

Electoral Transparency and Accountability

Free and fair elections are a cornerstone of all forms of democracy. In many representative democracies, elections are practically the only means whereby citizens/voters can participate and hold the political parties, candidates and the incumbent governments accountable for their promises and performance. Given that there are generally no legal or constitutional grounds for monitoring or requiring that politicians meet electoral promises, elections are often the only opportunity that citizens have to reward or punish candidates on the basis of their integrity and performance. Around the world, however, and especially in transitional and nascent democracies, free, fair and peaceful elections are far from the norm. Lack of electoral transparency and accountability, the use of money or violence to influence or intimidate voters and the criminalization of politics are critical problems in many parts of the world. While participatory governance promotes many forms of citizen participation beyond voting, free and fair elections are nevertheless a fundamental element of democracy and good governance. The tools in this category are aimed at fostering electoral and political accountability while also seeking to empower voters to effectively participate in the electoral process and enable them make informed choices.

Tools under the Electoral Transparency and Accountability category

- **Pre-Election Voter Awareness Campaigns** are aimed at making people aware of: the importance of their participation in electoral processes either as voters or candidates; different modes of participation; the procedure to become eligible for voting and to actually cast their vote; and ways to assess the poll-worthiness of a candidate.
- **Platform Mounting** means creating a platform for dialogue during the run-up to the elections by bringing together representatives of all the electoral stakeholders such as the Election Commission, registered political parties and civil society organizations to share information, foster good working relations, consult each another on legislative change and resolve administrative matters that may affect parties and other stakeholders while ensuring a democratically credible electoral process.
- **Candidate debates** are a key component of a political campaign because they: provide voters with an opportunity to hear the candidates discuss important issues and policy preferences; illustrate the differences between various candidates and their respective parties on various issues of public

concern; and, if open to public participation, help candidates understand what is important to their constituents.

- **Election Monitoring** is intended to strengthen the electoral process by providing an independent assessment of election preparations, capabilities, and fairness, thereby helping to strengthen democratic processes and institutions and to ensure that the conduct of elections meets international standards, are peaceful, and have credible results.
- **Accountability for Electoral Promises** involves various means that CSOs can deploy for effectively demanding the fulfillment of electoral promises - thus enhancing the political credibility - of individual politicians and the democratic system more generally.
- **Crinis** is a tool to measure the transparency of political financing activity. The purpose of Crinis is two-fold. Firstly, it assesses the legal framework and practices with regards to transparency of political finances in a given country. Secondly, based on these results, it helps civil society to develop actions to advocate for reforms to improve the law and the practice.

Benefits

- Reduces the scope for unfair or corrupt electoral practices.
- Enhances voters' awareness about the electoral process, helps voters make informed choices and lays the foundation for increased citizen participation in governance over the long-term.
- Helps convey the felt needs of constituencies and communities to political parties and candidates, thereby contributing to better-informed platforms and plans.
- Contributes to enhanced political transparency, accountability, credibility and public trust in governance.
- Helps to empower marginalized and disenfranchised population groups.
- Can serve to increase voter turn-out (especially among women and other politically marginalized groups).
- Encourages persons with integrity, and who are concerned with public causes, to participate as candidates.
- Promotes a culture of internal democracy amongst political parties.

Challenges and lessons

- The success and credibility of independent electoral interventions is directly proportional to the extent of support and cooperation of electoral authorities

and other concerned state agencies and the quality of information shared by them.

- Effective interventions usually require a high level of public awareness-raising, citizen education and mobilization.
- In order to have institutional and sustainable effects, efforts to foster electoral transparency and accountability need to be conceived as a continuous activity in a long term perspective. In this regard, post-election follow-up efforts which are timely and action-oriented are a must. Otherwise, people may question the credibility and usefulness of such interventions.
- Since levels of political interest and involvement tend to peak during elections and wane when elections are over, it is important to ensure a sustained process of communication and engagement with citizens/voters.
- Voter preferences are determined by multiple factors (such as the popularity of a given political party, money-driven canvassing by candidates, influential persons /leaders in the family/community, the ethnic identity of the candidates, etc.) These factors can hinder the impact of issue-based education and advocacy efforts. Therefore, it can be important to ensure that such campaigns are well-targeted and sustained over time.
- Self-serving and unscrupulous political elements may feel threatened by CSO interventions for electoral transparency and accountability, and there is a risk that they may resort to coercive or violent means. Strategies for dealing with such situations may include: reporting coercive behavior or threats to electoral authorities, the press or the police.

