the assessment could map the ownership and biases of the major media outlets to help better understand media bias.

The barriers that women face in electoral competition are often compounded by limited or disproportionately negative media coverage of women candidates and their proposals. The assessment should consider whether there are differences in the coverage of male and female political leaders and candidates by the media that may affect women's ability to put their candidacies and proposals before the electorate.[90]

The assessment should also examine the extent to which online media, including social media, are being both used for positive and malign purposes, how this affects different types of voters' access to information, and what challenges these issues present to electoral integrity. Posting more electoral information online, including through social media, can help to democratize access and facilitate participation. On the other hand, this may serve to limit participation among those with little or no access to the internet and mobile phones (such as women and rural voters).

Social media, blogs, websites, and other forms of online media provide powerful platforms for increasing the speed with which political communication and other election-related information is shared and debated. Social media can serve as a platform for political debate and can enhance the voice of ordinary citizens in the electoral process. Political parties and candidates can use social media to more easily disseminate their messages to different audiences, and EMBs and civil society groups can more effectively inform voters about important electoral information. Mobile-based tools, such as messaging applications, are another important way for voters to receive and share election-related information.

The assessment should examine the extent to which online media, including social media, are being both used for positive and malign purposes, how this affects different types of voters' access to information, and what challenges these issues present to electoral integrity.

However, manipulation of social platforms, amplified by the use of big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence (AI), is being used by authoritarian regimes, state and non-state actors, transnational strategic communication companies, and domestic political actors in countries around the world to influence and undermine trust in elections. Manipulation of social media platforms and messaging apps typically involves disinformation campaigns that deceive voters, create confusion, exacerbate polarization, tilt electoral playing fields, and depress voter turnout. Combined with the increased use of surveillance technologies and harvesting of personal data, foreign and domestic actors are weaponizing AI to systematically manipulate voters, promote extremist narratives, and undermine trust

[89] For more detailed commentary, see European Commission for Democracy through Law, *Guidelines on Media Analysis During Observation Missions* (2009): https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)031-e

[90] For more information, see UN Women/International IDEA's *Election Coverage from a Gender Perspective: A Media Monitoring Manual* (2011): https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/election-coverage-gender-perspective-media-monitoring-manual

in political processes. This is aided by the fact that data privacy and the use of AI on new media platforms are not well-regulated, over-regulated, or in some countries completely unregulated.

Along with disinformation, the assessment should assess the extent to which hate speech and dangerous speech are used in political rhetoric. While in many countries there are laws forbidding the dissemination of hate speech and dangerous speech, including in the media, in practice local media outlets and social media are often used for such purposes by dominant elites and malign actors. Having the systems and institutions in place to monitor, report and take action against such behavior is particularly important in conflict-prone environments. Disinformation, hate speech, and dangerous speech have a disproportionate impact on—and often directly target—women and marginalized populations. In addition, these forms of speech threaten core democratic freedoms if regulations are not carefully balanced against freedoms of expression and opinion. Fact-checking groups can play an important role in achieving this balance through their validation or invalidation of reported facts

2.6 Media Ecosystem: Illustrative Assessment Questions

- ✓ What are the most common ways (including but not limited to different traditional and social media sources) that different types of voters receive information about politics and elections?
- ✓ What are internet connectivity rates, mobile telephone usage, and social media site usage among different segments of the population (including by gender)?

Traditional Media

- ✓ What are the most trusted media sources in this country context? Does the public generally trust the media as a credible source of information on elections and politics? Or are certain types of media (print, TV, radio, online) trusted more than others?
- ✓ How pluralistic is the media environment? Are diverse views presented, and if not which views are under-represented?
- ✓ Who owns or controls the main media outlets (TV, print, radio), and what are the political implications of this ownership?
- ✓ Is state-owned, state-controlled, and/or public media coverage politically balanced and impartial, or is it state-influenced and/or biased toward the government and ruling party/coalition?
- ✓ To what extent is the media free of censorship and undue influence from the government in covering parties, the government, and election-related topics?
- ✓ Do election participants have unimpeded access to domestic (public and private) and international media?
- ✓ Does the media have access to all elements of the electoral process?
- ✓ What is the media's level of capacity to responsibly and accurately report on the electoral process?
- ✓ To what extent are there differences in coverage between men and women political leaders and candidates? What impact does this have on the ability of women to participate and compete on an equal basis as men?

Social Media and Disinformation

- ✓ What is the level of media literacy of the population?
- ✓ How resilient are different segments of the population to disinformation and propaganda efforts, and which segments are most vulnerable?
- ✓ To what extent and how do different segments of voters use social media platforms and messaging apps to engage in politics and elections?
- ✓ What roles do social media and messaging apps play in enhancing and undermining the electoral process?
- ✓ To what extent, and in what ways, is disinformation a threat to electoral integrity?
- ✓ Who are the main perpetrators of using social media and messaging for malign purposes (disinformation, hate speech, offensive/personal attacks, etc.), and what are their respective motivations? Who are the main victims? What impact does this have on the inclusiveness and fairness of the process?
- ✓ What types of online violence against women in politics are most common and/or were most common during previous elections?

2.7 ELECTORAL SECURITY AND CONFLICT

While the findings from the Conflict and Security section of Step 1 will help determine what level of emphasis to place on assessing electoral security, the issue of electoral security and violence should be considered in every electoral assessment. Too often, this issue is only considered in the context of conflict, post-conflict, or otherwise fragile settings. However, elections can potentially trigger violence, whether during the campaign, during polling, or in the post-election and transition period. Moreover, security in the election context is much broader than the prospect of violence; it relates to securing the integrity of the election itself, ensuring that all stakeholders can exercise their electoral rights and fundamental freedoms freely and openly. USAID's Electoral Security Framework should be used to inform the assessment of electoral security and conflict considerations.[91]

Electoral conflict is defined as "any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse an electoral stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence the electoral process."[92] The main types of electoral conflict are: physical violence; sexual violence; threats, intimidation, and coercion; and psychological violence (including defamation and hate speech). Electoral conflict can be targeted against specific individuals and groups, whether political rivals, EMB officials, civil society representatives, journalists, observers, or voters, or they may create a generalized environment of intimidation and fear that affects a large cross-section of electoral stakeholders. Cyber attacks in the form of threats, phishing, or hacking, can also be considered electoral conflict.

Violence against Women in Elections: In particular, female electoral participants, including candidates, voters, election officials, party activists, and observers, are often victimized by violence, which presents additional barriers to their electoral participation. For example, in a 2016 study across 39 countries, 82 percent of women legislators reported experiencing psychological violence.[93] The nature of violence against women often takes different forms than violence against men. Women often encounter social and familial intimidation in private spaces, or intimidation and violence from members of their own political party. The assessment should incorporate a gender-responsive lens that takes into account how women are disproportionately and differently impacted by violence.[94]

The assessment should incorporate a gender-responsive lens that takes into account how women are disproportionately and differently impacted by violence.

Perpetrators of electoral violence are commonly assumed to be warring factions, insurgent groups, political opposition groups, and the governing authorities. However, as with overall security issues, other stakeholders with vested interests in the outcome of elections have sometimes instigated electoral conflict. This may include family members and/or close associates (including party leaders and members), particularly in the case of violence against women. Organized crime groups seeking to support candidates who are complicit with their activities are also potential perpetrators. Similarly, in some countries, dominant corporate interests have been associated with violent tactics to preserve their business interests, which are often inextricably tied to governmental authorities. Finally, evidence of foreign interference in elections, particularly through digital warfare, is creating new security concerns.

[91] USAID Electoral Security Framework (2010): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAEA453.pdf

[92] IFES, *Electoral Conflict and Violence—A Strategy for Study and Prevention* (2002): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/econflictpaper.pdf

[93] IPU, *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians* (2016): https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians

[94] For more, see IFES, *Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence* (2011): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/gender_and_electoral_violence_2011.pdf and NDI, *Votes Without Violence: Monitoring and Mitigating Violence Against Women in Elections* (2016): https://www.ndi.org/votes-without-violence-guide

Types of Electoral Security Challenges

An assessment must seek to identify the types of electoral challenges that have taken place in the past, are still occurring, and the extent to which conflict may take place in the future. As elaborated in USAID's *Electoral Security Framework*,[95] elections present different types of security challenges:

- **Physical security** relates to the protection of election-related facilities such as EMB offices, political party headquarters and offices, registration and polling stations, residences of stakeholders, and even hotels or restaurants hosting candidates, observers, or media.
- **Personal security** involves the security of the individual stakeholders themselves, whether voters, politicians, candidates, commissioners, observers, journalists, or security personnel.
- **Information security** calls for the protection of data critical to the electoral processes, including voter lists, ballots, and tabulation documents, including both paper and digital files. Digital security is especially important in countries using automated balloting.
- **Electoral events**, such as debates, rallies, meetings, and especially voting, counting, and tabulation, are vulnerable to electoral violence and also require security.

Evaluating electoral security vulnerabilities should be informed by factors from the broader country context, including a history of conflict, post-conflict dynamics, security status, political stability, and social cleavages. Patterns of victimization, perpetration, tactics and types of incidents observed in conjunction with past violence should be compared with the present context to evaluate the future risk. The type of election (e.g., local vs. national) should be considered, since the drivers of conflict could be different for each type. Other factors involving the democratic principles and electoral environment dimensions will help focus the risk. Deprivation of rights or systemic discrimination will reinforce existing social cleavages. Electoral systems, especially a "winner take all" system in a politically divided context, can make large numbers of people feel alienated. Inflammatory campaign rhetoric, including premature allegations of fraud or victory, calls for protests, political ideology that elevates one segment to the detriment of others, threats towards the media (especially if in conjunction with a disinformation campaign), and interference with opposition campaigns are all symptoms of electoral conflict.

The assessment should consider the capacity and level of commitment of the respective government and EMB to prepare for and prevent electoral conflict. This includes assessing the adequacy of any prior or existing electoral security plans. A comprehensive security plan should be funded proportional to the overall electoral budget and faithfully implemented. The role of electoral security stakeholders should be clearly defined, and the plans should be tailored, to the extent possible, to prior experience with election violence and incorporate indicators of the potential for future conflict. Further, analysis of the level of professionalism within security forces and their perceived neutrality should be included in the assessment. Finally, an examination of the coordination mechanisms between the EMB and security forces is warranted.

Elections in Conflict or Post-Conflict Settings

A substantial amount of USAID electoral programming takes place in conflict and post-conflict settings.[96] Timing in such settings is of critical importance. While an elected government should be chosen by voters as soon as is feasible, if rushed and conducted without adequate political consensus and technical preparations, an election may trigger violence, undermine the legitimacy of the new government, or perpetuate mistrust in the system. In many post-conflict contexts, this is a question on which the international community has important influence. Thus, any assessment conducted where elections are likely to trigger significant violence should be carefully weighed, and DRG officers should actively participate in policy as well as assistance decisions to the extent possible given interagency dynamics.

[95] Available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAEA453.pdf
[96] In Fiscal Year 2019, for example, 57 percent of USAID election assistance took place in post-conflict settings.

For details on how to approach such cases, DRG officers can consult USAID's *Guide on Transition Elections and Political Processes in Reconstructions and Stabilization Operations: Lessons Learned*.[97] The guide highlights the importance of the peacebuilding calendar and decisions on timing and sequence of elections, delineation of voting districts and inclusion of women, conflict-forced migrants, and other marginalized groups on the same level as former combatants. The role of the international community in organizing and supporting the elections needs to be carefully considered and clearly defined in the peacekeeping agreement or international resolution. In rare cases, an international body, such as the UN, may be in charge of election administration, but in most cases this is either a shared responsibility (to different degrees) with the domestic election body, or the election is organized solely by the country's EMB.

2.7 Electoral Security and Conflict: Illustrative Assessment Questions

Electoral Violence Types/Tactics, Triggers, Perpetrators, and Victims

- ✓ What are the main types, tactics, and extent of electoral violence in past elections?
- ✓ What are the most likely triggers of electoral violence during the pre-election, election day and post-election periods? What are some key early warning sign indicators of these triggers that should be closely monitored?
- ✓ Is there a high degree of uncertainty about the outcome of the elections? Or is there a perception that the elections will be illegitimate or unfair?
- ✓ Which geographic areas (hot spots) are more susceptible to violence?
- ✓ Who have been the main perpetrators of electoral violence in terms of organizational/party affiliation and demographics?
- ✓ Who have been the main victims of and most affected by electoral violence in terms of organizational/party affiliation and demographics (gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.)?
- ✓ Are any malign foreign actors seeking to foment violence? If so, for what purpose and through what means?

Violence against Women and Marginalized Groups

- ✓ What types of electoral violence (physical, psychological, threats and coercion, sexual) have most affected the participation of women as voters, activists, candidates, and officials?
- ✓ In what ways do gender norms and political dynamics in the country put women at increased risk for violence?
- ✓ To what extent are women candidates and officials the targets of threats, intimidation, or shaming tactics on social media?
- ✓ What types of electoral violence affect the participation of each marginalized group, including LGBTI individuals and religious and ethnic minorities?
- ✓ To what extent are measures put in place to monitor, mitigate and punish violence against each type of marginalized group? If measures are insufficient, what are the main reasons for this?

Government Capacity and Commitment

- ✓ What is the *capacity* of the government and EMB to prepare for, prevent and control potential election-related violence? Have they received training in electoral security administration?
- ✓ What is the *level of commitment* of the government and EMB to prepare for, prevent and control potential election-related violence?
- ✓ To what extent are the security forces that are involved in electoral security (particularly surrounding election day) trusted as impartial and effective by the main electoral stakeholders?

[97] Available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB804.pdf

Other Questions

- ✓ To what extent do social media and messaging apps play a role in spreading hate speech and other content that could trigger electoral violence?
- ✓ To what extent is the international community involved in promoting secure, peaceful elections? Who are the key international peace actors?
- ✓ In contexts that are significantly-affected by conflict and/or emerging from conflict, what would be an appropriate time frame for holding elections?

2.8 ELECTORAL JUSTICE

Promoting credible electoral justice is increasingly important yet becoming increasingly difficult as electoral integrity challenges evolve. Methods of electoral manipulation have become more sophisticated and, thus, more difficult to adjudicate and hold perpetrators accountable. In many countries, losing candidates and parties are growing more likely to file electoral disputes, although in some cases they have not followed proper procedures and/or submitted sufficient evidence. As election technologies are introduced in more countries, electoral dispute resolution bodies often lack expertise in technology and cybersecurity needed to effectively adjudicate complaints and disputes related to those technologies. In more authoritarian contexts, EDR bodies are often influenced or controlled by the regime and, thus, cannot be trusted to rule impartially on complaints and disputes.

Electoral justice has been defined as the "set of means or mechanisms available in a specific country…to ensure and verify that electoral actions, procedures, and decisions comply with the legal framework, and to protect and restore the enjoyment of electoral rights." The concept of electoral justice is broader than electoral dispute resolution, and can include measures to prevent electoral malpractice as well as alternative forms of resolving electoral violations throughout the entire electoral cycle.[98] The degree to which electoral stakeholders have confidence in the electoral justice system can have a profound impact on whether the elections are peaceful and viewed as credible. This is particularly the case when elections are expected to be closely contested or controversial, or where the losing candidates are expected to challenge the results. EDR processes have become battlegrounds for political actors to not only contest elections, but also to influence public perceptions of whether the elections were credible.

PHOTO: SERGEY SUPINSKI, AFP

Given these challenges, a tremendous responsibility is placed on the electoral justice bodies to uphold international principles and obligations, including: the right to a fair and public hearing by a competent, impartial, and independent tribunal (due process); the right to effective remedy; the right to equality before the law; freedom from discrimination; and the principle of transparency.[99] For their part, electoral stakeholders, including parties, candidates, and voters, also have an obligation to learn how to exercise their electoral rights by responsibly utilizing the electoral justice system.

