

# REVIEW OF THE 2024 SUPER-CYCLE YEAR OF ELECTIONS

Trends, Challenges and Opportunities



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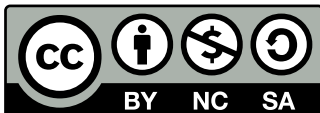
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# PREFACE

Ever since the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) was founded three decades ago, elections have been a central part of our work and identity. But never have elections globally faced such a complex and daunting set of challenges as today—from disinformation campaigns to disruption from extreme climate events to outright denial of electoral results, to name just a few.

The cumulative impact of all these challenges to elections cannot be overstated. Credible, high-integrity elections play a foundational role in democracy, not least because they offer the best opportunity to stem the tide of democratic deterioration. In case after case, from Guatemala to Poland to Zambia, it is through elections that democratic forces have changed the trajectory of receding democracies. Moreover, elections are one of the most visible and public events in democratic life; if people lose trust in elections, it is very hard to retain or regain their trust in other aspects of democracy. Democracy is much more than elections, but there can be no democracy without elections.

With this in mind, and as countries with half the world's population went to the polls in 2024, International IDEA redoubled its focus on elections as pillars of democracy. Through this global campaign last year, we helped develop the capacity of election authorities to manage risk, convened dialogues to exchange lessons learned and practices among our Member States, leveraged our institutional voice through media and advocacy, and generated and disseminated knowledge about the trends we were seeing and the lessons to be drawn.

This report is a culminating piece of that effort to ensure that lessons from the super cycle are both learned and used. As a multimethod and multidisciplinary analysis, it draws on knowledge from practitioners and academics alike, embodying the 'think and do' nature of our Institute. It is the product of collaboration with peers in the Electoral Integrity Project, reflecting the

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**Democracy is much more than elections, but there can be no democracy without elections.**

importance of partnerships in addressing the myriad overlapping challenges to electoral integrity. And in addition to providing a definitive summary of key themes and trends emerging from the 'Year of Elections', it offers policy recommendations for election management bodies and other authorities to strengthen elections for an uncertain future. In particular, the report highlights the importance of contextual conditions for elections, inter-agency and whole-of-society coordination, and the use of foresight to imagine possibilities and plan accordingly.

Building on International IDEA's strong record of leadership in defining and developing the field of electoral assistance, I am confident that this report will become a key reference for the next generation of election managers, policymakers and stakeholders seeking to strengthen electoral integrity worldwide.

Dr Kevin Casas-Zamora  
Secretary-General, International IDEA

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 super-cycle year of elections sparked unprecedented interest in electoral processes. Indeed, the sheer number of elections and voters was impressive. An estimated 1.6 billion cast ballots in 74 national elections throughout the world. The year saw many well-run elections worldwide, bringing meaningful political change for many citizens. These elections were moments of citizen empowerment—opportunities for voters to express themselves, removing their representatives from office or renewing their mandates for another electoral cycle. However, there were also cases of electoral backsliding, where the quality of elections was much lower than in previous years.

Data from the Electoral Integrity Project shows that, across countries, the greatest problems in the 2024 elections were related to the media and the role of money in elections. These problems are not entirely new. The media landscape should be free, open and fair so that citizens can make informed choices at the ballot box. However, there have always been biases in news and media coverage. Likewise, regulating campaigns so that the candidates and parties with the greatest financial resources do not have a significant advantage has been a long-term challenge.

The interest in the super-cycle year marked a profound and growing concern—a sense that we are at a historical juncture where we must revisit and reassess the strength of our democratic culture and institutions. Many of the challenges that emerged in this super cycle will shape the global democratic landscape in 2025 and beyond.

Technological and political developments are combining to create problems of a new magnitude. Major platforms have taken a deregulated—or actively partisan—approach to content management. Facebook and Instagram have removed fact-checkers from their platforms. The owner of X has actively sought to intervene in overseas elections. The aggressive use of disinformation in the online information space, the deregulated approach

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**An estimated 1.6 billion cast ballots in 74 national elections throughout the world.**

of social media platforms and the challenges involved in tracing financial flows worldwide make it difficult to ensure a level playing field for election candidates.

For the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP), the diversity of the 2024 election slate provided an opportune entry point to revisit assumptions and track evolving challenges in electoral management and policy. In this publication, a team of academics and experts tied to the EIP and International IDEA reviews the 2024 elections through lenses ranging from the administration of elections, the context in which they were held and the rising interest in electoral trust. Each chapter is underpinned by data from a series of key International IDEA and EIP trackers and data sets: the Global Elections Super Cycle, the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity data set, the Global Election Monitor, the Global State of Democracy and its Democracy Tracker, the Election Emergency and Crisis Monitor, the Electoral Management Survey as well as specialized data sets.

**This review illustrates profound changes underway in how elections are conducted and the increasingly complex contexts in which elections are held.**

This review illustrates profound changes underway in how elections are conducted and the increasingly complex contexts in which elections are held. Many of these challenges directly affected the work of electoral management bodies (EMBs), as they had to navigate inclement weather, a radically changed information environment, the politicization of their mandate and aggression towards their officials, alongside their already complex portfolios. Institutions, regulatory frameworks and global norms established in previous generations to ensure a level playing field are being sorely tested by the egregious use of money in politics and the manipulation of social media algorithms to influence elections, exacerbated by the explicit willingness of domestic, foreign and non-state actors to engage in such activities.

This report, divided into eight main chapters, highlights the following findings:

1. In 2024, electoral reform arose as a topic of concern because of its links to democratic backsliding—that is, the risk and reality of legislative change designed to entrench incumbent power and diminish safeguards for democratic checks and balances, whether aimed at the media, civil society, the political opposition or the international community. Electoral reform laws were passed with minimal support, such as in Georgia, or at the last minute, as in Tunisia. In response, a coalition of global actors developed updated global norms for electoral reform, emphasizing the importance of transparency, appropriate timelines, evidence-based political consensus building and the involvement of those most affected by potential changes.
2. Election-related malpractice, often at the local level, remains a perennial problem in elections; allegations of fraud, including vote buying and financial irregularities were recorded in at least 17 national elections in 2024, from Mauritania to Pakistan. The standout example of electoral malpractice at scale occurred in Venezuela, where, at the moment the polls closed on election day, the meticulously designed voting system

was thwarted through blatant irregularities and a lack of transparency during the vote count, leading to highly questionable results that were not supported by the official vote count.

3. The year 2024 saw historic peaceful transfers of power, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Election-related violence continues to occur, nonetheless, with patterns and degrees of violence varying between countries. Notable examples of targeted attacks against political candidates in 2024 were seen in Mongolia, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea and the United States. Violence by illicit armed groups was seen in Mexico and Pakistan, and government-sponsored violence took place during the election period in Mozambique. Clashes between party supporters were reported in India, the Maldives and South Africa, with violence and the threat of violence against election workers recorded in Ghana, Madagascar and the USA.
4. In 2024 instances of gender-based violence during election periods were recorded in 28 national elections across public, private and online spaces. While the degree of violence varied, what was clear was that it disproportionately affected marginalized groups. Addressing identity-based violence requires legal and institutional reforms as well as transformative, intersectional strategies that challenge harmful norms and strengthen protection, prevention and response capabilities across all levels of society. Examples of such measures were seen with media outreach and education campaigns in Moldova and legal and institutional measures introduced in Mexico for their respective 2024 national elections.
5. Forty-three national elections in 2024 involved instances of mis- and disinformation that undermined the credibility of political actors or the electoral process itself. The information environment around elections remains a strategic target for hybrid threat actors, as part of their non-conventional warfare strategies to accomplish geopolitical ends. In 2024 cases of hybrid threats against elections—through operations run by actors in China, Iran and Russia—were noted in EU countries as well as Georgia, Moldova, the Solomon Islands, Taiwan and the USA. In 2024 artificial intelligence was used during campaigns primarily for satirical purposes rather than explicit manipulation, proving less disruptive to elections than feared.
6. The record number of elections meant a record number of voters served. However, this achievement was accompanied by instances of technology malfunctions, procedural mistakes, negligence and human error in at least 14 national elections held in 2024. In El Salvador, the electronic result management system broke down on election day, while in Scotland, ahead of the UK general election, a production breakdown led to delayed postal packs. Cybersecurity incidents and breaches of voter and other confidential data were reported in Indonesia and South Korea during the electoral cycle.
7. In 2024, 20 elections were affected by natural hazards such as floods, heatwaves and tropical storms during primary, subnational, national or supranational elections in 15 countries, with climate change and the

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**The record number of elections meant a record number of voters served.**

2023–2024 El Niño event as contributing factors. Natural hazards affected more than one election in Austria, Indonesia and the USA. An example of resilience building was seen during the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka, with close inter-agency collaboration between the Election Commission and Disaster Management Centre through joint planning and the establishment of a Joint Election Emergencies Operation Unit.

8. The unpredictable environment, plethora of snap elections, difficulty introducing needed reforms under fraught circumstances and the ease with which elections were undermined in the online space highlighted the need to incorporate trust building into election planning. The year 2024 saw a rise in EMBs making concerted efforts to explain their processes, changes and decisions, and to collaborate with other societal actors to reassure concerned stakeholders about the integrity of electoral processes.

For those who design and manage electoral processes, the lessons learned from 2024 highlight the following priorities:

1. *Safeguarding electoral reform.* Changes to electoral processes and institutions can be used instrumentally to entrench power by incumbents, exclude the opposition and disenfranchise citizens. These risks of misuse point to the importance of the design of electoral reform processes, including the guardrails against political opportunism. A well-designed electoral process has transparent and well-defined processes and milestones that encourage political consensus building and that involve multiple voices, including those of the most politically vulnerable in society.
2. *Excellent and trustworthy election delivery through investment in EMB capabilities and accountability measures.* Election results tend to be accepted when an EMB performs well and is recognized as doing its best even in the most challenging circumstances, and when political actors agree not to undermine the EMB's reputation for short-term gain. Fulfilling the core functions of an electoral process and addressing ongoing and evolving challenges requires adequate and sustainable funding that is insulated from political manoeuvring, which can undermine impartiality.
3. *Attentiveness to the information environment around elections.* EMBs can be more attentive to the information environment by taking proactive and pre-emptive measures, such as instituting early-detection systems, exercising situational awareness and engaging in enhanced cooperation across sectors. Credible institutions, when seen as reliable sources of information, play a critical role in mitigating the impact of mis- and disinformation.
4. *Security and duty of care.* The rise of in-person and online aggression against election workers and electoral institutions has implications for recruitment, training and security measures. Support mechanisms for EMB staff, legal provisions and interparty codes of conduct are examples of initiatives that make elections safer—for both election workers and voters.

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**Excellent and trustworthy election delivery through investment in EMB capabilities and accountability measures.**

5. *Preparing for the unexpected.* From the pandemic onwards, preparing for the unexpected has become the new reality for election administrators. This environment has created an imperative for policymakers and election officials to incorporate risk management, resilience building and crisis management into their work and to ensure that they are sufficiently resourced to hold elections during challenging weather or security-related conditions.
6. *Inter-agency cooperation.* Electoral integrity challenges are multifaceted and complex, often going beyond any EMB's mandate or capacity to manage. A whole-of-government approach enables close working relationships between EMBs and other state agencies, such as those tasked with responding to cyberattacks, ensuring citizens' safety during elections and preparing for extreme weather events. Appropriate protection of electoral processes also requires the formal and informal engagement of a broad range of stakeholders (whole-of-society approach), each bringing relevant mandates, expertise and resources to the effort.

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**From the pandemic onwards, preparing for the unexpected has become the new reality for election administrators.**

## Introduction

# ELECTION QUALITY IN THE 2024 SUPER CYCLE

*Toby S. James and Holly Ann Garnett*

In 2024, 1.6 billion people across 74 national elections cast ballots, with an average voter turnout of 61 per cent ([International IDEA n.d.a](#)). In late 2023, *Time* declared that ‘2024 is not just an election year. It’s perhaps the election year’ ([Ewe 2023](#)). In the end, even more elections were held in 2024 than expected, as governments fell, dissolved their parliaments and called snap elections.

While elections are always significant and should be viewed as a process which includes events before, during and after the polls open on election day, the sheer number of national elections taking place and the number of voters casting ballots in a relatively short time frame made 2024 a landmark year for elections. The so-called electoral super cycle resulted from the convergence—which occurs every 20 years—of national electoral calendars that require elections to take place every 4 or 5 years.

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**These elections were also significant because they took place at a time of global concern about democratic backsliding.**

These elections were also significant because they took place at a time of global concern about democratic backsliding. International IDEA ([2024: 3, 13](#)) reported that 82 countries saw a decline in at least one of their indicators of democratic performance compared with five years prior and that one in three voters were living in a country where the quality of elections had declined.

This report examines the elections that took place in 2024 to identify lessons and both established and emerging trends applicable to the broad task of protecting and strengthening electoral processes. This is a pivotal time, with multiple threats to electoral integrity around the world. The report maps out some of these challenges and encourages global conversations about them.

The remainder of this Introduction defines some key terms relating to electoral integrity and democratic backsliding, maps the overall quality of elections in



2024 against longer-term trends and introduces electoral integrity challenges to be further explored.

## WHAT IS ELECTORAL INTEGRITY?

Elections are an indispensable part of the democratic process and can offer opportunities for empowerment. They provide a chance for voters to remove their representatives from office—or renew their mandate for another electoral cycle. They enable the electorate to express their views about the future of their families, their communities and their country. They provide a platform for citizens, civil society and representatives to discuss and deliberate about the political issues facing them and their society.

Elections can also result in disempowerment, however. The rules governing elections can be manipulated to limit choice and favour an incumbent. Electoral violence can be used against candidates, citizens and electoral officials to intimidate them and shape the outcome of an election. Disinformation can spread across social media platforms to misinform citizens, cause conflicts and sow distrust of public institutions.

We therefore define electoral integrity as a set of principles to be upheld in elections which empower citizens and help to realize the ideals of democracy (James and Garnett 2025a forthcoming, 2025b). Democracy is defined as a societal system where preconditions exist to fully empower all citizens to realize their individual potential, and where political power is distributed equitably (James 2024). Elections fully empower citizens when the following principles are upheld (James and Garnett 2025a forthcoming, 2025b):

1. *Contestation.* Elections empower citizens by allowing a wide range of groups, individuals and parties to compete. They empower all citizens to have the opportunity to run for office themselves. Those elected can then represent the interests of their fellow citizens and implement the general will of the wider electorate. Effective contestation therefore requires that there should be no bans on the formation of political parties and that candidates should not be prevented from contesting an election. All candidates and parties should also be permitted to campaign and use the media to inform the public and attract support for their views.
2. *Participation.* Although there might be a variety of candidates in an election, citizens will not be empowered if participation is constrained across the electorate. Wide and even participation is needed to ensure that the whole population is part of the electorate and can therefore choose their representatives and influence policy directly.
3. *Deliberation.* Deliberation makes it possible to base decisions on evidence, discussion and consensus rather than the influence of powerful actors

**Elections are an indispensable part of the democratic process and can offer opportunities for empowerment.**

such as incumbent leaders, state-owned media outlets or the owners of social media companies.

4. *Adjudication.* Adjudication refers to the institutional governance processes in place to uphold the above principles. Elections should be conducted in line with the electoral laws, codes and constitutions of each country. The rule of law means that everyone is aware of the rules of the game in advance and can have confidence that these rules are followed. There should be broad opportunities for involvement and consensus about the design of the electoral rules. Finally, there should be clear processes for raising and dealing with electoral complaints.

All electoral bodies work together to uphold these principles. For example, electoral management bodies—the critical state bodies responsible for implementing elections—ideally work to ensure that citizens are empowered to participate in elections and to enable candidates to contest elections. They may facilitate wider deliberation by providing electoral information.

These principles of electoral integrity are embedded widely in international standards on elections. Hence, International IDEA and the Kofi Annan Foundation (2012) define an election with integrity as:

any election that is based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as reflected in international standards and agreements, and is professional, impartial, and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle.

International standards are therefore an essential tool for empowering people around the world. Charting the degree to which those standards were upheld in elections in 2024 is indispensable for measuring the empowerment of voters.

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**The electoral cycle refers to the stages involved in organizing, conducting and managing elections.**

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**Decisions and activities made at all stages of an election have important consequences for the overall quality of the election.**

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## THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

Both the news media and ordinary citizens often assume that elections are events which take place over the course of a few days, every few years. The reality is that elections are months, years and decades in the making. This reality gave rise to the concept of an ‘electoral cycle’, which was developed as a planning tool for practitioners to embed the idea that elections involve lengthy preparations (ACE Project 2017).

The electoral cycle refers to the stages involved in organizing, conducting and managing elections. It includes everything from the preparation phase before an election to activities carried out after the results are declared (see Figure I.1).

Decisions and activities made at all stages of an election have important consequences for the overall quality of the election. Constitutions, for example,

Figure I.1. The electoral cycle



Source: J. Barrat, A. Ellis, G. Orr, V. Vashchanka and P. Wolf, *Special Voting Arrangements: The International IDEA Handbook* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2023), <<https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2023.84>>.

can be designed decades or centuries before an election and are often difficult to change. However, elections have to be conducted in line with the formal codified constitution—if there is one. Voter registration can take place years ahead of polls. Campaigning (whether formal or informal) may begin well before an election is called. It therefore follows that the quality of elections in 2024 was partially the result of work that was carried out earlier.

## WHAT IS ELECTORAL BACKSLIDING?

Global democracy has developed unevenly over time, in waves—sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating (Huntington 1991). Countries have undertaken political, economic and social transformations which, in many cases, have meant a move from autocracy to democracy. However, the confidence about the future of democracy that existed in the 1990s and early 2000s has receded. There is evidence of a ‘third wave of autocratization’ in

which many countries have seen the quality of their democracy undermined ([International IDEA n.d.a](#); [Lührmann and Lindberg 2019](#); [Nord et al. 2024](#)).

Autocratization, which is defined as a ‘substantial de-facto decline of core institutional requirements for electoral democracy’ ([Lührmann and Lindberg 2019: 1096](#)), can take many forms. With respect to elections, electoral backsliding refers to a decline in the quality of electoral integrity over a period of time ([Garnett and James 2023](#)). This decline could occur in any area of the electoral cycle, as a result of a number of actions which undermine the four principles of electoral integrity outlined above.

Evidence of electoral backsliding might include (a) electoral reforms which consolidate power in an autocrat; (b) crackdowns on political opponents; (c) vote buying and manipulation; (d) the spreading of disinformation; (e) violence against candidates, citizens, electoral officials or other stakeholders; (f) a reduction in the capacity of the electoral authorities; (g) the exclusion of opposition candidates; (h) or reduced freedom of movement, freedom of assembly or participation in elections as a result of a state of emergency.

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**Prior to 2024  
evidence of electoral  
backsliding around  
the world was mixed.**

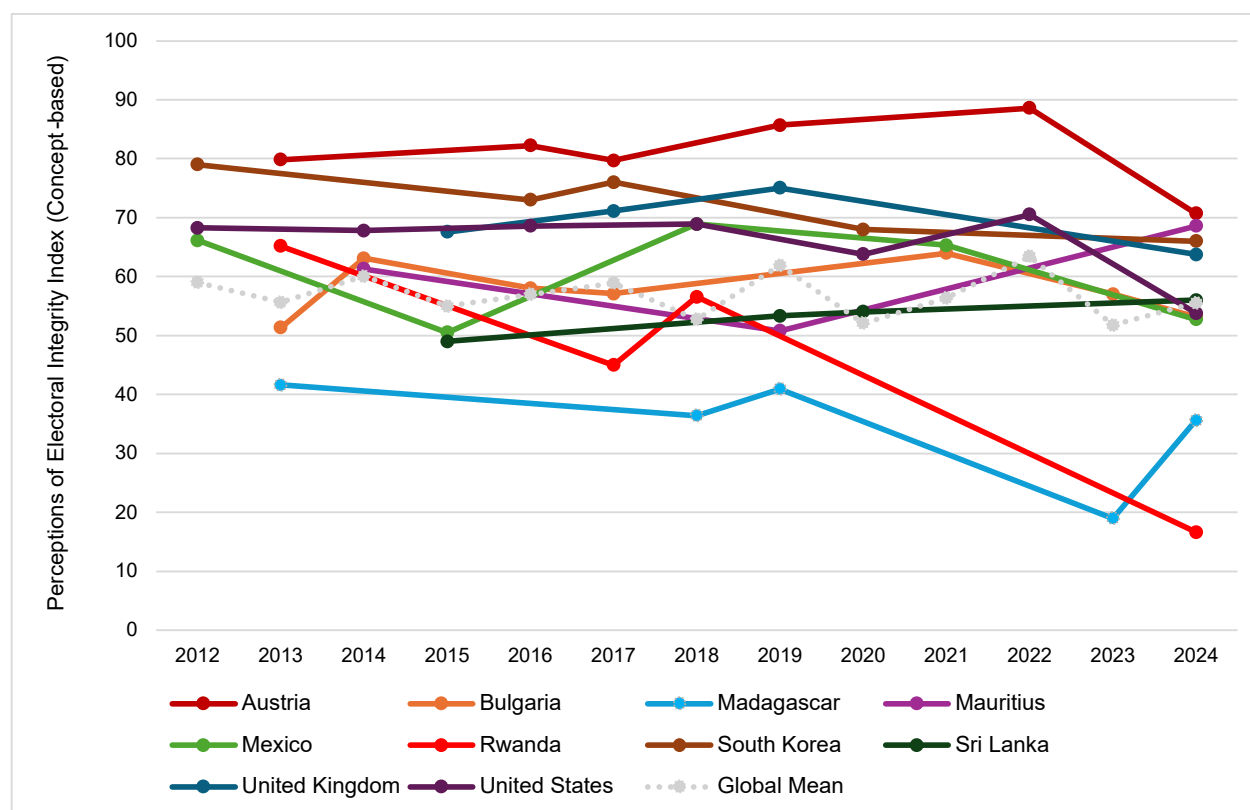
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## OVERALL TRENDS, 2012–2024

Prior to 2024 evidence of electoral backsliding around the world was mixed ([Garnett and James 2023](#)). There were undoubtedly countries where election quality had improved over the longer term. Since 1991, for example, there had been major improvements in the quality of elections in Bhutan, Croatia, Ghana, Kuwait and Timor-Leste. However, there had also been major declines, in countries including Belarus, Honduras, Nicaragua, Türkiye and Venezuela ([Garnett and James 2023](#)). The situation is often more nuanced, however. Election quality can improve in one part of the electoral process but decline in others within the same country.

The main factors leading to electoral backsliding at the aggregate level were the erosion of civil liberties and the growing personalization of power on the part of political leaders. Electoral integrity can also be undermined by other changes in citizens’ freedoms to mobilize, debate and express their opinions. Power grabs by incumbents seeking to consolidate their power and erode individual liberties were therefore crucial ([Garnett and James 2023: 10](#)).

There is evidence of both electoral backsliding and electoral strengthening in 2024. The Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI) data set, compiled by the Electoral Integrity Project, provides a comprehensive analysis of how well countries’ elections uphold the principles of electoral integrity set out earlier ([Norris, Frank and Martínez i Coma 2014](#); [Garnett, James and Caal-Lam 2024b](#)). Based on a survey of election experts, the PEI data set provides an overall score for each election, ranging from 0 to 100, as well as comparative rankings of countries based on these scores. Given that data is released each summer for contests held in the previous year, complete data for all elections

**Figure I.2. Trends in election quality in selected countries**

Source: H. A. Garnett, T. S. James and S. Caal-Lam, Codebook – The expert survey of Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, Release 11.0, Electoral Integrity Project, forthcoming 2025, <<https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/pei>>.

held in 2024 is not available at the time of writing. Therefore, this report's comparison of the quality of elections held in 2024 with that of previous elections is provisional.

A comparison of trends in several countries can be seen in Figure I.2, which paints a complex picture, where election quality declines in some cases, increases in others and remains stable in others.

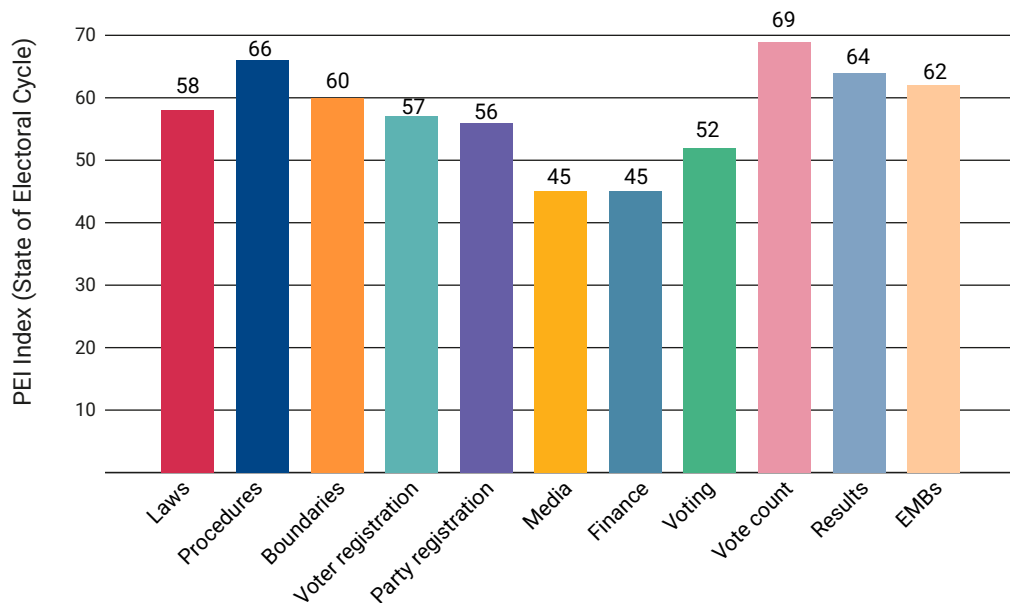
## MEDIA AND FINANCE: THE WEAK SPOT FOR ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

The Electoral Integrity Project has previously reported that elections tend to be stronger when it comes to technical aspects—procedures, the counting process, results tabulation and the work of electoral authorities. By contrast, the weaker parts of the electoral process are media and campaign finance

**The Electoral Integrity Project has previously reported that elections tend to be stronger when it comes to technical aspects.**

(Garnett, James and Caal-Lam 2024a: 8, 2024b). An examination of 2024 elections suggests that no major change took place in this respect. Figure I.3 shows that media and finance remain the weakest part of the electoral process, while the counting process is the strongest.