Key resources

ACE Electoral Knowledge Network

<http://aceproject.org/about-en>

- ☞ The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network is an online knowledge facility that provides comprehensive and authoritative information on elections, promotes credible and effective electoral processes by offering knowledge, capacity development and electoral assistance services. It also provides users with comparative data and news related to elections and it acts as a forum for election practitioners to meet and share knowledge and experiences

Accountable Democracy

<http://sites.google.com/site/democraticf8/about>

- ☞ Accountable democracy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan initiative to enhance political accountability in parliamentary democracies. It has been developed from a number of innovative accountability strategies, given current democratic discontent and systemic flaws in existing accountability mechanisms.

Bratton, M & Logan, C. *Voters but not yet citizens: The weak demand for vertical accountability in Africa's unclaimed democracies*. AFROBAROMETER Working Paper No. 63, 2006

<http://www.afrobarometer.org/papers/AfropaperNo63a.pdf>

- ☞ This paper based on a sample survey of 18 African countries attempts to explain the Africans' understandings of political accountability and their responsibility for securing it.

EISA, South Africa

<http://www.eisa.org.za/>

- ☞ EISA is a not for profit organization that strives for excellence in the promotion of credible elections, participatory democracy, human rights culture, and the strengthening of governance institutions for the consolidation of democracy in Africa. Their website is a powerhouse for resources and useful links

Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS)

<http://www.eris.org.uk/>

- ☞ Electoral Reform International Services is a company limited by guarantee and a leading provider of specialist electoral and democratization assistance. ERIS provides support to emerging democracies for the further consolidation of democracy and good governance around the

world, with a particular emphasis on the conduct of credible and transparent elections.

International IDEA

<http://www.idea.int/about/>

☞ The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. International IDEA's mission is to support sustainable democratic change by providing comparative knowledge, and assisting in democratic reform, and influencing policies and politics.

Maravall, J.M. *Surviving Accountability*. European University Institute, Jean Monnet Chair Paper RSC No 97/46 (1997)

http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/WP-Texts/JM97_46.html

☞ The main point of this paper is to discuss some of the ways politicians try to survive in office and to increase their margin of manoeuvre to design and implement policies.

Moneyandpolitics.net: International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)

<http://www.moneyandpolitics.net/add/index.php>

☞ MoneyandPolitics.net, an initiative of IFES, provides information on political finance and public ethics initiatives around the world and offers opportunities for experts to contribute their knowledge and share best practices in IFES' efforts to set global standards in transparency and accountability. It also contains several links other key resources.

National Democratic Institute

<http://www.ndi.org/node/14262>

☞ NDI and its local partners work to promote openness and accountability in government by building political and civic organizations, safeguarding elections, and promoting citizen participation. Independent election monitoring and candidate debates are two key components of NDI's election related activities.

Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)

http://www.nimd.org/page/about_nimd

☞ Currently working with more than 150 political parties from 17 programme countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy is a democracy assistance organization of political parties in The Netherlands for political parties in young democracies.

Project Vote Smart, USA

http://www.votesmart.org/npat_about.php

- ☞ Project Vote Smart is a U.S. based non-partisan, non-profit organization engaged in educating voters on various aspects of electoral process and particularly on generating information on candidates' poll antecedents and their positions on various topical issues.

Transparency International & the Carter Centre (2007): *The CRINIS Project: Money in Politics – Everyone's Concern*

http://www.transparency.org/regional_pages/americas/crinis (full report - English)

http://www.cartercenter.org/documents/folleto_ingles_final.pdf (English- flier)

http://www.cartercenter.org/documents/crinis_fullrpt_spanish.pdf (report-Spanish)

- ☞ This 111 page report provides a comprehensive description of the objectives, methodology and country specific findings of The Crinis Project that was jointly pioneered by the Transparency International and the Carter Center in eight Latin American countries viz. Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Peru.

The [Carter Center](#) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that helps alleviate human suffering in over 65 countries by working in the areas of conflict resolution, human rights, economic opportunity and disease prevention. [Transparency International \(TI\)](#) is the global civil society organization leading the fight against corruption. Through approximately 90 national chapters and its international secretariat in Berlin, Germany, TI raises awareness about the harmful effects of corruption.

United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD)

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/ead/>

- ☞ The main role of UNEAD is to evaluate all requests for electoral assistance, to work cooperatively with UN and non-UN system actors in the design and implementation of electoral assistance project activities, to develop operational strategies for electoral components of peace-keeping operations, to facilitate the international observation of elections, and to serve as the UN's institutional memory in the electoral field

World Movement for Democracy

<http://www.wmd.org/>

- ☞ The World Movement for Democracy is a global network of democrats including activists, practitioners, academics, policy makers, and donors, who have come together to cooperate in the promotion of democracy.