Electoral justice mechanisms vary significantly from country to country. It may involve any of the three branches of

[98] International IDEA, *Electoral Justice: The International IDEA Handbook* (2010), p. 200: https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/electoral-justice-handbook.pdf

[99] See The Carter Center, *Election Obligations and Standards* (2014); https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/democracy/cc-OES-handbook-10172014.pdf

government at the national, regional, or local levels. The EMB itself may be responsible for some or many aspects of electoral justice (most commonly, the adjudication of complaints). Alternatively, independent bodies or even international tribunals may have roles to play. The adjudicatory bodies may be permanent or established solely for the purpose of a particular election. Some are specialized courts or administrative bodies with expertise in electoral justice, while others may be general constitutional, civil, and criminal courts.[100] At lower/more local levels, there may be alternative dispute resolution mechanisms involving civil society or traditional leaders. While the most active period of complaints and disputes is typically during the period immediately surrounding election day, the electoral justice system should be set up and prepared to effectively adjudicate complaints and disputes throughout the electoral cycle.

There is no single preferred model of electoral justice. Instead, an assessment of electoral justice should focus on identifying the extent to which international principles and obligations are upheld under a given model. To assess and prioritize challenges in electoral justice, several key considerations are the extent to which:

- electoral justice is carried out—and is perceived to be carried out—fairly, independently, and impartially;
- the legal framework and EDR mechanisms provide the opportunity for effective, timely, and enforceable remedies;
- the electoral justice authorities are competent and technically capable of effectively carrying out their responsibilities;
- there is sufficient transparency in electoral justice processes;
- electoral stakeholders understand and are equipped to access electoral justice mechanisms; and
- there is equality before the law, including freedom from discrimination.

Impartiality and independence: At the most fundamental level, bodies responsible for EDR must act in an impartial and independent manner that can be trusted by electoral stakeholders. In authoritarian or semi-authoritarian environments, the body or bodies responsible for adjudicating complaints and disputes are often formally or informally controlled by the executive and/or ruling party.

Legal and procedural framework: The legal and procedural framework for electoral justice should provide the opportunity for effective, timely and enforceable remedies. Some key features of an effective EDR framework include:[101]

- Clear, simple, and accessible procedures for filing complaints and disputes, and inclusive rules for who can file complaints.
- Definition of the body responsible for resolving each type of dispute and complaint, with no overlapping jurisdiction.
- Reasonable and clear timelines for submitting, adjudicating, and appealing complaints.
- Clear and reasonable rules on burden of proof and standards of evidence.
- Provision of authority to EDR bodies to ensure accountability.
- Provision of an appeals process, as well as judicial review.

Competence of the EDR bodies: Adjudicating electoral complaints and disputes requires a high level of legal and technical capacity, as well as effective systems to manage the process. Even if EDR bodies are independent and impartial, public confidence in the electoral justice system can be undermined if the EDR bodies lack the capacity to efficiently and effectively carry out their responsibilities. Thus, an assessment should consider several factors related to the capacity and competence of the EDR bodies at the national and, when relevant, sub-national levels.

[100] For a thorough catalogue of electoral justice systems, see International IDEA's *Electoral Justice Regulations Around the World* (2016): https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/electoral-justice-regulations-around-the-world.pdf

[101] For a more detailed discussion of key elements of an EDR legal and procedural framework, see IFES' *Guidelines for Understanding, Adjudicating, and Resolving Disputes in Elections* (2011): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/guarde_final_publication_0.pdf and OSCE/ODIHR's *Handbook for the Observation of Election Dispute Resolution* (2019): https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/429566?download=true

This includes assessing the extent to which judges and arbiters have EDR experience in past elections and whether there are enough adequately trained personnel, with sufficient resources, to be able to meet the legally-mandated timelines for adjudicating disputes. EDR bodies should have case management systems for processing and tracking complaints and disputes. In elections where electronic technology is used, an assessment should consider whether EDR bodies have sufficient expertise and resources to manage cases related to the use of these technologies.

Transparency: EDR bodies can take a number of steps to ensure transparency, including holding open, public hearings and publishing a detailed register of complaints in a timely manner, including information on each decision that allows the public to see how the body came to its conclusion.

Electoral stakeholder understanding: This includes assessing whether authorities make concerted efforts to raise awareness about the EDR process and the opportunity and procedures to submit complaints and to file disputes. In addition, an assessment should consider the extent to which electoral stakeholders, such as parties and election observer groups, have prepared themselves to exercise their electoral justice rights. In many countries, parties and candidates lack sufficient understanding and/or capacity to appropriately and effectively use EDR mechanisms.

Equality before the law and discrimination: An assessment should also consider whether women and marginalized populations, such as minorities and persons with disabilities, have equal access to electoral justice and, ultimately, whether they have equality before the law and freedom from discrimination. In many contexts, women and marginalized populations face additional procedural and/or institutional barriers to accessing electoral justice. Even if the procedures are equal on paper, women and marginalized populations may face discrimination in the practice of electoral justice. In addition, an assessment should consider the gender composition of the EDR bodies and whether this could have an impact on the opportunity for women to enjoy equality before the law.

Election results challenges: Particularly in contexts where elections are expected to be close, contested, and/or controversial, an assessment should place special emphasis on looking at the systems, procedures, and stakeholder perceptions around challenges to election results, recounts, and election reruns. All of the above considerations (impartiality, independence, and competence of EDR body; legal framework; transparency; electoral stakeholder understanding; and equality before the law) should be taken into account when assessing this high-stakes component of electoral justice, so that the most significant risks or challenges can be clearly identified well in advance of election day.

2.8 Electoral Justice: Illustrative Assessment Questions

Legal Framework and EDR Mechanisms

- ✓ What types of EDR mechanisms exist? On paper, do these provide an opportunity for effective remedy? In practice, have they in past elections?
- ✓ Does the electoral calendar include adequate time to implement EDR processes?
- ✓ What points in the electoral cycle are likely to see the most (in terms of quantity) complaints and/or disputes filed? What points in the electoral cycle could be the most legally controversial?
- ✓ Are the elections expected to be close, contested, and/or controversial?
- ✓ Are there clear procedures for filing and processing challenges to election results, recounts, and re-run elections?

Impartiality

- ✓ Are adjudicative authorities impartial and free from partisan influence?
- ✓ Do stakeholders trust that the electoral justice system is fair and impartial?
- ✓ How and by whom are EDR authorities appointed? How does this affect whether electoral justice can be administered—and perceived to be administered—impartially?

Competence/Capacity

- ✓ Is it likely that the adjudicative authorities are capable of providing effective remedy even in highly controversial, grave situations?
- ✓ Do stakeholders have confidence in the capacity of the EDR body's capacity?
- ✓ Are grievances typically resolved in a timely manner?
- ✓ Do EDR bodies have sufficient expertise and resources to manage their caseload and meet legally-mandated timelines for resolving complaints and disputes?

Stakeholder Awareness and Transparency

- ✓ Are stakeholders aware of EDR mechanisms? Do they use EDR mechanisms?
- ✓ Are the EDR processes transparent? Are meetings and/or hearings open to the public, media and observers? Is EDR-related data provided in an open manner?
- ✓ Are procedures for recounts and re-elections open and accessible to election stakeholders?
- ✓ Are alternative dispute resolution mechanisms available to stakeholders?

Equality before the Law and Nondiscrimination

- ✓ Do women and marginalized populations face institutional and/or procedural obstacles in accessing electoral justice?
- ✓ Is there a pattern of unequal treatment by EDR bodies concerning certain political parties or populations?

2.9 POST-ELECTION TRANSITIONS

The assessment should consider the most likely post-election scenarios, risks, and needs, so that potential post-election programming options can be identified well in advance of election day. Potential scenarios to consider include the likelihood of the election resulting in a transition of power, and—if so—whether that could increase or decrease the potential for democratic development. For example, if a transition to a more democratic government is possible, the assessment could identify what would be the most pressing capacity building needs of the incoming government and/or legislators.

As discussed in the Electoral Security and Conflict section, the assessment should also consider the potential for post-election violence and/or destabilization. Assessing these factors in more detail goes beyond the scope of the electoral assessment and would require a more in-depth assessment involving expertise beyond elections and political processes. However, these factors should at a minimum be considered during an electoral assessment to ensure that areas for further assessment and planning are identified well before the elections take place.

2.9 Post-election Transitions: Illustrative Assessment Questions

- ✓ What are the most likely post-election scenarios?
  - What is the likelihood of the elections resulting in a transition of power? Would this increase or decrease the prospects for the country's democratic development?
  - Is the post-election period expected to be highly contentious and potentially violent or destabilizing?
- ✓ If transition of power to a more democratic leader/government is possible:
  - What would be the most important capacity-building needs of the new government?
  - What are the highest priority democratic reforms? Who are the key stakeholders that should be involved in shaping and advocating for those reforms, should the opportunity arise?

- What opportunities would there be to increase gender equality and inclusion of marginalized populations in the country's governance?

✓ If transition of power to a more authoritarian leader/government is possible:

- What would be the highest risks for curbing of rights, closing space, and other democratic backsliding?
- What would be the opportunities and challenges for preventing such backsliding?
- Which groups of stakeholders would be most important in this effort?

✓ If a highly contentious, potentially violent post-election environment is anticipated, review Illustrative Questions in the Electoral Security section above.

PART III.
DEFINING A STRATEGY AND IDENTIFYING PROGRAM OPTIONS

PHOTO: HECTOR RETAMAL/AFP, HAITI, 2015

PHOTO: CAROL SAHLEY/USAID, GHANA, 2016

STEP 3: DEFINE OBJECTIVES AND DEVELOP AN EPP STRATEGY

In any country, an assessment is likely to identify a vast array of challenges, problems, or areas that could be improved or refined. An assessment team or in-country DRG team will need to sort through all of these challenges and possible areas of assistance to provide clear and actionable recommendations, and to identify realistic and achievable objectives for electoral assistance. Step 3 helps USAID DRG officers interpret the information collected during the assessment and apply it to developing an EPP strategic objective and a theory of change. This provides an essential link between the assessment and the consideration of potential program options.

Defining Objectives and Developing an EPP Strategy

- 3.1 Prioritize Problems to be Addressed
- 3.2 Consider USG Priorities and Programs
- 3.3 Map Other Donors
- 3.4 Consider Resources
- 3.5 Develop Objectives and EPP Strategy

3.1 PRIORITIZE EPP PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED

The assessment will have identified a number of needs and problems in each of the electoral areas assessed in Step 2. The assessment should then prioritize the key problem or problems to be addressed through EPP support. To help reduce these problems to a more manageable list, the team should:

1. identify key risks and vulnerabilities;
2. identify windows of opportunity and areas for positive reform; and
3. consider timing and the electoral cycle.

Identify Key Risks and Vulnerabilities to Electoral Integrity

Start by reviewing the problems identified in Step 2, and determine whether each is an acute risk to electoral integrity that is so significant it threatens the credibility of the elections if not addressed. This first filter helps summarize the most significant problems in the electoral process to determine where there are critical gaps and specific threats.

Any assessment of electoral integrity risks should identify the actors that may seek to undermine the electoral process, assess their motivations, and attempt to anticipate the tactics they may use. Questions about these spoilers and their motivations and tactics have been woven throughout the nine electoral components in Step 2. However, to better inform potential objectives and programming, it is important to pull this information together systematically by considering the following: What are the most significant types of electoral fraud and manipulation that are expected? Who are the main perpetrators of each type of fraud and malpractice, and what are their motivations? Who are the main victims? What impact on electoral integrity could they have? The worksheet on the following page provides a tool for pulling this information together. The risk categories of electoral fraud and manipulation risks are illustrative; the findings from Step 2 should inform what is listed in this worksheet.

In addition to considering the key electoral fraud and manipulation risks, the assessment should summarize the main capacity constraints, along with the reasons for those constraints, that were identified in Step 2. Illustrative questions to help summarize these constraints include:

- Do major, glaring gaps exist in election management that could undermine confidence in the elections or could disenfranchise a large number of voters, such as an outdated, inaccurate, or incomplete voter registry?
- Is the election observation capability (citizen observation, international observation, and/or political party) not sufficient to provide effective accountability, transparency, and oversight of the electoral process?
- Does a significant portion of citizens (or specific marginalized groups) lack the information necessary to know where and how to vote and/or to make an informed choice?

For post-conflict settings, additional illustrative questions could include:

- Is the election a part of a larger peace process or a transitional plan?
- Are there conflict dynamics that have to be taken into consideration? Is there sufficient local capacity to administer the elections, or will this be an internationally-administered election?
- Is providing electoral security a significant challenge, and how will it be addressed?
- To what extent have combatants demobilized and disarmed?
- Has a constitutional process been completed?
- Is there a competent election authority to organize the election, whether national, international or some combination?
- Are there challenges to accessing certain parts of the country? What impact could this have on electoral credibility?

Worksheet for Summarizing Key Risks of Electoral Fraud and Manipulation[102]

Risk Categories (Illustrative)	Likely types of fraud/ manipulation	Main perpetrator(s)	Motivation of perpetrator(s)	Impact on electoral integrity
Manipulation of legal and procedural framework				
Politically-biased electoral management body and/or judiciary				
Manipulation of information (including traditional and social media)				
Voting process fraud (e.g., multiple voting, ballot box stuffing)				
Manipulation of vote count and/or election results				
Exclusion of women and other marginalized groups				
Restrictions on political rights for electoral advantage				
Election-related violence, coercion, and intimidation				
Distortion and/or abuse of political finance				
Abuse of state resources				

[102] For more on categorizing electoral fraud and manipulation risks, see Creative Associates, *Electoral Malpractice Primer: Insights and Priorities* (2012): http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/531723839/52093951/Creative-Electoral-Integrity-Framework-Project.pdf and International IDEA, *Electoral Risk Management Tool* (2013): https://www.idea.int/data-tools/tools/electoral-risk-management-tool

Identify Windows of Opportunity and Potential Areas for Positive Reform

Next, it is important to determine if there are particular windows of opportunity (recent political breakthroughs, recent legal reforms, the timing within the electoral cycle, etc.) that could provide a higher likelihood of success in addressing a particular problem. However, the problems should only be those that could realistically be addressed through USG support. Potential questions to consider include:

- Identify if certain reform agendas have momentum behind them. Do they have a champion in civil society or within a political party?
- Is there a reform process underway that could lead to positive change? For example, is there an electoral legal reform process underway in which the decision makers are genuinely committed to improving the electoral process?
- What reforms or actions are more likely to result in positive change once incentives, potential buy-in or resistance, and capacity of the key stakeholders are considered?
- Are there particularly strong partners, in government or civil society, that could be drivers of reform?

Not all problems identified in the assessment are amenable to change through EPP assistance. Some issues, such as deeply-rooted, widespread corruption, unresolved conflicts, and broader constraints on human rights, may be better addressed by support to other DRG sectors.

Consider Timing and the Electoral Calendar

It is also important to consider how the electoral cycle may affect the ability to address specific problems. The timing of various elements of the electoral cycle will help define the scope of potential USAID interventions that may be appropriate for an upcoming election. Generally, the more time in advance of an election, the more strategic options will be available. If there is very little time left before election day, strategic options will be limited. Proper planning for future electoral cycles requires early and careful consideration of the electoral and, if relevant, peace-building calendars to identify the appropriate timeframe for launching prospective programming in different areas. The time required to conduct the assessment, prepare the design, and award the activity(ies) must be factored into these time estimates.

- Does the timing of the election jeopardize peace and stability, and, if so, what could be done to address this?
- Is there sufficient time to address robust capacity building needs, including when introducing and using new technologies in the electoral process? Some EPP activities are long-term, such as political party development and EMB capacity building, which typically span several electoral cycles.
- Identify if there are targeted capacity building needs of EMBs, election observation groups, and/or political parties that can be addressed in the existing timeframe.
- Consider activities like voter registration, election observation, and voter information and education, and their alignment to the electoral cycle and the electoral calendar. Even election day-focused activities, such as election day observation and results verification, require significant preparation time and resources.

Using the above three filters (identify key risks and vulnerabilities; identify windows of opportunity and areas for positive reform; and consider timing and the electoral cycle) can help the assessment team or in-country DRG team prioritize the areas where EPP assistance is likely to have the greatest impact. Before developing the objectives and theory of change, however, there are other factors that need to be considered to help further refine and, if needed, narrow down the problems that are appropriate to address through USAID support. This includes considering USG foreign policy priorities and existing USG programming, mapping other donor efforts, and considering the resources (staffing and financial) and time available. These are explained in the next subsections.