**Figure I.3. Perceptions of electoral integrity, by stage of electoral cycle (2024)**



Source: H. A. Garnett, T. S. James and S. Caal-Lam, Codebook – The expert survey of Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, Release 11.0, Electoral Integrity Project, forthcoming 2025, <<https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/pei>>.

**Media and finance remain the weakest part of the electoral process, while the counting process is the strongest.**

The connection between media-related challenges and the influence of money is a central problem facing elections around the world, as this report clearly illustrates. The media landscape should be free, open and fair so that citizens can make informed choices at the ballot box. However, there have always been biases in news and media coverage, possibly because of state management and ownership of the press or because the owners and proprietors of private newspapers, TV stations, radio stations and social media platforms are keen to push a particular political message or support certain candidates.

The resources of any society are unevenly distributed. Private media will always be owned by wealthy individuals, which gives them the means to influence the electoral process. This influence increases when media platforms grow and cross continents.

Large media conglomerates have often played a role in elections everywhere in the world. Newspapers have endorsed parties and candidates; news channels have partisan and ideological slants. However, the influence of Elon Musk, the richest man in the world and owner of the social media platform X, is unique in history. His social media platform has an estimated 650 million active

users around the world ([SEO.AI 2025](#)). Musk has used his platform to express support for far-right politicians, parties and activists across the globe, including Alternative for Germany and the far-right activist Tommy Robinson in the United Kingdom, claiming that ‘traditional parties have failed’ ([Hayden 2024](#)). Musk was also the de facto head of the Department of Government Efficiency inside the US Government for just over four months.

Since the owners of social media platforms have the power to tip the balance of the media coverage of elections around the world, their active influence presents an existential challenge to democracy ([Broughton Micova and Schnurr 2024](#)). Firstly, they can use algorithms not only to spread information but also to target specific people. Secondly, their platforms can be used to spread misinformation and disinformation, which can undermine the information environment, deliberation and even participation in elections. Moreover, there is an increasing lack of willingness on the part of global media platforms to address this threat. Facebook and Instagram have even removed fact-checkers from their platforms ([McMahon, Kleinman and Subramanian 2025](#)).

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**The owners of social media platforms have the power to tip the balance of the media coverage of elections around the world.**

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## EIGHT KEY CHALLENGES TO ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

Eight key electoral integrity issues are introduced here. The remainder of this publication evaluates lessons learned in light of the eight key, overlapping challenges to election integrity.

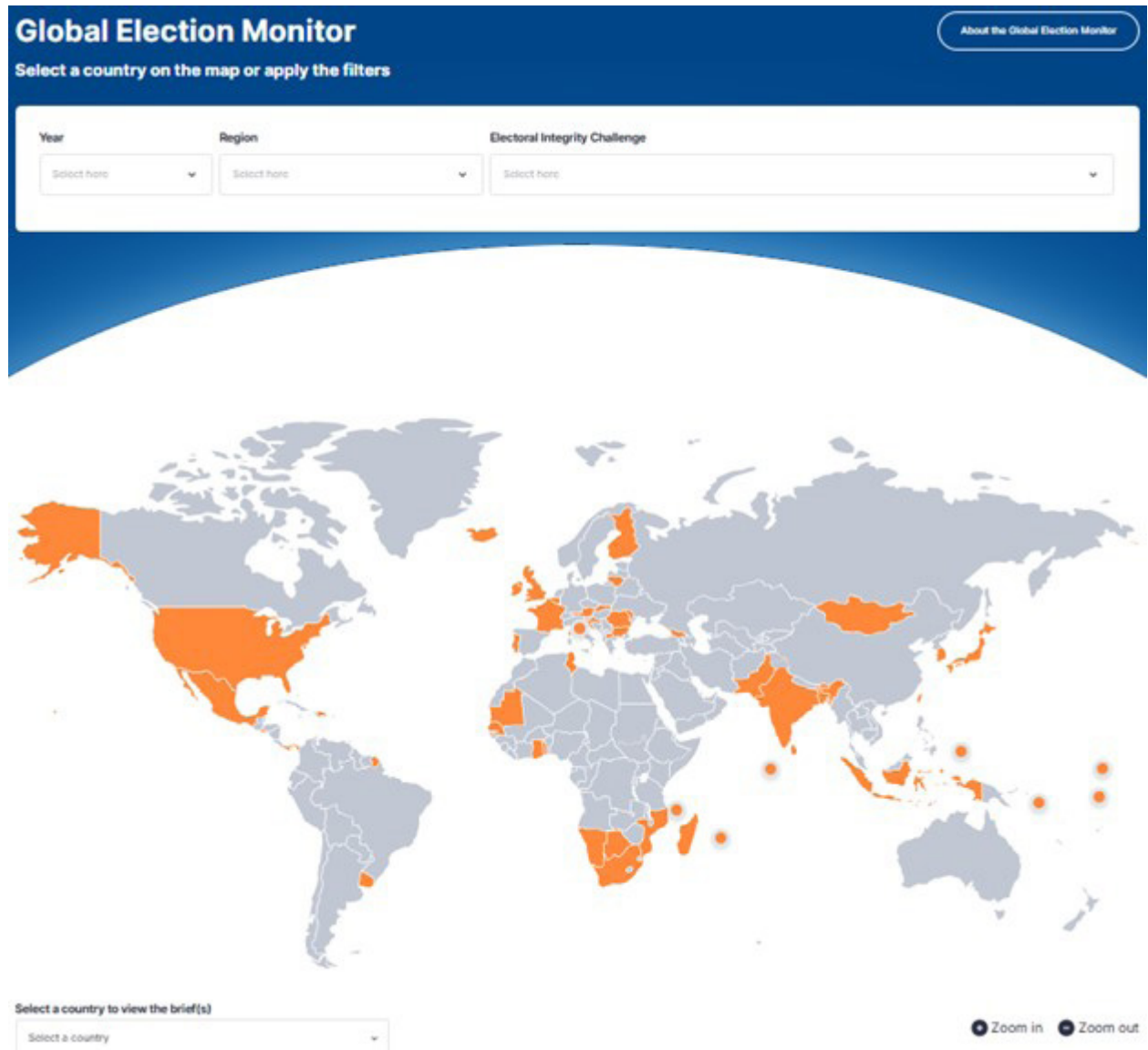
Each chapter is based on research that used a mixture of methods, including analysis of election observation reports, news reports, data relating to election quality and other relevant documents, as well as case studies focusing on Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada (British Columbia), El Salvador, Mexico, Moldova, Mozambique, Pakistan, Romania, Sweden, the UK, the United States and Venezuela.

The chapters also draw on the Global Election Monitor ([Asplund and Tucker 2025](#)), a tool designed to illustrate challenges to electoral integrity in national elections (see Figure I.4). The Global Election Monitor consists of 54 election briefs covering 50 countries based on reliable open-source information, compiled by International IDEA during the 2024 super-cycle year, using a variety of keyword searches and fully referenced media monitoring. These briefs are organized around challenges to electoral integrity adapted from International IDEA’s work on protecting elections ([International IDEA n.d.b](#)) and are accessible through the Global Election Monitor dashboard.

In addition, Chapters 4 and 7 use the findings from the Electoral Integrity Project’s 2024 Election Management Survey, which included 54 questions and received responses from 50 electoral management bodies around the world ([Electoral Integrity Project n.d.](#)).



Figure I.4. The Global Election Monitor



Source: E. Asplund and J. Tucker (eds), 'Global Election Monitor', International IDEA, 31 March 2025 (and updated), <<https://www.idea.int/global-election-monitor>>, accessed 18 May 2025.

**Changing the electoral rules can be an act of autocratization by incumbents in an effort to reduce the scope for electoral competition.**

### Chapter 1: Electoral reform

Changing the electoral rules can be an act of autocratization by incumbents in an effort to reduce the scope for electoral competition and give themselves a greater chance of winning elections. There is also a paradox, however, in that electoral reform may also provide the gateway needed to improve election quality. Those seeking to make genuine attempts to improve elections will usually need to amend primary and secondary legislation to strengthen electoral integrity.



Ultimately, the motives of those proposing electoral reform are often unclear. In Chapter 1, Toby James reviews some of the key electoral reform debates and changes that took place in 2024. He also notes the development of new international best practices guiding electoral reform, including the idea that stakeholders should seek to reach consensus when designing reforms. Sadly, reforms that were made in 2024 were more likely to be characterized by a breakdown in consensus. The chapter includes a case study of Mozambique.

## **Chapter 2: Electoral malpractice**

Electoral integrity can be directly undermined by electoral malpractice. As Vasil Vashchanka sets out in Chapter 2, drawing from the work of Sarah Birch (2011), electoral malpractice comes in various forms, including the manipulation of rules, such as changing the legal framework for elections to favour incumbents in order to reduce fair competition. The manipulation of voters involves altering the free expression of the electorate through methods such as bribery or coercion. Meanwhile, the manipulation of votes takes place at the ballot box—and during the subsequent aggregation of voting results. There were plenty of examples of each of these forms of manipulation around the world in 2024, many of which involved old tactics long deployed by those seeking to centralize power. The chapter includes cases studies of Pakistan and Venezuela.

## **Chapter 3: Election-related violence**

Violence in elections can be perpetrated by different actors towards a variety of ends. Electoral violence includes coercive actions aiming to influence the process or outcome of an election. As Gudlaug Olafsdottir sets out in Chapter 3, violence is not only a serious humanitarian concern but also undermines all of the principles of electoral integrity. She demonstrates how many of the national elections held in 2024 were marked by some form of election-related violence. The chapter includes a case study of Bangladesh.

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**Violence in elections can be perpetrated by different actors towards a variety of ends.**

## **Chapter 4: Gender-based discrimination and violence**

Electoral integrity depends on universal suffrage and political equality, yet gender-based discrimination and violence remain significant barriers to women's full and equal participation and representation. Rooted in gendered power structures, violence against women in elections takes many forms—including physical, psychological and digital—that target women in various political roles. While the motives and forms may differ, the impact is often the same—discouraging women's participation, distorting public discourse, ultimately undermining electoral integrity and weakening democratic processes. In Chapter 4, Julia Thalín explores how violence against women in elections undermines electoral integrity, tracing its manifestations throughout 2024 with examples from Bangladesh, El Salvador, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, the USA and beyond. The chapter also highlights effective responses—such as legislative reforms, training and awareness-raising initiatives—including through case studies of Mexico and Moldova.

### Chapter 5: The information environment around elections

Chapter 5 includes a description of harmful online actions and unprecedented threats to the information environment surrounding elections. Electoral integrity faces increasing threats from malicious foreign and domestic actors who use online spaces to exploit electoral vulnerabilities and destabilize democratically elected governments without resorting to physical violence. Ingrid Bicu maps developments from 2024 in Chapter 5. The tactics being used include cyberattacks as well as misinformation and disinformation campaigns. In 2024 these attacks and campaigns focused on influencing voting patterns and undermining trust in election results. The chapter includes case studies of Romania and Sweden.

### Chapter 6: Electoral management hurdles and malfunctions

Electoral management refers to the delivery and implementation of elections. Electoral laws might be designed with a specific (ill) intention through the courts, legislatures and executives. However, it is in the implementation of electoral rules that the voter actually experiences electoral integrity or malpractices most directly. In Chapter 6, Sonali Campion reviews the lessons of running elections around the world in 2024. Elections held during the year faced growing pressures because of stretched resources, cybersecurity breaches and technological malfunctions and challenges with the enforcement of complex rules. The chapter includes case studies of El Salvador and the UK.

### Chapter 7: The impact of natural hazards on 2024 elections

Hazards—both human-made and natural—can damage or destroy critical infrastructure, impacting various aspects of the administration of elections throughout the electoral cycle. In this context, climate adaptation, which is built around responding to extreme weather events, plays a major role in safeguarding electoral integrity. In Chapter 7, Erik Asplund and Madeline Harty chart developments related to natural hazards in 2024. Fifteen countries were impacted by disasters during the electoral cycle last year. These events caused a significant disruption to many electoral activities. The chapter includes case studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the USA.

**Ensuring broad public trust in the electoral process and its outcome is critical to maintaining electoral integrity.**

### Chapter 8: Trust and public perception in elections

Ensuring broad public trust in the electoral process and its outcome is critical to maintaining electoral integrity. It is essential that stakeholders trust the electoral process and outcome, as negative perceptions can undermine the credibility of the process and weaken institutions. In Chapter 8, Therese Pearce Laanela provides an overview of some of the ways in which trust was undermined or at stake in 2024, as well as a description of how many electoral authorities developed new initiatives to strengthen trust among stakeholders. The chapter includes a case study of British Columbia, Canada.

### Conclusion

The conclusion draws together the lessons from the report, arguing that the lessons learned from the 2024 super cycle need to be situated in the context of broader election-related trends and transformations. There are a variety of ongoing mega-trends which are affecting all aspects of the electoral cycle

around the world, such as interconnectivity in online communication, climate change resulting from global warming and increased political polarization. The transition to an age of complexity demands that a wider response should be taken, which would involve pre-emptive action, the development of collaborative cross-boundary solutions and broad, evidence-based conversations about solutions. This publication aims to contribute to these conversations.

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## Chapter 1

# ELECTORAL REFORM

*Toby S. James*

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### 1.1. INTRODUCTION: WHY ELECTORAL REFORM MATTERS

Electoral rules vary enormously around the world. Constitutional designs and rule-makers can pick from a range of different electoral systems, campaign regulations and voting arrangements, for example. The choices that are made about electoral rules matter. They can determine the winner of an election, the size of the majority or the outcome of contests for specific seats. Incumbent governments may therefore be tempted to revise electoral laws to increase their chances of victory at future elections and consolidate their power. Therefore, these kinds of electoral reforms can sometimes be acts of autocratization, which centralize power and undermine electoral integrity.

In fact, such changes can have an impact on all four principles of electoral integrity discussed in this report. An incumbent's manipulation of electoral laws to give themselves an electoral advantage will have an impact on the equality of contestation, and rules that deliberately demobilize voters will limit participation. Laws aimed at restricting access to public spaces can limit deliberation, and the neutrality of adjudication processes can be undermined when loyal, partisan officials are hand-picked to serve on the bodies that decide election disputes.

At the same time, electoral reforms may be undertaken to strengthen electoral integrity and democracy. If stakeholders have identified weaknesses in the electoral process—for example, by using the data set out in this report—then primary legislation or constitutional amendments are often needed to address those weaknesses. Electoral finance laws may be needed to ensure equal contestation. Measures such as special voting arrangements could boost participation. Online spaces may require regulation to enable deliberation.

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**The choices that are made about electoral rules matter.**

Electoral authorities may need to be empowered through new rules enshrining their independence from incumbent governments.

It can be difficult to distinguish between reforms introduced by incumbents to increase their chances of winning future elections and those which are genuinely aimed at improving elections. While reformers will always claim that their motivations were positive, their political opponents may criticize the reforms to gain political capital—whatever the intention of the reform. The real intentions of lawmakers are difficult to know, and the future consequences of reforms are often uncertain. Moreover, electoral laws could be enacted both to increase an incumbent's chances of winning and to improve the quality of elections.

The process of making changes to electoral rules—in addition to the substance of reform—also matters for electoral integrity. Given the uncertainty about intentions and effects, it is vitally important not to sow distrust unnecessarily. Evidence-based decision making can generate better public policy, and a variety of stakeholders should have an opportunity to provide input into the rule-making process (James and Garnett 2025).

This chapter maps some of the prominent electoral reforms which were proposed, adopted and rejected around the world in 2024—and considers whether consensus was achieved. Problems experienced last year included electoral laws being passed unilaterally, incumbents ignoring carefully crafted agreements and legislation being passed at the last minute, which put pressure on electoral management bodies (EMBs).

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## **Electoral reforms take time to progress from initiation to implementation.**

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### **1.2. ELECTORAL REFORMS IN 2024**

Electoral reforms take time to progress from initiation to implementation. The underlying principles for electoral reforms are often set out in draft or consultation form ahead of being introduced into the legislature. The legislative process can be long and subject to delay. Once reforms have received formal approval, they may then take several years to be implemented. As a result, some of the elections held in 2024 took place under new rules that were often the result of rule-making processes from several years prior.

For example, the US presidential election was subject to the Electoral Count Reform Act of 2022, which followed the insurrection of 6 January 2021. The insurrection involved an attempt to prevent the certification of Electoral College votes, which was possible because of a loophole in the Electoral Count Act of 1887. In response, the new Act of 2022 changed the process for casting and counting Electoral College votes in Congress—a process used for presidential elections. It set a deadline for electors to cast their vote and required that Electoral College votes tallied by Congress accurately reflect the public vote on election day (United States Congress 2022). It thereby sought to avert a repeat of the insurrection and improved the country's electoral dispute mechanisms.

Elsewhere, Jordan held general elections in 2024 under new rules brought about by reforms instigated in 2021, when King Abdullah II established a committee to ‘propose changes aimed at enhancing public participation, developing political life, and broadening participation’ ([Sharawi 2024](#)). The 92-member Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System proposed 30 reforms, 26 of which were approved in 2022 ([Sharawi 2024](#)).

The reforms included a new Election Law for the House of Representatives, a new Political Parties Law, as well as a set of constitutional amendments to be implemented across three electoral cycles ([EU EOM 2024: 7](#)). One of the key reforms encourages the development of political parties by requiring that 41 parliamentary seats be reserved for members of political parties (increasing to 90 in future years) ([Sharawi 2024](#)). Previously, only independents contested elections, which was thought to hinder the development of multi-party parliamentary democracy ([Choucair 2006](#)).

Elsewhere, in Georgia, parliamentary elections were held for the first time under full proportional representation, following constitutional amendments passed in 2020 ([Fremer 2020](#)).

For an overview of the key electoral reforms that were passed (but not necessarily implemented) around the world in 2024, see Table 1.1.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.3. KICKSTARTING (AND BANNING) ELECTIONS

Elections require laws to enable them to take place. Somalia is one of few countries that does not hold direct national elections, having not done so since 1969 ([Freedom House 2024](#)). In one of the most significant developments in 2024, Somalia’s Federal Parliament passed several laws in quick succession in November to establish an independent electoral and boundaries commission and regulate political parties ([Abdullahi 2024](#); [Hiiraan Online 2024](#)).

At the same time, laws and rules were also enacted to suspend or annul certain elections. A notable clash occurred between the federal government and the state of Jubaland, which had long sought autonomy. The dispute arose when Jubaland appointed its own seven-member commission to organize and then hold a subnational presidential election ([Horn Observer 2024](#)). The Somali Parliament responded by passing a law to invalidate elections that did not comply with national law ([Tuuryare 2024](#)), and the federal government declared the presidential election in Jubaland ‘illegal’ ([Shabelle Media Network 2024](#)).

A similar sequence of events took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Constitutional Court annulled an electoral law passed in Republika Srpska, a

**In one of the most significant developments in 2024, Somalia’s Federal Parliament passed several laws in quick succession in November to establish an independent electoral and boundaries commission and regulate political parties.**

<sup>1</sup> The list was compiled through a search of online newspapers and legal news through LexisNexis. A search for the term ‘electoral law passed’ in stories published in 2024 produced 177 results. Although these results are not comprehensive, there is no systematic list of electoral laws available. Additional materials—for example, legislative websites, policy reports and other news stories—were found to provide more information about the legal changes.



Table 1.1. Examples of electoral reforms passed around the world in 2024

Country	Electoral reform	Description
Australia (Tasmania)	Electoral Disclosure and Funding Amendment Bill 2024 (still in progress)	Required that political donations exceeding AUD 1,000 (approximately USD 630) be disclosed within a month of receipt.
Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska)	Electoral Law of Republika of Srpska	Established independent electoral processes for elections within Republika Srpska that were subsequently annulled.
Canada	Electoral Participation Act (Bill C-65) (in progress)	Provides for additional days of advance voting and other measures.
Georgia	Amendments to the Election Code of Georgia	Changes included the removal of gender quotas and modifications to the structure of the Central Election Commission ( <a href="#">Venice Commission 2024</a> ).
Japan	Revision of the Political Funds Control Act	The threshold for the disclosure of fundraiser party tickets was lowered from more than JPY 200,000 (approximately USD 1,360) to JPY 50,000 (approximately USD 340) ( <a href="#">The Mainichi 2024</a> ).
Mozambique	Law 14/2024 and Law 15/2025	Changes were made to the ballot box design and to the procedures for observation of the count; in addition, limitations were placed on the power of district and city courts to order recounts.
New Zealand	Local Government (Electoral Legislation and Māori Wards and Māori Constituencies) Amendment Act 2024	Reinstated the requirement for public referendums on the establishment or continuation of Māori wards and constituencies within local and regional councils.
Nigeria	Local Government Independent Electoral Commission (Establishment) Bill (SB 5310) 2024	Established a federal agency overseeing local government elections.
Nigeria (Kwara)	Kwara State Local Government Electoral (Amendment) Law 2024	Enabled local elections to be held.
Nigeria (Anambra state)	Anambra State Electoral Law 2024	Re-established the Anambra State Independent Electoral Commission ( <a href="#">Abana 2024</a> ; <a href="#">Ofomah 2024</a> ).
Nigeria (Cross River state)	Cross River Electoral Law 2024	Extended the tenure of local officials from three to four years ( <a href="#">Independent 2024</a> ).
Nigeria (Benue state)	Benue State Electoral (Amendment) Law 2012	Mandates the organizing secretary of political parties to submit the names of delegates and candidates for local government elections to the Benue State Electoral Commission ( <a href="#">Martins 2024</a> ).
Somalia	Political Parties and Unions Federal Government of Somalia Act 2024	Laws to provide a legal basis for and regulation of political parties and the establishment of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission.



**Table 1.1. Examples of electoral reforms passed around the world in 2024 (cont.)**

Country	Electoral reform	Description
South Africa	Electoral Matters Amendment Act 14 of 2024	Regulated the funding of independent candidates and other party funding provisions ( <a href="#">South African Government 2024</a> ).
South Korea	Parliamentary agreement	Electoral district boundaries were redrawn, increasing the number of constituencies from 253 to 254 and reducing proportional representation seats from 47 to 46 ( <a href="#">Lee 2024</a> ).
Tanzania	Independent Electoral Commission Law and Political Parties Affairs Act 2024	Tanzania's National Electoral Commission was renamed the Independent National Electoral Commission. The methods for appointing or removing commissioners, budgetary control and other issues of governance were set out. The policing of political party activities and disclosure of party financial reports was covered ( <a href="#">Center for Strategic Litigation 2024</a> ; <a href="#">Kwayu 2024</a> ).
Tunisia	Revision of Organic Law No. 16 of 2014	The power to arbitrate on electoral disputes was transferred from the Administrative Court to the Court of Appeal ( <a href="#">Mosaïquefm 2024</a> ).
USA (Pennsylvania)	House Bill 2473	Set a deadline for resolving recounts ( <a href="#">Walker 2024</a> ).
UK (Wales)	The Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024	Introduced automatic voter registration, reforms to the role of electoral authorities and campaign expenditure limits.

Source: Compiled by the author based on a search of the LexisNexis newspaper archive.

region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, earlier in 2024 ([Sarajevo Times 2024b](#)). The Government of Republika Srpska had developed the law to enable it to conduct its own local elections, independent of the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It had also called on electoral officials inside of Republika Srpska to resign ([Sarajevo Times 2024a](#)).

The European Union had warned of 'serious consequences' if Republika Srpska passed its own electoral law, as it would threaten the 'sovereignty, territorial integrity and constitutional order' of Bosnia and Herzegovina ([Baccini 2025](#)).

Members of both the House of Representatives and the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina had called on the Constitutional Court to review the constitutionality of the law ([Sarajevo Times 2024a](#)). The Court's ruling therefore addressed a central question in the governance of the country.

**The European Union had warned of 'serious consequences' if Republika Srpska passed its own electoral law.**

**Electoral finance has often been one of the weakest aspects of the electoral cycle globally.**

#### 1.4. ELECTORAL FINANCE DISPUTES

Electoral finance has often been one of the weakest aspects of the electoral cycle globally ([Garnett and James 2023](#); [Garnett et al. 2023](#)). Although measures to regulate electoral finance could improve electoral integrity, debates are often deeply polarized and partisan, and reforms have been criticized.

In Japan, electoral finance laws were revised in 2024 following a slush fund scandal in which politicians from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) were accused of pocketing funds raised at party fundraising events ([Kyodo News 2024](#)). An LDP task force on political reform was established to make recommendations in response to the scandal. The recommendations received broad support from LDP lawmakers ([NHK World 2024](#)), and reforms were passed in June 2024 ([The Mainichi 2024](#)). The scandal remained a key issue in the October 2024 parliamentary elections, and opposition parties were critical of the proposed reforms, calling for more drastic finance reform instead ([Matsui and Okubo 2024](#)).

In South Africa, the National Assembly and the president approved amendments to the Political Party Funding Act, enabling independent candidates to contest elections for seats in the National Assembly and provincial legislatures. The Act also regulated the funding of independent candidates and granted them access to the Multi-Party Democracy Fund ([Parliament of South Africa 2024b](#)). However, the amended Act was criticized for creating a temporary gap in the law by removing caps on how much parties could receive and not requiring declarations ahead of South Africa's 2024 elections. Under the amended Act, the president would be given the authority to establish limits on donations following a resolution from the National Assembly ([Thorne 2024](#)).

In Tanzania, new legislation included timelines for the reporting of election offences by candidates and their parties; however, it was criticized for not requiring full public disclosure of election expenses ([Center for Strategic Litigation 2024](#): 33).