3.2 CONSIDER USG PRIORITIES AND PROGRAMMING

EPP program decisions should take into account and align with USG foreign policy objectives, in accordance with a USG electoral strategy. There may be broader political, economic, or military aspects to the host country's bilateral relationship with the U.S. because of its geography, economy, history, or geopolitical significance.

The assessment should consider the Integrated Country Strategy, as well as the CDCS or transition strategy, for the country, as well as both past and current USAID and broader USG DRG support, particularly with elections and political processes. Questions to consider include:

- What are the lessons learned from past efforts?
- Who have been reliable local partners on past efforts?
- What EPP problems are already being addressed through existing USAID programs?
- What assistance are other USG agencies active in the electoral field (such as the State Department's Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) and Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL)) already providing and/or planning to provide? In some contexts, it is also important to consider assistance provided by the Department of Defense (security of elections), Department of Justice, and Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), or others.
- Are there major gaps that need to be addressed?
- Where are USAID's comparative advantages vis-a-vis other donor efforts?

By considering these questions, the assessment can further narrow down and refine the key problem(s) to be addressed through USAID's EPP strategy. The assessment may ultimately recommend making changes to existing programs to adapt to a new strategic focus. It could also recommend that existing programs run their course while new programs are put into place that respond to the new strategy.

3.3 MAP AND COORDINATE WITH OTHER DONORS

Mapping donors beyond USG entities is a key step in the assessment process. It is important to identify which activities are most appropriate for USAID's consideration, given other donors' plans and activities. USAID has extensive experience in a broad array of electoral programming and is the global leader in political party development programs. Yet, as the number of countries holding periodic multi-party elections began to surge in the 1980s,[103] the amount of donor funding dedicated to electoral assistance and the number of donor entities involved increased drastically.[104]

While ongoing programming by one donor does not necessarily preclude similar programming by another, coordination is essential to avoid duplication of effort and strategically allocate limited resources. Detailed information including funding levels, specific stakeholder engagement, geographic coverage, timeframes, and likelihood of extensions should be collected as early as possible. Coordination among donors also optimizes the impact of assistance by capitalizing on their relative strengths. Some donors are better suited to work in a particular functional area or are precluded from working in others. Donors may also be distinguished based on their historical, cultural, political, and economic connections with the host country. Strong trading partners may be able to make stronger political demands, as may regional entities to which the host country belongs or is aspiring to join. Some stakeholders may have established relationships of trust working with a particular donor.

Donor coordination is of particular importance in conflict settings, where the international community may be also administering the post-conflict elections. In some elections, the UN coordinates this assistance through a multilateral trust fund, in coordination with international military forces.

[103] The number of electoral democracies grew from just over 40 in the 1980s to more than 90 in 2017. World Bank, World Development Report 2017, p. 24: www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2017

[104] Official donor disbursements for electoral assistance increased from $52 million in 2002 to a peak of $752 million in 2010, before dropping to $278 million in 2017. OECD, *International Development Statistics:* https://stats.oecd.org/qwids/#?x=1&y=6&f=2:262,4:1,7:1,9:85,3:297,5:3,8:85&q=2:262+4:1,2+7:1+9:85+3:297+5:3+8:85+1:1,2,25,26,77+6:2002,2010,2017&lock=CRS1

3.4 CONSIDER RESOURCES

Additional key factors to consider include budget availability and staff resources. Funding levels and staffing requirements can vary significantly depending on the scope and scale of the EPP problem to be addressed. Some problems may be so deep-rooted or widespread that they require unrealistic budget and staffing levels to address. Others may need to be refined and narrowed down, so that the potential solutions could be more feasible from a resource perspective. Thus, the assessment should consider existing financial and personnel resources, the degree of flexibility of USAID's funding for the country, and the constraints and opportunities this may raise for programmatic options. Although financial and staffing resources may limit options, they are not necessarily firm constraints. Rather, the assessment should recommend if there are certain priorities and programming opportunities that should be increased; any trade-offs if resources for those priorities are not increased; short- and/or long-term USAID personnel needs; and whether USAID support could be leveraged to complement other donors' support.

3.5 DEFINE EPP ASSISTANCE OBJECTIVES AND DEVELOP A USAID EPP STRATEGY

Defining Objectives

After prioritizing and refining the key problems that can be addressed, the assessment or in-country DRG team should define objectives for the overall elections and political process engagement plan. The objectives identified by the assessment will help inform program objectives and design.

The assessment recommendations should articulate mid-level, or intermediate, objectives, which are the most ambitious objectives on which USAID expects to have a direct material effect in the EPP sector. For example, if the problem statement is "widespread citizen disenchantment and dissatisfaction threaten the credibility—and, potentially, the legitimacy—of the elections," the mid-level objective could be to "promote political competition that is more responsive and accountable to citizens." The objective should not be too broad and unrealistically ambitious, such as "strengthen democratic institutions to ensure credible elections." On the other hand, at this stage, objectives should not be too narrow nor focused at the programmatic level, such as "increase public understanding of electoral procedures and processes."

After prioritizing the problems to be addressed and defining the objectives, the assessment team should articulate a theory of change, which explains why and how the proposed interventions, when implemented successfully, will lead to achieving the EPP objective(s). The theory of change (also referred to as development hypothesis) should describe the logic and causal relationships between the EPP objective and the proposed interventions through "if-then" statements.[105] As part of developing the theory of change, the assessment should identify the key assumptions (conditions, behaviors, and critical events outside the control of the strategy) that must hold for the theory of change to remain valid.

USAID EPP Strategy

While in many cases Missions move directly from the assessment to program design, it is a best practice to develop a USAID EPP strategy. An EPP strategy summarizes the objective(s) of the USAID's overall EPP assistance and highlights how all the programs work together to achieve the objectives. The objectives identified in the assessment can form the basis of such a strategy.

A strategy should consider the totality of EPP-related programs and how they intersect to support higher level goals. Determining the overall objectives should ideally be a collaborative process among the USAID Mission, USAID/Washington, the country team at the U.S. Embassy, and, if relevant, other interagency stakeholders. If there is sufficient time before the next elections, the Mission could engage in a consultative process with relevant host country stakeholders to inform the strategy. Early interagency higher-level coordination is essential to ensure that strategic objectives are fully aligned with policy goals and diplomatic messages. The USAID EPP strategy can also

[105] For more on theories of change, see: Kedzia, Kasia, "Theory of Change: It's Easier Than You Think," *Learning Lab,* March 13, 2018: https://usaidlearninglab.org/lab-notes/theory-change-it%E2%80%99s-easier-you-think

serve as a tool for the Agency to identify and obtain the needed additional resources and staff well in advance of election day, in accordance with the electoral cycle approach.

The USAID EPP strategy should also take into account factors such as the importance of the election to U.S. foreign policy goals, the importance of the election to the country's democratic development, the level of host country government commitment to credible elections, the capacity of the host government to hold credible elections, and the potential for USAID assistance to have a positive impact.

EPP strategies provide an important step between the assessment findings and programmatic decisions. They allow for the Mission to align its assistance with the USG policy and facilitate interagency collaboration.

Developing a USAID EPP strategy is not yet a common practice, but, when developed, it provides an important step between the assessment findings and programmatic decisions. It enables the Mission to align its assistance with the USG policy and facilitate interagency collaboration. In countries with small budgets and very clear election needs, it may be more opportune and efficient to use the assessment recommendations to directly inform program design, rather than to spend more time developing a larger EPP strategy.

Interagency Election Strategies

In high-profile, complex countries, USAID may also participate in an interagency election strategy, which can either be a Washington-based exercise or a field based process. Such interagency strategies have been produced for countries such as Burma, Kenya, Nigeria and Ukraine. In the case of Kenya, the USAID strategy document for the 2017 elections there became the backbone for an interagency strategy document. This interagency strategy aligned the US Embassy's public messaging with the overall assistance portfolio, including assistance provided by other Agencies, and identified staffing and programming gaps.

Interagency strategies should ideally consider the full range of USG assets—diplomatic, assistance, economic, and/or information—engaged in achieving the strategic objective.[106] In the special case of internationally-administered elections, such as Cambodia, Timor Leste, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, as well as elections with shared administration between international and local bodies, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, the need for a clear USG interagency election strategy is evident and can help inform the development of a sequenced plan. For example, such a plan, developed for Afghanistan in 2004, identified tasks to be accomplished in each area of the political transition, including elections. Such plans also provide clear benchmarks including the presence of legal, political, security and other preparations before elections can take place.

The development of an interagency strategy should be based on consensus around a common USG goal for the election process. Such a strategic approach can also help facilitate consensus with the international community on an integrated approach. For transitional elections, "the strategic goal is likely to place a great deal of emphasis on how well the elections serve to mitigate conflicts, whether they include people formerly excluded by virtue of the conflict, whether the spoilers are neutralized, and whether popular will is expressed."[107]

Scenario Planning

Not all electoral needs are predictable, as conflict and political developments can create additional challenges and opportunities that impact the underlying assumptions identified in the assessment. Thus, an EPP strategy should consider the major scenarios that could play out, as well as the potential adaptations that would be needed under each scenario. To ensure that the program objectives and strategy remain reflective of the country's current conditions, the assessment findings should be periodically updated to determine if changes to programming are needed. The frequency will depend on the country context.

Missions should build adaptive management mechanisms and flexibility in their EPP portfolios in case quick changes

[106] USAID, *Transition Elections and Political Processes in Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations: Lessons Learned* (2007): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB804.pdf

[107] Ibid, p. 8.

are necessary. This can include rapid response mechanisms with readily obligated funds that can be easily mobilized. For example, a rapid response fund could help support an unanticipated run-off, referendum, or delay in the electoral calendar. Missions should also anticipate potential uses of last-minute funding in case it becomes available. For example, depending on needs, last minute funding can be used to support media air time for voter education messages, get out the vote campaigns, peace messaging, or candidate debates; post-election surveys; and/or covering unanticipated last-minute logistical costs such as communications with polling sites, faster recuperation of sensitive materials from isolated polling sites, or more frequent public messages by the electoral commission on the progress of the vote and count.

An EPP strategy should consider the major scenarios that could play out, as well as the potential adaptations that would be needed in each scenario.

Scenario planning should also consider "red lines" for curtailing certain assistance or all assistance, if needed. A "red line" suggests a change of circumstances so drastic that the integrity of the programs, or the safety of those involved, would be compromised—for example, increasing security risks to partners in a hostile environment. These are often policy decisions made by ambassadors or at the interagency level. However, the role of the DRG officers in such discussions is invaluable, as they can provide specific information about the political environment, partners, and processes. Factors that go into such decisions beyond the high-level political relationship include considerations of risks such as the safety and security of the implementers, beneficiaries, and USAID staff; potentially legitimizing an illegitimate electoral process; the impact of withdrawal on recipients; the emergence of autocratic leaders; and the lack of accountability. Often, modifying assistance in these situations is a better option than cutting it altogether.

PHOTO: VICTOR DRACHEV/AFP, UKRAINE, 2010

STEP 4: IDENTIFY PRIORITY PROGRAMMING

After defining objectives in Step 3, Step 4 involves prioritizing EPP programming areas related to those objectives. This section summarizes the most common types of USAID's EPP programming,[108] with insights into how they can be adapted to serve different needs.

Program activities should be aligned with the stated strategic objectives (if there is a written strategic document), in coordination with other USG agencies, and donors, and based on the commitment and capacity of local actors. In many cases the problems are complex and are best addressed in a cross-cutting manner, including amending existing DRG activities under other sectors, such as civil society and media development, parliamentary support, and/or rule of law. In countries where there are serious electoral security issues, it is useful to consider programs aimed at ensuring citizen security, security sector reform, or even preparing humanitarian assistance in case of crisis. A cross-cutting approach can include civic education under an education portfolio or outreach to voters during a pandemic under a traditional health portfolio.

This chapter is not intended to cover every potential program option, but to outline the most commonly-used key interventions. In addition, it does not cover each program area in full detail; rather, it provides a general overview of each area and highlights illustrative activities to address different strategic objectives. Links to additional resources that provide more detailed guidance on each program area are included in Annex 3.

[108] Although technically not part of the electoral cycle, USAID programming typically extends to the transition process. Accordingly, an overview of these types of activities is included.

The nine program areas, matching the subsections in Step 2 (Electoral Context Assessment), are:

1. legal framework and electoral reform
2. election management;
3. political party development;
4. voter education and information;
5. election observation;
6. media ecosystem;
7. electoral security and conflict;
8. electoral justice; and
9. post-election and transition of power.

4.1 LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL REFORM

Designing an appropriate legal framework and electoral reform assistance program will depend upon the findings of the assessment across a range of context-specific issues. This includes the political dynamics, motivations, and potential for consensus among the key stakeholders, as well as the credibility of the reform process itself, the level of assistance needed, the degree of openness to donor assistance, and the electoral calendar. For example, transitioning to a different electoral system can be a massive undertaking for which a dedicated multi-year project that engages lawmakers, civil society, and other stakeholders may be appropriate. On the other hand, technical assistance on discrete reforms may potentially be added to existing legislative and/or election assistance programming, thereby taking advantage of existing relationships of trust.

The assessment should not only identify the extent to which political will for reforms exists, but also identify potential champions of reform. The optimal approach to programming empowers those champions for reform, whether lawmakers, EMB members, political party representatives, civil society organizations, or academics, thereby building their capacity to advance reforms. If the government lacks the political will to initiate and implement a genuine legal reform process, support for electoral reform advocacy through media and/or civil society programming is more appropriate to consider.

Constitution drafting/amendment and development of a comprehensive set of election laws, including the choice of electoral systems, usually arises in the event of the founding of a new state, one emerging from conflict, or a transition from autocracy to democracy.[109] As such, activities in this context should be carried out in concert with other international entities, and are often part of a peace accord engaging the warring factions and other domestic stakeholders, or of a transitional "pact" between the remnants of the autocratic regime and democratic reformers. Given the newness of electoral processes in this situation, technical assistance in constitution drafting/amendment should normally be accompanied by assistance with election administration, as described in the module below. Cases of internationally administered elections fall into this category. Those cases are somewhat controversial given how hard "nation building" proved to be and the level of sustained engagement and funding that it required. USAID's technical assistance to Indonesia's 1999-2004 constitutional amendment process as part of its democratic transition is a good example of a success story.

The post-election period is often the ideal time to initiate reforms, as political tensions related to elections have subsided and lessons learned from the election are still fresh.

Assistance with periodic legal reforms in an established electoral context is the more common intervention. In countries where there is political will among decision makers to conduct meaningful, democratic electoral reforms, these legal reforms may be in part responding to shortcomings identified in election observation reports or by

[109] Countries undergoing decentralization or federalization could also experience the need for constitution drafting/amendment and development of a legislative framework at the subnational level. Electoral expertise would be an element in such an undertaking.

regional bodies. Topics such as legislative threshold levels, special measures (such as quotas), EMB independence, district delineation, voter and contestant registration procedures, voter identification requirements, access to information, and campaign finance are commonly the subject of reforms. In addition, reforms can include the election-relevant statutes in media, NGO, and women's rights laws.

Typically momentum for electoral reforms builds in the months immediately following elections. The post-election period is often the ideal time to initiate reforms, as political tensions related to elections have subsided and lessons learned from the election are still fresh. Substantive changes to the legal framework should be completed well in advance of election day or should only be applied in future electoral cycles to allow voters and contestants time to adapt to the reforms, as well as to guard against incumbents passing amendments that help entrench their dominance. Changes to any one aspect of the legal framework are likely to impact other aspects, potentially creating a cascade of amendments necessary to avoid contradictions or ambiguity. Therefore, a comprehensive legislative impact analysis, identifying other laws that may need to be harmonized, as well as reviewing proposed changes for their impact on gender, should be a required element of any legal reform activity.

Programming in this area should address both the substance and the process of the reforms. On substance, international technical assistance should generally be limited to providing a range of stakeholders with objective information and comparative analyses of a variety of reform options and their likely consequences. This approach empowers host country actors to make informed choices among a range of democratic options for their legal framework, increasing the likelihood of local ownership of the results. Advocacy in favor of particular options should generally be left to local stakeholders. USAID often supports civil society organizations to conduct their electoral reform advocacy more effectively.