In India, tighter restrictions were put in place following a legal ruling. In February, the Supreme Court scrapped the seven-year-old electoral bonds system, which had allowed individuals and companies to make anonymous donations to political parties.<sup>2</sup> The system, introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Finance Act 2017, had allowed donors to buy bonds from the government-run State Bank of India which could then be transferred to a political party and redeemed for cash ([Rajagopal 2024](#)).

The role of money in politics was also raised in Canada. The Electoral Participation Act (Bill C-65) was introduced to delay the 2025 general election by one week ([Canada 2024](#)). The Liberal government said that the purpose

<sup>2</sup> *Association for Democratic Reforms and another v Union of India and others* [2024] SC (India).

of the delay was to avoid a clash with Diwali and local elections in Alberta. Opposition parties pointed out, however, that the change would have enabled 80 members of parliament who were first elected in 2019 to receive pensions they would not otherwise have been eligible for (Aiello 2024).

## 1.5. ELECTORAL DISPUTES AND MANAGEMENT

Amendments to electoral laws in several countries in 2024 changed who has power to validate election results. In Tunisia, for example, shortly before the presidential election on 6 October, legislators proposed and adopted an amendment to remove the Administrative Court's prerogative to validate the election on 27 September. In anticipation of the Administrative Court's invalidation of the result, power was granted to the Court of Appeal instead, a body considered to favour the president (France 24 2024). Amid reports of arrests of the president's political opponents, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk said that, 'The rejection of a legally binding court decision is at odds with basic respect for the rule of law' (OHCHR 2024).

The question of who should have the power to validate election results was also at the centre of electoral reform disputes in Mozambique (see Box 1.1).

The independence of electoral management bodies (EMBs) is widely seen as important for securing electoral integrity (James et al. 2019). Some reforms to electoral management arrangements in 2024 called this independence into question. In Georgia, for example, amendments to the electoral code changed the procedure for appointing the chair of the Central Election Commission (CEC), authorizing the speaker of parliament (rather than the president) to nominate the chair and seven members of the CEC (Civil Georgia 2024; ODIHR 2024: 5–6). These changes were made without broad support and were criticized for centralizing power in the governing party (ODIHR 2024: 7). The reforms were passed amid political turmoil and despite criticism from civil society about the adoption of the Transparency of Foreign Influence Bill, which would require many civil society groups and media outlets to register as agents of foreign governments (ODIHR 2024: 1).

In Tanzania, the National Electoral Commission Act 2024 established a dedicated law to direct the operation of the EMB. While the Act was proclaimed as a law to establish independence, the Center for Strategic Litigation noted that it also gave the president the power to remove commissioners from office. Moreover, the Act also stipulated that appointments to the EMB would be made by a committee consisting of presidential appointees (Center for Strategic Litigation 2024).

Reforms in other countries reconfigured bodies involved in delivering and overseeing elections. In Nigeria, for example, a bill was introduced in the Senate to establish a National Independent Local Government Electoral

**Amendments to electoral laws in several countries in 2024 changed who has power to validate election results.**

Commission, which would be responsible for conducting elections for local government chairpersons and councillors ([Omogbolagun 2024](#)). The bill followed a Supreme Court decision stipulating that state governors could not retain funds meant for local government administrators ([Ukanwa 2024](#)). However, the Inter-Party Advisory Council, an umbrella group representing all registered political parties, criticized the bill as an ‘unacceptable, ill-conceived ... electoral jamboree’ ([Murey 2024](#)). The Council also challenged a new electoral law in the state of Anambra, which created an independent electoral commission in the state, a move the Council called ‘a blatant attack on democracy’ ([Nwachukwu 2024](#)). The State House of Assembly passed the law in its first, second and third readings on the same day, shortly before the 28 September 2024 local elections ([Nwachukwu 2024](#)).

In Wales, the Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Act 2024 created a new Democracy and Boundary Commission to coordinate the administration of parliamentary and local elections in Wales, along with any devolved referendums in the country.

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**A variety of legislative measures were adopted in 2024 to make elections more inclusive.**

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## 1.6. BUILDING INCLUSIVE ELECTIONS

A variety of legislative measures were adopted in 2024 to make elections more inclusive. Tanzania, for example, passed a new act that requires political parties to have a gender and social inclusion policy (Center for Strategic Litigation 2024: 32). Wales made progress towards automatic voter registration, with pilot projects getting under way following changes to the law (Welsh Government 2024). Problems with voter registration in the United Kingdom extend beyond Wales, with an estimated 7–8 million people incorrectly registered or missing entirely from the voter rolls across the UK. Moreover, registration rates are lower among some socio-demographic groups ([United Kingdom n.d.](#)). In Canada, the Electoral Participation Act (Bill C-65) was introduced in Parliament in March 2024, providing for two additional days of advance voting and introducing other inclusive voting measures to make voting easier—such as for citizens with disabilities or those living in care institutions ([Canada 2024](#)).

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## 1.7. BLOCKED OR DELAYED REFORMS

Not all attempted electoral reforms were passed in 2024, as various barriers emerged. In Mexico, for example, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador sought to undertake major electoral reforms while in office (2018–2024). In February 2024 he announced a package of 20 proposed reforms (18 constitutional and 2 legal), which included plans to elect electoral judges and members of the National Electoral Institute (INE) by popular vote; to restructure the INE by reducing the size of its General Council, changing its functions and eliminating local electoral bodies; and to change the electoral system by

removing seats allocated by proportional representation and reducing the number of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate ([López 2024](#)).

In response to these reform proposals, tens of thousands of demonstrators protested in cities across Mexico and abroad in a ‘march for democracy’ ([Marentes 2024](#)). The legislature was also strongly opposed to the proposed amendments, and the president was unable to implement them before the June 2024 elections.

However, the Morena party and its allies secured a supermajority in Congress after the elections, which enabled the approval of constitutional amendments that introduced the election of judges (including electoral magistrates) by popular vote and changes to term limits for the Federal Electoral Tribunal to coincide with presidential elections ([Ballesteros and O’Donohue 2024](#)). These changes were adopted as part of a broader judicial reform (included in the package announced in February 2024), which was promulgated in September 2024 by then-President López Obrador, weeks before he was succeeded by President Claudia Sheinbaum.

In India, the High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, chaired by a former president, published a high-profile report on the ‘One Nation, One Election’ approach to Indian elections. The report recommended aligning the electoral cycles of the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the national parliament) and state legislative assemblies in India. Prime Minister Modi has been a proponent of the idea, and there has been support from the Election Commission of India. The Bharatiya Janata Party ([Yadav 2024](#)) argued that synchronized elections would result in reduced costs and potential savings through the economies of scale that could be achieved. Critics of the proposal argued that the move would give more power to the prime minister, weaken the federal government structure and limit states’ rights in the country. However, implementation would require constitutional amendments, a two-thirds majority in parliament and ratification by at least half of India’s states ([The Economic Times 2024](#)).

Some proposed changes were blocked by courts in 2024. In Germany, for example, the electoral law for Bundestag elections passed by the so-called traffic light coalition in 2023, introduced without opposition support, was challenged in the Constitutional Court in 2024 ([Breton 2024](#)). The Court ruled in June that the reform was partly unconstitutional, as the requirement of the law that a party must meet an electoral threshold of 5 per cent of the votes in parliament breached the principles of electoral equality and equal opportunity for parties ([Bleckmann 2024](#)).

Elsewhere, proposed legislative changes were blocked by a lack of technical capacity. In South Sudan, for example, elections scheduled for December 2024 were postponed for two years. The government said that more time was needed to develop the legal framework for a permanent constitution, undertake a census and register political parties ([Al Jazeera 2024](#)). Meanwhile, the bicameral parliament passed a new electoral law that includes a provision

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**Some proposed changes were blocked by courts in 2024.**

(article 82, section 2) to declare any election invalid if it is not in line with the law.

**The year 2024 saw a flurry of electoral reforms around the world which are likely to have lasting effects on future elections.**

## 1.8. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The year 2024 saw a flurry of electoral reforms around the world which are likely to have lasting effects on future elections. Inevitably, the reforms will have a mixture of outcomes. These reforms rarely enjoyed broad consensus, however. Problems included electoral laws being passed unilaterally, incumbents ignoring carefully crafted agreements and legislation being passed at the last minute, which put pressure on electoral management.

Fault often lay with those proposing the reforms. In several contexts, there was strong evidence that reforms were introduced to consolidate the power of incumbents. One tactic that autocrats used in an effort to win elections was to gain control of the courts responsible for adjudicating on electoral petitions. In such cases, consensus was not the aim; the goal was, rather, to eliminate opportunities for electoral justice.

Consensus is also difficult to achieve in contexts where there are existing societal conflicts. In those contexts, debates about electoral law reflect wider debates about the jurisdiction of different levels of government, as seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Somalia.

Despite these challenges, several examples of good practices could be identified. In the early stages of 2024, for example, electoral law reform in Mozambique (see Box 1.1) was marked by political consensus, as opposing political factions came together to develop a shared agenda for reform. Cross-party working committees within parliamentary institutions provided a key forum for this collaboration. These proposals were ultimately rejected, however, setting in motion a series of events involving a disputed election, violence and loss of life.

Two general lessons can be taken from 2024:

1. The media, civil society, political opposition and the international community should focus their attention on electoral reform, as reforms can have important consequences for the conduct of elections and, in some cases, serve as a means of autocratization.
2. Finding ways to develop political consensus remains a key challenge. In 2024 an international initiative offered a step forward. After wide consultation, the Global Network for Securing Electoral Integrity (2024) published some key principles for how electoral reform can be undertaken. These principles state that (a) political consensus building is foundational to any electoral reform process; (b) electoral reform processes should be transparent, inclusive, and informed by evidence and a long-term

**Finding ways to develop political consensus remains a key challenge.**

### Box 1.1. Disputed legal framework ahead of Mozambique 2024 general elections

Mozambique saw a flurry of proposed changes to its electoral law in 2024. In January, the Standing Commission of the Assembly of the Republic, Mozambique's parliament, called an extraordinary sitting to schedule voter registration to take place during the rainy season, in February and March ([MozParks 2024b](#)). The governing party, Frelimo, and two opposition groups, Renamo and the Mozambique Democratic Movement, all supported the move. However, the opposition demanded additional reforms in exchange for their support for the revised voter registration schedule. Frelimo agreed, and the opposition submitted their set of proposals, which were discussed by a parliamentary working group especially set up to discuss changes to the electoral laws.

In April, the Assembly approved amendments to the electoral law—which were ‘passed unanimously, and in record time’ ([All Africa 2024](#))—because the parties had reached an agreement on the parliamentary commission on public administration and local power ([All Africa 2024](#)). Reforms included giving the district and city law courts the power to order recounts of votes, which until then was the exclusive purview of the National Elections Commission and the Constitutional Council. If concerns were raised about possible fraudulent results, then the district court would be enabled to review copies of the polling station results sheets (*editais*) and minutes submitted by the parties. A recount could be demanded if there were irregularities. Although the second opposition party, the Mozambique Democratic Movement, voted in favour of the amendments, it complained that an agreement had been reached between Frelimo and Renamo, and that they had not been properly consulted ([All Africa 2024](#)).

In June, however, President Filipe Nyusi refused to promulgate the amendments, claiming that he had concerns about the ‘procedural mechanism’ for the district courts to order recounts ([MozParks 2024d](#)). Nyusi's refusal was surprising, given that his own party had backed the negotiated provisions ([MozParks 2024d](#)). Nyusi was also criticized for not providing an adequate explanation, as required by the Constitution, which meant that it would be difficult for the Assembly of the Republic to amend the proposal to respond to his concerns ([Maússe 2024](#)). One opposition candidate for governor claimed that ‘the President returned the law because he wants to perpetuate fraud’ ([MozParks 2024a](#)).

In August, after the Assembly chose to remove the articles on the district courts and recounts, the revised electoral law amendments were promulgated by the President ([Fauvet 2024](#)). The revised law included new requirements that ballot boxes needed to be transparent, and that the slot had to be wide enough for only one ballot paper, to make ballot box stuffing impossible. It also moved to prevent vote counts from taking place behind closed doors to ensure that observers and journalists could be present throughout the count.

The Mozambican Association of Judges criticized this change, which was agreed by the Frelimo and Renamo parliamentary groups ([Fauvet 2024](#)). The late changes were also criticized by the Centre for Public Integrity (Centro de Integridade Pública), which argued that the changes had been made in secret, contained confusing provisions and enabled electoral fraud ([Centro de Integridade Pública 2024](#)). Observers and journalists lost their right to obtain an official copy of the *edital*, they noted, but this was not included in the list of amendments. A further late correction therefore had to be published on 13 September ([Centro de Integridade Pública 2024](#)).

The report of the Southern African Development Community ([2024: 5](#)) noted that Law No. 14 and Law No. 15, which were gazetted on 23 August 2024, ‘brought some challenges, including the fact that sufficient time was needed by all stakeholders’ because of their late enactment. The Southern Africa Development Community also pointed out that changes were made to the ballot boxes after they had already been produced for the election.

The European Union's report on the election claimed that the ‘passing of 30 amendments to the electoral law, just 47 days before election day is not in line with international good practice, caused lack of legal certainty and added confusion and dissatisfaction among stakeholders’ ([EU EOM 2025](#)).

Opposition parties announced their intention to challenge the election in light of ‘many irregularities’ even before the results were announced ([MozParks 2024c](#)). EU observers called on electoral authorities to ensure greater



### Box 1.1. Disputed legal framework ahead of Mozambique 2024 general elections (cont.)

transparency and urged the Constitutional Council to address the challenges raised by various parties (European Union Election Observation Mission Mozambique 2024). Demonstrations and protests followed, which led to violent clashes. According to one non-governmental organization, the death toll over the course of the post-election protests reached 358 between 21 October 2024 and 16 March 2025 (Amnesty International 2024; Plataforma Electoral Decide 2025; International IDEA 2024).

vision; (c) adequate time frames and resources are essential for a viable and democratic electoral reform process; and (d) clear accountability structures are essential for electoral reform processes.

These principles could serve as useful guidelines for electoral reform stakeholders in 2025 and beyond.

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## Chapter 2

# ELECTORAL MALPRACTICE

*Vasil Vashchanka*

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**Electoral malpractice  
is essentially  
the antithesis of  
electoral integrity.**

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### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

Electoral malpractice is essentially the antithesis of electoral integrity. If we define electoral integrity as a set of principles that elections must abide by in order to uphold democratic ideals (see the Introduction; James and Garnett 2025), electoral malpractice can be described as a set of actions which flout these principles. In other words, malpractice refers to acts which aim to secure an electoral advantage by means that are incompatible with electoral integrity.

While the term ‘electoral malpractice’ readily evokes images of stuffed ballot boxes and falsified tally sheets, elections can be manipulated in a number of ways. Sarah Birch (2011) offered an authoritative typology, distinguishing between three kinds of manipulation: (a) manipulation of rules, which targets the legal framework for elections by introducing regulatory obstacles that get in the way of fair competition; (b) manipulation of voters, which seeks to alter the free expression of the electors’ will by illicit means—such as bribery or coercion; and, last but not least, (c) manipulation of votes, which takes place at the ballot box—and during the subsequent aggregation of voting results. The different kinds of malpractice are, of course, not mutually exclusive, and some manipulative actions involve elements of more than one kind of foul play.

By definition, electoral malpractice affects one or more elements of electoral integrity. It can undermine the competitive nature of elections by crafting eligibility criteria to exclude opposition candidates or by rejecting nominations on spurious grounds. Opposition supporters may be disenfranchised through manipulation of the voter register or a failure to supply sufficient numbers of ballots to selected polling stations, diminishing participation. Partisan bias and other manipulation of the media undercuts deliberation. By colluding

in the fraudulent tabulation of voting results, electoral authorities abrogate adjudication.

Electoral malpractice is usually a covert activity, and allegations of electoral malpractice are difficult to prove. This makes it an even more troubling problem for democracy because those seeking to manipulate elections may be able to use such tactics undetected. False claims of electoral malpractice may also be made by opponents to discredit the result of an election. Nonetheless, it is essential for electoral stakeholders, policymakers and international organizations to be vigilant concerning possible cases of electoral malpractice.

This chapter will highlight examples of allegations of electoral malpractice from 2024, using the analytical framework mentioned above. It will flag potential trends and conclude with several lessons from what was an eventful year for elections. These observations are aimed at enriching the conversation rather than reaching any final conclusions. Large as it is, a one-year sample is still only a snapshot of processes unfolding over longer timespans. As with other topics taken up in this volume, the elections super cycle of 2024 has provided a powerful impetus for further reflection and analysis.

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## 2.2. ELECTORAL MALPRACTICE IN 2024

The electoral super cycle demonstrated that electoral malpractice remains a problem requiring vigilance and scrutiny. When it comes to manifestations of malpractice, most issues that came to the fore in 2024 are hardly new. As we show below, the toolbox of electoral malpractice—and the corresponding threat to electoral integrity—is abundant and continues to expand. Since this report focuses on countries whose democratic practice exceeds a certain threshold, we make very few references to elections in autocratic environments. Needless to say, in the absence of meaningful safeguards for electoral integrity, the repertoire of electoral malpractice in autocracies is naturally broad.

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**The electoral super cycle demonstrated that electoral malpractice remains a problem requiring vigilance and scrutiny.**

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## 2.3. CHANGES IN INSTITUTIONS RAISED CONCERNS ABOUT ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

In 2024 several governments were accused of making self-serving changes to electoral laws ahead of upcoming elections. In the United Kingdom, the 2024 general election was held using a compulsory photographic identification system. This was the first time that this system had been implemented, following the introduction of the 2022 Elections Act. Critics argued that the associated changes to electoral laws would lead to lower turnout among some sections of the population, particularly young people, who were less likely to vote for the incumbent government. Academic studies showed that many people were unable to vote as a result (James and Clark 2025 forthcoming)



and indicated that voters for the incumbent party were more likely to hold valid photo identification than supporters of other parties ([Fieldhouse et al. 2024](#)).

In India, a new law adopted in 2023 altered the three-member committee responsible for appointing election commissioners to include the union home minister instead of the chief justice. Opposition parties criticized the committee's appointments, claiming that they were closely aligned with the government ([Al Jazeera 2024](#); [The Economic Times 2024](#); [International IDEA 2024a](#); [Rajagopal 2024](#)). The president of the Indian National Congress accused the government of the 'systematic decimation of independent institutions' after a senior official resigned ahead of the general election ([Al Jazeera 2024](#)). Two new election commissioners were appointed by a three-member committee comprising Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Minister Amit Shah and the leader of the Indian National Congress in the Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury ([International IDEA 2024a](#)). However, concerns continued to be raised about subsequent appointments ([International IDEA 2024a](#)). Opposition parties also claimed that non-contested elections were facilitated under pressure in some constituencies, where opposition nominations were rejected or withdrawn ([Sharma 2024](#)).

A proposed overhaul of Mexico's National Electoral Institute (INE) in 2023 brought protesters into the streets and challenges to the Supreme Court ([Al Jazeera 2023](#)). These 'Plan B' reforms were eventually blocked ([International IDEA 2023](#); [Reuters 2023](#)). However, 'Plan C' reforms were proposed in 2024 which, it was argued, would reduce the capacity of the INE and introduce the popular election of judges. The governing party, Morena, responded that the reforms were motivated by a concern about the costs to the Mexican people of institutions such as the INE and denied that the reforms threatened democracy ([Deslandes 2024](#)).

**In Georgia, the ruling party was accused of consolidating control over the appointment of the Central Election Commission.**

In Georgia, the ruling party was accused of consolidating control over the appointment of the Central Election Commission (CEC) ([ODIHR 2024](#)). Reforms passed included a new decision-making process, the removal of the position of the opposition-nominated deputy CEC chairperson and a modified selection procedure for CEC members ([ODIHR 2024: 5–6](#)). This effectively undercut the independence of the electoral body, which has multiple levers of influence on the process.

The effects of institutional tweaks may not be visible in the short term, but they may threaten electoral integrity in the longer run. The manipulation of rules can also relate to other aspects of elections. In El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele spearheaded efforts to reduce the number of seats in the legislature and proposed the consolidation of municipalities into larger districts, a move which, according to the opposition, was designed to reduce smaller parties' political participation ([Renteria 2023](#)). In Mozambique, amendments promulgated less than seven weeks before election day stripped district courts of their power to order recounts of ballots or annual election results (see Chapter 1: Electoral reform). These rules were changed after the 2023 municipal elections, when several district court decisions to rerun elections were overturned by the



Constitutional Council. Observers claimed that this diminished the role of the courts in addressing potential violations (IRI 2024).

## 2.4. VOTER MANIPULATION WAS OFTEN PRESENT—IN BOTH NEW AND TRADITIONAL FORMS—BUT NOT ALWAYS EFFECTIVE

All electoral campaigns seek to sway voters, but some forms of manipulation are deemed undue influence, which stands in the way of the free formation or expression of voters' preferences (Birch 2011). With respect to the expression of preferences, voters can be prevented from casting a ballot for the candidate or party of their choice by coercion or inducement. The former is more characteristic of authoritarian environments, occurring less frequently in democracies, but international observers noted this issue in Georgia (ODIHR 2024). Inducement, on the other hand, frequently takes place in democratic elections, in the form of vote buying (Cruz, Keefer and Labonne 2015).

As one of the most common forms of electoral malpractice, vote buying is available to both incumbents and challengers. In the toolbox of electoral mischief, it is arguably one of the more 'benign' instruments—particularly compared with intimidation and electoral violence. It also serves a distributive function for communities which may otherwise be neglected in resource distribution. But its long-term effects are far from positive, and its corrosive influence on electoral integrity and accountability is rightfully noted by researchers and observers alike (Stokes 2007; Joseph and Vashchanka 2022).

In 2024, vote-buying accusations again surfaced in a variety of contexts: International IDEA's Global Election Monitor recorded 17 elections that saw allegations of fraud, including vote buying and financial irregularities (Asplund and Tucker 2025).<sup>3</sup> In Indonesia, citizen observers expressed concerns about candidates' 'unethical conduct' and 'money politics' (ANFREL 2024: 12). Prior research in Indonesia showed that, in a crowded field with narrow winning margins, where access to the media is challenging and the electoral system promotes intraparty competition, many candidates see vote buying as a viable campaign strategy (Muhtadi 2019). The lack of accountability for such practices created a further incentive for inducements (ANFREL 2024: 12). Observers also questioned the distribution of social assistance (*bansos*) by the outgoing President, Joko Widodo, whose son was a vice-presidential candidate, noting that during the campaign period the President handed out *bansos* personally in closely contested areas (ANFREL 2024: 7).

Widespread vote buying also reportedly played a role in the ruling party's resounding victory in the Maldives. Allegations of large cash handouts proliferated, and there were claims that state resources may have also been channelled to buy votes (Daily Mirror 2024). In the Dominican Republic, political

**In 2024, vote-buying accusations again surfaced in a variety of contexts.**

**Widespread vote buying also reportedly played a role in the ruling party's resounding victory in the Maldives.**

<sup>3</sup> The elections in question took place in the following countries: Bulgaria, Comoros, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Georgia, Ghana, Indonesia, Madagascar, the Maldives, Mauritania, Moldova, Mongolia, Mozambique, South Africa, Sri Lanka (presidential and parliamentary elections) and Tunisia.

and civil society actors alleged that the governing party used public resources for electoral purposes, including social plans and bonuses, the distribution of food rations and other goods, and the irregular allocation of pensions (OAS 2024b: 26).

Vote buying frequently indicates the presence of systemic issues, such as clientelist politics, where electoral loyalties are won by the provision of individual or community goods and favours, rather than programmatic policy considerations (Birch 2011: 93–95). A vexing question posed by such contexts is, How is change possible? For example, what circumstances could lead to a shift in voters' attitudes and a rejection of patronage politics? Ghana supplied an example where, despite alleged vote buying (Asima 2024), the ruling party suffered a heavy electoral defeat (Adom 2024).

Another country which stood out for change in the 2024 super cycle was Sri Lanka. In both the presidential and the parliamentary elections, Sri Lanka's voters largely abandoned the established political parties associated with political patronage and corruption (Peiris 2022) and gave a chance to a political force which had not yet been tested in government. Vote buying and 'treating' electors to food and drinks were still reported by observers (PAFFREL 2024), albeit on a smaller scale than previously, but the outcome was a resounding victory for the candidates who promised a different kind of politics. These elections were the first after the popular uprising of 2022, which ousted the previous president (EU EOM 2024a). It remains to be seen whether they will mark a paradigm shift.

When it comes to the formation of voters' preferences, social media and online platforms have opened up new possibilities for the manipulation of election-related information. Birch (2011: 91) argued that manipulation of preference formation is primarily a 'wholesale' activity that takes place in the media and public spaces with a broad reach, in contrast to manipulation of preference expression, which is 'retail' and targets voters individually. This distinction no longer holds in the online information space, where voters can be targeted individually. Importantly, this form of malpractice is available not only to incumbents and opposition parties but also to foreign actors. In 2024 an election was annulled for the first time—in Romania—principally due to concerns about this kind of manipulation (Financial Times 2024; see also Chapter 5: The information environment around elections).

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## 2.5. FRAUD AT THE BALLOT BOX CAPTURED HEADLINES AND LED TO PUBLIC OUTCRIES

Manipulation of votes—either when ballots are cast or when they are counted and tabulated—carries the greatest risks, since it can be detected more easily than other kinds of malpractice, and exposing it can deal a heavy blow to electoral legitimacy (Birch 2011). Still, reports of this malfeasance of 'last resort' repeatedly emerged in 2024, capturing news headlines. In Venezuela,

the opposition claimed that the country's unpopular president was able to cling to power through the wholesale falsification of election results ([Buschschlüter 2024a](#)). With the independence of the electoral management body (EMB) long written off, the official election result handing the victory to President Nicolás Maduro was not backed by polling station data, which was never released, and which the opposition said confirmed its decisive win ([Euronews 2024a](#)). There were also strong concerns raised in Pakistan (see Box 2.1).

### Box 2.1. Pakistan: Election results lacking credibility

When general elections were finally held in February 2024, after several postponements, there was hope that they would mark a step towards resolving a protracted political crisis. The vote of no confidence in Prime Minister Imran Khan and the ouster of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party from government in April 2022 was followed by a series of protests, including violent attacks on military installations in May 2023. The PTI leader evidently fell out with the army, which takes a heavy hand in ruling the country behind the scenes ([Jalal 2024a](#)).

The PTI competed in the February 2024 elections with severe disadvantages. Its leadership was in prison, its candidates were prevented from registering, and it effectively had no access to traditional media. Controversially, the Election Commission (EC) ruled that the PTI could not use its electoral symbol, which identifies political parties on the ballot and especially accommodates illiterate voters, so its candidates had to register as independents and apply for their own symbols ([Jalal 2024b](#)).

Yet none of these hurdles were evidently enough to stop the country's most popular political force. In the official tally, PTI-backed independent candidates won 92 out of 266 parliamentary seats contested in single-mandate constituencies, more than any other party. This outcome, however, was vehemently contested by the PTI, which claimed to have won as many as 170 seats, and accused the EC of covering up a stolen election ([Jalal 2024b](#)).

Indeed, the vote tabulation process lacked transparency, and the credibility of the official results was widely questioned ([Jalal 2024b](#)). Numerous PTI candidates claimed that they and their agents had been denied access to the tabulation. Citizen observers faced the same problem in more than half of all constituencies ([FAFEN 2024a](#)). The EC's results reporting system was down on election day and night due to a blackout of mobile network coverage, and some of the tally sheets it belatedly posted online were later replaced. The EC remained quiet for several days after the election, and there were doubts as to whether it had full control over the tabulation.

The flawed election brought little respite to the protracted political crisis. A government was formed by an awkward coalition of former adversaries and excluded the PTI, which continues its protests, while its leaders face numerous criminal charges ([Azeem 2024](#)). An audit of the election results, advocated by citizen observers ([FAFEN 2024b](#)), never took place, and election petitions contesting dubious election results are being handled at a snail's pace ([FAFEN 2024c](#)).

Electoral legitimacy was very much at stake in highly disputed elections, such as Georgia's, where the opposition cried foul ([Euronews 2024b](#)). Allegations of massive malfeasance at the ballot box in Georgia, however, could not be confirmed by international observers, who rather emphasized the uneven playing field in the lead-up to the elections ([Agenda.ge 2024](#); [NDI 2024](#); [ODIHR 2024](#)). The Election Commission rejected claims of meddling with the results ([Sauer and Agence France-Presse 2024](#)). Allegations of rigging were also not corroborated by observers in Mauritania ([Mohamed 2024](#)). In Mozambique, on

the other hand, problems with the transparency of ballot counts and potential irregularities with vote tabulation were flagged already in the preliminary observer statements (EU EOM 2024b; IRI 2024).

Alleged or real, electoral fraud is a potent trigger of public discontent. In Mauritania, the opposition accused the EMB of deception and called for peaceful demonstrations, which turned violent in some areas (Mohamed 2024). Post-election protests also engulfed Mozambique and were met with a heavy-handed response by the government (Schwikowski 2024). In Venezuela, the crackdown against protesters was extensive and brutal (Human Rights Watch 2024; see also Box 2.2). In Georgia, post-election demonstrations subsided, only to be reignited again by the government's inept reversal of policy direction (Fouda 2024).

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**Addressing malpractice should remain a high priority for election practitioners.**

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## 2.6. CONCLUSIONS

Addressing malpractice should remain a high priority for election practitioners. This task is arguably becoming more challenging due not only to the inherently clandestine nature of malfeasance but also to its sophistication as well as competing (and vocal) claims about its prevalence. On the one hand, the existence of space for such claims is already a marker of democratic contestation. In authoritarian regimes, where electoral malpractice is rampant, bringing it to public attention is often impossible, and international observers doing so may find themselves uninvited (see Box 2.2). On the other hand, it is hardly a cause for celebration when political actors publicly question electoral integrity as a matter of partisan strategy, without evidence and with scant regard for the consequences. A strategy that claims that a loss can only be due to fraud damages electoral integrity and deepens polarization.

Impunity for electoral malpractice erodes democratic institutions. When revelations of electoral malpractice trigger legal consequences, this could potentially wipe out the gains obtained through malpractice and serve as a deterrent (e.g. when an election is annulled due to the winning candidate's conviction for vote buying). The absence of accountability creates a false sense of security and encourages wrongdoing while systemic crises are brewing. The loss of electoral legitimacy in Bangladesh due to the opposition's boycott did not trigger the protests which ultimately led to the ousting of the prime minister, but it certainly contributed to the public's frustration with the entire political system (Sajjad 2024). Among other factors, anti-government protests in Mozambique were exacerbated by the lack of response to allegations of electoral fraud (ICG 2024).

At the same time, adjudicating elections tainted by electoral malpractice will continue to be challenging. The extent of mischief will always be contested, as, for example, in Georgia (Kirby 2024), and its effect on the outcome of an election may be difficult to gauge, particularly when it comes to manipulation of rules and voters. Annulment of an election is a drastic measure, which

### Box 2.2. Electoral malpractice in Venezuela

In July 2024 Venezuela held a presidential election at a time when the country was facing a severe economic and humanitarian crisis. The election was expected to be the most competitive of the past few despite the unfair advantage enjoyed by Nicolás Maduro of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. Using government resources, Maduro had more media coverage, garnered disproportionate campaign funding and launched continuous legal attacks against opposing parties ([The Carter Center 2024](#)). For example, the Supreme Court upheld the ban on the candidacy of the opposition leader, María Corina Machado, despite her winning 90 per cent of the vote in the primaries. The opposition was then required to field a new candidate, Edmundo González Urrutia ([García Cano 2024a](#)).

On polling day, Venezuelans went to the polls in large numbers and mostly peacefully. However, there were a number of reported irregularities and accusations of electoral manipulation. Reports of the movement of polling stations without warning and sometimes into neighbouring states were noted. Conversely, it was noted that the polls remained open longer than they were supposed to in some historically pro-Maduro neighbourhoods ([Glatsky 2024](#); [Rogerero 2024](#)).

Moreover, many reports of vote suppression, arrests of opposition party election workers and the imposition of incumbent party checkpoints either at or in the vicinity of polling stations all pointed to evidence of electoral manipulation ([Glatsky 2024](#); [Rogerero 2024](#)). Additionally, many Venezuelans abroad could not vote due to arbitrary registration laws for voters with residency outside the country ([The Carter Center 2024](#); [Rogerero 2024](#)). The Venezuelan Government even revoked an electoral observation invitation to the EU, citing sanctions as the reason ([García Cano 2024b](#)).

The controversy reached a critical point when the National Electoral Council (CNE) claimed that Maduro had won but did not provide disaggregated results from each polling centre, a process required by law to declare a winner. The CNE stated that Maduro had won with 52 per cent of the vote ([Rogerero 2024](#)). Opposition parties pushed back against the declaration and stated that they had collected vote tabulations from around 80 per cent of all polling stations, declaring the opposition leader, González Urrutia, the true winner, with at least 67 per cent of the vote. Two other independent sources reached similar conclusions ([Rogerero 2024](#)). Electoral observers, such as the Carter Center and the Organization of American States (OAS), also scrutinized the results of the election and called for the release of disaggregated results ([The Carter Center 2024](#); [U.S. Mission to the Organization of American States 2024](#)).

Maduro responded to the opposition claims, calling them fraudulent. The CNE is the only body that can declare the official results; however, the CNE is also stacked with Maduro loyalists. While the CNE declared Maduro the winner, they refused to release the disaggregated results, citing, without evidence, that they had been targeted by hackers and that the disaggregated results could therefore not be released ([Buschschlüter 2024b](#)). Later, Venezuela's Supreme Court certified that Maduro had won the election, but to the objection of observers like the OAS ([International IDEA n.d.](#)). The OAS stated that the basis for the ruling was unclear and that the arguments of the appealing party were not revealed. The OAS ([2024c](#)) also pointed out that the disaggregated results had still not been released publicly. Some key Latin American countries, including Brazil, Colombia and Mexico (with governments more ideologically aligned with Venezuela's), demanded that Maduro provide evidence of his win ([Rogerero 2024](#)). Despite Maduro's failure to do so, the aforementioned nations sent ambassadors to Maduro's swearing-in ceremony in January 2025 ([Osorio 2025](#)).

Due to the number of irregularities during the election and the conflicting results, large numbers of people took to the streets in peaceful post-election protests. The authorities and armed pro-government groups aggressively arrested and repressed the protesters ([International IDEA n.d.](#); [Stroehlein 2024](#)). Some reports state that the government arrested more than 2,200 protesters, at least 150 of whom were children, with many being charged with terrorism and other serious crimes. There have also been reports of torture, gender-based violence, politically motivated prosecutions and violations of human rights ([CBS News 2024](#)).

should not be taken lightly. The decision of the Constitutional Court of Romania to cancel the first round of the presidential election was criticized by both candidates who made it to the second round ([Ross and Popoviciu 2024](#)) and may have set an awkward precedent. Should it be assumed that all voters exposed to disinformation online no longer have agency to freely form their preferences? What is the threshold for such manipulation to be deemed to have had a decisive impact on the election outcome? Dealing with the consequences of electoral malpractice poses difficult dilemmas.

### Box 2.3. Flaws and successes in electoral observation

In a call on representatives of democratic nations, International IDEA ([2024b](#)) highlighted that the Russian Foreign Ministry's invitations to groups to observe the 2024 presidential election amounted to a visitors programme (rather than an election observation mission) that would yield a superficial snapshot of the election rather than deep insights and that did 'not follow a systematic methodology to examine a given electoral process for its compliance with international standards for free and fair elections'. In addition to the subversion of established observation methodology, the provision of government funding to individuals participating in this visitors programme and the lack of standards agreed upon through international consensus discredits observers taking part in such a programme.

Election observation is a global practice whereby independent domestic or international groups monitor the integrity of an electoral process. It is a key tool for avoiding electoral malpractice.

Election observation can involve analysing the legal framework for elections, political campaigns and media coverage prior to election day; it can also involve visiting polling stations, monitoring vote counting and assessing the work of electoral management bodies ([United Nations 2005](#)).

The Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, adopted in 2005, set guidelines for impartial and professional election observation to include systematic data collection, unbiased analysis and high standards for accuracy ([ACE Project n.d.](#)).

The year 2024 showcased both flaws and successes in electoral observation. In Bangladesh, civil society restrictions and regulatory obstructions limited election transparency for domestic election observers, and there were no recognized international election observation missions. Further, the election commission funded several foreign observers that showcased a conflict of interest and partisanship ([European Union Election Expert Mission 2024](#)). In contrast, in the Solomon Islands a recently founded international election observation group consisting of observers from the Group of Seven Plus also had meaningful access and upheld effective observation standards and findings ([Group of Seven Plus 2024](#)).

For a mixed observation result, the election observation mission for the Organization of American States successfully met with stakeholders and observed the strengths and weaknesses of El Salvador's presidential and parliamentary elections, though there were some issues with access to public financing information ([OAS 2024a](#)).

Russia provides a standout election observation case study from 2024. Russian officials did not invite internationally recognized observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to its presidential election ([OSCE PA 2024](#)). Instead, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that 1,000 other international observers had been invited ([MID 2024](#)). During the election, the observers were revealed as partisan figures, defying the requirements of transparency and legitimacy in election observation ([Grynszspan 2024](#)).



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## Chapter 3

# ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE

*Gudlaug Olafsdottir*

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

A significant number of the national elections held in 2024 were marked by some form of election-related violence ([Asplund and Tucker 2025](#)).<sup>4</sup> Election-related violence hence poses a substantial threat to democracy worldwide. It can come in many forms and take place at varying points in the electoral process.

Electoral violence is generally understood as coercive actions aiming to influence the process or outcome of an election ([Birch, Daxecker and Höglund 2020: 4](#)). The types of coercive actions vary, ranging from physical attacks to intimidation. Election-related violence—and the threat thereof—is not only a serious humanitarian concern and an inherent breach of the democratic principle of peaceful electoral contestation; it also risks severely undermining the integrity of elections. While it is difficult to assess from available data whether election-related violence is increasing year-on-year, the threat of violence remains a salient challenge to the integrity of elections. The Global Election Monitor identified election-related violence resulting in bodily harm in 22 of 54 national elections but does not measure the severity, extent or number of instances of election-related violence ([Asplund and Tucker 2025](#)).

In summarizing the various forms of electoral violence that were witnessed in 2024, this chapter traces the links between violence and electoral integrity and provides an overview of actions that can be taken to mitigate its occurrence.

**Electoral violence is generally understood as coercive actions aiming to influence the process or outcome of an election.**

<sup>4</sup> This list includes elections held in Bangladesh, Comoros, El Salvador, France, Georgia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, the Maldives, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia, Mozambique, Pakistan, Senegal, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Togo and the United States.

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### 3.2. WHY ELECTORAL VIOLENCE MATTERS

Election-related violence causes severe harm. The humanitarian implications of such violence are noteworthy in their own right, with election-related deaths, injuries and psychological harm affecting individuals across the globe. Besides contradicting one of the core principles of democracy—peaceful electoral competition (Dahl 1989: 233)—election-related violence is also detrimental to electoral integrity, through multiple mechanisms.

First, electoral violence undermines the competitive nature of elections. Violence against politicians risks skewing the electoral playing field by limiting the pool of candidates that stand for election. Violence—or the threat thereof—risks hindering targeted electoral candidates from running for elections ([Shortell 2024](#); [Duque-Salazar 2025](#)). At its extreme, violence can remove candidates from the electoral process through outright murder ([Gutiérrez-Romero and Iturbe 2024](#)).

Second, violence hinders participation. Violence targeting voters prevents electoral results from reflecting the true preferences of the population. Electoral violence reduces turnout ([van Baalen 2024](#)). It is often used to demobilize or displace voters (Laakso 2007: 228; [Rauschenbach and Paula 2019](#)), resulting in skewed participation. Moreover, widespread violence can lead governments to curtail electoral liberties, limiting the freedom to campaign or organize rallies. At times, governments employ such restrictions as a political tool to suppress the opposition ([Birch, Daxecker and Höglund 2020](#)).

Third, violence impedes deliberation. For example, violence carried out by political parties can polarize the populace ([LeBas 2006](#)). Violence and threats targeting politicians, voters, campaigners or others engaged in political debate can hamper free dialogue and the exchange of ideas. Such violence can induce fear and anger, hindering citizens' likelihood of seeking out political information and forming political opinions ([Söderström 2018](#)). It risks silencing certain voices and amplifying others. Political discourse focusing on security issues around elections also risks shifting the focus away from electoral malpractices and impeding constructive debate ([Jenkins 2020](#)). Moreover, the fear of electoral violence risks eroding the public's belief in democracy as a desirable form of governance ([von Borzyskowski, Daxecker and Khun 2022](#); [Fjelde and Olafsdottir 2024](#)).

Fourth, violence hampers adjudication. It can impede the implementation of electoral law as well as demands for electoral justice. Violence against election workers or electoral institutions risks preventing them from upholding electoral law consistently. Moreover, violence sometimes follows as a response to mobilization against incumbents following reports about electoral malpractices ([von Borzyskowski 2019](#)). Hence, protests against overt breaches of electoral law can spur repression by heavy-handed leaders against opponents demanding electoral justice. In turn, such violence limits the ability

of citizens, parties and civil society organizations to seek electoral justice following serious violations of electoral integrity.

Moreover, violence towards election workers and electoral institutions risks deterring individuals from participating as election workers ([Anderman 2024](#)), posing challenges to the administration of elections. As such, electoral violence has a multitude of detrimental effects on democratic development and electoral integrity.

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### 3.3. PATTERNS OF ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE IN 2024

Electoral violence took many different forms in 2024. Below, I summarize the main trends by describing five categories of violence based on the perpetrators and the targets. These are not mutually exclusive, and, as the examples illustrate, there is some overlap between them.

#### Targeted attacks against political candidates

Elections in 2024 were marked by varied types and degrees of violence, including a surge in targeted attacks. For example, there were several high-profile assassination attempts against political candidates. Notably, Donald Trump was targeted twice while campaigning for the presidency in the United States ([Pilkington 2024](#)). In Slovakia, Prime Minister Robert Fico survived an assassination attempt in May, following the presidential election ([Simon and Schmitz 2024](#)). In South Korea, Lee Jae-Myung, the head of the main opposition party, was stabbed in the neck prior to the parliamentary election, in April ([Park and Shin 2024](#)). In Mongolia, one of the district party heads of the opposition Democratic Party, B. Bayanmunkh, was beaten to death ([AFP 2024](#)). Moreover, 12 councillors in South Africa were killed in the run-up to the national and provincial elections (Small 2024: 71).

There were isolated incidents of violence—less severe in nature—in France and Germany against politicians and party members. For example, Prisca Thevenot, spokeswoman for the French Government and candidate for the Ensemble alliance, was attacked by a group while putting up campaign posters with a party activist and a deputy, who both ended up in hospital ([Jeantet 2024](#)). In Germany, there was a surge in assaults on political candidates and campaigners leading up to the elections for the European Parliament ([Marsh and Abnett 2024](#)).

Attacks on politicians—even if they are thwarted—pose a great threat to the integrity of an election by inciting fear among current and prospective candidates, potentially discouraging individuals from running for office, which, in turn, affects which groups are represented. Attacks on politicians undermine the principle of free and fair contestation, and politically motivated violence negatively affects the climate for constructive deliberation ([Birch, Daxecker and Höglund 2020](#)). Where there is a well-functioning judicial system and

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**Elections in 2024 were marked by varied types and degrees of violence, including a surge in targeted attacks.**



**Electoral violence frequently involves criminal groups or non-state armed actors seeking to bolster their political influence, develop mutually beneficial relationships with politicians or disrupt elections.**

democratic government, violent incidents against politicians are prosecuted, with the legal system serving as a deterrent to possible future offences.

**Violence by illicit armed groups**

Electoral violence frequently involves criminal groups or non-state armed actors seeking to bolster their political influence, develop mutually beneficial relationships with politicians or disrupt elections (Turnbull 2021; Fjelde and Höglund 2022; Gutiérrez-Romero and Iturbe 2024). In Mexico, for instance, drug cartels regularly target political candidates, aiming to exert power over local politicians (Gutiérrez-Romero and Iturbe 2024). The targeting of candidates was prominent during Mexico's 2024 general election, which CNN called the country's 'bloodiest election in history', with at least 34 political candidates assassinated by criminal groups (Stephen Hu et al. 2024). In addition to the assassination or attempted assassination of candidates, these groups also carried out kidnappings and attacked politicians' family members, campaign staff and electoral infrastructure (Asmann 2024). In total, 749 victims of violence—including 231 who were assassinated—were recorded in the months leading up to the election (Gonzalez 2024: 6). The violence caused some candidates to drop out of the race due to fear for their lives (Animal Político n.d.; Shortell 2024).

In Pakistan, some political parties collaborate with violent actors to influence the outcome of elections (Siddiqui 2022). Moreover, there are armed groups active in parts of the country that use violence to disrupt elections. In Balochistan, for instance, a separatist militant group carried out more than two dozen attacks during the week leading up to the 2024 general election, causing the caretaker minister to declare 5,028 polling stations 'sensitive' (Baloch 2024). In two other incidents in the same region, explosions targeting candidate offices killed at least 30 people (Tyab 2024). In another incident, in the Nushki district, a grenade was launched at the election commission's office (Akhtar and Khan 2024). Moreover, multiple bombs were set off on election day, killing at least nine people (Hussain 2024). The presence of illicit armed groups implies a significant security threat around elections, as these groups often take advantage of the high profile of elections to strengthen their own standing locally (Matanock and Staniland 2018). Unless the government regains a monopoly on the use of force, the risk of electoral violence remains, negatively affecting both contestation and participation.

**Government-sponsored violence**

When it comes to electoral violence, governments are sometimes the perpetrators rather than the victims. For example, governments have frequently been implicated in the perpetration of electoral violence in an effort to maintain their hold on power (Straus and Taylor 2012; Taylor, Pevehouse and Straus 2017). This type of violence may take place prior to an election to limit the ability of the opposition to mobilize or in response to anti-government mobilization spurred by claims of fraudulent elections.

Examples in 2024 were seen in both Mozambique and Indonesia. In Mozambique, anti-government activists, international and national observer



groups, national democracy watchdog groups and other civil society bodies criticized the general elections, held in October. Two important opposition members, Elvino Dias and Paulo Guambe, were murdered while the opposition was preparing to challenge the electoral results ([Mangwiro 2024](#)). The ensuing protests were met with mass arrests of protesters as well as the use of both live ammunition and tear gas by police, with the death toll over the course of the post-election protests reaching 358 between 21 October 2024 and 16 March 2025 ([Amnesty International 2024b](#); [International IDEA 2024a](#); [Platforma Electoral Decide 2025](#)).

In Indonesia, there were allegations of security agencies using excessive force in response to demonstrations organized in opposition to incumbents and proposed changes to regional election laws in the summer of 2024. A report by Amnesty International ([2025](#)) claimed that there had been 344 arrests, which included approximately 150 physical injuries and cases of incommunicado detention. In at least one case, a video circulated of excessive police force against unarmed protesters in Badung, West Java ([Amnesty International 2024c](#)).

Government repression also took place before the general election in Bangladesh, in January 2024. Leading up to the election, the electoral commission and police targeted the opposition, limiting campaign activities and arresting 27,507 opposition members on questionable grounds ([IRI and NDI 2024: 9](#)). Similarly, in Georgia, opposition supporters and anti-government activists faced intimidation, harassment and crackdowns by the government around the parliamentary and presidential elections ([AP 2024b](#); [France 24 2024](#)).

These examples illustrate the ways that governments misuse their power to crack down on the opposition. Government repression of the opposition hinders fair contestation and participation, and it prevents opponents from demanding electoral justice. These dynamics highlight the danger that governments can use judicial tools and the state security apparatus to undermine electoral integrity.

### Clashes between partisans

At times, heightened tensions around elections lead members and supporters of different political parties to clash with one another due to the high stakes of winning or losing the elections or holding seats in parliament. In the Maldives, for example, a fight broke out between rival party members in parliament over the approval of four new proposed cabinet ministers. One of the parliamentarians went to hospital because of a head wound ([Rahaman Sarkar 2024](#)). While the South African general election in 2024 was largely non-violent, isolated clashes between rival party supporters took place, leading to the death of two supporters of the uMkhonto we Sizwe party ([European Union Election Expert Mission 2024: 25](#)).

In countries where political parties mobilize voters along ethnic or religious lines, there is a risk that increased intergroup antagonism and polarization

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**Government repression also took place before the general election in Bangladesh, in January 2024.**

could lead to violence (Wilkinson 2004; Mueller 2011; ACLED 2024). In India, for instance, there were indications of increased sectarian violence following the release of the results of the 2024 parliamentary elections, as the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party failed to gain a majority (*The Hindu* 2024). In Maharashtra, candidates' vehicles were attacked, polling stations were vandalized, political workers attacked each other, and death threats were made against rival candidates (*The Economic Times* 2024; Human Rights Watch 2024). Where partisan identity is salient, parties sometimes pit their supporters against each other. For example, rival party supporters clashed both before and after the elections in Bangladesh (IRI and NDI 2024: 11, 22). A leader of the governing party called upon his supporters to attack supporters of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party if the former saw the latter engaging in boycotts (IRI and NDI 2024: 11). Heightened tensions between groups, leading to outbreaks of violence, undermine participation and deliberation, as the political sides cease to engage in respectful dialogue. In addition, security threats risk deterring voters—particularly from marginalized groups—from turning out to vote.

### Box 3.1. Bangladesh: Violent elections on the verge of change?

Elections in Bangladesh have frequently been marked by violence between the country's two main parties, the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Violence often involves 'attacks against political opponents, street clashes between the parties, violent anti-government demonstrations, and state repression of demonstrations' (Pandya 2024). While the elections in January 2024 were somewhat less violent than previous elections (IRI and NDI 2024: 3), they were still marked by multiple forms of violence.

#### Government-perpetrated violence

Although the government increased its security budget and deployed security forces in larger numbers and for longer periods around the most recent elections than in prior elections, the security forces and the electoral commission faced allegations of being politically biased in favour of the ruling AL (IRI and NDI: 2024: 3, 8). For example, security forces used unlawful force against protesters and opposition members, failed to protect opponents of the AL from violence, unlawfully detained thousands of opposition members and overtly threatened opposition supporters, many of whom perceived their mere presence as a form of intimidation (Human Rights Watch 2023; IRI and NDI 2024: 6, 8–9).

#### Interparty violence

The BNP boycotted the elections due to the low likelihood of a free and fair electoral competition. In turn, pre-electoral violence was most common in constituencies where there was a high degree of competition between candidates from the ruling AL and their independent affiliates. Clashes between rival party campaign workers, activists and supporters occurred during the campaign and post-election period, resulting in several deaths and numerous injuries (IRI and NDI 2024: 11; Transparency International Bangladesh 2024). Both sides threatened and intimidated citizens to force them either to vote or to boycott the election (IRI and NDI 2024: 12).

#### Winds of change

Widespread, at times violent, anti-government protests erupted in mid-2024, leading Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to flee the country, after having significantly dismantled Bangladeshi democracy since 2009 (AP 2024a; Sajjad 2024). Now, with an interim government in place until new elections are held in late 2025, there are prospects for democratic change (Staniland 2024; Sultana and Haque 2024).

### Violence against election workers and electoral institutions

At times, electoral bodies are targeted by enraged protesters amid allegations of electoral misconduct. In Madagascar, for example, the opposition mobilized post-election protests over electoral irregularities. The protests turned violent, and two buildings of the electoral commission were burned down ([Amnesty International 2024a](#)). Similarly, in Ghana, supporters of President-elect John Mahama attacked public property, including setting fire to two buildings of the electoral commission in protest over delays in declaring the results for some parliamentary seats ([Naadi and Rukanga 2024](#)). Polling stations are also frequently targeted, such as in Manipur, India, where armed mobs tried to take over polling stations in the midst of interethnic violence ([Reuters 2024](#)). Such events pose a threat to those working in electoral administration, as well as to electoral integrity.