As detailed in the assessment framework, an inclusive, consultative, and transparent process, engaging as many and as diverse a set of stakeholders as feasible, is paramount. USAID can support public deliberation through focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and public outreach. In other cases, USAID can support working groups and experts that draft laws and amendments and also support public forums. Technical assistance can also help develop feedback loops that both solicit input and inform stakeholders of decisions regarding substantive suggestions. However, if electoral reform is being used by the incumbent to further entrench power, programming could instead focus on promoting meaningful dialogue on reforms in parallel to or outside of the official reform process, and/or on civil society advocacy for an improved reform process.

Finally, it is also important to note that changes to the legal framework will impact other aspects of electoral assistance. Changes to political party laws, for example, need to be reflected in political party development programming, just as changes to EMB regulations will likely necessitate training on those changes for commissioners.

4.1 Legal Framework and Electoral Reform: Illustrative Objectives and Programming Examples

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Promote a coherent electoral legal framework that adheres to international principles and obligations	• Technical assistance on constitutional and electoral system design. • Provision of comparative examples and legal analysis. • Technical assistance on drafting electoral legislation, amendments, and regulations. • Training in legislative and regulatory drafting. • Awareness raising among civil society, political parties, and other electoral stakeholders of the options for legal reform and their consequences.

Encourage an inclusive, transparent electoral reform process	• Support and technical assistance for:
	  • electoral reform working groups, public forums, inter-party dialogue, public opinion research, and/or other mechanisms for inclusive input and deliberation on reform;
	  • civil society advocacy for electoral reforms; and
	  • civil society analysis and monitoring of electoral reforms and reform processes.
	• Coordinate with and support for diplomatic engagement to encourage electoral and political reforms.

4.2 ELECTION MANAGEMENT

Programming that supports election management primarily focuses on the election management body as the entity responsible for administering elections. As detailed in the Election Management section of Step 2: Assess the Electoral Context, the assessment should consider whether the EMB is independent and free from interference and whether the EMB has demonstrated political will to conduct elections impartially and effectively. The assessment's findings on these factors have significant impact on potential programming options. Where EMBs are widely perceived to be highly partisan or do not demonstrate the political will to conduct elections in an impartial manner, nearly all forms of assistance to the EMB would be misplaced and could unintentionally strengthen the actors seeking to undermine the electoral process and enable manipulation or fraud.

Objectives of election management programs usually relate to building the EMB's capacity and commitment to fulfill its functions in an efficient, transparent, accountable, and impartial fashion. This includes building EMB capacity to master multiple strategic and operational functions and develop productive relationships with electoral stakeholders, including other government agencies, law enforcement, political parties, civil society, media, and individual voters. Accordingly, program designs should include both institutional strengthening in the spirit of self-reliance and measures to strengthen the autonomy, impartiality, and transparency of the EMBs.

Technical assistance for EMBs typically takes the form of training, mentoring, providing analysis and specialized assessments, and providing guidance on specific aspects of work, such as drafting procedures and planning. The main objectives of EMB support are listed below, though this list is not exhaustive. Programming examples for each of these objectives are included in the table at the end of this section. Illustrative objectives include the following:

- Promoting independence and impartiality of the EMB in carrying out its responsibilities;
- Strengthening leadership and strategic management;
- Building operational capacity to conduct effective administration and logistics surrounding voter registration, candidate registration, voting, counting, results tabulation, and other core EMB functions;
- Promoting regular, inclusive, and transparent two-way engagement with key stakeholders, including the public;[110]
- Enhancing transparency and the provision of open election data; and
- Ensuring inclusive, well-informed consideration and—if appropriate—effective implementation of electronic technologies.

For newly-established EMBs, more intensive assistance will be needed, helping them perform the minimum functions necessary to conduct the immediate election. This could include embedding experts to build capacity, and, if necessary, facilitate a gradual transition from an election administered by or with significant input from international actors. A limited amount of support for materials and supplies is sometimes necessary, particularly in the post-conflict or breakthrough elections context. In dire situations, such support could include facilities, office supplies, and computers, but more commonly material assistance takes the form of ballot boxes, voting booths, and indelible ink.

Assistance to more experienced EMBs can focus on the institutional pillars that bolster independence and sustainability. Moreover, as elections are fundamentally based on public trust, activities that promote open election data and effective strategic communications will enhance transparency, trust and accountability. In addition, USAID programs are increasingly providing technical assistance to EMBs to prepare for and counter disinformation efforts during election periods. Finally, sustainable EMBs must be able to develop their own strategic and operational plans, accounting not only for accomplishing their fundamental tasks but also anticipating future challenges, measuring and evaluating performance, and adapting as necessary to achieve greater efficacy.

Electronic Technologies in Election Administration

As emphasized in Step 2: Assessing the Electoral Context, before considering programming that supports electoral technologies, it is essential to consider the host country decision making around introducing new technologies. In

[110] Voter education and information are discussed in Step 4: Section 4 below.

countries where the political will to conduct democratic elections is clear, long-term technical assistance to EMBs can focus on processes for careful, well-informed, inclusive, and transparent decisions on whether and, if so, how to integrate appropriate technologies in elections. Technology can only improve election integrity if it enjoys broad domestic support and is based on the electoral stakeholders' commitment to use the equipment for its intended purpose.

The decision making process for considering new technologies should be inclusively and transparently debated with electoral stakeholders, based on (1) identifying specific electoral problems that should be addressed; (2) assessing potential manual and technology-based solutions; (3) researching and assessing the feasibility of available technologies; and (4) conducting a cost-benefit analysis that includes an assessment of long term financial sustainability. In addition, EMBs considering new technologies should conduct pilot projects to inform the decision, ensure that enough time is allocated for implementing and raising awareness of the technologies, and secure the financial and human resources to handle the technological and logistical challenges that are inherent in their use. Finally, several countries have learned that if an EMB doesn't have a proven ability to administer a well-run election *without* using electronic technologies, it is not advisable for that EMB to adopt electronic technologies that require a much higher level of capacity and training than manually-run elections.

While technology solutions may help address certain problems, it is crucial for donors to ensure that the solutions presented match actual problems that need to be addressed before supporting such efforts.

For USAID and other donors, programs anticipating the introduction of technology at a large scale, such as biometric registration and identification systems or electronic voting and/or counting mechanisms, should be viewed as long-term projects that should be based on genuine local needs and capacity assessments. While technology solutions may help address certain problems, it is crucial for donors to ensure that the solutions presented match actual problems that need to be addressed before supporting such efforts. For example, financially and technically burdensome biometric voter registration systems are sometimes proposed in countries where voter registration is not a principal or even significant threat to electoral integrity.

Careful consideration must also be given to the capacity of the EMB to use, maintain, and financially sustain technological systems over time. Further, given the potential for corruption in procurement, such programming should be accompanied by support for open procurement processes. The implementation of new technologies also requires substantial EMB training, as well as concerted voter education campaigns to familiarize stakeholders with—and build confidence in—the technologies. Given the amount of time necessary for such activities, the introduction of technology is a process that, if done credibly, should take years, not months, and should be fully tested and completed well in advance of election day. By-elections may offer opportunities to pilot test such technologies.

Finally, addressing cybersecurity is an essential component of any programming to support EMBs in implementing new technologies. These programs can aid EMB cybersecurity planning, staff training on detecting and responding to cyber threats, conducting assessments, and upgrading software and hardware. Programming can also include providing guidance to EMBs and government officials on external communication to emphasize measures they have taken to secure the electoral systems and infrastructure as part of their regular communication with political stakeholders and the public. Lastly, it can also include supporting post-election reviews that include a cybersecurity assessment to help inform improvements for the next electoral cycle.

4.2 Election Management: Illustrative Objectives and Programming Examples

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Enhance EMB independence and impartiality	Technical assistance on: • establishing rules and procedures on composition and selection/appointment of commissioners, officials, and members for different levels of the EMB; • drafting regulations and electoral procedures; and • regulating areas under the EMB's purview, such as political finance (depends on country). Support for strengthening and empowering EMB governmental oversight body(ies), where appropriate.
Strengthen leadership and strategic management	Technical assistance and training on: • strategic and operational planning and management; • applying leadership principles; • scenario planning and crisis management; • assessing electoral conflict and fraud risks to develop mitigation measures; and • internal audits and post-election assessments. Facilitating exchanges with other EMBS for mutual problem-solving and professional development. Support for developing and implementing a gender and social inclusion strategy.
Ensure effective administration and operations	Technical assistance and training on planning, administrative, and logistical aspects of core EMB functions, including: • voter registration and voters list integrity; • candidate registration; • production and distribution of election materials; • recruitment and training of pollworkers; • security of electoral infrastructure; • preparation for and running of election day voting and counting processes; and • tabulating and publishing election results. In specific, limited circumstances, programming may include logistical and administrative support and/or commodities and procurement assistance.
Promote effective external communication and inclusive stakeholder engagement	Technical assistance and support on: • strategic communications; • crisis communication planning and skills; • coordination mechanisms with other state bodies; • dialogue platforms with political parties, media, and civil society; and • countering disinformation.
Enhance transparency and open election data	• Assessment to identify ways to improve provision of open election data • Assistance with establishing more transparent processes, from procurement and commission decision making to results tabulation and dispute resolution. • Technical support for transparency measures, such as digitizing information and providing data to stakeholders in an accessible, timely manner.
Promote sound and inclusive consideration and—if appropriate—implementation of electronic technologies	Technical assistance on: • decision making on considering adoption of new technologies on whether they are appropriate to the context, financially sustainable, and address specific problems; • assessing feasibility and testing potential technologies; • strengthening technological capacity to integrate new technologies, when appropriate; and • bolstering cybersecurity capability and preparedness.

4.3 POLITICAL PARTY DEVELOPMENT

Political party assistance is a key component of USAID's EPP programming globally. Two principles govern USAID's *Political Party Assistance Policy:* USAID programs support representative, multiparty systems, and USAID programs do not seek to determine election outcomes.[111] To this end, USAID adheres to the principle of non-interference, and USAID policy requires that implementers make a good faith effort to assist all democratic parties with equitable assistance.[112] In countries where a high number of parties makes this impracticable, the Policy allows implementers to limit their collaboration to "significant" democratic political parties. Guidance on how to make those determinations is included in the *Political Party Assistance Policy*. In rare cases, exceptions to the Policy are possible. Such exceptions are granted in only very exceptional cases, as they come with a range of political sensitivities and risks to both USG and the implementers and do not necessarily bring the desired results.

The assessment findings will inform the type of political party assistance that is most appropriate. For example, political party programming faces particular challenges in authoritarian societies where opposition forces are subjected to harassment and repression. Further, the country's social, economic, and demographic characteristics shape political party development, as parties may be rooted in discrete social issues, oligarch interests, or ethnic groups. In post-conflict societies, parties may have emerged from conflict actors and may not have transitioned fully to peaceful political competition.

Two principles govern USAID's Political Party Assistance Policy: USAID programs support representative, multiparty systems, and USAID programs do not seek to determine election outcomes.

As detailed in Section 3 of Step 2: Assess the Electoral Environment, it is essential to take into account political will, including the formal and informal rules of the game and incentive structures that shape party behavior. Many parties tend to be personality driven, controlled by a closed elite group, and may be rife with corruption. Parties and their leaders may have deliberately opaque ties to economic actors. Programs that ignore these factors are unlikely to achieve their desired aims.

Where the country is in the electoral cycle will shape the options available. While parties might be most eager for assistance in the months leading up to elections, much of the longer-term development work at the heart of party assistance is better suited to the periods between elections when the pressure of competition is lower. Parties can then address internal issues, focus on organization and strategic capacity, and build stronger relationships with communities.

Political parties are essential for any representative democracy, as parties remain an important vehicle to foster constructive policy debate, convene diverse constituencies, and facilitate compromise. They play a unique and vital function in democratic society, serving roles that—in most contexts—no other group or entity performs, such as recruiting candidates, aggregating interests, and forming coalitions. Parties that are inclusive, moreover, can be the conduit to making government and state institutions more inclusive.

At the same time, parties are primarily shaped by broad social and political forces, and are often controlled by powerful personalities. The ability of external assistance to profoundly change the nature, character and direction of a political party is limited. Program objectives, therefore, should be realistic and clearly defined, in a more fine-grained manner that breaks down the long-term overarching goal of truly representative parties into intermediate steps. There are a multiplicity of objectives and principles that can be pursued within party programs. Illustrative examples are listed below.

- **Citizen-responsive Practices:** Many programs aim to encourage parties to adopt and develop citizen-responsive practices, policies, and behaviors. Techniques such as public opinion polling and soliciting constituent feedback can help parties understand the demands and interests of their supporters. This can help a party develop policies and platforms that are more responsive and less elite-driven.

[111] USAID *Political Party Assistance Policy* (2003): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/200maz.pdf
[112] Standards for determining what constitutes a democratic party are elaborated in USAID *Political Party Assistance Policy,* p. 2.

The expansion of online media radically changes the landscape for party communications. Although the advent of social media ostensibly makes it easier to solicit input, parties often use it solely as a means of broadcasting their message, thereby perpetuating a "top-down" approach to communication. Parties that develop a relationship with diverse constituencies through effective and interactive use of digital communication can use insights gleaned to develop an ideological foundation more reflective of societal interests. This can contribute to party politics that are issue-based and policy-focused.

- **Inclusion:** Party assistance programs can work to increase women's leadership and participation, both in parties and in elected positions. Greater gender equality in parties can lead to more women assuming policy making roles in local and national government. USAID has promoted greater inclusivity within party structures and in the overall electoral system by encouraging gender analysis and internal assessments and through training of party activists, aspirants, and candidates.[113] USAID also places priority on encouraging and equipping parties to reach out to other social, ethnic, religious or geographic groups, including a growing number of youth who are frustrated by or apathetic to elite focused party politics. More inclusive political parties can lead to important changes in the composition of local and national governments that are more reflective of a country's population and ensure that the voices of marginalized populations are represented.
- **Transparency and Anti-corruption:** Some activities seek to improve internal party transparency when it comes to decision making and finances while also building organizational capacity. Since citizens' increasing disillusionment with parties often stems from concerns about corruption, political party programming should aim to encourage parties to be more transparent about their finances, including greater compliance with existing political finance regulations. These efforts should address the legal and regulatory framework to compel parties to disclose finances and transparency. State capacity (and political will) for financial oversight is also needed to ensure compliance, while civil society and media watchdogs can play a powerful role in shaping the incentive structure for parties. Often decision making is concentrated at the top of the party, and regional branches and regular members feel disempowered and insufficiently informed or consulted about important decisions regarding the important matters such as party platforms, candidates selection and overall campaign strategy. Thus, helping parties that are genuinely willing to create reforms with instituting transparent structures and practices is likely to strengthen parties both structurally and ideologically.
- **Organizational and Electoral Capacity:** Political party assistance is typically a long-term activity involving strengthening capacity and building political will for change that tends to span multiple electoral cycles. A core element of party assistance often focused on building organizational capacity, including on campaign-related/electoral functions. This includes providing technical assistance, guidance, and training to parties on organizational and structural changes; strategic planning and research; media relations; fundraising techniques; campaign and communication techniques; candidate recruitment, selection, and nomination processes; and voter identification and contact methods.

  Digital technology also presents an array of new challenges for political contestants and technical assistance providers alike. Activities may include interventions that promote sound digital security practices that help protect against cyber attacks.
- **Monitoring of the Electoral Process:** While much emphasis in electoral observation programming is placed on nonpartisan citizen observation, the role parties play in monitoring elections shouldn't be overlooked. In fact, they play a unique particularly important role in being the 'eyes and ears' of the party on the ground on election night and in monitoring both the voting and results tabulation. Political party pollwatchers, also referred to as agents, also play the vital role of collecting information and in many countries, filing complaints when they witness irregularities. Candidates and party leaders will often turn to reports by their party pollwatchers to help decide whether to concede an election or dispute results. Thus, programming should aim to help parties not only train their pollwatchers, but also to develop effective systems to collect and analyze data received, and to draw on this data, as appropriate, to support any electoral complaints.