Violence—or even threats of violence—risks influencing electoral administration. In the USA, threats of violence against election workers have led to high turnover in election personnel, posing challenges to the administration of elections ([Anderman 2024](#)) (see Chapter 6: Electoral management hurdles and malfunctions). Over time, there is a risk that the impact of such threats will be compounded. In the case of the USA, the number of people bringing weapons to polling stations has increased. Although these weapons have generally not been used, their presence poses a threat which in itself can be a powerful driver of fear ([Anderman 2024](#)).

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**Violence—or even threats of violence—risks influencing electoral administration.**

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## 3.4. LESSONS LEARNED AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section discusses prevention strategies adapted to each of the five types of electoral violence. To mitigate election-related violence, it is essential to get at the root causes of each type of violence.

1. Strengthening the rule of law and providing security are essential to combating violence by illicit groups and targeted violence against politicians.

Targeted violence against politicians or election workers may require efforts by security forces to seek out better intelligence on threats and provide more protection to individuals and institutions that are at risk. For violence by illicit armed groups, however, the core issue is the existence and strength of criminal groups and militias. Where strong illicit armed groups remain in place, there remains a risk that these actors could engage in election-related violence ([Mueller 2011: 103](#)).

Electoral violence is frequently a symptom of weak rule of law, where a proliferation of armed actors and a lack of accountability establishes fertile ground for violence to take root ([Höglund 2009](#)). Addressing this weakness requires investments to bolster the rule of law and the security system more generally and to ensure neutrality.

2. Institutional constraints, domestic watchdogs and international judicial processes can address the risk of violence by political elites

The issues of politicized security forces and impunity are central to the occurrence of government-perpetrated violence. An independent judiciary, strong constraints on the executive and a vibrant civil society are important factors that can mitigate this type of violence (Mueller 2011; Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski 2014). Given that this type of violence is carried out by those in power, who can operate with impunity within their own borders, international actors can contribute by enhancing pressure and accountability (Bjork and Goebertus 2011). For example, after the widespread electoral violence in Kenya following the 2007 elections, the International Criminal Court—alongside domestic efforts—played a role in mitigating further violence spurred by politicians (Coradetti 2015).

3. Strong and autonomous electoral management bodies reduce the risk of violence

**Many instances of electoral violence, particularly between supporters of opposing parties or against electoral institutions, stem from allegations of electoral fraud.**

Many instances of electoral violence, particularly between supporters of opposing parties or against electoral institutions, stem from allegations of electoral fraud. According to Tanja Hollstein (2024) at the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the relatively peaceful dynamics around the 2024 elections in South Africa, despite numerous risk factors for severe violence, was attributable to the independence of the electoral commission. The presence of autonomous electoral authorities induces greater trust in elections, which is also likely to limit the use of violence towards electoral bodies and their employees. The importance of autonomous electoral management bodies for reducing the risk of violence is corroborated by empirical research (Ruiz-Rufino and Birch 2020). Moreover, technical assistance ‘which actively tries to improve election quality through financial, technical, and logistical help, hiring and training of election officials, voter registration, and voter education long before election-day’ has been shown to reduce the risk of election-related violence (von Borzyskowski 2019: 124), further emphasizing the importance of the international community’s provision of broad technical support to strengthen the capacity and credibility of electoral management bodies.

4. Addressing polarization reduces the incentives for violence

Since stark polarization increases the threat of violence, addressing polarization should diminish that threat. In the USA, for example, civil society actors took action to prevent electoral violence by reducing polarization. They collaborated with community leaders to reduce the spread of disinformation and hostile intergroup narratives, focusing instead on maintaining unity (Yousef 2024). While reducing polarization is a long-term task, ensuring that community leaders have the tools to identify and rebuff polarizing messages enhances their ability to address escalating polarization around elections.

## 5. Interparty codes of conduct attempt to mitigate parties' fomentation of violence

Breaking cycles of violence is difficult, although progress has been made in some cases. For example, several countries that have previously been affected by significant electoral violence experienced relatively calm elections in 2024. The elections in the Dominican Republic, for instance, were relatively peaceful compared with previous elections despite a prior propensity for violence, with all elections between 1990 and 2004 marked by violence that resulted in civilian fatalities (Hyde and Marinov 2012). The reduction in violence can, in part, be attributed to political candidates' signing of an electoral ethics pact in 2000, where they promised to refrain from violence and exercise mutual respect (Pichardo 2024). While there have still been fatalities related to elections in the country since then, suggesting that such a pact may be insufficient when it comes to eliminating election-related violence altogether, there is less electoral violence overall than in the past (Pichardo 2024).

Other countries have implemented similar pacts and maintained peaceful conduct. Ahead of the 2024 parliamentary election in Uzbekistan and the 2024 general election in Namibia, for example, all parties formally committed to abide by a code of conduct that called on them to refrain from intimidation and coercion (OSCE 2024; Petersen 2024). This was also the case ahead of the European Parliamentary elections, when supranational European political parties signed a commitment which explicitly rejected the dissemination of narratives promoting violence (International IDEA 2024b). Such commitments may help prevent electoral violence between political parties and their supporters.<sup>5</sup>

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**Breaking cycles of violence is difficult, although progress has been made in some cases.**

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## 3.5. CONCLUSIONS

The year 2024 stood out from previous years in terms of the amount and severity of violence targeting political candidates, not least in more established democracies (Keating 2024). This category of violence has been less prominent in recent decades, and the levels of violence in more consolidated democracies in 2024 coincided with rising concerns of democratic backsliding and deep-seated polarization within the contexts where the violence occurred (Dhabhai 2024). This rising threat requires a shift in prevention strategies and focus, which instead of primarily focusing on intergroup clashes, violence by illicit groups and government repression—areas that have traditionally received much more attention within academic literature and democracy promotion circles—builds on insights regarding prevention of targeted attacks on politicians, including in more democratic contexts. It is difficult to assess the wider trends in election-related violence in 2024, but it nevertheless remained

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<sup>5</sup> None of the parties in Uzbekistan are considered genuine opposition parties (OSCE 2024: 4–5), indicating a low risk of party-motivated violence to begin with. In turn, the government employs violence to stifle dissent (Freedom House n.d.).

**The elections of 2024 are also noteworthy for providing examples of historically significant peaceful electoral turnover.**

an issue in a variety of electoral contexts and continues to pose a tangible challenge to electoral integrity.

However, the elections of 2024 are also noteworthy for providing examples of historically significant peaceful electoral turnover. Botswana, for example, saw the first turnover of power since its independence in 1966, and it was entirely peaceful (Onyango-Obbo 2024). Similarly, the voters in Mauritius rejected the governing Alliance Lepep in a landslide, with the opposition Alliance of Change winning 60 out of the 62 elected seats, with no violence (*Journal of Democracy* n.d.). Sri Lanka also experienced a peaceful transition of power, which Weerakoon (2024) suggested was thanks in part to the fact that the opposition candidate who won refrained from using inflammatory language during the campaign. Onyango-Obbo (2024) attributes the positive trends in sub-Saharan Africa to a reduction in political pessimism and radicalization, as well as generational shifts, where young people are more focused on programmatic issues than their elders. As such, the locations, threats and dynamics of electoral violence might be changing; in turn, the strategies for preventing it must evolve accordingly.

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## Chapter 4

# GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

*Julia Thalín*

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's political participation are fundamental human rights and preconditions for inclusive and sustainable democracy. However, despite women's increased engagement in political life over the past 30 years, progress remains uneven and alarmingly slow. The gender gap persists across all levels and spheres of decision making, and, at the current pace, it is estimated that it will take 134 years to close this gap ([World Economic Forum 2024](#)).

Although the 2024 super-cycle election year offered a unique opportunity to advance women's political participation and representation globally ([World Economic Forum 2024](#)), the overall developments appear predominantly negative. While 22 countries made progress in increasing women's legislative representation, 27 experienced a decline ([IPU 2025a](#)). Globally, the share of female members of parliament changed only slightly, from [26.8 per cent](#) to [27.2 per cent](#), indicating overall stagnation in women's representation ([IPU 2025b](#)). Similarly, only 5 of the 33 countries that held presidential elections in 2024 elected female presidents. The reasons for this are complex and contextual, involving formal barriers such as inadequate legal frameworks and informal ones like harmful norms and stereotypes. However, violence against women in elections (VAWE) stands out as a particularly significant and widespread challenge.

**Gender equality and women's political participation are fundamental human rights and preconditions for inclusive and sustainable democracy.**

## 4.2. DEFINING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS

Electoral violence can be understood as a subtype of political violence, distinguished by its timing (occurring during the electoral cycle) and often by its motive (to influence an electoral outcome) (Höglund 2009).<sup>6</sup> However, it is increasingly recognized that gender matters to our understanding of the specific motives, forms and impacts of violence against women in elections. While electoral violence affects both men and women, violence against female election officials, candidates and elected leaders, among others, often stems from efforts to reinforce traditional gender roles, typically manifests in sexist or sexualized forms, and frequently deters women from participating in political life (see, for example, Bardall 2011; NDI 2018; Schneider and Carroll 2019; Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo 2020). Women who face discrimination on grounds other than gender—such as ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation—are often disproportionately affected. Recognizing intersectionality is thus crucial to understanding how women’s intersecting identities can lead to overlapping forms of discrimination that amplify the risk and impact of violence (ODIHR 2022). Moreover, understanding VAWE as an intersection of electoral violence and gender-based violence means that any individual transgressing dominant gender roles, norms or expectations of behaviour may be targeted. While this includes all actors outside the hegemonic male group (i.e. women, but also non-dominant men and gay, queer, non-binary and trans individuals), this chapter focuses specifically on women in all their diversity (Schneider and Carroll 2019; Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo 2020).

Moreover, the forms of violence against women in elections exist on a continuum, encompassing physical, sexual, psychological and digital violence, occurring across private, public and political spaces. The digital dimension of VAWE—encompassing a broad range of technology-facilitated acts and online activities—has become a prevalent and legitimate form of violence, often as harmful as offline manifestations. Technology amplifies and accelerates VAWE, enabling widespread abuse and harassment that can significantly impact women’s electoral participation (NDI 2021; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2023). (For more details on digital aggression targeting women in elections, see Chapter 5: The information environment around elections.)

**VAWE undermines electoral integrity by constituting serious obstacles for women’s equal and meaningful participation, contestation and deliberation.**

## 4.3. IMPACTS ON ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

VAWE undermines electoral integrity by constituting serious obstacles for women’s equal and meaningful participation, contestation and deliberation. When women are threatened, harassed or attacked for participating in electoral processes, it risks creating chilling effects that deter women collectively from engaging in political roles or contributing to elections as administrators, observers and voters (NDI 2018). The effects are broad and systemic, creating

<sup>6</sup> For more information on election-related violence and its manifestations in 2024, please see Chapter 3: Election-related violence.



a skewed political playing field where women in all their diversity, already underrepresented in politics, are further disadvantaged. This is true also in cases where violence is not motivated by gender. Violence—which women may experience differently than men—can cause women to disproportionately retreat from public life or refrain from addressing ‘controversial’ issues such as human rights (Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo 2020). Consequently, rather than fostering evidence-informed, rational public debate, hate and intimidation create uneven discourse, silencing voices and undermining deliberation.

**Violence—which women may experience differently than men—can cause women to disproportionately retreat from public life.**

#### 4.4. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS IN 2024

With systematic data collection on VAWE virtually non-existent and much of this violence going unreported, accurately assessing its true scale and impact remains challenging. Nonetheless, according to International IDEA’s Global Election Monitor, 28 out of 54 elections in 2024 saw instances of gender-based violence, underscoring the persistence of this challenge globally (Asplund and Tucker 2025). Observation reports and media coverage further reveal widespread violence against women in various roles.

##### Gendered motives

When violence targets women in elections for being women or to enforce traditional gender roles, the motive is inherently gendered. This pattern can be seen worldwide, with violence oftentimes acting as a backlash against women’s growing presence in political life. Although men still constitute the majority of victims of political violence in Mexico (México Evalúa 2024), the 2024 election cycle saw an unprecedented surge in VAWE, coinciding with a record number of women running for office (Calderón 2024; International IDEA 2024). Women in various roles faced targeted threats and attacks designed to delegitimize, silence and exclude them from public and political spaces (International IDEA 2024). While male candidates were more likely to be assassinated, VAWE also escalated to murder, as seen in the killing of Yolanda Sánchez, the first female mayor of Cotija (Buschschlüter 2024).

In the United States, female candidates and election workers also faced rising violence aimed at undermining their participation. A Brennan Center for Justice report found that, among 43 per cent of state legislators who experienced threats, women, people of colour and LGBTQIA+ office holders were disproportionately targeted (Ramachandran et al. 2024). Women of colour and African American candidates faced significantly more hate speech than other candidates (Thakur and Finkel 2024).

Similarly, in Bangladesh, El Salvador, Indonesia and Iran, patriarchal norms and misogynistic beliefs fuelled violence aimed at disrupting women’s participation in politics. In Bangladesh, women candidates faced public insults and threats from male supporters of the ruling party and independent candidates (NDI and IRI 2024). In El Salvador, 135 acts of violence—including physical, psychological, emotional, symbolic and sexual violence—against politically

**In the lead-up to Iran's presidential elections, the government intensified its crackdown on women activists.**

active women were recorded during the presidential and legislative elections, with an additional 96 incidents documented on municipal and council election day. Notably, 20 per cent of these attacks targeted female election workers (ANDRYSAS 2024a, 2024b). During election campaigns in Indonesia, politically active women experienced intensified cyberbullying, often orchestrated by male candidates and so-called cyber-mercenaries (Harsianti 2024).

Meanwhile, in the lead-up to Iran's presidential elections, the government intensified its crackdown on women activists, systematically targeting those advocating for gender equality and human rights (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2024). In response, feminist advocates like the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Narges Mohammadi, along with reformists and other marginalized groups, called for a boycott of the elections, leading to a historically low voter turnout of just 40.6 per cent (Tajali 2024).

**Gendered forms of violence**

Incidents that took place in 2024 also highlighted the gendered nature of violence against women in electoral processes, both offline and online. In Mexico, women were disproportionately subjected to threats and armed attacks (México Evalúa 2024), with violence frequently extending to their children and families (International IDEA 2024). Public discourse was rife with sexism and gender stereotypes (De La Fuente and Tawfik 2024). Claudia Sheinbaum, elected President, faced misogynistic and anti-Semitic insults and was often dismissed as former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's 'puppet' despite her credentials (Calderón 2024). Social media further fuelled hostility, with sexist hashtags and harassment targeting women's appearance, families and personal lives, while generative artificial intelligence amplified these threats by spreading deepfakes and other harmful content (International IDEA 2024; Klepper 2024).

Similarly, in the USA, presidential candidate Kamala Harris faced attacks like those targeting Sheinbaum, with her opponent, Donald Trump, calling her 'morally, physically, and emotionally weak' (Bindel 2024). At the local level, women and people of colour experienced more severe threats and abuse targeting their families, gender and race, and women were nearly four times more likely than men to face sexual abuse (Brennan Center for Justice 2024). Online harassment against women included misogynistic comments, rape threats and sexual violence (Thakur and Finkel 2024). Among election officials—80 per cent of whom are women—38 per cent reported threats and sexual intimidation (Wynn, Fried and Eisen 2023). Seven out of 10 local election officials said threats had increased since 2020, nearly half of which went unreported (Brennan Center for Justice 2024).

Meanwhile, election observers in El Salvador reported widespread instances of psychological, emotional, physical and sexual violence targeting female voters, candidates and election workers. Psychological and emotional violence were the most prevalent forms, including sexist insults, threats and gender-based defamation. Sexual violence and technology-facilitated abuse, such as the publication of personal and intimate information, were also alarmingly

common. Online platforms amplified the sexist nature of this violence, perpetuating narratives of women's suggested biological, moral and intellectual inferiority through hashtags, emojis and memes (ANDRYSAS 2024a, 2024b).

### Gendered impacts

Overall, VAWE had gendered impacts in 2024, directly affecting women's participation, representation and deliberation. In Mexico, female candidates dropped out of races due to threats (Breda and Pellegrini 2024), and in the USA abuse discouraged female officeholders from seeking re-election or higher office; leading on key issues such as reproductive rights, gun regulation, criminal justice reform and LGBTQIA+ rights; and engaging with constituents online and at public events (Ramachandran et al. 2024).

Equally concerning is the impact of false fraud claims in the USA, which incited violence and unsafe working conditions, leading to an exodus of election officials. Women, who make up 80 per cent of the US election workforce, were disproportionately affected by threats and harassment, even when not explicitly gender-motivated. In 11 states alone, this led to the loss of over 1,800 years of experience, weakening the security, safety and effectiveness of the electoral process (Beckel et al. 2023).

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, electoral violence seemingly unrelated to gender produced gendered outcomes in 2024. While 43 per cent of candidates in local elections in May faced some form of abuse, safety concerns led 56 per cent of female candidates to avoid campaigning alone, compared with 19 per cent of their male counterparts. In addition, 47 per cent of female candidates avoided discussing controversial topics for fear of violence, versus 20 per cent of men (Al-Othman 2024; United Kingdom 2024). These statistics show that, even without explicit gendered motives, electoral violence can disproportionately restrict women's participation, representation and deliberation at all levels.

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**In Mexico, female candidates dropped out of races due to threats.**

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## 4.5. PROTECTING ELECTIONS AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: FINDINGS FROM 2024

Effectively addressing the complexity, scope and scale of VAWE requires a comprehensive, intersectional and multi-stakeholder approach that incorporates a gendered lens into prevention, protection, prosecution, policy coordination and support efforts (NDI 2018; ODIHR 2022). This section outlines some measures taken in 2024, focusing on six key areas of action for identifying and preventing VAWE, as defined by a United Nations programming guide aimed at preventing violence against women in elections (Ballington, Bardall and Borovsky 2017). Although these actions alone are insufficient and their long-term impacts are yet to be assessed, they represent important good practices.

1. *Mapping and measuring.* VAWE is often invisible due to poor documentation, but growing recognition highlights the need for data collection. For example, country-level mapping exercises, such as UN Women's 2024 assessment of VAWE in Somalia, reveal the scope of violence and enable evidence-based interventions ([UN Women Somalia 2024](#)). Integrating VAWE considerations into existing monitoring tools is also important, as demonstrated by the Moldovan Audiovisual Council's recently updated media monitoring methodology, which now incorporates indicators for sexist language ([Council of Europe Office in Chisinau 2023](#)). Similarly, the gender-sensitive news monitoring methodology developed by Mexico's National Electoral Institute for the 2023–2024 local elections included key variables on political violence against women ([INE n.d.c](#)).
2. *Election observation.* Election observation missions play a crucial role in collecting information on VAWE. While organizations like the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe traditionally have focused on women's participation and representation, recent frameworks have begun to assess the prevalence of VAWE. For example, OSCE observation missions now commonly make use of the organization's updated *Handbook on Observing and Promoting Women's Electoral Participation* ([ODIHR 2023](#)), which includes targeted inquiries into VAWE (see, for example, [ODIHR 2024a, 2024b](#)). Moreover, there are specific gender-focused observation efforts such as the gender election observation mission ([Gender Concerns International 2024](#)) that monitored the 2024 European Parliament elections and the mission in El Salvador run by the National Association of Salvadoran Women Councillors, Trustees and Mayors (ANDRYSAS) and supported by the National Democratic Institute and UN Women. The ANDRYSAS (2024a, 2024b) mission documented 231 cases of electoral violence against women during the 2024 elections, highlighting the need for a unified registry and stronger victim support systems.
3. *Legal and policy reform.* Progressive and robust legal and policy frameworks are key components in driving transformational change. In April 2024 the European Parliament approved its first EU-wide rules on combating violence against women, setting standards for criminalization, victim support and accountability ([European Parliament 2024](#)). Other positive examples from 2024 include Chile's new law on violence against women, which measures prevention, protection and accountability ([Republic of Chile 2024](#)), as well as Spain's Organic Law on Parity Representation, which promotes gender equality in politics and protection against gender-based violence ([Kingdom of Spain 2024](#)). Moreover, 11 US states have passed laws to protect election officials. Some states have also included confidentiality provisions in this broader legislation, aiming to safeguard female officials by protecting their personal information and penalizing improper disclosure ([Wynn, Fried and Eisen 2023](#)). To date, only California has signed this bill into law ([California 2022](#)). Legal frameworks and guidelines are also being increasingly adopted to combat digital VAWE. One example from 2024 is the Principles and

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**11 US states have passed laws to protect election officials.**

Guidelines for the Use of Digital and Social Media in Elections in Africa, adopted by the Association of African Election Authorities and supported by the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa (n.d.). These guidelines aim to combat gendered digital violence and promote a safer online environment for women in elections.

4. *Electoral arrangements.* Electoral management bodies (EMBs) can play a key role in preventing and addressing VAWE through gender-sensitive training, voter education, safety measures for staff and voters, and logistical measures like gender-segregated polling stations and special voting arrangements. According to the 2024 Electoral Management Survey (James, Garnett and Campion 2025), 29 out of 50 surveyed EMBs included gender equality in staff training programmes, while 24 provided stakeholder training on the topic. Additionally, 42 EMBs implemented measures to improve accessibility for disadvantaged groups, including women, people with disabilities, the elderly and LGBTQIA+ individuals. However, with the exception of Fiji, which referenced procedures to ensure a safe working environment for staff, none of the surveyed EMBs highlighted efforts specifically targeting violence. Examples of proactive measures were, however, observed in Pakistan, where the Election Commission implemented initiatives such as deploying a maximum number of female polling workers at women-only polling stations, aiming to foster a safer environment for female voters and election officials (ECP n.d.). Similarly, in Mexico, the National Electoral Institute (INE)—with its long history of addressing VAWE—used its National Registry of Persons Sanctioned for Gender-Based Political Violence against Women to enhance accountability by barring offenders from running for election (INE n.d.b). The INE also partnered with Meta to identify and remove harmful content related to VAWE on social media (Calderón 2024; International IDEA 2024).
5. *Working with political parties.* Political parties are the most common perpetrators of VAWE, which is why their engagement in prevention efforts is key. In response, some positive practices were showcased in 2024. In Mexico, the INE (n.d.a) and national political parties signed commitments to ensure elections free from violence against women. The Election Commission of India (2024) urged political parties to use social media ethically to prevent VAWE. Ahead of the 2024 European Parliament elections, International IDEA and the European Commission (2024) developed a code of conduct for political parties to address gender-based violence and promote inclusive practices. Additionally, in the UK, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy hosted a conference to explore strategies for political parties to support female candidates and create a safer, more inclusive political environment (Poskitt 2024).
6. *Raising awareness and changing norms.* Because VAWE is often underreported and normalized, raising awareness and transforming social norms are critical (ODIHR 2022). Good practices from 2024 were observed in Moldova, where the Central Election Commission, in collaboration with the EU, the Council of Europe and the Audiovisual Council, launched awareness-raising initiatives like media campaigns and

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**Political parties are the most common perpetrators of VAWE.**

#### Box 4.1. Historic gains, enduring threats: Mexico's dual reality for women in politics

While violence against women in politics and elections remains a serious challenge in Mexico—with unprecedented levels of both offline and online violence reported during the 2024 elections—the same period also marks a historic advancement in women's political representation. For the first time, Mexico has a female president, Claudia Sheinbaum, which is a monumental milestone that was not achieved by chance ([INE 2024](#)). It is the result of years of sustained efforts, legal reforms and collective action. The increasing participation of women in politics underscores the importance of the legal and institutional measures that have been implemented, which can serve as valuable lessons for other countries ([International IDEA 2024](#)).

##### Legal and institutional measures advancing women's political inclusion

Mexico has progressively strengthened its legal framework to promote women's political participation. Key milestones were reached in the following years:

- 1996. A gender cap introduced in 1996 limited candidacies to no more than 70 per cent of the same gender. This policy evolved into a minimum 40 per cent gender quota under article 219 of the 2008 Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures, marking a shift towards stronger guarantees for women's political representation ([International IDEA 2024](#)).
- 2011. The Electoral Court closed loopholes that allowed parties to bypass these quotas, ensuring more effective implementation ([International IDEA 2024](#)).
- 2014. A constitutional reform mandated gender parity in federal and local legislative candidacies, supported by laws requiring gender alternation in proportional lists and safeguards against placing women in only unwinnable constituencies ([United Mexican States 2020a](#)).
- 2019. The 'parity in everything' constitutional reform extended gender parity to all branches and levels of government, promoting women's access to positions of power across the country ([United Mexican States 2019](#)).

Beyond legal reforms, complementary measures have played a pivotal role in increasing women's representation:

- Parties are required to allocate 3 per cent of their resources to the training of women and promotion of women's political leadership ([INE 2020b](#)).
- Forty per cent of public funding and media space must be allocated to women's campaign activities ([United Mexican States 2020b](#)).
- Measures have been implemented to prevent and sanction political violence against women ([International IDEA 2024](#)).

##### Addressing violence against women in elections

Violence against women in elections—particularly in digital spaces—remains a widespread and pressing challenge in Mexico. It reflects deeply entrenched gender norms, sexist practices and resistance to women's political leadership ([International IDEA 2024](#)). While these ongoing challenges highlight the need for continued efforts and stronger enforcement, many of Mexico's existing measures offer valuable lessons for addressing VAWE. In 2020 Mexico enacted a landmark reform that amended key legislation, including the General Law on Electoral Institutions and Procedures ([United Mexican States 2020a](#)) and the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence ([United Mexican States 2020b](#)). The reform introduced clear provisions for the prevention, sanction and eradication of political violence against women. These legal changes have been reinforced by institutional actions, such as the following:

- The National Electoral Institute created a National Registry of Persons Sanctioned for Gender-Based Violence against Women in Elections ([INE n.d.b](#)).
- The '3 of 3 against Violence' initiative barred candidates with a history of gender-based violence from running for office. A 2023 reform of article 38 of the Constitution reinforced this initiative by prohibiting individuals sanctioned for political violence against women from holding elected or public office.
- A pilot programme offered legal and psychological support for women experiencing gender-based violence during the 2023–2024 elections ([INE n.d.b](#)).