[113] USAID, *Gender Integration in Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Programming Toolkit* (2016), p. 48: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2496/Gender%20Toolkit.pdf

- **Respect for Rule of Law and Democratic Conduct:** Representative parties that reflect democratic norms and respect the rule of law are the linchpins of a democratic electoral process. Electoral integrity is only possible when political parties respect the rules of the game and compete fairly, without resorting to corrupt practices. Parties and candidates should peacefully accept legitimate results. Programs can work with parties and their members to help them better understand legal frameworks and electoral processes, but must also work to shift the incentive structures that influence party conduct. This can be achieved through civil society and media watchdogs, enforcement of regulations by the EMB and/or another appropriate body, and shifting public expectations of acceptable conduct. For example, public campaigns to reject and report vote buying set a tone and expectation of fair conduct. Inter-party dialogue can defuse tensions and build a common understanding of electoral processes. In countries at high risk of electoral violence, codes of conduct and public statements by leaders pledging non-violence can send a strong signal to supporters to remain peaceful. Monitoring and anti-violence campaigns that set public expectations for peaceful behavior can begin to shift the incentive structure.

  Disinformation by political parties has the potential to perpetuate false narratives, amplify hate messages and attacks, and manipulate public opinion on key issues. While the solutions to these problems are complex, technical assistance can help political parties contribute by, for example, adopting inter-party codes of conduct that eschew such abusive practices and developing internal monitoring systems to ensure compliance with the code of conduct.

4.3 Political Party Assistance: Illustrative Objectives and Programming Examples

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Promote a competitive multiparty system	• Promotion of legal enabling environment and regulatory reforms to level the playing field and improve electoral integrity. • Use of alternate strategies and methods of outreach in closed contexts.
Encourage issue-based parties; enhance platform and policy development capacity	Training and guidance on: • platform development; • research on substantive policy issues; • issue-based citizen engagement activities; • candidate debates; and • conducting and applying polling and research to understand citizen priorities.
Increase responsiveness to citizens and diversity of party representation	Technical assistance and training on enhancing campaign capacity, including: • strategic campaign planning; • voter participation, voter identification and contact, and GOTV; • inclusive candidate recruitment, selection, and training; • fundraising techniques; • media relations; and • strategically leveraging new technologies. Training and technical assistance on citizen responsiveness and engagement efforts, including: • expanding membership; • developing and expanding core constituencies; • building grassroots volunteer networks; and • engagement of women, youth, and other traditionally marginalized groups.
Enhance party internal democracy and organizational effectiveness	Technical assistance on: • strengthening internal party management; • improving the recruiting and training of party staff; • establishing branch offices; and • introducing more inclusive and transparent candidate recruitment and selection methods.

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Increase women's political leadership within parties and in elected office	• Training for party members and leaders to conduct and use gender audits. • Capacity building for women's wings and affinity groups. • Training emerging women leaders and candidates. • Encouraging and advising on mechanisms, bylaws, and regulations that improve gender equality. • Training for party leaders to enhance their understanding of gender, discrimination, and inequality.
Enhance political parties' oversight of electoral process	Support and technical assistance on: • political party pollwatching (election day); and • political party monitoring of the entire electoral process using evidence-based techniques.
Improve political parties' legislative capacity	• Technical assistance on coalition building, opposition-government relations, and/or caucus management in the legislature.
Increase parties' respect for the rule of law, democratic conduct, and transparency	Technical assistance and training on: • development and enforcement of codes of conduct; • inter-party dialogue to foster consensus on electoral processes and respect for legal framework; and • improving compliance with financial disclosure regulation. Support for civil society monitoring of parties and advocacy toward parties for internal reforms and/or commitment to party integrity.

4.4 VOTER EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Voter education and information efforts are one of the main vehicles to ensure broad and informed participation. EMBs are often responsible for conducting official voter information and education efforts during and between election periods. In addition, civil society organizations, political parties, private sector, media outlets, and even international entities conduct activities that inform voters and encourage participation. In countries with impartial and independent EMBs, civil society groups often coordinate with the EMB on voter education activities, and in many cases may help disseminate EMB-produced voter education content and materials. In addition, CSOs often produce their own voter education content, which can include electoral education courses. In countries that are less democratic and/or have more partisan EMBs, credible CSOs that produce their own content are often more objective sources of voter education than the EMB. A key constraint in some countries is a requirement that CSOs receive EMB approval to provide voter information.

Thus, drawing on the assessment findings, careful consideration should be given to how best to support voter education in a manner that ensures voters have access to accurate and impartial information. Support for government or EMB-led voter education and information is most appropriate when the assessment findings indicate that the government and EMB have at least a basic level of commitment to holding credible electoral processes. In contexts where the government and EMB are clearly working to undermine credible elections, it is more appropriate to support civil society-led voter education efforts, if they are allowed to be implemented independently of the EMB.

Voter information and education programming typically involve a combination of direct support for specific interventions and building organizational capacity to continue such work in the future. Informational campaigns seek to ensure that participation is successful (i.e., that they know how, when, and where to vote) and informed (i.e., that they have sufficient information to discern among the contestants on a substantive basis). Donors also support GOTV activities to promote participation by encouraging citizens to exercise their suffrage rights. Voter education is often geared toward specific audiences that have less access to information, including under-represented, marginalized, or other vulnerable populations.

The electoral assessment will identify the main challenges (e.g., low turnout, uninformed voters, high spoiled ballot

rate) related to voter education and their causes. These findings should inform the voter education and information strategy. One common challenge is low voter turnout. To consider potential ways to address that problem, it is necessary to identify the main barrier to turnout. If the cause of low voter turnout is apathy, more information regarding the democratic process and people's civic duties may be persuasive. If the assessment reveals that voters are staying away out of fear for their safety, voter information materials should focus on security measures taken or alternatives to voting at the polling station, to the extent they exist. If a lack of registration is the reason for low turnout, campaigns to inform voters of the registration process and encourage them to register are especially important.

If voters are not well-informed about where, how, and when to vote, amplifying this information can boost turnout. Alternatively, low turnout among specific groups could be due to high barriers to participation. In countries with minority languages or high rates of illiteracy, conducting the voter education campaign in different languages or depicting it visually is necessary to engage those voters. Voter education materials in conservative societies can promote women's participation by, for example, informing women of the availability of separate voting areas or of female election officers to confirm identity, to the extent these services are made available. Similarly, if accommodations are available for transgender persons, who are sometimes denied the right to vote because their appearance does not match the gender on the registry, targeted materials informing them of these alternatives has been helpful in places like Guatemala.

If there have been any changes to the registration or voting process, such as converting to a biometric system, integrating other technologies, redistricting, or a change in the electoral system, extensive voter education efforts are necessary to avoid disenfranchising large numbers of voters. Campaigns explaining the reason for the changes and laying out the steps necessary to be eligible to vote will help assure voters of the legitimacy of the process and encourage them to register. Similarly, anything that changes the appearance of the ballot or the way in which a voter's preferences are indicated should be fully explained in advance of election day. Well-designed voter information campaigns can demystify the process, building public trust. Message testing and message identification through focus groups should precede the campaign roll out to ensure the message will achieve its intended impact.

Another common challenge is that voters do not have enough information to make an informed choice. Although information aiming to ensure that voters have sufficient knowledge of candidate and party platforms on key issues is typically provided by the parties, civil society and media play an important role on a nonpartisan basis as well. Examples of this include hosting or moderating political debates, publishing party platforms, or soliciting party and candidate responses to a uniform set of questions on key issues. For referendum votes, the question put to voters may be published so they have time to discuss and weigh the proposition prior to election day.

Regardless of the type of voter education, the materials should be easily comprehensible and tailored to the target audiences and needs. Likewise, the methods of outreach should be tailored to specific audiences. Depending on the target audiences, voter education and information efforts may use a variety of media; posters/fliers; postcards; broadcast, print, and televised public service announcements; outreach through social media and messaging apps; "tabling" at public events or gathering spots; small group meetings; live presentations within communities; and targeted outreach to marginalized populations including women, youth, and linguistic minorities. Engaging a trusted source, such as traditional leaders and civil society organizations serving women and minority constituents, as the conduit of the messages can be an effective way of reaching those audiences. Branding waivers may be obtained where association with a donor may detract from the messages' impact.

Finally, as USAID's ultimate goal in all assistance activities is to build local capacity to perform these functions independently, interventions to build the capacity of EMBs and civil society partners should always be incorporated. Depending on the identified needs, capacity building could include training, ongoing guidance, and sharing practical experience and comparative best practices on message development and testing, research, target audience identification, responding to dangerous speech, and platform selection (including social media). Another means of ensuring that appropriate voter education will continue independently is by engaging schools and media sources. Promoting democratic culture and values among youth throughout the education system can provide a strong foundation for adult voter education efforts.

4.4 Voter Education: Illustrative Objectives and Programming Examples

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Promote access to accurate and impartial voter information	• Technical assistance and support to EMBs and CSOs on the design, testing, targeting, implementation, and evaluation of voter information campaigns. • Support for production and dissemination of voter information and education materials, media content, and online content. • Guidance and support to EMBs and CSOs on context-appropriate uses of technologies to improve voter information outreach. • Facilitation of private sector engagement for supporting voter information. • Development of electoral education courses.
Ensure voters are equipped to make an informed choice	Support for: • candidate debates; • civil society and media-led voter education focused on key electoral issues and factual information about candidates/parties; • activities to counter disinformation (described in more detail in the Media Ecosystem section below); and • digital literacy training.
Bolster voter participation	Support for: • nonpartisan GOTV campaigns; and • voter education tailored to address the reasons behind why specific populations are not able to and/or not choosing to participate.

4.5 ELECTION OBSERVATION

As outlined in the Election Observation section of Step 2: Assess the Electoral Context, the main types of election observation activities that USAID supports are: nonpartisan citizen election observation (including results verification efforts such as PVTs); international observation; and partisan pollwatching (described in Section 3: Political Party Development). In addition, USAID is often involved in USG diplomatic observation.

The findings from the country context and electoral environment assessments (Steps 1 and 2), along with the EPP objectives developed in Step 3, will inform which electoral problems, processes, and threats should be observed in a given context, as well as which type(s) of observation would be most effective to monitor those issues. Depending on needs and available resources, some EPP strategies may call for multiple types of election observation, while others may, for example, only call for citizen election observation.

Citizen Election Observation

Nonpartisan citizen (domestic) election observation is the most common type of observation supported by USAID. Citizen election observation is particularly important, because it allows citizens to engage in oversight of their political processes and hold their own governments accountable. Compared to international observation, citizen observers have the advantage of deep knowledge of the country context and the language(s), and in many cases have experience developed in previous election cycles. Citizen observation is much less expensive per observer than other forms, which allows for fielding a larger team with more comprehensive coverage over a longer period of time. In the long-run, building the capacity of citizen observers is sustainable and empowering, promoting self-reliance and local ownership. It provides an important mechanism, aside from voting, for citizens to participate in elections, which can contribute to a virtuous cycle in terms of democratic participation. Citizen observation often engages women, youth, and other marginalized populations in significant numbers.

Long-term citizen election observation is an important and often essential component of citizen observation.

Long-term observation involves a number of different methodologies that cover a wide range of issues and aspects of the electoral cycle that are crucial to assessing the credibility of an electoral process. The areas of focus for long-term observation depend on the aspects that are most important to observe in the given context, as well as the particular observer group/coalition's capacity. Potential areas of focus are listed in the text box below. Some observer groups may have the capacity and scope to monitor several of these areas, while others may be more specialized.

Long-term Observation: Potential Areas of Focus

- Legal framework and electoral reform processes;
- Voter registration processes;
- Voters list accuracy, completeness and currency (through a voters list verification/audit);
- Candidate nomination and registration processes;
- Party congresses and/or primaries;
- Access to the electoral process for specific marginalized populations, such as women, ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities, persons with disabilities, LGBTI, and youth;
- Campaign activities and environment (e.g., political space);
- Campaign finance compliance and enforcement;
- Recruitment, composition, and training of election officials;
- Procurement of equipment and materials;
- Abuse of state/administrative resources;
- Traditional media and social media, including disinformation;
- Electoral violence, including early warning signs and violence against women in elections;
- Electoral dispute resolution; and
- Political transitions.

Short-term citizen election observation involves a larger number of observers dedicated to monitoring election day processes, including opening, voting, closing, counting, and tabulation processes, in precincts throughout the country or election region. Since each method has advantages and disadvantages, the type of short-term observation should be matched to the objective. Objectives and methods for the main types of short-term observation are:

- **traditional or convenient deployment**, in which observers are deployed in large numbers to wherever they choose to go. This method helps promote electoral participation but provides findings that are not representative of the country or region being observed, because polling stations are not selected through random, representative sampling;
- **strategic or targeted deployment**, in which observers are deployed to "hot spots" to help monitor and deter potential violence and/or fraud;
- **thematic deployment**, in which observers specialize in monitoring a particular issue, such as barriers to the participation of women, persons with disabilities, or ethnic minorities; and
- **systematic, sample-based observation (SBO)**, in which observers are deployed to a random, representative sample of locations to provide a statistically accurate assessment of election day processes and, in the case of **PVTs**, a projection of what the honest results should be within narrow margins of error.

Results Verification

As mentioned above, the utility of PVTs, exit polling, and/or electoral forensics varies depending upon the electoral context, intended purpose, local capacity, risks, and costs. PVTs are the most widely used and, in most cases, the most definitive and effective results verification tool,[114] while exit polling or electoral forensics can also be useful depending on the context and objectives. Detailed guidance for DRG officers designing results verification activities, including a six-step strategic planning process, is set forth in USAID's manual *Assessing and Verifying Election Results: A Decision-Maker's Guide to Parallel Vote Tabulation and Other Tools.*[115]

As described in the *Assessing and Verifying Results* manual, a number of considerations and "pre-conditions" should be taken into account when considering results verification tools. The overall political and electoral context and challenges help determine whether results verification activities are appropriate, and, if so, what other aspects of election observation should accompany them. Other means of electoral manipulation, particularly before and after election day such as pre-election voter intimidation, abuse of state resources, biased delimitation, and disinformation, will not be detected by these tools. Thus, if PVTs are used by themselves and/or are not properly framed within the broader electoral context, this can risk mischaracterizing the elections and—in less democratic environments—help to legitimize an otherwise fraudulent process.

Because PVTs and other forms of systematic observation activities require a high level of capacity and commitment by the observer group, the assessment findings regarding the capacity of potential election observer groups must be taken into account when considering support for a PVT. Groups often require significant technical assistance, particularly when conducting their first PVT. Furthermore, preparation for a PVT requires at least several months of lead time prior to election day.

The type of election and electoral system are also relevant, particularly for consideration of a PVT. PVTs are best suited for presidential elections and legislative elections in which the entire country is a single electoral district, such as in a national proportional representation system. Legislative elections in which sub-national constituencies elect their own representatives are significantly more challenging, as each district needs to be sampled separately and, in fact, requires a separate PVT in itself. If sampling is not possible due to a small number of polling stations, as may be the case in local elections or smaller districts in legislative elections, a PVT would require observers in all of the polling stations in the district.

Other information provided in Step 2: Assess the Electoral Context will help determine if investment in verification activities is cost-justified and logistically feasible. Access to all election day voting and counting processes, as well as any and all polling stations, is required. The observer group must be able to gain access to a complete list of polling stations well in advance of election day, so that a sample can be drawn. In addition, if the assessment reveals that these activities are not permitted under the law or the security environment would put implementers in harm's way or limit access, programming in this area could be severely constrained and may not be warranted.

Another method that—depending on the needs and objectives—can help assess the process is exit polling, where not precluded by law. Exit polls are voter surveys conducted by interviewing voters outside select polling stations. While they may provide some data predictive of the outcome if a sufficiently large sample of polling stations and voters are surveyed in accordance with statistically mandated controls for randomness and distribution, exit polls may not be accurate in part because voters are not always candid about how they voted. Exit polls can be more useful for the other information they yield. For example, questions about a voter's knowledge of registration and voting procedures will help evaluate the efficacy of voter education and civic information efforts. Finally, in campaigns where disinformation has been a problem, exit polls may help evaluate the extent to which disinformation impacted the results.[116]

Following an election, official results data can be assessed through election forensics, which involves statistical

[114] Credible PVTs also incorporate a systematic assessment of election day processes, as they involve monitoring all day in each sampled polling station to determine if those results are credible

[115] See https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00KGWR.pdf

[116] For a more detailed discussion of key considerations for PVTs, see: USAID, *Assessing and Verifying Election Results* (2015): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00KGWR.pdf

analysis of several data points to identify anomalies and potential electoral manipulation. For example, a significantly lower voter turnout in specific precincts may suggest shortcomings in voter information activities, or, potentially, discrimination if the affected precincts were in minority-dominant areas. An unexplained deviation in voter turnout could also indicate either voter suppression, if turnout was abnormally low, or ballot box stuffing, if turnout greatly exceeded similar precincts. However, election forensics cannot project results. Election forensics only identifies anomalies in results data. Determining the cause for those anomalies requires further investigation.

International Election Observation

When conducted professionally and credibly, international and citizen observation are complementary activities. International election observation missions (IEOMs) bring international scrutiny and attention to a specific country context, as well as comparative electoral expertise. International observation can help boost public confidence in electoral processes that are conducted democratically, lend legitimacy to the institutions that have been elected, and provide constructive recommendations for further improvements. When elections are marked by significant flaws, international observation can push for greater accountability. When the outcome of an election is disputed, election observers may help play a conflict mitigation role by providing objective analysis and encouraging a peaceful resolution.

To ensure different perspectives are included and to guard against accusations of bias or interference, IEOMs must include observers from a variety of countries and ethnicities and must strive for gender balance among both staff and observers. In addition, to be credible, international observation missions must observe aspects of the elections beyond just election day, which is typically done through long-term observation and/or pre- and post-election assessment missions.[117] An international observation mission does not meet basic credibility standards if it only observes election day processes.

While there are several variations of types and sizes of IEOMs, the three main types of missions that USAID typically supports are:

- **specialized, stand-alone missions**, such as pre-election or post-election assessment missions;
- **long-term observation missions** (without an election day observation component), which can include deploying teams of long-term observers and/or a team of long-term analysts (each focused on a different topic) in the capital; and
- **comprehensive missions**, with long-term analysts, long-term observers, one or more pre-and/or post-election assessment missions, and short-term observers for the period surrounding election day.

There are several categories of international entities that conduct credible international election observation. Regional intergovernmental organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the African Union Democracy and Elections Assistance Unit, and the Organization of American States (OAS), are known for monitoring elections in their respective regions. The European Union and the Commonwealth Secretary-General observe elections in a number of regions. USAID programming for international observation has supported international NGOs that have endorsed the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, including The Carter Center, Democracy International, NDI, and IRI, as well as regional NGOs, including the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO), and the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL).

Diplomatic Observation

US embassies often deploy accredited members of the diplomatic staff to conduct short-term (election day) diplomatic observation, similar to other Western embassies. In some countries, embassy personnel also observe other parts of the electoral process, such as voter registration. Their input is invaluable given their knowledge of the context-relevant laws and issues.

[117] These and other well-established international observation norms are outlined in the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* (2005): https://electionstandards.cartercenter.org/at-work/collaborative-efforts-towards-standards/

These diplomatic observation missions contribute to the monitoring of elections in a host country and inform USG's election statements, assessments, and policy decisions. The presence of embassy observers can also help deter violence. However, diplomatic missions should not be thought of as the equivalent of robust, independent international election observation missions, particularly since (1) they are conducted under the auspices of particular government/state interests; (2) they typically only involve deploying a small number of observers for the few days surrounding election day; and 3) given their small size, they cannot provide systematic, representative findings and often do not produce public reports.

Along with the State Department, USAID's DRG Center helps embassies and Missions train observer teams, organize a command center at the embassy, and set up a reporting system. Embassy observers are reminded to remain neutral at all times and follow the *Declaration of Principles and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observation.*[118] They should not make any statements to the media or the public and should defer questions to the public affairs section of the embassy.

The safety of observers is of primary importance and diplomatic security guidelines accordingly may limit where and when observers may go. Embassy observers may be restricted from staying out as votes are counted late into the night, a key part of the electoral process. Finally, they must coordinate with all other IEOMs on the ground, both international and local. This process can provide valuable information for the embassy's reporting.

4.5 Election Observation: Illustrative Objectives and Programming Examples

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Promote public confidence in the electoral process. *(Where the government demonstrates a commitment to holding credible elections)*	• Long- and short-term citizen election observation. • International election observation.
Strengthen accountability for holding genuine elections. *(Where the government demonstrates partial commitment but takes some measures to restrict democratic principles)*	• Long- and short-term citizen election observation, with a particular emphasis on long-term observation. • International election observation.
Expose and deter fraud. *(Where the government actively seeks to undermine credible elections.)*	• Long- and short-term citizen election observation, with a particular emphasis on long-term observation.
Promote impartial and systematic oversight of electoral processes.	• Long-term citizen election observation. • Systematic short-term (election day) observation by citizen election observers, such as sample-based observation/PVT.
Demonstrate international support for credible and peaceful elections.	International election observation, which can include: • pre- or post-election assessment missions; • long-term observation; and • election day observation delegations.
Independently verify election results.	• Support and technical assistance for a PVT. • Exit polling. • Election forensics.
Mitigate electoral violence.	• Long-term and short-term citizen election observation focused on triggers and incidents of violence, while integrating consideration of violence against women in elections. • Targeted citizen election observation focused on violence against specific, vulnerable populations such as women and minorities.
Contribute to informing USG's election statements, assessments, and policy decisions.	• Complementing citizen and international election observation with diplomatic observation.

[118] See https://electionstandards.cartercenter.org/at-work/collaborative-efforts-towards-standards/

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Expose and counter disinformation in elections	• Citizen election monitoring of social and traditional media (see Section 6: Media Ecosystem for more details). • Long-term international election observation that includes thematic focus on the information environment, including disinformation.

4.6 MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

Media is a conduit of information used by virtually all electoral stakeholders. Quality news reporting improves transparency, helps to hold candidates, parties, and election management bodies accountable, and helps voters make informed choices and know where, and how to vote. Investigative journalism and analytical reporting add depth to this "watchdog" function. Traditional media can help EMBs transmit voter information and helps political parties communicate their visions to prospective voters. Social media provides platforms for citizen interaction, feedback, and debate. Social media and mobile phones have also facilitated the role of citizen journalists capable of recording events and disseminating them widely. However, as discussed in the media section of Step 2, particularly with the rise of social media usage, media can also be a powerful tool for manipulation, whether disinformation and/or hate-based content is spread by the government, opposition factions, foreign state and non-state actors, or even media outlets and journalists themselves.

Media programming should be considered in the course of any EPP project design. An expansive definition of media should be used, including both public and private print, radio, television, and online outlets, as well as social media platforms. Media and elections programming can involve editors, journalists, media associations, formal or informal regulating bodies, civil society and civic tech groups, or journalist federations, bloggers, and citizen journalists, among others. Moreover, media assistance should be integrated into, or at least linked to, programming in other areas, including election administration and political party development, and engaging public information offices of the EMB and other governmental entities, and political party communications teams. USAID often supports stand-alone media projects that support local independent media outlets to produce high-quality information, and an election component can be added to such programs in advance of key elections. Integrating a dedicated media activity into an overall election support package is increasingly necessary, given the importance of media to the overall electoral process.

PHOTO: ROBIN NELSON, FHI 360

The assessment findings will inform the objective(s) and type of media programming for elections. In contexts where the electoral legal and regulatory framework contains deficiencies, such as undue limitations on access to information or restrictions on freedom of expression that are not specific and well-grounded, programming may focus on supporting legal advice and advocacy for legal reforms that provide greater access to information, enhanced protection of freedom of expression, and equal and fair access to media by all candidates and parties.

In contexts where the capacity and/or standards of media professionals are a significant challenge, capacity building for media professionals, journalists, and editors is a frequent intervention. Training may include basic journalism standards, such as accuracy, fairness, and impartiality of reporting, in the electoral context. Similarly, training in investigative techniques, conflict-sensitive reporting, polling, and fact-checking may be appropriate. Training on the electoral legal and regulatory framework, including media-specific policies such as providing equitable access to the media during the campaign periods, can help media professionals understand and accurately report on the pro-

cesses. In more democratic countries, this may be done in conjunction with the EMB, building stakeholder relations while also improving the quality of reporting. In countries where media actors face severe threats when reporting on public corruption or elections, training may address security, including security of their facilities, information, cybersecurity, and their personal safety.

Technical assistance may also include legal and regulatory, as well as institutional (EMBs, media councils) assistance to ensure that media laws and regulations are consistent with international standards, which would create a conducive environment for objective reporting, equal playing field and equal candidate access to public media, and proper oversight of dangerous phenomena like hate speech.

Media assistance can engage specialized media production entities or coalitions of media sources, building capacity to develop and disseminate voter education information, hold political debates, develop editorial standards for covering elections in an impartial, inclusive, and fair manner, organize and host candidate debates, publish party platforms, conduct rolling polls, and provide election day coverage. Other interventions could include working with media federations, councils, or commissions to develop codes of conduct and by-laws; conducting media monitoring; and enforcing ethical standards.

Exposing and Countering Disinformation in Elections

Programming to combat disinformation and other manipulation of information in elections should be informed by the problems, opportunities, and vulnerabilities identified in the assessment. Such programming can involve short-term measures focused on the period immediately surrounding elections, as well as long-term efforts that go well beyond electoral programming, such as building a country's infrastructure of information integrity and enhancing citizens' resilience when subjected to disinformation. Programming specifically focused on addressing disinformation in the electoral context can include:

- Strengthening or advocating for legal and regulatory reforms that promote digital rights and regulate disinformation and dangerous speech in elections, while balancing the principles of freedom of speech, privacy, and transparency;
- Supporting media to increase the supply of credible, accurate information by building the capacity of media professionals at national and local-level TV, print, and radio outlets;
- Strengthening and adapting fact-checking and debunking platforms;
- Adapting citizen and international election monitoring to expose disinformation;
- Increasing incentives for ethical online conduct by political parties and campaign consultants by facilitating political party codes of online ethics and supporting civil society and media monitoring to hold parties accountable; and
- Promoting social media platform accountability by supporting civil society advocacy for more responsible norms and practices by the platforms.

In addition, media literacy programming can be conducted to help equip citizens to evaluate political and electoral information for accuracy and bias and to apply this knowledge when sharing online content via social media and/or messaging apps. Media literacy focused on electoral and political content can help ensure voters make an informed electoral choice and combat the spread of false or misleading information during electoral periods.

4.6 Media Ecosystem: Illustrative Objectives and Programming Examples

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Improve media ecosystem legal environment	• Support for development of and advocacy for legal reforms that bolster media independence, access to information, internet freedom, media rights, and/or security for journalists.
Build media actors' capacity to cover elections	• Training and technical assistance for journalists and other media professionals on covering elections, investigative reporting, fact-checking, gender-aware reporting, security, and conflict-sensitive reporting. • Technical assistance to media bodies on editorial standards and voter education

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Enhance access to objective and accurate electoral information	• Support for the production of political debates, voter education, and other election-related content (see Voter Information and Education section above for more details).
Promote resilience to disinformation / counter disinformation	Support for: • traditional and social media-focused groups and civic-tech efforts to detect, monitor, expose, and combat disinformation; • media literacy efforts; • fact-checking platforms; and • civil society advocacy for social media platform accountability.

4.7 ELECTORAL SECURITY AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

Elections in conflict settings and post-conflict environments have their own dynamics and considerations. Conflict grievances may remain and can be politicized by electoral actors, making elections a destabilizing factor in fragile security environments. Managing elections in these contexts requires delicate trade-offs, balancing the need for negotiation and agreement with respect for pre-existing rules and competition.

USAID approaches to electoral security programming should be based on identified needs and potential conflict triggers among state and non-state stakeholders. USAID's *Electoral Security Framework and Programming Guide*[119] elaborates on "how programming can more consistently and effectively address the causes, manifestations, and consequences of election violence." While the information from the broader electoral assessment will be helpful, in contexts where security is a significant issue, a specific assessment on electoral security should be conducted, drawing on USAID's Electoral Security Framework. Because of the sensitivities inherent in electoral security programming, USAID should coordinate with other USG agencies, such as the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations and INL, as well as the Departments of Justice and Defense.[120]

The findings from the electoral assessment and, if needed, electoral security assessment, will provide the foundation for developing a strategy for electoral security programming. USAID's guide to best practices in electoral security provides examples of potential programming.[121] Election security requires planning and management by state actors, who all have unique roles to play in ensuring the safety and security of the entire electoral process, including voters, election materials and facilities, and election workers. Assistance to EMBs may include developing a thorough electoral security concept and plan, as these are complex and expensive endeavors. Careful analysis of triggers and hotspots at the national and subnational levels must be juxtaposed with potential responses, ranging from deployment of security officers to cyber security for electoral information. Naturally, a realistic assessment of the availability of resources and institutional capacity is integral to such plans.

Coordination and planning by state actors can include establishing a Joint Election Operations Center or other mechanism to enable coordinated planning across the range of state entities engaged in elections and security. These coordination mechanisms can facilitate the creation of scenario planning across government entities. USAID can also help prepare security officials for their role in the electoral process with training on electoral legislation, strategic planning, human rights, and de-escalation techniques.[122] The assessment may be useful in determining whether state-based security bodies are potentially perpetrators of electoral violence (such as intimidation or physical violence against opposition political parties or certain minority groups), and therefore not viable partners.

[119] See https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAEA453.pdf

[120] In particular, USAID may want to leverage the experience and resources of the Department of Justice's International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), which has led similar electoral security trainings in various countries.

[121] USAID, *Best Practices in Electoral Security: A Guide for Democracy and Governance Programming* (2013): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAEA302.pdf

[122] Legal restrictions exist on USAID activities with police and military. Consult your Resident Legal Advisor before engaging with security sector actors.

Programming with state stakeholders may include legislative assistance to ensure election crimes, penalties, enforcement authority, and use of force regulations are adequately addressed in the legal framework.

Another approach to prevent election-related violence is to mitigate or eliminate potential trigger events before they happen. For example, real or perceived bias or shortcomings within the process can be a catalyst for violence. While election administration assistance designed to improve the transparency and functioning of the EMB may help dispel such tension, especially volatile environments may warrant additional interventions to assure voters of the legitimacy of the process, such as: embedding international experts in EMBs; supporting assiduous monitoring efforts; and implementing visible and open communication channels including Frequently Asked Questions resources, feedback loops, and complaint resolution mechanisms. As discussed in the next section, building comprehensive electoral dispute resolution capacities, whether through the judiciary, EMBs, or special tribunals, is another means through which USAID can help mitigate the potential for violence.

Another approach to prevent election-related violence is to mitigate or eliminate potential trigger events before they happen. For example, real or perceived bias or shortcomings within the process can be a catalyst for violence.

Conflict prevention programming should also engage non-state stakeholders, including civil society, political parties, media, and traditional leaders in programming in mediation, civic education, community peacebuilding around election processes, and monitoring. Stakeholder forums at the national and community level can act to mediate and defuse tensions that may emerge during the electoral process. Mechanisms that bring together party activists from all parties, election officials, community leaders, policy and others have proved effective in resolving some conflicts before they escalate. Engaging political parties, media, and traditional leaders to denounce hate speech and other inciteful rhetoric and to sign codes of conduct outlining democratic, peaceful campaign conduct can be another means of dispelling triggers and holding each of the electoral stakeholders accountable.

Monitoring by the EMB or civil society can act to detect early warning signs, escalating tensions, or actual violence. Monitoring may involve documenting incidents of violence against party members, civil society activists, women or marginalized populations; potential early warning signs of violence; incidents of inflammatory language or hate speech in traditional and social media; and issues in the EDR process. Hate speech can trigger physical and other violence and forms of "hate crimes."[123] Methodologies aimed at collecting and analyzing online data can help identify perpetrators and victims, as well as flag potential early warning signs of violence.[124]

Because in many environments violence is one of the most significant barriers to the political and electoral participation of women and marginalized populations, security programming should consider and address violence against women in elections, as well as against other marginalized groups. This should involve applying a gender-responsive lens to all security work, taking into account how women are disproportionately or differently impacted by violence. These activities should be integrated into other electoral programming; however, in many environments, dedicated programming may be necessary to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach. This is particularly true if key government stakeholders lack the capacity or political will to engage directly.