### Box 4.1. Historic gains, enduring threats: Mexico's dual reality for women in politics (cont.)

Additionally, the INE's collaboration with Meta has played a critical role in addressing digital violence, with the INE requesting the removal of harmful content from social media. This initiative, alongside the INE's creation of gender-sensitive protocols and internal units, highlights the importance of cross-sector collaboration in addressing gender-based violence in elections and politics ([International IDEA 2024](#)).

In conclusion, even though the 2024 elections saw unprecedented levels of VAWE—an alarming trend that must be fully acknowledged, addressed and prevented—the election also represents a significant leap forward for women's political participation in Mexico. This progress is not the result of any single measure but rather the outcome of a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach that combines legal reforms, institutional safeguards, and sustained engagement with civil society and international partners.

round-table discussions to counter hate speech and sexism ahead of the 2024 presidential election ([Council of Europe Office in Chisinau 2023](#); see also Box 4.2). Moreover, civil society groups in Bangladesh implemented awareness-raising efforts around VAWE, targeting authorities such as the Election Commission and the police ([NDI and IRI 2024](#)).

## 4.6. CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

**Examples from 2024 demonstrate that VAWE remains a persistent global problem.**

Examples from 2024 demonstrate that VAWE remains a persistent global problem, manifesting in diverse ways across public, private and online spaces, targeting women in roles ranging from candidates to poll workers, with marginalized groups disproportionately affected. The impacts are profound, discouraging women's participation, representation and deliberation at all levels of the electoral process, thus undermining the integrity of elections.

The global surge in VAWE, coupled with the evolving electoral landscape increasingly shaped by online dynamics, underscores the urgent need for more comprehensive, collaborative and innovative approaches. Robust data collection and coordinated efforts across society are vital to understanding and effectively addressing VAWE. While legal and policy frameworks play a foundational role, they must be reinforced with adequate funding, accountability mechanisms and protective support systems. Achieving transformative change also requires tackling deep-rooted socio-cultural norms that perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination globally as well as adopting an intersectional approach to ensure that no one is left behind.



### Box 4.2. Moldova: Addressing gender-based discrimination and violence in 2024 elections

Moldova has made significant strides in gender equality in politics, with increased women's representation and fewer instances of gender-based electoral violence in its 2024 referendum and presidential election compared with the widespread misogynistic hate speech that occurred during its 2020 election. While it is too early to draw conclusions, several factors likely contributed to the positive developments. Over the past decade, Moldova has ratified international conventions ([United Nations 1979](#); Council of Europe 2014) and enacted domestic legislation to promote gender equality ([Parliament of the Republic of Moldova 2006](#))—including a 40 per cent gender quota in electoral lists ([Parliament of the Republic of Moldova 2022](#))<sup>1</sup>—while also addressing violence against women ([Parliament of the Republic of Moldova 2002, 2007](#)).<sup>2</sup> Since 2020 the country has ratified the Istanbul Convention ([Council of Europe Treaty Office 2025](#))<sup>3</sup> and implemented legal amendments to enhance protective measures for victims of domestic and sexual violence.<sup>4</sup>

In 2024 the Central Election Commission (CEC) took proactive steps to address violence against women in elections. In collaboration with the Council of Europe and the EU, the CEC implemented a campaign called 'Do Not Tolerate Sexist Speech. Report It!', promoting zero tolerance for gender-based discrimination through education and media outreach. Following its successful launch for the 2023 local elections, the campaign was relaunched in 2024 ([Votează 2023; CICDE 2024](#)). In support of these efforts, the CEC organized round-table discussions with political parties, media, public authorities, civil society and citizens to reflect on lessons from the 2023 elections. Additionally, the Audiovisual Council of Moldova updated its monitoring methodology to include hate speech and sexist language in broadcasts, providing training for its monitors to address these issues effectively ([Consiliul Audiovizualului al Republicii Moldova 2023](#)). Altogether, these initiatives demonstrate a commitment to creating a safer and more inclusive electoral environment in Moldova.

Although misogynistic rhetoric was less prominent in 2024, preliminary observation reports highlight the widespread use of anti-LGBTQIA+ narratives to fuel public opposition to the EU referendum ([CEC 2024a: 116](#)), as well as their occurrence in certain presidential campaigns. Simultaneously, the interests of LGBTQIA+ voters and other marginalized groups, such as Roma women, were largely ignored in public discourse. This points to a need to strengthen intersectional approaches in an effort to prevent and respond to gender-based discrimination and violence in the Moldovan context. Likewise, for transformative change to be possible, it is crucial that legislative and policy frameworks are regularly reviewed and complemented with adequate funding and commitment. The CEC has taken steps in this direction, indicating that election observation findings will inform adjustments to the Electoral Code and related legislation.<sup>5</sup>

While challenges remain, the progress seen in 2024 underscores the potential of these measures to foster a more inclusive electoral process free from violence and discrimination.

<sup>1</sup> The Electoral Code mandates minimum representation of 40 per cent of each gender on candidate lists, with positioning provisions ensuring that every 10 seats include individuals of the opposite gender (article 68[2]).

<sup>2</sup> In addition, article 201 of the Criminal Code was amended.

<sup>3</sup> The Istanbul Convention was signed by the Republic of Moldova in 2017, ratified in 2022 and entered into force in 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Legal amendments were introduced to the Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Family Code in order to strengthen protective measures for victims of domestic and sexual violence ([GREVIO 2023](#)).

<sup>5</sup> The CEC noted that the findings from election observation missions and electoral authorities will inform proposals to adjust the Electoral Code and related legislation ([CEC 2024a: 116, 2024b: 183](#)).

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## Chapter 5

# THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT AROUND ELECTIONS

*Ingrid Bicu*

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**Numerous countries saw attempts to manipulate the information environment.**

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### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

High-profile elections in 2024 raised interest in the effectiveness of protective measures against the use of information—in both new and old ways—to harm electoral integrity. Numerous countries saw attempts to manipulate the information environment in an effort to undermine the credibility of political actors or the electoral process itself. Instances of disinformation narratives during elections were recorded in at least 43 (80 per cent) of 54 national elections monitored by the Global Election Monitor ([Asplund and Tucker 2025](#)). For this reason, electoral management bodies (EMBs) were—and continue to be—concerned about an information environment in which discourse around minor problems or normal issues in the electoral process can rapidly escalate into something controversial or politicized through the virality of social media posts.

Concerns about systemic and malign information operations targeting elections extended to the security sector, in recognition of the grave risks to social or regional stability caused by elections that fail because of attacks or that descend into chaos because of public discontent. Attempts to counter these serious threats have bolstered cooperation and intensified dialogue between the security sector and those responsible for electoral processes in countries that are potential targets.

Notable developments that influenced the discourse around electoral processes included hybrid threats, oversight of the media and digital platforms, the instrumentalization of influencers, aggression and violence against women in elections, the targeting of local communities and interest in the role of artificial intelligence.

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## 5.2. MEDIA CAPTURE, BIASED REPORTING AND CENSORSHIP

Media capture refers to situations where the media are controlled either directly by governments or by powerful groups with close ties to political entities, which significantly impacts the independence and integrity of media institutions (Schiffrin 2017). Captured media are increasingly exposed to pressures from both state and non-state actors around elections, especially in contexts where public service media are vulnerable to external influences (Dragomir and Horowitz 2021).

The phenomenon of media capture is not new and has been widely documented, but its impact was amplified by compounding attacks in the information environment around elections in 2024. Foreign actors have been identified as very active in their attempts to influence the information space, as seen in the United States (Becket and Quinn 2024; Martin 2024), where multiple pro-Kremlin bots were detected on the social media platform X, spreading disinformation about Kamala Harris ahead of the 2024 presidential elections in an effort to undermine her and support Donald Trump (AFP 2024).

Biases in media coverage, a lack of neutrality and the instrumentalization of media for political purposes emerged as recurring issues in the reports of electoral observation missions during 2024 elections, and similar concerns were raised in investigations across the globe—in countries such as Austria, Ethiopia, Georgia, Ireland, Romania and Sri Lanka—with implications for voters' information consumption (Mulugeta 2024; ODIHR 2024b). In countries such as Hungary and Serbia (International IDEA 2023), state-owned or government-influenced media were used to shape public opinion by controlling the narrative, suppressing the opposition and promoting the ruling party's or incumbent's interests (Nemeth 2024).

In countries such as Bangladesh, Belarus, Pakistan and Venezuela, online and offline censorship was used to prevent opposition messages from reaching voters (Freedom House 2024: 1–2, 7–9). Additionally, Internet shutdowns around elections were documented in countries including Azerbaijan, Comoros, India, Mauritania and Mozambique (Access Now n.d.).

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**The phenomenon of media capture is not new and has been widely documented, but its impact was amplified by compounding attacks in the information environment around elections in 2024.**

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## 5.3. THE ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Digital platforms and private messaging apps played a central role in the execution of malign actions during elections in 2024 (Clegg 2024). These technologies gave actors powerful tools to disseminate disinformation, amplify divisive narratives and coordinate covert operations at scale. Social media platforms, particularly Meta, TikTok, X and YouTube, enabled widespread public outreach, while private messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram facilitated targeted and often untraceable communication, as part of malign operations in the information space around elections (Kern 2024; Mozur et al. 2024).

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**The transformation of Twitter into X, under Elon Musk's ownership, has had notable implications for its user base and the type of discourse it fosters.**

The transformation of Twitter into X, under Elon Musk's ownership, has had notable implications for its user base and the type of discourse it fosters. Since Musk's acquisition, the platform has undergone structural and content moderation changes that have shifted user demographics, with a noticeable increase in right-wing and conservative voices ([Davies 2024](#)). The cause of this shift was the combination of Musk's personal engagement and incentives, rather than an algorithm ([Ingram 2024](#)).

Additionally, video-based platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are progressively becoming preferred sources of information, to the detriment of news articles. While both platforms were used during 2024 elections, TikTok gained particularly high traction for political content across the European Union, the USA, and in countries such as Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Moldova, South Africa and the United Kingdom, and it was banned in India ([Burn-Murdoch 2024](#)).

Algorithms are another impactful aspect of the information environment, with both political actors and regular citizens using them to their advantage to promote or hide certain information. For example, during Indonesian President Prabowo S. Djojohadikusumo's campaign, observers noted that Tik Tok not only allowed Prabowo to create a new, 'cuddlier' persona but also made it possible to flood the platform with material which drowned out information about the candidate's record which did not align with the narrative being promoted ([Widianto 2024](#)). The pro-democracy Bluebird movement in Taiwan specifically chose a non-political word as its name to avoid being censored by Facebook's algorithms ([Gargiulo 2024](#)).

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#### **5.4. THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF INFLUENCERS**

Influencers played a significant role in manipulating elections around the world in 2024, in countries from Indonesia and Taiwan in Asia to France, Moldova and Romania in Europe. Analysis by Freedom House ([2024](#)) revealed how influencers acted as superspreaders of messages favourable to pro-Russian candidates or, in the case of Taiwan, of narratives aimed at discouraging voting.

In the case of Romania, some influencers were aware of their role, while others claimed that they had been misled into participating in campaigns where the true objectives were concealed behind seemingly positive civic messages (see Box 5.1). Russia has used similar tactics, both ahead of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in 2022, and in the presidential elections in Moldova, in 2024 ([Neag et al. 2024](#)).

### Box 5.1. Annulled 2024 presidential election in Romania

The first round of the 2024 presidential election in Romania was held on 24 November. Three days after the results were validated, the Romanian Constitutional Court (CCR) annulled them (CCR 2024a, 2024b). The CCR's decision mandated that the elections be repeated in their entirety. At the time of the decision, the Romanian diaspora had already started voting in the second round. The decision was controversial and prompted an appeal about the proportionality of the measures taken by the court (Henley 2025).

In stating the grounds for its decision, the CCR highlighted significant irregularities in the election process, citing manipulation of voter behaviour, unfair advantages for certain electoral competitors and violations of electoral legislation (Vulcan 2024). The decision found that the use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), in the campaign lacked transparency and failed to comply with legal standards, and that unreported sources of campaign funding had been uncovered.

The decision also stated that voters' access to accurate information had been compromised through disinformation and aggressive campaigns to promote one candidate, facilitated by social media algorithms and non-compliant advertising practices. The CCR emphasized the importance of fair access to accurate information and protection from undue influence, noting that preferential treatment of a candidate on social media platforms and irregularities in campaign financing undermined trust in the electoral process and violated the constitutional principle of equal opportunities for candidates (CCR 2024b).

The presidential elections will be rerun, with the first round scheduled for 4 May 2025 and the second round for 18 May. The Supreme Council of National Defence (CSAT) examined the context of the election results and suspicions of foreign interference. The CSAT concluded that there had indeed been cyber interference that impacted the results of the first round of the presidential elections (Biziday n.d.).

Meanwhile, a dispute arose when TikTok failed to comply with a decision of the Central Electoral Bureau (BEC), the temporary electoral body overseeing the organization and conduct of the presidential elections. Despite official assurances given to Romanian authorities, TikTok did not implement the BEC's requirements to identify Călin Georgescu as a candidate in the elections. The CSAT acknowledged that TikTok's failure to comply with the BEC decision constituted a violation of legal provisions governing the electoral process, impacting the fairness of the elections and their final results. Consequently, CSAT members requested that national security authorities, election regulators and law enforcement agencies take the necessary measures within their legal competencies to clarify the issues presented during a meeting of the CSAT.

It is worth noting that the Permanent Electoral Authority of Romania sent notifications to TikTok regarding various irregularities related to illegal content distribution, requesting that the platform take the necessary measures to ensure that the electoral campaign in Romania adhered to legal provisions. However, TikTok did not respond promptly to these requests. Similar notifications were sent to other digital platforms.

The situation was also brought to the attention of the European Commission, which launched an official investigation regarding TikTok's possible violations of the Digital Services Act (European Commission Representation in Romania 2024). Subsequent disclosures (Presidency of Romania 2024b) revealed that the elections had been targeted in a synchronized manner through attacks against the country's cyber electoral infrastructure and through cognitive influence operations. It was concluded that both TikTok (Liboreiro 2024) and Facebook (Zuidijk 2024) had facilitated the process by failing to moderate political advertising, enabling the proliferation of coordinated content that included sensationalized narratives and denigrated candidates' political opponents (CheckFirst 2024). Furthermore, these reports indicated that in the current regional and electoral security context, Romania, along with other countries on NATO's eastern flank, had become a priority target for hostile actions by state and non-state actors.

**During various elections in 2024, local communities and diaspora groups were targets of disinformation and divisive narratives.**

## **5.5. LOCAL COMMUNITIES INCREASINGLY TARGETED WITH DIVISIVE NARRATIVES**

During various elections in 2024, local communities and diaspora groups were targets of disinformation and divisive narratives, reflecting a strategic shift likely driven by their specific vulnerabilities aligned with the objectives of malign actors. These vulnerabilities included a lack of or delays in situational awareness, insufficient interventions by central state institutions, a lack of local media and limited access to reliable information, low levels of media literacy, widespread dissatisfaction with the government, and socio-economic challenges such as poverty and social segregation (Noordin 2024).

Strategies designed to exploit these vulnerabilities included leveraging individuals as propagation agents, as seen in the USA, or antagonizing people against one another and against other vulnerable or traditionally marginalized groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities and religious minorities. In other words, many of the strategies used focused on identity (Suriani 2024), leading to a high level of digital violence that dominated significant parts of the information environment, effectively silencing other voices.

## **5.6. HYBRID THREATS**

The definition of hybrid threats is continuously evolving to keep pace with the continuous and compounding challenges that emerge within specific environments.

NATO (2024) provides one example of a definition:

Hybrid threats combine military and non-military as well as covert and overt means, including disinformation, cyberattacks, economic pressure, deployment of irregular armed groups and use of regular forces. Hybrid methods are used to blur the lines between war and peace, and attempt to sow doubt in the minds of target populations. They aim to destabilise and undermine societies.

**The information environment around elections has been a strategic target for hybrid threat actors.**

The information environment around elections has been a strategic target for hybrid threat actors (Kovalčíková and Spatafora 2024), as part of their non-conventional warfare strategies to achieve geopolitical objectives (Latschan 2024). In 2024 cases involving hybrid threats against elections—through operations run by actors such as China, Iran and Russia—were seen all over the world, from EU countries (FIMI-ISAC 2024) to Georgia, Moldova, the Solomon Islands, Taiwan (von Sydow 2024) and the USA (MTAC 2024).

These operations have become increasingly complex, with domestic actors such as influencers, incumbents or electoral competitors, media outlets,

civil society organizations and even clergy members serving the agendas of foreign states with malign intentions—or even their own personal agendas. Hybrid threat actors exploit these domestic actors to further geopolitical and economic objectives, often capitalizing on the intermediaries' personal agendas or vulnerabilities within their respective countries (Bay 2024).

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### 5.7. AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS

Mexico, Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania and the USA share the distinction of having had a woman run among the top two contenders for the highest office in the country in the 2024 elections cycle, with the first four ultimately electing female leaders. These countries also share the troubling commonality of extreme levels of aggression in digital communication spaces targeting women candidates, illustrating the pervasive challenge of gendered online violence in political contexts (see Chapter 4: Gender-based discrimination and violence).

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### 5.8. THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A literature review shows that in 2024 AI was used in political campaigns (Bhattacharya 2024), voter outreach (Bhattacharya 2024) and some administrative processes (Juneja 2024) as well as for foreign electoral interference (Stockwell 2024).

AI was used in numerous electoral campaigns to serve satirical purposes rather than for explicit manipulation, suggesting, at first glance, a less disruptive application than initially anticipated. Upon closer analysis, malign intent is frequently evident, even in AI-altered content that may initially seem harmless (Bicu 2024b). For example, Donald Trump shared AI-generated images portraying Kamala Harris as a communist dictator (Trump 2024). While some uses are clearly malicious, others blur the line between satire and influence, as seen in a widely circulated Spanish video depicting political rivals engaging in festive reconciliation through AI-generated scenes (United Unknown 2024).

One consequence of AI's contribution to a crisis of trust (see Chapter 8: Trust and public perception in elections) is that voters often struggle to determine the authenticity of the content they encounter amid a flood of AI-generated material, including deepfakes, fabricated audio and manipulated images on digital communication platforms. An erosion of trust in information sources has exacerbated ongoing declines in the credibility of democratic processes and institutions (Emmons, Vickery and Shein n.d.) and contributed to the capture of the information environment.

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**One consequence of AI's contribution to a crisis of trust (see Chapter 8: Trust and public perception in elections) is that voters often struggle to determine the authenticity of the content.**



EMBs approached the use of AI in their operations with caution in 2024. Most avoided relying on AI-powered technology in an extensive way due to concerns about fairness, accountability and transparency. This approach is beneficial, as it enables EMBs to take the time they need to understand, assess and mitigate the risks associated with the wider use of AI in electoral administration.

Panditharatne (2024) warned at the beginning of 2024 that AI could significantly disrupt elections by amplifying and refining existing harmful practices while also introducing new ones, hence destabilizing democratic processes. Overall, while there were instances where AI was misused in elections in 2024, assessments indicate that it had little impact on the results (Chow 2024; Stockwell 2024).

However, given the wide availability and variety of AI tools and the lack of research and access to data, it is still too early to fully understand the extent of the implications for elections. At the end of the electoral year, some experts even claimed that AI's impact on the information environment around elections was being overblown and had distracted from other, more pressing threats to democracy, such as the use of AI for surveillance, intimidation and repression targeting democratic actors (McBride, Simon and Altay 2024).

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## 5.9. CONCLUSIONS

Following patterns from previous years, malign actors continued exploiting societal vulnerabilities such as disruptions in democratic systems, political instability, and economic and social inequalities during the 2024 elections super cycle. These weaknesses provided fertile ground for manipulation by both domestic and foreign actors deploying hybrid tactics to undermine trust in institutions and democratic processes and alter electoral outcomes.

Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond reactive responses and adopting proactive, pre-emptive measures. Interventions should focus on building resilience before threats materialize. Proactive strategies demand sustained attention, long-term commitment and the application of lessons learned from global examples. Efforts to implement these strategies include early-detection systems and situational-awareness mechanisms, such as social media monitoring, intelligence sharing and early-warning systems at the local, national, regional and global levels, with enhanced cooperation across sectors to pre-empt disinformation before it takes root.

Building and maintaining high levels of trust in institutions play a critical role in mitigating the impact of disinformation, as credible institutions can serve as reliable sources of information, countering false narratives effectively.

Building resilience against malign actors in the information space requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach and efforts to address the root causes of societal and systemic vulnerabilities. Involving civil society,

### Box 5.2. Sweden: Safeguarding electoral integrity through inter-agency cooperation in the face of misinformation

Sweden has been touted as an example of the adoption of proactive measures to pre-empt threats. This model rests on an understanding that elections comprise critical infrastructure, transparent communication with the public, the provision of resources to ensure electoral independence, and a broad-based response to disinformation and content which may harm electoral integrity (Bay 2025).

Over the past decade, Swedish election officials have developed and refined strategies to help prevent problems arising in the information environment surrounding elections. These strategies highlight the importance of inter-agency collaboration, information literacy and the ability to continuously adapt to changing circumstances (Bay 2025). This was partly driven by concerns over a more fraught geopolitical situation and concerns about the potential reach of election interference by hostile foreign actors.

Since 2017 the Swedish Election Authority (Valmyndigheten), alongside the Civil Contingencies Agency (Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap, MSB), the Psychological Defence Agency (Myndigheten för psykologiskt försvar, MPF) and others state agencies, has been developing strategies to maintain trust in elections and respond rapidly to challenges emanating from the information environment. These strategies include the following:

- publishing training courses and a handbook, developed in partnership with Lund University and the MPF, to teach public sector employees to recognize and respond to disinformation (MPF 2024);
- partnering with media outlets to ensure that accurate information about elections is widely disseminated (Bay 2025);
- collaborating with social media platforms to facilitate the prompt removal of inorganic accounts, block the spread of false or misleading content, and identify and address public concerns about elections (Bay 2025);
- carrying out a public awareness campaign to promote information literacy and make it easier to identify and respond to emotionally charged content, conducted in partnership with the MPF (Psychological Defence Agency 2023);
- commissioning of ongoing independent research into the impact and spread of disinformation in online spaces (Bay 2025).

In preparation for the 2018 general election, contact lists were created to facilitate quick access in the event of an emergency, and weekly crisis management coordination meetings were held, deepening inter-agency and inter-institutional collaboration. Furthermore, the 2018 general election and 2019 European Parliament election were marked by efforts to harm electoral integrity through the information space. The MSB responded by acting as a gathering point for instances of suspected information influence events, with an internal working group dedicated to analysing potential incidents of foreign interference and disseminating the findings to their counterparts in other agencies and municipalities (Bay 2025).

The Swedish Police Authority (Polismyndigheten) would later build on this work by creating a dedicated incident code and hotline for election-related threats. In 2022 the now permanent election cooperation network (nationellt valnätverk) came under the auspices of the Election Authority (Valmyndigheten 2025).

Inter-agency collaboration in the form of working groups also underpinned the cyber defence dialogue and communications network, which was cited as a success following the 2024 European Parliament election (Valmyndigheten 2024). During the 2024 European Parliament election, the MPF launched a widespread information literacy campaign called 'Don't be fooled' (Bli inte lurad), which advised citizens to approach potential false or misleading information through the following four steps:

- being vigilant of information, images or narratives that appeal to a strong emotional response;
- avoiding inadvertently creating misinformation or disinformation;
- critically assessing the sources of potential disinformation; and

### Box 5.2. Sweden: Safeguarding electoral integrity through inter-agency cooperation in the face of misinformation (cont.)

- seeking out sources of information that can be confirmed or vetted—for instance, information shared by authorities.

Inter-agency collaboration among Swedish electoral agencies has helped protect electoral integrity despite the rise of malicious online actors and misinformation. These efforts have improved electoral processes in Sweden.

academia and experts in addressing disinformation can foster innovation and impartiality in combating these threats. The perfect mix of protective measures will vary depending on the context. Still, it will likely include some combination of codes of conduct, proactive public communication, carefully designed regulation, media literacy campaigns, protections and support for independent journalism and citizen monitoring.

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## Chapter 6

# ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT HURDLES AND MALFUNCTIONS

*Sonali Campion*

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### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

Electoral integrity requires effective election management, but credible elections are difficult to deliver. They are major administrative undertakings involving complex logistics, substantial resources, tight time frames and charged political dynamics. This means they are prone to electoral malfunctions, such as mistakes or administrative deficiencies. Malfunctions are distinct from malpractices, where processes are deliberately manipulated ([Birch 2011](#); see also Chapter 2: Electoral malpractice). Nevertheless, they have the potential to compromise all four principles of electoral integrity and cannot be overlooked (see the Introduction to this report).

As the institutions responsible for organizing, monitoring and certifying electoral processes, election management bodies (EMBs) are primarily responsible for minimizing errors and ensuring that any problems that arise do not materially impact results ([Mozaffar and Schedler 2002](#)). Although many EMBs around the world have become more proficient in core aspects of election delivery ([International IDEA 2024b](#)), malfunctions continued to undermine voter confidence in electoral processes and outcomes in the super-cycle year. This chapter considers why electoral management continues to be fraught with difficulty, before discussing key administrative challenges identified in 2024. It concludes with lessons and recommendations for EMBs and other stakeholders.