Particularly in contexts where elections are expected to be closely contested or controversial, and/or where there is a history of post-election violence, electoral security programming should include robust post-election violence mitigation activities. Information obtained in the country and electoral context assessment will help evaluate the likelihood of different post-election scenarios, as well as the specific challenges to address in each scenario. Program designs should include contingency plans accordingly.

[123] Hate speech must be well defined, balancing the right to free speech with concepts of dignity, equality, and personal security.

[124] For example, see IFES/NDI's *Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool* (2019): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/violence_against_women_in_elections_online_a_social_media_analysis_tool.pdf

4.7 Electoral Security and Conflict Prevention: Illustrative Objectives and Programming Examples

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Defuse/mitigate interparty tensions and promote inter-party dialogue	Support for: • development and enforcement of political party conflict management mechanisms; • codes of conduct; and • inter-party dialogue mechanisms.
Improve election security planning and implementation	• Technical assistance to EMBs and security bodies in assessing electoral security risks and threats at different points in the electoral process, and designing strategies and plans to mitigate those risks. • Provision of electoral security training, with a human rights emphasis, where appropriate. • Support for the development of coordination bodies comprising government and non-state actors.
Strengthen accountability measures	• Strengthen legal enforcement by relevant state actors and entities. • Support public campaigns to build public support and norms regarding peaceful elections.
Mitigate potential triggers of electoral conflict.	• Promote greater transparency in election administration. • Training in conflict mediation skills for parties, CSOs, and pollworkers. • Support establishment of electoral stakeholder forums at the national and community levels. • Strengthen electoral justice and medication mechanisms. • Support for government institutions (where relevant) and civil society to monitor early warning signs and develop incident response capabilities. • Support for monitoring early warning signs and incidents of violence against women in elections. • Support for grassroots peacebuilding efforts.

4.8 ELECTORAL JUSTICE

The focus and scope of potential electoral justice programming will be informed by the country context and electoral environment assessment. As mentioned in Step 2 (Assess Electoral Context), programming focused on electoral justice is particularly important in contexts where elections are expected to be close, contested, and/or controversial. However, in situations where the electoral dispute resolution bodies are not perceived as independent, impartial arbiters of the law (such as in authoritarian environments where the EDR body is controlled or influenced by the ruling party), it is not advisable to provide support or capacity building to the EDR body. In these contexts, it would be more effective to provide support to demand side actors, such as civil society, citizen election observers, and the media. These actors can monitor EDR processes, expose bias in EDR processes and decisions, and/or advocate for reforms that adhere to international and regional commitments regarding rights of access to electoral justice. When deemed appropriate through the assessment, this demand-side support could be bolstered by engagement from the international community, including diplomatic engagement and/or as part of international election observation.

In contexts where the institution(s) responsible for EDR are broadly perceived to be independent, there are a much wider range of programmatic options available. In these contexts, USAID electoral assistance can focus at least in part on building the capacity and/or processes and systems of the EDR institution itself. The focus of support would depend on the key challenges identified in the assessment, which could include impartiality and fairness of EDR processes; legal framework and available EDR mechanisms; capacity and competence of EDR authorities; transparency of EDR processes; level of understanding among electoral stakeholders; and the extent to which there is equality before the law.

The legal framework may need to be revised to ensure EDR procedures are simple, clear, and timely. Support may be needed to build the capacity of the EDR body on the election law, case management, election technologies, and results-related disputes. In countries with sub-national EDR bodies, training and capacity building may need to focus on the sub-national level instead of or in addition to the national level. It may also be important to strengthen the commitment and capacity of the EDR body to make transparent decisions and to explain and disseminate them transparently.

In most countries, stakeholders with the legal right to file complaints and disputes lack the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively use EDR mechanisms. Political parties often need technical assistance to ensure they have the commitment, systems, and capacity in place to systematically collect evidence, follow legal procedures and deadlines, and defend their cases. Voters and election observers (in countries where citizen observers have the right to file complaints) may need education and training on their rights and on proper complaints filing procedures.

In some contexts, support for alternative dispute resolution mechanisms (ADR) may be required. Some ADR mechanisms, such as the use of mediation or arbitration as opposed to litigation, operate alongside formal EDR mechanisms and serve a complementary and supportive role. Others, such as ad hoc bodies, are created in times of political crisis or institutional failure to address credibility gaps in existing formal EDR mechanisms.

Support in other aspects of electoral assistance can help lay the foundation for preventing electoral disputes, including promoting inclusive, transparent electoral reform processes; bolstering the commitment and capacity of the EMB to administer elections in an effective and impartial manner; promoting equitable conditions for contestants, including in political finance; and supporting robust citizen election observation efforts.

4.8 Electoral Justice: Illustrative Objectives and Programming Examples

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Strengthen EDR legal framework and mechanisms	• Technical assistance on assessing and revising EDR legal framework, such as composition and operation of EDR body, timelines, and ease of procedures. • Where appropriate, support for developing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as the use of mediation, arbitration, or ad hoc bodies.
Bolster impartiality, fairness, and transparency of EDR processes	• Support to relevant EDR body(ies) in providing open data and information on EDR processes. • Support for monitoring EDR mechanisms and demand for improving electoral justice through citizen (and, if appropriate, international) election observation, civil society advocacy, and/or media programming. • Diplomatic engagement to encourage adherence to norms and standards on EDR.
Strengthen EDR capacity	• Capacity building for EDR leadership on handling of EDR process, results-related disputes, and other topics. • Technical assistance on setting up and/or improving case management processes and tools. • Capacity building for sub-national EDR bodies (where relevant) focused on legal framework, case management, and other topics.
Promote stakeholder awareness	• Support for awareness-raising efforts to ensure stakeholders—parties, voters, and observers where relevant—know how to use EDR mechanisms, including procedures and deadlines. Place particular emphasis on awareness raising among marginalized groups. • Training for political parties (including pollwatchers) on how to adequately document, file, and defend sound election-related cases with election commissions or the courts.

4.9 POST-ELECTION AND POLITICAL TRANSITIONS

The post-election period is the ideal time to reflect upon the electoral process and the impact of EPP programming, promote electoral reforms that address weaknesses identified in the process, and support democratic and peaceful political transitions.

The political window of opportunity for implementing electoral reforms is often brief, so post-election programming to promote electoral reforms should be planned well in advance of election day. Programming options for electoral reform are covered in more detail in the Legal Framework and Electoral Reforms section above. Credible citizen and international election observation reports contain detailed analysis and information on irregularities and inefficiencies that help inform the types of programming most needed in subsequent electoral cycles. More importantly, observation reports include specific, targeted recommendations that can be helpful in future program designs and diplomatic engagement to encourage electoral and democratic reforms.

Implementing partners should convey those conclusions and recommendations to their respective domestic counterparts as the final step of the post-electoral period, simultaneously moving into the pre-electoral phase of the next cycle. Local partners can start looking forward to the next electoral cycle by using these analyses and recommendations to advocate for reforms and improve electoral planning processes. International EOMs sometimes hold roundtable discussions and directly interact with the EMB, government, and/or the legislature on their recommendations for improving the electoral process. Citizen observers often engage in electoral reform advocacy and may monitor the extent to which observation recommendations are implemented. The momentum from such activities can help support a broader debate on reforms and planning issues, which in turn feeds directly into legal framework and election management programming in the next election cycle.

Evaluating EPP Support: In addition to a critical review of the concluded electoral process, it is important to evaluate the impact of EPP support in the post-electoral period, extracting best practices, lessons learned, and pockets of political will for, or resistance to, democratic principles. Such a post-electoral assessment will also evaluate local capacity gains, documenting milestones in their road to self-sustainability. Finally, consistent with the electoral cycle approach to elections and electoral assistance, the information obtained from the post-election analyses, reports, and evaluations should be used to update the electoral assessment. In turn, this will feed into a new strategy for upcoming elections, thereby helping future program designs be responsive to existing needs, building upon the gains of past programming and empowering champions of reform.

Bolstering Post-election Transitions: If electoral outcomes result in a transition of power to a democratic or potentially democratic government, post-election transition programming should be considered far in advance of the actual election day to facilitate a smooth and peaceful transition of power. This can include support, training, and technical assistance to the executive, legislature, and political parties, as well as support to civil society for monitoring the fulfillment of campaign promises and/or advocating for reforms. For example, new member orientation and training can be incorporated into parliamentary development programs for periods immediately following elections. Public administration programming should include the development of standard operating procedures and protocols that help preserve institutional memory and facilitate a smooth transition between administrations. Executive transition programs can focus on the mechanics of democratic transfers of power between administrations, the creation of legal frameworks for effective transitions, and prioritization of legislative or administrative reforms.

4.9 Post-election and Political Transitions: Illustrative Objectives and Programming Examples

Illustrative Objectives	Programming Examples
Promote democratic electoral reforms	See Programming Examples in Section 1: Legal Framework and Electoral Reform above
Bolster democratic and peaceful political transitions	• Orientation and training for newly-elected officials and legislators. • Executive transition programming that facilitates a smooth transition between administrations. • Support for immediate strategic and crisis communication capability of the new government. • Support to a potential ongoing peace process.
Promote accountability in political transitions	• Civil society monitoring of and advocating for fulfillment of campaign promises, democratic reforms, and/or ongoing peace processes.

PHOTO: JOHAN ORDONEZ/AFP, GUATEMALA, 2011

CONCLUSION

Because elections are complex, high-stakes political processes, effective programming must take a holistic view of elections as a sequence of interrelated activities, culminating in citizens collectively and freely choosing their representatives from a competitive selection of contestants. International assistance may not be necessary, or appropriate, for every aspect of the electoral cycle, and funding is often not sufficient to provide assistance to most or all parts of the electoral process. Thus, it is crucial to assess the strengths, opportunities, challenges, and areas of highest risk to prioritize where electoral assistance can have the greatest impact.

Designing an effective electoral assistance strategy also depends on a deep understanding of how the country context influences electoral dynamics. While it is reasonably evident how security impacts elections, program design should also take into account more subtle factors, such as how a country's history, culture, education, demographics, and economic drivers influence the motivations and incentives of key electoral stakeholders. In addition, the extent to which the host government demonstrates a commitment to holding credible elections is a key determining factor in the type of electoral strategy and program options that are appropriate for each context.

For USAID, providing electoral support is both a technical decision and one that should take into account broader USG policy priorities. For example, decisions on when and how to support holding elections in a post-conflict environment present moral and ethical dilemmas, as they can potentially either trigger violence or solidify peace. Decisions on whether and, if so, what type of electoral support is appropriate in politically restrictive environments require thinking politically and strategically to ensure that USAID is not helping to legitimize fraudulent elections. The role of the USAID officer during the interagency policy discussions on those hard questions is as important as maintaining good relations with local electoral stakeholders and designing and overseeing election programs.

Cutting across all policy and programming options is USAID's commitment to building local capacity and advancing a country on its journey to self-reliance in the realm of democratic governance. Conducting credible elections is a significant step in this journey.

ANNEXES

PHOTO: SONNY TUMBELAKA/AFP, INDONESIA, 2015

ANNEX 1: INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLES AND OBLIGATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

The two most fundamental election-related human rights obligations are contained in Article 21 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and Article 25 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Most countries where USAID works are signatories to these two instruments, and thus have committed themselves to upholding the principles underlying genuine electoral processes. These documents enshrine the following core concepts:

- "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government;"[125]
- all citizens have the right to "take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;"[126] and
- the will of the people "shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures"[127] without discrimination and unreasonable restrictions.

Election Process-related Obligations[128]

- **Universal suffrage:** States must guarantee that the broadest pool of voters possible be able to vote, without discrimination or unreasonable restrictions. This also includes making accommodations for people with disabilities and special needs.
- **Equal suffrage:** Every voter should be granted a vote of equal value to that of other voters. This includes applying the principle of "one person, one vote" such that constituency boundaries are drawn in a manner that provides voters with roughly equal representation in legislatures.
- **Periodic elections:** Elections must take place at reasonable intervals, which should not be so long that the authority of the government is no longer representative of the will of the voters.
- **Secret ballot:** Voters should be able to cast their ballot in secret without fear of intimidation. Ballots should not be able to be linked with individual voters.
- **Prevention of corruption:** States should take effective action to prevent corruption in elections, including transparency in procurement, decision making, and recruitment of officials, as well as facilitating public participation (including election observation) to deter corruption. This also relates to regulating campaign and political finance and to preventing the abuse of public (state) resources, which is often used by incumbents to tilt electoral playing fields and to entrench their power.

Election Process-related Rights and Freedoms

- **Right and opportunity to participate in public affairs:** This includes the right and opportunity to vote, as well as the right and opportunity to be elected and to participate in election administration without unreasonable restrictions and free from discrimination. This also applies to citizen (domestic) election observers, which should have the right to observe all aspects of their country's electoral process.
- **Freedom of association:** The freedom to associate allows for the formation and operation of political parties, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, and a wide array of citizens' associations.
- **Freedom of assembly:** The freedom of peaceful assembly ensures that political parties and civil society can conduct meaningful activities, such as rallies, debates, and conventions, and that citizens can participate freely in those assemblies.
- **Freedom of movement:** Inclusive, transparent, and fair elections depend on the ability to move about freely whether to conduct campaigns, administer elections, exercise the right to vote, or observe the electoral process.

[125] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 21
[126] ICCPR, Art. 25
[127] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 21
[128] This annex draws primarily on *Election Obligations and Standards: A Carter Center Assessment Manual* (2014), as well as *NDI's Promoting Legal Frameworks for Democratic Elections* (2008) and *International IDEA's International Obligations: Guidelines for Legal Frameworks* (2014).

- **Freedom of opinion and expression:** This includes the freedom to communicate one's political philosophy as a candidate, political party, or constituent as well as citizens' freedom to vote their conscience. Free expression is typically restricted in closed and electoral autocracies, as journalists, candidates, and even voters may face repercussions for speaking out against the government. These rights are facilitated by having an independent, free, and pluralistic media. Independence means they are free from censorship and pressure; pluralistic means that a variety of opinions are represented, whether in a single public outlet airing multiple voices, or via a diversified media marketplace.
- **Transparency and access to information:** A critical means of ensuring electoral transparency and accountability is protecting everyone's right to seek and receive information. With the exception of a limited set of objective, well-grounded restrictions (such as narrow, strongly-justified restrictions related to privacy), decisions and data related to elections should be provided in an open, transparent manner so that stakeholders can independently verify whether the process is conducted honestly and accurately, and—ultimately—whether voters can determine whether the elections reflect their will.
- **Right to security of the person:** This includes protection from arbitrary arrest and detention, as well as protection from interference, coercion, or intimidation. Protection of this right requires that security bodies and law enforcement act in a neutral manner during electoral processes.
- **Right to effective remedy and to a fair and transparent hearing:** An effective system for adjudicating electoral complaints, including challenges to results, should be in place. This ensures that redress is handled in a timely, impartial manner, and that—when granted—remedies are enforced. Everyone has a right to a fair, expeditious, and public hearing by a competent, impartial, and independent tribunal. In more restrictive environments, the body responsible for adjudicating complaints and disputes may be formally or informally under the influence of the executive and/or ruling party.
- **Equality of women and men, freedom from discrimination, and equality before the law:** Women should have equal rights to men in their participation as voters, candidates, party activists, observers, election officials, and other electoral roles. Everyone should be free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, language, religion, sex, political or other opinion, property, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, birth, or other status. States should not only refrain from discrimination, but they should also take proactive measures to prevent discrimination. In some cases, states should take temporary special measures to achieve equality for women and/or to advance ethnic minorities or groups that have suffered past discrimination. Election data should be disaggregated by gender and, when applicable, by minority group.

ANNEX 2: ASSESSMENT REPORT TEMPLATE

The following is a suggested outline for the assessment report that is produced through using the *Electoral Assessment Framework*. The outline may be adapted depending on the particular focus and purpose of the assessment.

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction and Contextual Information
   A. Purpose and Methodology
   B. Contextual Information: Summarize any broader country context information from Step 1 (Country Context) that is crucial to framing the key assessment findings and recommendations.
3. Key Assessment Findings
   A. *Problems and Threats to Electoral Integrity:* Summarize the highest priority problems and threats to electoral integrity identified in Step 1 (Country Context) and Step 2 (Electoral Context). The "Identify Key Risks and Vulnerabilities" section of Step 3.1 helps narrow these down.
   B. *Windows of Opportunity:* Summarize the windows of opportunity identified in Step 1 (Country Context) and Step 2 (Electoral Context). The "Identify Windows of Opportunity and Potential Areas for Positive Reform" section of Step 3.1 helps narrow these down.
   C. *Other Key Considerations:* Summarize relevant findings related to timing, resources, interagency priorities, and donor mapping from Steps 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4.
4. Assessment Recommendations
   A. Potential EPP Objectives: Summarize recommendations from "Defining Objectives" section of Step 3.5.
   B. Key Assumptions and Alternative Scenario Considerations: From "Scenario Planning" section of Step 3.5.
   C. Recommended Priority Program Areas: Summarize findings from Step 4.
5. Appendices: List of data sources and interview list

ANNEX 3: REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

General EPT and Program Design Resources

- USAID, *User's Guide to Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Programming* (2019): https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1866/users-guide-democracy-human-rights-and-governance-programming
- USAID, *Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Strategic Assessment Framework* (2014): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Master_SAF_FINAL%20Fully%20Edited%209-28-15.pdf
- USAID, *Managing Assistance in Support of Political and Electoral Processes* (2000): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNACR213.pdf
- IFES, *Assessing Electoral Fraud in New Democracies: A Strategic Approach* (2011): https://pages.usaid.gov/system/files/ifes_electoral_fraud.pdf
- IFES, *Assessing Electoral Fraud in New Democracies: Refining the Vocabulary* (2012): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/assessing_electoral_fraud_series_vickery_shein_0.pdf
- Creative Associates, *Electoral Malpractice Primer: Insights and Priorities* (2012): http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/531723839/52093951/Creative-Electoral-Integrity-Framework-Project.pdf
- International IDEA, *Electoral Risk Management Tool* (2013): https://www.idea.int/data-tools/tools/electoral-risk-management-tool
- USAID, *ADS Chapter 201: Program Cycle Operational Policy* (Revised in 2020), particularly Section 3.4 on Activity Design and Implementation: https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/201
- USAID, *Project Design Guidance* (2011): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACS686.pdf
- USAID, *Thinking and Working Politically through Applied Political Economy Analysis* (2018): https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/pea_guide_final.pdf
- Kedzia, Kasia, "Theory of Change: It's Easier Than You Think," *Learning Lab*, March 13, 2018: https://usaidlearninglab.org/lab-notes/theory-change-it%E2%80%99s-easier-you-think
- USAID, *Evaluation Policy* (Updated 2016): https://www.usaid.gov/evaluation/policy
- USAID, *Local Capacity Development, Suggested Approaches, An Additional Help Document for ADS 201*: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2496/Local_Capacity_Development_Suggest_Approaches_1.pdf

Resources on Electoral Legal Frameworks and Electoral Reform

- The Carter Center, *Election Obligations and Standards: A Carter Center Assessment Manual* (2014): https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/democracy/cc-OES-handbook-10172014.pdf
- NDI, *Promoting Legal Frameworks for Democratic Elections* (2008): https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/2404_ww_elect_legalframeworks_093008.pdf
- International IDEA, *International Obligations for Elections: Guidelines for Legal Frameworks* (2014: https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/international-obligations-for-elections.pdf
- OSCE/ODIHR, *Guidelines for Reviewing a Legal Framework for Elections: 2nd Edition* (2013): https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/104573?download=true
- IFES, *The Hierarchy of Laws: Understanding and Implementing the Legal Frameworks that Govern Elections* (2016): https://ifes.org/sites/default/files/2016_ifes_hierarchy_of_laws.pdf
- International IDEA, *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook* (2008): https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/electoral-system-design-the-new-international-idea-handbook.pdf
- EU, *Guide for Citizen Observers on Electoral Reform* (2018): https://media4democracy.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Guide-for-Citizen-Observers-on-Electoral-reform.pdf

Resources on Election Management

- International IDEA, *Electoral Management Design: Revised Edition* (2014): https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/electoral-management-design-revised-edition?lang=en

- IFES, *Civil and Voter Registries: Lessons Learned from Global Experience* (2011): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/civil_and_voter_registries_final_0.pdf
- IFES, *Gender Equality and Election Management Bodies: A Best Practices Guide* (2014): https://www.ifes.org/publications/gender-equality-election-management-bodies-best-practices-guide
- UNDP and UN Women, *Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation* (2015): https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/7/inclusive-electoral-processes
- IFES and NDI, *Implementing and Overseeing Electronic Voting and Counting Technologies* (2013): Interactive version here: http://www.evotingguide.com/, full manual here: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Implementing_and_Overseeing_Electronic_Voting_and_Counting_Technologies.pdf
- IFES, *Electronic Voting and Counting Technologies: A Guide to Conducting Feasibility Studies* (2011): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/electronic_voting_and_counting_tech_goldsmith_0.pdf
- International IDEA, *Introducing Electronic Voting: Essential Considerations* (2011): http://www.eods.eu/library/IDEA.Introducing-Electronic-Voting-Essential-Considerations.pdf
- International IDEA, *Introducing Biometric Technology in Elections* (2017): https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/introducing-biometric-technology-in-elections-reissue.pdf
- IFES, *Out of Country Voting: A Brief Overview* (2012): https://www.ifes.org/publications/out-country-voting-brief-overview
- IFES, *Cyber security in Elections: Developing a Holistic Exposure and Adaptation Testing Process (HEAT) for Election Management Bodies* (2018): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2018_heat_cybersecurity_in_elections.pdf
- IFES, *Countering Hate Speech in Elections: Strategies for Electoral Management Bodies* (2018): https://www.ifes.org/publications/countering-hate-speech-elections-strategies-electoral-management-bodies
- NDI, *Open Election Data Initiative: Unleashing the Potential of Election Data to Promote Accountability* (2015): https://www.openelectiondata.net/en/
- IFES, *Abuse of State Resources Research and Assessment Framework Guidelines for the Democracy and Governance Community of Practice* (2018): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/abuse_of_state_resources_research_and_assessment_framework_guidelines_for_the_democracy_and_governance_community_of_practice.pdf

Resources on Political Party Assistance

- USAID, *ADS 200-203: USAID Political Party Assistance Policy* (2003): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/200maz.pdf
- USAID, *Political Party Development Assistance* (1999): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNACE500.pdf
- NDI, *Context Analysis Tool* (2014): https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_ContextAnalysisTool_proof_f.pdf
- NDI, *Political Party Programming Guide* (2014): https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Political_Party_Programming_Guide.pdf
- DFID, *Guide to Working with Parliaments and Political Parties for Sustainable Development* (2018): https://gpg-wp-media.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/22152333/FINAL-Guide-to-working-with-Parliaments-and-Political-Parties-for-Sustainable-Development-Feb-2018.pdf
- International IDEA, *The Challenges of Political Party Programming: International Assistance to Parties and Parliaments* (2011): https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/challenges-political-programming-international-assistance-parties-and
- University of Pittsburgh, *Evaluation Approaches for Political Party Assistance: Methodologies and Tools* (2011): http://www.pitt.edu/~smorgens/papers/USAID%20Evaluation%20Methodologies.pdf
- Carnegie Endowment and NDI, *Breaking the Cycle of Gender Exclusion in Political Party Development* (2020): https://carnegieendowment.org/files/202003-BrechenmacherHubbard_GenderInclusion.pdf
- USAID, *Gender Integration in DRG Programming Toolkit,* "Module 6: Integrating Gender into Political Party Programming" (2016): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2496/Gender%20Toolkit.pdf

- UNDP and NDI, *Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties* (2012): https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/empower-women-political-parties.html
- NDI, *Win with Women Political Party Assessment Toolkit* (2019): https://www.ndi.org/publications/2019-win-women-assessment-toolkit
- OSCE/ODIHR, *Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties* (2014): https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/f/120877.pdf
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- IRI, *Political Parties in the Digital Age: A Comparative Review of Digital Technology in Campaigns Around the World* (2020): https://cepps.org/technical-leadership/gept-political-parties-in-the-digital-age/
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- NDI, *Reflect, Reform, Reengage: A Blueprint for 21st Century Political Parties* (2017): https://www.ndi.org/publications/reflect-reform-reengage-blueprint-21st-century-parties
- Lachapelle, Guy and Maarek, Philippe J., *Political Parties in the Digital Age: The Impact of New Technologies in Politics* (2015): https://www.worldcat.org/title/political-parties-in-the-digital-age/oclc/913088033
- NDI, *Developing Party Policies* (2013): https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/FINAL-Policy-Development-PDF-2.pdf
- Svåsand, Lars, *International Party Assistance—What Do We Know About the Effects* (2014): https://www.oecd.org/derec/sweden/International-party-assistance.pdf

Resources on Election Observation

- *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* (2005): https://electionstandards.cartercenter.org/at-work/collaborative-efforts-towards-standards/ and https://www.ndi.org/DoP
- *Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations* (2012): https://gndem.org/declaration-of-global-principles/
- USAID, *Assessing and Verifying Election Results: A Decision-Maker's Guide to Parallel Vote Tabulation and Other Tools* (2015): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00KGWR.pdf
- OSCE/ODIHR, *Handbook on Election Observation: 6th Edition* (2010): https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/68439
- NDI, *Handbook on How Domestic Organizations Monitor Elections: An A to Z Guide* (1995): https://www.ndi.org/publications/ndi-handbook-how-domestic-organizations-monitor-elections-z-guide
- NDI and WAEON, *Systematic Methods for Advancing Election Observation* (2013): https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Systematic%20Methods%20for%20Advancing%20Election%20Observation_WAEON_EN.pdf
- The Carter Center, *Handbook on Observing Electronic Voting* (2012): https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/democracy/des/Carter-Center-E_voting-Handbook.pdf
- IFES and NDI, *Implementing and Overseeing Electronic Voting and Counting Technologies* (2013): Interactive version here: http://www.evotingguide.com/, full manual here: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Implementing_and_Overseeing_Electronic_Voting_and_Counting_Technologies.pdf
- IFES, *Election Access Observation Toolkit* (2018): https://www.ifes.org/publications/election-access-observation-toolkit
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- NDI, *Disinformation and Electoral Integrity: A Guidance Document* (2018): https://www.ndi.org/publications/disinformation-and-electoral-integrity-guidance-document-ndi-elections-programs

Resources on Media Ecosystem in Elections

- International IDEA, *Media Assistance and Elections: Towards an Integrated Approach* (2015): https://www.idea.int/es/publications/catalogue/media-assistance-and-elections-toward-integrated-approach
- UNDP, *Media and Elections: A Guide for Electoral Practitioners* (2014): http://www.eods.eu/library/UNDP-Media_and_Elections_LR.pdf
- USAID, *Gender Integration in DRG Programming Toolkit*, "Module 10: Integrating Gender into Media and ICT Programming" (2016): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2496/Gender%20Toolkit.pdf
- IFES, *Social Media, Disinformation and Election Integrity* (2019): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_working_paper_social_media_disinformation_and_electoral_integrity_august_2019_0.pdf
- IFES, *Disinformation Campaigns and Hate Speech: Exploring the Relationship and Programming Interventions* (2019): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2019_ifes_disinformation_campaigns_and_hate_speech_briefing_paper.pdf
- NDI, *Organizing and Producing Debates: An International Guide* (2014): https://www.ndi.org/debate_organizers_guide

Resources on Electoral Security and Conflict Prevention

- USAID, *Electoral Security Framework* (2010): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAEA453.pdf
- USAID, *Best Practices in Electoral Security* (2013): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAEA302.pdf
- US Department of State, *Transition Elections and Political Processes in Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations: Lessons Learned* (2007): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB804.pdf
- USAID, *Conflict Assessment Framework* (2012): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnady739.pdf
- USG Interagency Reconstruction and Stabilization Policy Coordinating Committee, *Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework* (2008): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB943.pdf
- International IDEA, *The Prevention and Mitigation of Election-related Violence: An Action Guide* (2018): https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/prevention-and-mitigation-election-related-violence-action-guide
- UNDP, *Elections and Conflict Prevention: A Guide to Analysis, Planning, and Programming* (2017): https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral_systemsandprocesses/elections-and-conflict-prevention-guide.html
- USAID, *Theories of Democratic Change Phase III: Transitions from Conflict* (2019): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TKJC.pdf
- IFES, *Elections Worth Dying For?: A Selection of Case Studies from Africa* (2014): https://www.ifes.org/publications/new-book-elections-worth-dying-selection-case-studies-africa
- NDI, *Monitoring and Mitigating Electoral Violence through Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observation* (2014): https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Monitoring-and-Mitigating-Electoral-Conflict.pdf
- IFES, *Monitoring Violence Against Women in Elections: A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring, and Response* (2017): https://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections
- NDI, *Votes without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections* (2016): https://www.ndi.org/votes-without-violence-guide
- IFES and NDI, *Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool* (2019): https://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections-online-social-media-analysis-tool

Resources on Electoral Justice

- International IDEA, *Electoral Justice: The International IDEA Handbook* (2010): https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/electoral-justice-international-idea-handbook
- IFES, Elections on Trial: *The Effective Management of Election Disputes and Violations* (2018): https://www.ifes.org/publications/elections-trial-effective-management-election-disputes-and-violations
- IFES, *Guidelines for Understanding, Adjudicating and Resolving Disputes in Elections (GUARDE)* (2011): https://www.

ifes.org/sites/default/files/guarde_final_publication_0.pdf

- OSCE/ODIHR, *Handbook for the Observation of Election Dispute Resolution* (2019): https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/429566?download=true
- IFES, *When Are Elections Good Enough? Validating or Annulling Election Results* (2018): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2018_ifes_when_are_elections_good_enough_final.pdf

Resources on Post-election and Political Transitions

- OSCE/ODIHR, *Handbook on the Follow-up of Electoral Recommendations* (2016): https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/244941?download=true
- EU, *Beyond Election Day: Best Practices for Follow-up to EU Observation Missions* (2017): https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eom_brochure_2017.pdf
- US Department of State, *Transition Elections and Political Processes in Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations: Lessons Learned* (2007): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB804.pdf

Resources on EPP Inclusion: Gender, Persons with Disabilities, and Youth

Please note: The below resources are broader inclusion-focused DRG and EPP resources. Inclusion-focused resources on specific EPP program areas are listed in the relevant program areas above.

- USAID, *Suggested Approaches for Integrating Inclusive Development Across the Program Cycle and in Mission Operations* (2019): https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/additional_help_for_ads_201_inclusive_development_180726_final_r.pdf
- International IDEA, *Overcoming Political Exclusion: Strategies for Marginalized Groups to Successfully Engage in Political Decision-making* (2013): https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/overcoming-political-exclusion-strategies-marginalized-groups
- USAID, *Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy* (2012): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACT200.pdf
- USAID, *Gender Integration in DRG Programming Toolkit* (2016): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2496/Gender%20Toolkit.pdf
- USAID, *Women in Power Summary Report* (2016): https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2496/USAID-WiP%20summary%20report_FINAL.pdf
- NDI, *Democracy and the Challenge of Change: A Guide to Increasing Women's Political Participation* (2010): https://www.ndi.org/Democracy_and_the_Challenge_of_Change
- USAID, *LGBT Vision for Action: Promoting and Supporting the Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals* (2013): https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PBAAA689.pdf
- IFES and NDI, *Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes* (2014): https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/equal_access_how_to_include_persons_with_disabilities_in_elections_and_political_processes_2.pdf
- USAID, *Youth and DRG Toolkit* (2019): https://www.youthpower.org/youth-inclusion-drg-toolkit