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**Electoral integrity requires effective election management, but credible elections are difficult to deliver.**

## 6.2. GROWING PRESSURES AND EXPANDED REMITS

The global election management landscape has shifted significantly since it was first documented in the late 1990s ([López-Pintor 2015](#)). Today, both the number of countries holding elections and the number of nominally independent EMBs has grown.<sup>7</sup> EMB leaders, supported by governments and development partners, have significantly enhanced the capacity and professionalism of many of these newer organizations ([Lührmann 2016](#); [Asplund 2023](#)). Even in ‘established’ democracies that might be thought of as ‘established’, there have been concerted efforts to raise standards and strengthen systems and processes (see, for example, [Australian Electoral Commission 2023](#)). Electoral Integrity Project data also highlights that, on average, scores are higher for stages of the electoral cycle where EMBs exercise more overall control, such as counting, results tabulation and election procedures ([Garrett, James and Caal-Lam 2024](#)). However, election management is a balancing act requiring EMBs to adapt and solve problems on an ongoing basis. Tasks such as maintaining accurate voter registers and recruiting and training enough temporary staff to administer polling continue to present challenges at every election. Laws and regulations change, so EMBs must constantly review their procedures to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

**EMBs have to adapt their operations to minimize the impact of increasingly disruptive climate emergencies.**

Furthermore, the environments in which EMBs operate have changed. As is discussed elsewhere in this report, EMBs have to adapt their operations to minimize the impact of increasingly disruptive climate emergencies (see Chapter 7: The impact of natural hazards on 2024 elections) and combat unprecedented levels of election mis- and disinformation (see Chapter 5: The information environment around elections). It is also increasingly clear that the erosion of institutions associated with democratic backsliding ([Bermeo 2016](#)) is directly impacting the real and perceived autonomy of EMBs ([International IDEA 2024b](#)). This can have serious operational implications. For example, a former Mexican president made multiple attempts to overhaul the widely respected National Electoral Institute and drastically cut its staff, budgets and oversight powers in the run-up to the June 2024 election ([OAS 2024b](#)). Although the substantive reforms were overturned by the Supreme Court, both federal and local electoral bodies experienced an ‘internal crisis’ due to unprecedented staff attrition and insufficient budgets during the election period ([Acuerdo Nacional por la Integridad Electoral 2024: 5](#)).

As their operating environments become more unpredictable, EMBs have also seen their remits expand. Over the past three decades, populations globally have both grown and aged, leading to a corresponding increase in the number of eligible voters ([United Nations 2019](#); [World Bank 2023](#)). In 2024 around two thirds of the countries that held elections had to cater to more registered voters than ever before.<sup>8</sup> Technology, ranging from databases to assistive devices, is now widely used throughout the electoral cycle and has contributed

<sup>7</sup> López-Pintor reported that 79 of 148 countries (53 per cent) had independent EMBs. Today, 138 out of 215 countries and territories (64 per cent) have them according to International IDEA's [Electoral Management Design Database](#).

<sup>8</sup> 41 out of 63 countries based on registered voter data from International IDEA's [Voter Turnout Database](#).

to greater accuracy, efficiency and transparency in EMB operations. However, the transition to increased technological dependence has introduced new cybersecurity vulnerabilities at a time when foreign digital interference is pervasive and technology failures can be highly disruptive (Tenove et al. 2018). The use of special voting arrangements (SVAs), such as early, mobile and proxy voting, accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic (Barrat et al. 2023; James, Clark and Asplund 2023). These alternative modes make voting more accessible but entail a whole range of separate processes, communications and safeguards that must be applied to avoid compromising the integrity of the wider election.

Navigating the pressures and demands associated with contemporary election management involves working with others. Election delivery has always been a highly collaborative undertaking; while an EMB may have overall responsibility for directing and coordinating electoral cycle activities,<sup>9</sup> there can be no election without voters, candidates, the media, the police, the judiciary and so on (Catt et al. 2014). Civil society plays a critical role in offering civic education, monitoring elections and promoting integrity, while government departments provide financial resources and other critical forms of support. Today, these 'electoral management governance networks' (James 2020: 100–02) have become more complex. EMB operations require more specialized expertise—for example, in cybersecurity—which may not be possible or desirable to cultivate in-house (van der Staak and Wolf 2019). An EMB's performance can depend as much on the effectiveness of their relationships with other members of the network as it does on their organizational capabilities. In this context, challenges around resourcing are not limited to the EMB: electoral integrity can also be jeopardized if other critical actors in the network lack the funds or personnel to undertake their electoral responsibilities.

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**Navigating the pressures and demands associated with contemporary election management involves working with others.**

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### 6.3. CHALLENGES IN 2024

In 2024, malfunctions were identified in several national elections reviewed by the Global Election Monitor.<sup>10</sup> There were also numerous scenarios where EMBs faced significant pressures but were able to navigate them and deliver credible processes.

#### **Strained human resources**

The knowledge and dedication of election staff were critical to the successful conclusion of many of 2024's polls. However, finding enough temporary workers to administer elections proved to be a real challenge for EMBs during the super cycle. Ninety per cent of local election officials surveyed in the United Kingdom reported that they struggled to recruit and retain temporary

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**The knowledge and dedication of election staff were critical to the successful conclusion of many of 2024's polls.**

<sup>9</sup> EMB structures vary significantly around the world. In some cases—particularly where elections are delivered by government departments—their remit may be much more limited. In every case, however, effective collaboration with others is critical.

<sup>10</sup> Instances of electoral malfunctions were identified in 14 out of 54 elections (Comoros, El Salvador, South Africa, Georgia, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Kiribati, Namibia, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Palau, Panama and UK).

### Heavy workloads contributed to the deaths of over 100 election officials in Indonesia.

polling staff, citing the increased complexity of the work in the wake of legal changes and low remuneration ([United Kingdom 2024b: 45](#); see also Box 6.2). In Georgia, the pool of non-partisan candidates willing to run polling stations was limited, and political parties had difficulty meeting their quotas of partisan staff because people proved reluctant to represent parties in a highly polarized election, especially for so little pay ([ODIHR 2024c: 7](#)). Even when staff were appointed, there was high turnover, and replacements were not always trained in time for election day—a problem that also arose in North Macedonia ([ODIHR 2024a: 10](#)). This trend is concerning, as front-line staff play a pivotal role in election day procedures and the voter experience.

Both permanent and temporary EMB staff often had to navigate difficult working conditions. Heavy workloads contributed to the deaths of over 100 election officials in Indonesia, while missing materials in El Salvador delayed the count, so front-line staff had to work continuously for up to 24 hours on election day ([BBC News Mundo 2024](#); [Salim 2024](#); see also Box 6.1). Workers in India ([Mitra 2024](#)), the Maldives ([International IDEA 2024a](#)) and Mexico ([Sosa 2024](#)) were required to deliver polling during extreme heatwaves, and at least 30 Indian officials died as a result. In South Africa, presiding officers were in some places required to manage polling stations with up to 20,000 registered voters because the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) did not implement its own cap of 3,000 voters per station in metropolitan areas ([EU EEM 2024b: 14](#)). Disinformation about electoral irregularities ahead of the US election fuelled the harassment of election officials, which necessitated new security measures, closer coordination with law enforcement and specialized safety training ([Leingang 2024](#)). Elections work is by its nature often demanding, but these cases indicate that more needs to be done to improve conditions so that staff are safe and able to perform to the best of their ability.

It is also clear that increased scrutiny and low public confidence in elections inflated EMB workloads. For example, the accelerated collapse of trust in US elections since 2020 prompted many officials to do more public and media engagement—for instance, promoting electoral integrity safeguards ([Wang 2024](#); see also Chapter 8: Trust and public perception in elections). Overburdened staff also had to respond to unprecedented mass challenges to voter eligibility and ‘zombie lawsuits’, both of which made false claims about the integrity of voter registers ([Raderstorf 2024](#); [Swift et al. 2024](#)). These factors, combined with an aging elections workforce, are contributing to a spike in staff attrition ([Ferrer, Thompson and Orey 2024](#)). As with the case of Mexico, the loss of institutional knowledge and pressure on remaining staff and new recruits is concerning. It also raises questions about the sustainability of human resources at a time when election delivery is growing more complex.

### Cybersecurity breaches and technology malfunctions

Technology contributed positively to many elections in 2024. For example, despite periodic criticism and challenges, India’s electronic voting machines once again helped to simplify the task of administering elections with almost a billion registered voters by eliminating the need to produce ballot papers and accelerating the count ([Gopalakrishnan 2024](#)). However, technology-related

problems also disrupted several 2024 elections to varying degrees. Issues with voter verification devices slowed voting at multiple polling stations in Georgia (ODIHR 2024c: 20), Namibia (ECF-SADC 2024: 10) and South Africa (EU EEM 2024b: 13), while online voting for advance and overseas voters in Panama was briefly suspended due to a discrepancy between the order of the candidates on the virtual and physical ballots (OAS 2024c: 11). The electronic results management system in El Salvador broke down due to a combination of logistical failures, inadequate training, connectivity issues and faulty equipment (see Box 6.1). These incidents underscore that all technology deployed in elections requires rigorous testing and strict quality controls. However, they also highlight that certain prerequisites need to be in place for systems to function, and that backup procedures should be agreed and communicated to staff as part of their training.

**The electronic results management system in El Salvador broke down due to a combination of logistical failures, inadequate training, connectivity issues and faulty equipment.**

Furthermore, technology is often viewed with suspicion, particularly by those who see it as vulnerable to manipulation or hacking. Cultivating trust in new systems therefore requires stakeholder engagement at every stage of decision making, testing and auditing. South Africa's IEC provides an example of good practice in this regard, as it emphasizes transparency and data sharing in its security approach and routinely invites stakeholders to independently audit its systems (Commonwealth Secretariat 2020: 72, 105). Moreover, timely communications when issues do arise are critical to maintaining citizen and stakeholder confidence. When the ballot paper discrepancy arose in Panama, the EMB undertook technical checks and consulted with political parties before resuming online voting (OAS 2024c: 11). These measures ensured that advance and overseas voters could still participate and deflected challenges to the process that might otherwise have emerged. Communications regarding the failure of results management systems in El Salvador and Pakistan were less forthcoming, leading to confusion, allegations of rigging and opposition challenges (Dawn 2024; see also Box 6.1).

Security is also a concern as EMBs routinely utilize the Internet and a range of software and devices to conduct their operations. Cyberoperations targeting election infrastructure intensified in the lead-up to the 2024 cycle (Asplund and Tucker 2025).<sup>11</sup> In November 2023 a hacker gained access to the personal data of 204 million registered voters via the Indonesian Electoral Commission website. This was one of a series of alleged leaks, with other incidents reported in 2020 and 2022 (BBC News Indonesia 2023). Breaches of voter data and other confidential EMB information have also been identified in South Korea (Nam 2023), the UK (see Box 6.2) and the United States (Florida and Washington, DC) since 2021 (Bowen 2023; Hope 2023). Just days before the October 2024 general elections in Mozambique, the EMB reported that it had been targeted by a cyberattack, although it was quick to emphasize that its data had not been compromised (360 Mozambique 2024). Incidents such as these offer an urgent reminder to all EMBs to regularly review and strengthen cybersecurity safeguards.

<sup>11</sup> Cyberattacks were reported in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mozambique, Palu, Romania, South Korea and Taiwan, according to the Global Election Monitor.



### Voter exclusion and campaign regulation challenges

Administrative shortcomings are particularly problematic when they exclude groups of voters. Despite efforts by many EMBs, provisions for people with disabilities were often deficient during the super cycle. In North Macedonia, voter information was provided in a range of formats, a helpline was set up for voters with hearing difficulties, and various assistive tools were also made available at polling stations. However, not all key information was available in accessible formats, and there were gaps in staff training, which meant polling staff rarely knew how to use tools such as tactile ballot papers (ODIHR 2024a: 11). Inaccessible polling stations remained a common challenge, with observers in Bangladesh (EU EEM 2024a: 17), Georgia (ODIHR 2024c: 28), Indonesia (Rosales, Antiquerra and Rana 2024: 60), Mongolia (ODIHR 2024d: 16) and North Macedonia (ODIHR 2024a: 28) reporting that 50 per cent or more of polling stations visited were not fully accessible for those with mobility issues.

SVAs were widely used, facilitating participation where they were effectively implemented. For example, eligible voters in South Korea were able to vote early or by post, at home or even aboard ships. The National Election Commission also successfully coordinated overseas voting in 115 countries, enabling the highest overseas turnout ever (Spinelli 2024). Deficiencies elsewhere resulted in cases of disenfranchisement. South Africa offered people with disabilities the option to vote at home. However, those who registered for this service were informed that electoral staff would come during a two-day window. As no specific time was provided, many would-be voters missed the visit (EU EEM 2024b: 17). In the UK, arrangements for overseas voters to participate by post proved inadequate. The timeline to apply for and return postal votes set out in the law was so short that it was difficult for many voters to get their ballots back in time to be counted (see Box 6.2). Postal delays similarly impacted overseas voters in Palau's general election (Ngirudelsang 2024), while the Electoral Commission of Namibia's efforts to allow citizens to vote at any polling station were stymied by technical and logistical problems (Links 2024; see also Chapter 8: Trust and public perception in elections). These examples offer insight into how SVAs can fail to ensure inclusion in practice due to a combination of legal constraints and administrative deficiencies.

**Electoral Integrity Project data has consistently identified campaign finance and campaign media as the lowest-scoring aspects of the electoral cycle.**

Electoral Integrity Project data has consistently identified campaign finance and campaign media as the lowest-scoring aspects of the electoral cycle (Garnett, James and Caal-Lam 2024), and it is clear that EMBs and other regulators struggled to guarantee a level playing field in 2024. Some countries did strengthen their legal frameworks: Sri Lanka introduced campaign finance limits for the first time (EU EOM 2024a: 2), and the Maldives tightened its regulations and gave the Election Commission more powers to punish violations (Transparency Maldives 2024: 23).

Significant gaps remain, however, and EMBs are often unable to fulfil their legal obligations in practice. Sri Lanka's new campaign finance rules lack an effective oversight mechanism, and, in 2024, the Election Commission did

not have the resources to exercise the powers it did have (ANFREL 2024: 10). Moldova's Central Election Commission similarly struggled to implement campaign finance regulations due to resource constraints (ODIHR 2024b: 18). Incumbents' abuse of state resources remains a widespread challenge that went largely unchecked last year. El Salvador's Supreme Electoral Court (TSE) was described as 'passive' in the face of complaints about the use of public resources in campaigning (OAS 2024a: 6). The Indonesian president personally distributed social assistance in contested areas, which civil society organizations and academics saw as an attempt to bolster his son's candidacy for vice president (Rosales, Antiquerra and Rana 2024: 2), while in Mozambique civil servants and teachers were summoned to participate in the ruling party's rallies (EU EOM 2024b: 6).

### Lessons learned and recommendations

Election management experiences in the super-cycle year illustrate how long-standing challenges associated with election delivery are being compounded by growing pressures and expanding responsibilities. Resourcing is a critical issue. EMBs need funds to implement electoral activities, but they must also invest in risk management and organizational capacity to navigate unpredictable environments and deliver genuinely inclusive elections. It is also clear that more needs to be done to support and reward election officials. Electoral staff were rightly described as heroes by several commentators in 2024, but current workloads and pressures are not sustainable. Working conditions, training and compensation for permanent and temporary staff need to be improved to attract and retain skilled candidates.

To maintain public confidence in electoral processes, EMBs need to be proactive in their communications and promote transparency throughout the electoral cycle. It is no longer enough for EMBs to perform to a high standard; they also need to be seen to be doing so (see Chapter 8: Trust and public perception in elections). When things do go wrong, it is critical that there is accurate and timely information available so that stakeholders do not turn to other, less reliable sources. The same goes for technology: wide stakeholder consultation and engagement are not just nice to have; they are key to ensuring confidence and buy-in. Robust quality and security protocols are also necessary to manage the risks associated with technology.

Finally, more consideration should be given to building the broader capacity of the other players in the electoral governance network, such as political parties, the media, civil society and the judiciary. EMBs are invariably in the spotlight when malfunctions occur. However, it is important to recognize that both the causes and solutions may lie elsewhere in the network (see Box 7.2). Ensuring that other actors have the knowledge, capacity and incentives to perform their electoral roles consistently would both reduce the pressure on EMBs and facilitate the realization of electoral integrity.

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**Election management experiences in the super-cycle year illustrate how long-standing challenges associated with election delivery are being compounded by growing pressures and expanding responsibilities.**

**Box 6.1. Electoral malfunction during the 2024 El Salvador presidential and legislative elections**

El Salvador held presidential and parliamentary elections on 4 February 2024 that were marred by a range of logistical and technological issues. The chaotic handling of the results processes delayed the finalization of the results until 18 February and prompted opposition parties to call for the election to be annulled (Reuters 2024). The observation mission deployed by the Organization of American States described the post-electoral process as ‘deficient, slow, and disorganised’, although they did express confidence in the final results (OAS 2024b: 4).

**Logistics and technology**

A new electronic system was introduced to facilitate counting and transmission, but delivery delays meant that few polling stations received the kit they needed by the time polls closed. In the rush to get necessary equipment to the polling stations, quality controls were inconsistently implemented, so materials were often missing or faulty. Other problems—for example, electricity and Internet outages—ultimately forced the TSE to switch to a hand count (OAS 2024a: 1). The handling of sensitive materials during this process also caused concern, due to a lack of protocols to ensure security and traceability (OAS 2024a: 13–14).

Other technologies also failed to work as planned. The TSE website was supposed to display live preliminary results, but it suffered outages, and results were published only sporadically (BBC News Mundo 2024; OAS 2024a: 3). A majority of polling-station staff did not use the system established to allow the TSE to monitor polling stations on election day (OAS 2024a: 13).

The TSE’s lack of communication internally and externally contributed to the post-election uncertainty, especially as the incumbent president declared himself the winner and held celebrations shortly after polls closed (OAS 2024a: 11).

**Overseas voting**

For the first time, citizens living abroad could vote remotely online or in person at overseas polling stations rather than by post. While the more accessible modes of voting enabled higher participation than ever before, the administration of overseas voting by a contractor with minimal oversight from the TSE or stakeholders was criticized (OAS 2024a: 16). Confusion around the total number of votes and a reported software failure delayed the publication of the results of overseas voting, which added to the chaotic environment surrounding the vote count (OAS 2024a: 17).

**Training**

Over 90 per cent of polling-station staff were trained face to face, but their performance on election day suggests that this did not sufficiently prepare them for their duties. Observers reported that staff often appeared unsure of what they were supposed to be doing, both on election day and during the count. Procedures were implemented inconsistently, and those operating the electronic kits struggled to do so (OAS 2024a: 13, 2024b: 2). Uncertainty around responsibilities extended to party monitors, who in some cases performed the duties of election officials (OAS 2024a: 9).

### Box 6.2. Errors and externally imposed constraints: The case of the 2024 UK general election

The UK general election held on 4 July 2024 was broadly viewed as well run (United Kingdom 2024b: 1). However, the implementation of new parliamentary boundaries and the provisions of the Elections Act 2022 meant that it was more administratively demanding than earlier national polls (United Kingdom 2024b: 43). The issues that did arise demonstrate that, even in more conducive operating environments, errors and externally imposed constraints can compromise electoral integrity.

#### Cyberattack

In August 2023, the Electoral Commission (EC) announced it had been subject to a 'complex cyber attack' in August 2021, which was not identified for over a year. During this time, various systems and the personal data of up to 40 million citizens were accessible (Information Commissioner's Office 2024b; United Kingdom 2024a).

An investigation by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) found that the EC had failed to take basic measures to secure its systems, such as installing security updates and implementing robust password policies. However, the ICO also indicated that it had found no evidence of direct harm caused by the breach (Information Commissioner's Office 2024b).

Following the attack, the EC worked with the National Cyber Security Centre and other experts to upgrade its technology infrastructure, monitoring systems and security policies (Information Commissioner's Office 2024a).

#### Timeline and postal voting challenges

Election dates are not fixed in the UK and are normally determined when the prime minister asks the monarch to dissolve parliament. An election is held 25 working days after the dissolution of parliament (Johnston, Baker and Priddy 2024).

The July 2024 election created additional challenges for the UK's electoral bodies. The summer holidays had begun in parts of the country, which created more demand for postal votes. In Scotland, the pressure on print suppliers led to production breakdowns, forcing individual councils to take steps to mitigate the impact of delayed postal packs (BBC News 2024). Problems around recruiting and training temporary staff were exacerbated by the timing of the election, as well as the introduction of voter ID requirements and various new polling procedures (Boakye 2023; CPA 2024: 4).

#### Overseas voting

The 2024 election also underscored that the postal voting arrangement for overseas voters, used by almost half of those living abroad, is not fit for purpose. The window to register for a postal vote, receive a postal pack and return it was simply too short. Although local authorities recognized that postal packs needed to be dispatched promptly, the procedures for processing applications and conflicting demands on staff time meant this was not always possible (United Kingdom 2024b: 18). As a result, only 52 per cent of overseas postal voters were able to return their ballots in time to be counted (United Kingdom 2024b: 23).

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## Chapter 7

# THE IMPACT OF NATURAL HAZARDS ON 2024 ELECTIONS

*Erik Asplund and Madeline Harty*

Extreme weather events—tropical storms, floods, heatwaves and wildfires—and other disasters such as earthquakes and volcanic activity have the potential to severely disrupt electoral processes ([Asplund 2022](#)). When natural hazards turn into disasters, they have the potential to harm local populations, causing injuries—or even fatalities—and destroying critical infrastructure, including electoral facilities and materials. Disasters can also displace voters and disrupt electoral timetables. In turn, these impacts threaten key principles of electoral integrity, particularly equality in terms of participation and contestation.

As the number of disasters has grown by a factor of five over a 50-year period ([WMO 2021](#))—driven by climate change, combined with a lack of climate adaptation efforts ([Hill 2025](#))—it is a statistical certainty that natural hazards will increasingly turn into disasters and disrupt electoral processes in the foreseeable future or until climate mitigation efforts are prioritized by the 196 parties that signed the Paris Agreement in 2015.

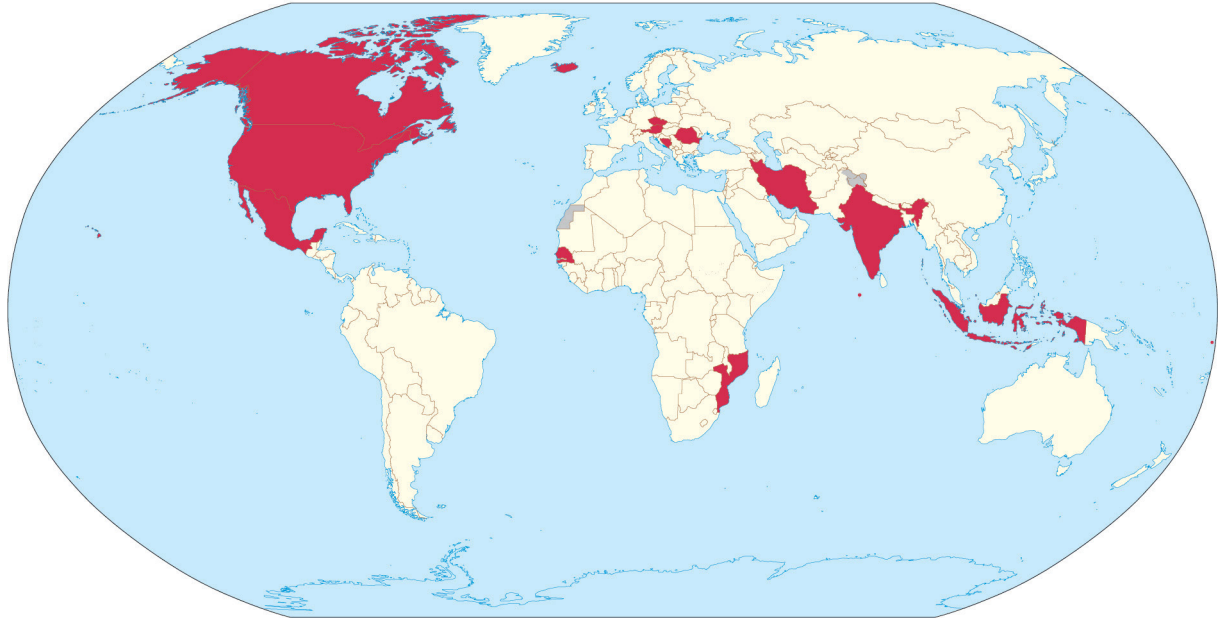
In 2024, 15 countries were affected by meteorological, hydrological, climatological or geophysical disasters during election periods (see Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.3). This number includes both high-income and low-income countries, showing that all countries, regardless of their income level, can be affected by extreme weather events. Moreover, many of these countries expressed concern over extreme weather as identified in the World Economic Forum's 2024 and 2025 global risk reports ([WEF 2024, 2025](#)).

The impact of disasters on elections in 2024 was varied and depended on the type of hazard, exposure to the hazard and the vulnerability of the exposed

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**In 2024, 15 countries were affected by meteorological, hydrological, climatological or geophysical disasters during election periods.**

**Figure 7.1. Countries affected by natural hazards during election periods in 2024**



Source: E. Asplund (ed.), Election Emergency and Crisis Monitor: Mapping Impact and Response to Disasters, International IDEA, 12 November 2024 (and updated), <<https://www.idea.int/election-dashboard-election-emergency-and-crisis-monitor>>, accessed 31 March 2025.

**Beyond climate  
change, the  
2023–2024 El Niño  
event was also a  
contributing factor.**

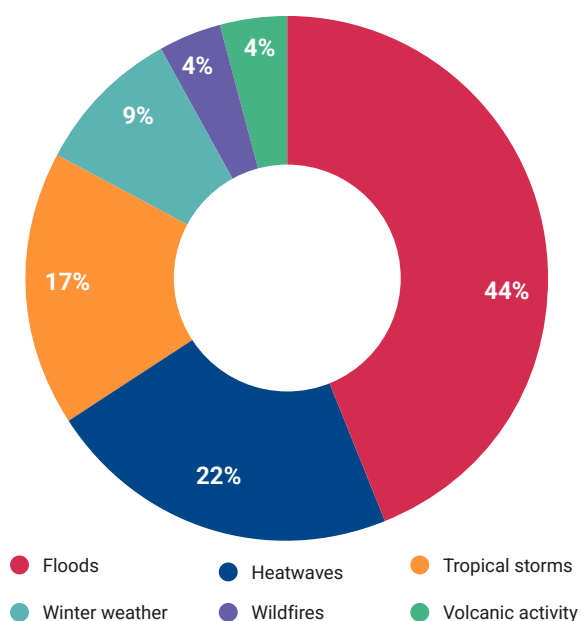
population (WHO 2021).<sup>12</sup> Beyond climate change, the 2023–2024 El Niño event was also a contributing factor in certain elections that were affected by extreme weather (WMO 2023).

This chapter begins with a broad overview of the countries that were affected by different types of disasters during elections in 2024, using the Election Emergency and Crisis Monitor (EECM) as the main frame of reference (Asplund 2024g). The country briefs that make up the EECM were prepared based on media monitoring and desk research. Each brief provides an overview of the type of natural hazard, its general impact on the jurisdiction and the electoral process, as well as measures taken to protect elections. The chapter then provides a brief introduction to the science of weather attribution and cites recent studies of extreme weather events, linked to climate change, that have coincided with elections in some countries.

The main part of the chapter analyses the impact that extreme weather events had on elections in 2024, with a focus on the electoral cycle, providing comparative analyses of the timing of extreme weather events on the respective electoral period, the impact on electoral processes (in terms of

<sup>12</sup> For example, the heatwave that exposed 968 million eligible voters to health risks throughout much of the 43-day election period in India was likely more impactful than the wildfires that disrupted voting in certain locations during primary campaigns in the US state of Texas, which had 17.9 million voters (Texas Secretary of State 2024).

Figure 7.2. Hazards that affected elections in 2024, by hazard type



Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from E. Asplund (ed.), Election Emergency and Crisis Monitor: Mapping Impact and Response to Disasters, International IDEA, 12 November 2024 (and updated), <<https://www.idea.int/election-dashboard-election-emergency-and-crisis-monitor>>, accessed 31 March 2025.

electoral integrity), and the response of the election authorities to the stresses and shocks that the respective event triggered.

The analysis throughout the chapter also draws on findings from an election management survey completed in 2024 by 50 election jurisdictions (James, Garnett and Campion 2025).

The chapter concludes with findings and lessons learned on what election stakeholders can do to overcome disaster-related challenges, including adaptation through contingency planning, increased cooperation and flexible administrative voting procedures. Climate adaptation in electoral planning and decision making and the designation of elections as part of critical infrastructure are two policy-oriented recommendations highlighted in the chapter.

## 7.1. NATURAL HAZARDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

In 2024, 15 countries were impacted by natural hazards during primary, subnational, national and supranational elections (see Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.3). Floods (44 per cent), heatwaves (22 per cent) and tropical storms (17 per cent) were the most common types of hazards to affect election periods in 2024 (see Figure 7.2). In some cases, natural hazards affected multiple

**Floods, heatwaves and tropical storms were the most common types of hazards to affect election periods in 2024.**

elections in one country. In the United States, for example, disasters impacted primary elections in Iowa, Florida and Texas as well as the presidential election (see Box 7.1). In Indonesia, floods resulted in the postponement of polls in several villages in Demak and North Jakarta during the February 2024 general election ([Asplund 2024b](#)). Floods and landslides also affected voting during the 2024 Indonesian regional elections held in November, in addition to a volcanic eruption that triggered a geophysical disaster in the East Nusa Tenggara province ([Asplund 2024g](#); [Gunawan 2024](#)). Flooding also impacted Austria's voting operations during the 2024 EU elections in June ([NL Times 2024](#)) and the 2024 general election in September ([Murphy 2024](#)). In total, 23 disasters affected 20 elections in 15 countries in 2024, impacting millions of voters around the world.

**There is quantifiable proof that many of these natural hazards were made worse because of climate change.**

Moreover, there is quantifiable proof that many of these natural hazards were made worse because of climate change. Climate change attribution science, which uses observations, computer models and statistical methods, has created an evidence base that focuses on 'whether, and to what extent, human caused climate change altered the likelihood of specific weather events' ([Florini and Hill 2024](#)).

According to reports from World Weather Attribution, an international scientific consortium, on Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton (which affected the US presidential election), the heatwaves in North and Central America as well as Asia (which affected elections in India, the Maldives and Mexico) and the heavy rainfall that caused floods in a large part of Europe (affecting elections in Austria and Czechia) clearly illustrate the impact of climate change on electoral processes ([WWA 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e](#)).

Highlighted countries include Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czechia, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, the Maldives, Mexico, Mozambique, Romania, Senegal, Tuvalu and the USA. Note that the respective natural hazard may not have affected the whole country, as many disasters that affected elections were more regional or local in character.

How does this 2024 snapshot look in comparison with recent years? According to the EECM, 33 countries were affected by natural hazards during election periods between 2019 and 2024 ([Asplund 2024g](#)), meaning 17 per cent of 195 globally recognized countries have struggled with disasters during elections. This number is further supported by survey results from the Electoral Management Survey: out of 50 respondents, 13 (26 per cent) indicated that elections in the previous five years had been adversely affected by natural hazards other than Covid-19 (see Table A.1 in Annex A).

## 7.2. HOW EXTREME WEATHER DISRUPTED 2024 ELECTIONS DURING DIFFERENT PERIODS IN THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

Disasters can be national, regional or local in scale and can take place at any time within the electoral cycle, including the pre-election period, the election period and the post-election period. In 2024 extreme weather affected voter registration, campaign events, voting operations, counting and tabulation, and results announcements.

In March 2024, torrential rain over southern Mozambique resulted in severe floods, forcing 96 registration offices to close due to inadequate working conditions for election officials (see Chapter 6: Election management hurdles and malfunctions). Moreover, many registration centres were used by local residents as shelters. Also, Tropical Storm Filipo, which hit the country in March 2024, damaged roads and prevented election officials from delivering election materials to school buildings used for voter registration in Manica province ([Asplund 2024e](#)).

In Czechia, Storm Boris disrupted the September 2024 Senate elections by forcing election officials in several towns to move polling stations to tents and shipping containers, as many of the buildings originally designated as polling stations were flooded ([AP News 2024](#)).

During India's general election, which was held in stages between 9 April and 1 June, much of the country experienced extreme heat, with temperatures between 45 and 50 degrees Celsius. To bolster participation among voters, the electoral management body (EMB) introduced health and safety measures, including the provision of tents, water and medical kits at polling stations. Despite these measures, there were incidents of citizens queuing to vote who lost consciousness or poll workers who died because of heat-related illness. On the last day of voting in Uttar Pradesh, for instance, at least 33 election officials died because of heatstroke. According to the minister of defence, the heatwave may have had an impact on voter turnout, which was 65.79 per cent, compared with 67.4 per cent for the previous general election, in 2019 ([Asplund 2024c](#); [Pradhan 2024](#)).

In Iceland, the tabulation of votes was delayed on the day of the 2024 parliamentary election because of a blizzard ([Ólafsson 2024](#)).

A storm and high tides delayed the vote for the new prime minister in the Pacific Island nation of Tuvalu, as newly elected members of parliament from outer islands were unable to travel to the capital for several weeks ([TOI World Desk 2024](#)).

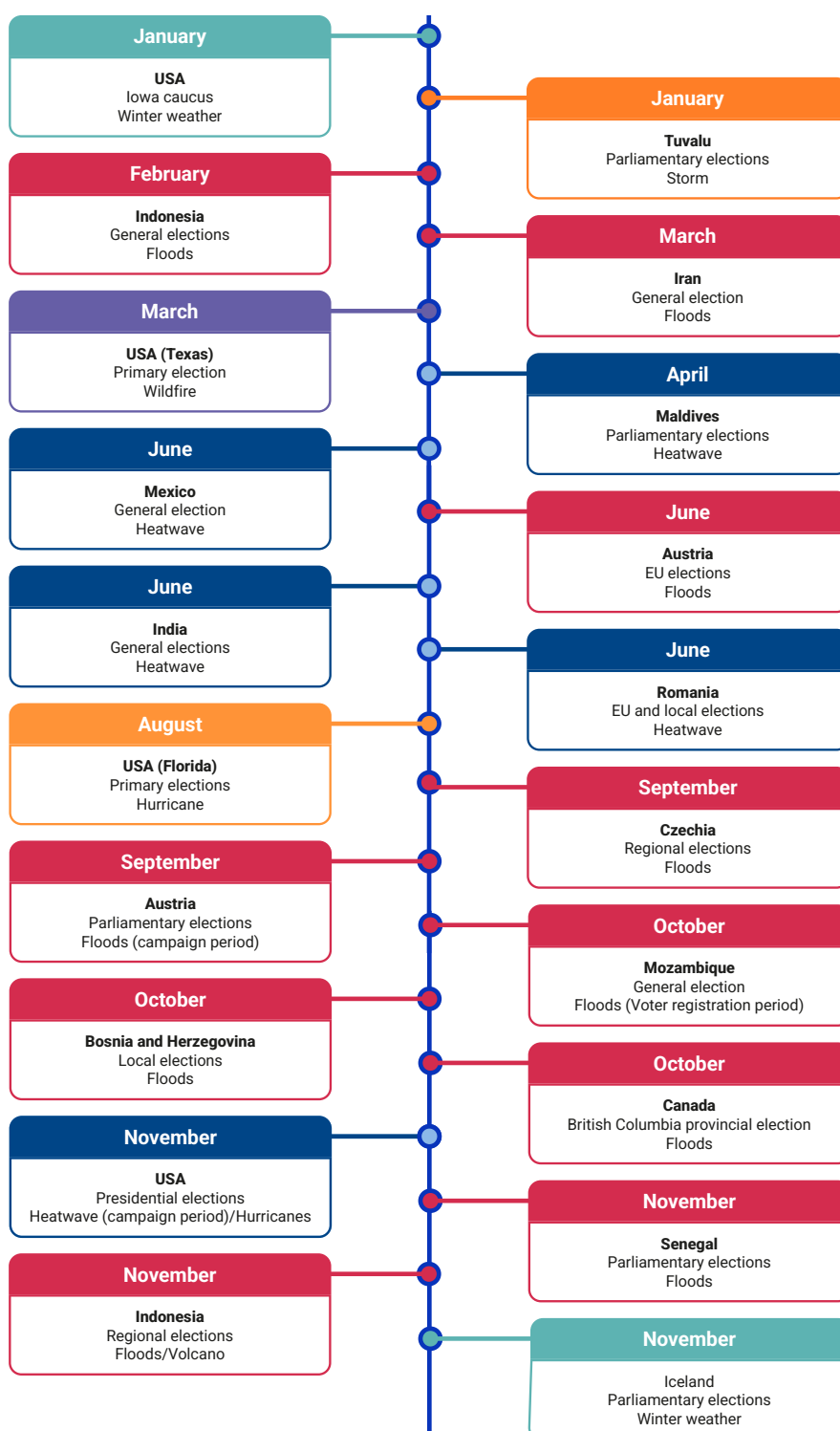
In some cases, electoral stakeholders are not able to effectively withstand or respond to disasters. In these situations, humanitarian and relief efforts take priority, and elections can be postponed altogether or in part, depending on the scale of destruction. This was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which postponed local elections in five municipalities severely affected by floods and landslides ([Vulovic 2025](#)). The Central Election Commission of Bosnia and

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**At least 33  
election officials  
died because of  
heatstroke.**



**Figure 7.3. Countries affected by natural hazards in 2024, by month and type of election**



Source: Compiled by the authors.

### Box 7.1. US primary and presidential elections in 2024: Hurricanes, floods, wildfires, winter weather and heatwaves

Extreme weather events had an impact throughout the 2024 US electoral cycle. In January, freezing temperatures and snow disrupted campaign events and the Iowa caucus, which was an in-person event to select delegates for the presidential nomination for the Republican Party for the state of Iowa. Ahead of the caucus, all three of the main candidates cancelled campaign events due to risks related to extremely low temperatures and hazardous road conditions ([Asplund 2024a](#)).

In March, the presidential primary elections in Texas were affected by a series of wildfires in north-western counties, resulting in a loss of power and temporary closures of polling stations due to the risk of nearby fires ([Olivia and Kessler 2024](#)).

In June, campaign events during a heatwave in Phoenix, Arizona, and Las Vegas, Nevada, resulted in the hospitalization of at least 18 supporters due to heat-related illness ([Asplund 2024f](#)).

In August, a category 1 hurricane made landfall in Florida, disrupting early voting for the state primary. In total, seven counties cancelled the first days of early voting ([Perry 2024](#)).

Hurricane Milton and Hurricane Helene in September and October, respectively, impacted registration and voting operations in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. Both storms rapidly intensified into category 3 and 4 hurricanes, respectively, destroying polling stations or making them inaccessible for early voting. Misinformation against candidates' political opponents spread during the disaster ([Barrón-López, Couzens and Lane 2024](#); [Tarrent 2024](#); see also Chapter 5: The information environment around elections). On election day, 5 November, two polling officials died as their vehicle was swept away by floods in Missouri ([Salter 2024](#)).

The fact that the USA experienced multiple hazards during different stages of the electoral cycle, including winter weather, wildfires, heatwaves, hurricanes and floods—made worse in many cases by climate change—illustrates how different types of natural hazards have the potential to make it more difficult for political parties to voice their message or for voters to reach polling stations to cast their votes. In some cases, extreme weather had a limited impact on the outcome (Iowa caucus); in other cases, such as in North Carolina, the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene had the potential to influence the results of the election in a key swing state ([Rakich 2024](#)), prevented only by the EMB's prompt use of emergency powers to adopt several measures to ensure 'accessible and safe voting'. These measures included expanding special voting arrangements such as early voting, temporary polling sites and flexibility in the recruitment of polling station staff, to name but a few ([Kolenovsky and Despa 2024](#)).

Herzegovina held elections in all affected municipalities 14–28 days after the scheduled election. This example highlights how natural hazards can disrupt the electoral process, testing the resilience of electoral management bodies and communication with national disaster agencies in times of crisis (see Box 7.2).

When electoral management bodies were asked, as part of the Electoral Management Survey, whether natural environmental factors such as extreme weather events were impacting their work, 4 (12 per cent) out of the 33 respondents that answered the question stated that their work was affected on a regular basis or often, and 16 (48 per cent) answered that their work was occasionally affected (see Table A.2 in Annex A). This clearly suggests that natural hazards are a concern shared by many election officials around the globe.

### 7.3. HOW WERE ELECTIONS PROTECTED AGAINST EXTREME WEATHER IN 2024?

The response to extreme weather events during election periods in 2024 depended, to a great extent, on the type of hazards, the likelihood and the scale of the resulting disaster, and the time in which the disaster occurred in the jurisdiction's election calendar. Moreover, existing election-related legal, institutional and management safeguards were all significant factors which contributed to response efforts aimed at preventing, withstanding or recovering from the respective threat or crisis ([Alihodžić 2023](#)).

Several of the 15 countries with elections impacted by natural hazards in 2024 had a legal framework in place to protect their elections during extreme weather events. For example, four US states affected by Hurricane Helene—Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia—all have state laws relating to election emergencies that permit the respective EMBs to reschedule elections or relocate polling stations ([NCSL 2024](#)).

In response to floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 2024, the Central Election Commission invoked the election law (Chapter 14, article 14.2), which gives the EMB the power to postpone voting at a particular polling station or within a specific constituency (for no more than 30 days) if there is evidence that the election cannot be conducted in accordance with legal provisions ([Bosnia and Herzegovina n.d.](#)).

**What is crucial is that election stakeholders are able to coordinate with state agencies to better protect electoral integrity.**

The impact of external factors like extreme weather on electoral integrity also depends on the capacity of other state institutions, such as national disaster and health agencies, and first responders to respond to emergencies, given that disaster recovery and relief efforts are not part of the EMB's mandate. What is crucial is that election stakeholders are able to coordinate with state agencies to better protect electoral integrity.

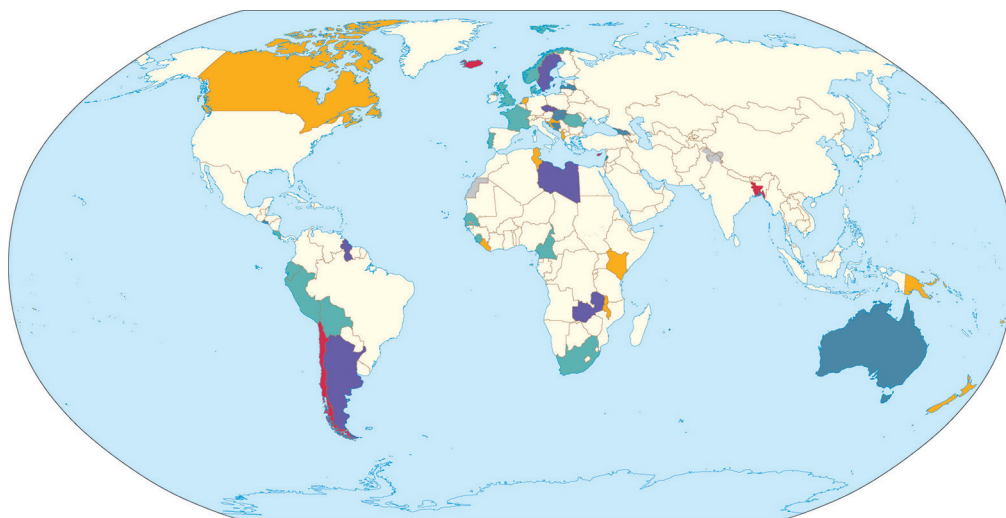
In 2024, there were several instances where EMBs collaborated with state agencies during extreme weather events for risk reduction, response or recovery. In Czechia, for example, local authorities navigated humanitarian efforts following intense flooding, and the Interior Ministry took over election organization in the affected towns ([AP News 2024](#)). During the parliamentary election in Senegal, the National Fire Brigade, the Directorate of Civil Protection, the General Directorate for Elections and local electoral committees worked together to transport voters and poll workers and to install informational signage ([Asplund 2024h](#)).

Lastly, all stakeholders should have contingency plans in place to guide their response in a crisis. Such plans may include identifying staff, conducting tabletop training exercises and drafting standard operating procedures. For example, Sri Lanka's Election Commission and Disaster Management Centre prepared operational plans ahead of the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections to mitigate the negative effects of natural hazards, in particular floods and landslides. The plans included guidelines for the three coordinating

agencies—the Election Commission, the Disaster Management Centre and the Ministry of Healthcare and Indigenous Medical Services—and 20 implementing ministries, departments and institutions. To improve coordination and planning during both elections, a Joint Election Emergencies Operation Unit—operating 24 hours a day for the five-day electoral period—was set up at the headquarters of the Disaster Management Centre (DMC 2024a, 2024b).

How then did election stakeholders, in particular EMBs, mitigate the impact of natural hazards on electoral integrity? According to the 2024 Electoral Management Survey, 29 out of 50 respondents (58 per cent) adopted contingency plans, 22 out of 50 engaged in inter-agency cooperation (44 per cent), 12 out of 50 (24 per cent) embraced a specific risk management framework, and 8 out of 50 (16 per cent) used special voting arrangements, among other measures (see Figure 7.4). In only two cases (Cameroon and Canada) did the respondents say that a dedicated lead person was responsible for environmental issues (see Table A.3 in Annex A).

**Figure 7.4. Countries with measures in place to prevent adverse effects from natural hazards, focusing on contingency plans and inter-agency cooperation**



Source: Compiled by the authors using data from T. James, H. Garnett and S. Campion, Electoral Management Survey 2024, Electoral Integrity Project, 2025 (forthcoming), <<https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/electoralmanagementsurvey>>, accessed 25 April 2025.

## 7.4. LESSONS LEARNED AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter illustrates how natural hazards impacted voters, political parties and election officials in 2024. It also shows that these natural hazards—whether tropical storms, floods or heatwaves—disrupted critical activities before, during and after elections, thereby undermining electoral integrity.

### Box 7.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Weakness in inter-agency cooperation

The Hydro-Meteorological Institute of Bosnia and Herzegovina issued a weather warning on 2 October, four days before the country's local elections. In accordance with the Protection and Rescue Operations Plan, this information was shared with the Agency of Watershed of the Adriatic Sea, which in turn notified stakeholders and the media of expected floods and landslides. The Central Election Commission (CEC) was not part of the protection and rescue coordination mechanism, resulting in a lack of formal information or updates about the situation in the affected municipalities. Instead, the CEC, based on available media information, contacted the Ministry of Security, the Federation Civil Protection Administration and the Republic of Srpska Civil Protection Administration and requested to be kept informed of developments. In the end, the local elections did go ahead on 6 October, but the CEC postponed elections for 14–28 days, in coordination with municipal election commissions in five municipalities severely affected by floods and landslides (Vulovic 2025).

### Designating the electoral process as critical infrastructure essential for the functioning of democratic societies.

In 2024 many of the 15 countries that held elections amid natural hazards exhibited resilience by adapting flexible administrative voting procedures or by activating contingency plans to recover from emergencies and crises. In addition, several EMBs collaborated with government agencies—in particular emergency services and national disaster agencies—to reduce health risks.

With the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, made worse by climate change, policymakers and election officials will need to consider climate adaptation in their electoral planning and decision making—for example, designating the electoral process as critical infrastructure essential for the functioning of democratic societies.

Further investment and whole-of-government support for EMBs will help guarantee that elections can be held in challenging conditions. Meanwhile, EMBs should continue to build capacity to implement risk management, build resilience and develop crisis management protocols in collaboration with all electoral stakeholders. Providing operational training and opportunities for professional development on how to protect elections during emergencies and crises is an essential step in this process.

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## Chapter 8

# TRUST AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION IN ELECTIONS

*Therese Pearce Laanela*

This chapter explores the dynamics of electoral trust and trust building within electoral management bodies (EMBs) through the lens of elections held in 2024. The unpredictable environment, the difficulty of introducing needed reforms under fraught circumstances and the ease with which elections were undermined through online activity put this topic front and centre for EMBs in their strategic planning.

Trust is intrinsically linked to stability, reliability, familiarity and predictability (Rousseau et al. 1998; Sztompka 1999). For EMBs, delivering reliable voting services is difficult even in the best of circumstances, for various reasons, such as complex logistics, tight timelines, reliance on an army of temporary workers, and changes in technology, regulations, and voting or candidate requirements. With elections held in a global atmosphere of ‘radical uncertainty’ (Casas-Zamora 2024) and facing a panoply of context-related challenges in 2024 (as described in companion chapters and in Nord and Lindberg 2024), the predictability needed to build electoral trust was in short supply for those tasked with delivering them.

The large number of snap elections held in 2024 is just one vivid illustration of the political space’s volatility and fragility.<sup>13</sup> Extreme weather, foreign interference and geopolitical turmoil create a sense of ‘normal rules interrupted’, providing an opening for discourse on how, or even if, elections should be held or the results accepted. This discourse, in turn, can be civil and constructive—or the opposite—depending on the inclination of the political actors involved. In Romania, the Constitutional Court annulled the results of the first round of the presidential election due to allegations of Russian-backed

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**Trust is intrinsically linked to stability, reliability, familiarity and predictability.**

<sup>13</sup> In 2024 snap elections were held in Portugal (parliamentary, on 10 March), Iran (presidential, on 28 June), France (parliamentary, on 30 June), the United Kingdom (parliamentary, on 4 July), Bulgaria (parliamentary, on 27 October), Japan (parliamentary, on 27 October), Sri Lanka (parliamentary, on 14 November), Senegal (parliamentary, on 17 November) and Iceland (parliamentary, on 20 November).

interference ([France 24 2024](#)); ostensibly, North Korean interference in South Korean elections was cited as the reason why the latter's president invoked martial law, which was quickly overturned ([Kim and Tong-Hyung 2024](#)). The question of Ukraine's election timing has become a topic for geopolitical posturing, beyond the legal and operational realities on the ground. The distinct contexts of Georgia, Moldova and Venezuela contributed to questions about how to interpret (and respond to) the legitimacy of processes, institutions and results.

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### **The trend towards EMBs' accelerated adoption of special voting arrangements and their use by voters continued in 2024.**

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#### **8.1. VOTING ARRANGEMENTS AND PUBLIC NARRATIVES**

The trend towards EMBs' accelerated adoption of special voting arrangements—such as advance and postal voting—and their use by voters continued in 2024. Technology at polling stations has driven this trend. Electronic voter lists, or e-poll books, often on laptops connected to a nation- or jurisdiction-wide voter register, are increasingly replacing the previously ubiquitous and standard printed voter registers specific to individual polling stations. In addition, in-station tabulators and touch-screen voting are replacing manual vote counting and delivering rapid results. In-station printers and touchscreen voting also make it possible to print out-of-jurisdiction ballot papers on demand, which, in combination with tabulators, are replacing the slower and more cumbersome 'tendered' ballot system. In combination, these technologies make voting more convenient, accommodate voting anywhere, and ensure faster and arguably more accurate results.

However, these technological advances and the global move towards special voting arrangements to accommodate voters for convenience and necessity have introduced new areas of contestation alongside the palpable benefits ([Barrat et al. 2023](#)). Whether warranted or not, postal, advance and out-of-country voting are frequently a source of concern for domestic actors. Anecdotal evidence supporting such concerns can be quickly amplified and disseminated in the current information environment, particularly when aligned with conspiracy theories or political interests. In the United States, for example, pre-election polling shows that confidence in the accuracy of election results among Republican voters dropped from 55 per cent to 28 per cent between 2016 and 2024, while 84 per cent of Democratic voters expressed confidence in the results ([Saad 2024](#)). The difference is remarkable and mirrors the narratives about the trustworthiness of electoral processes that each side is exposed to, particularly the concerted 'stop the steal' campaign on the Republican side, focusing on the vulnerabilities of postal votes.

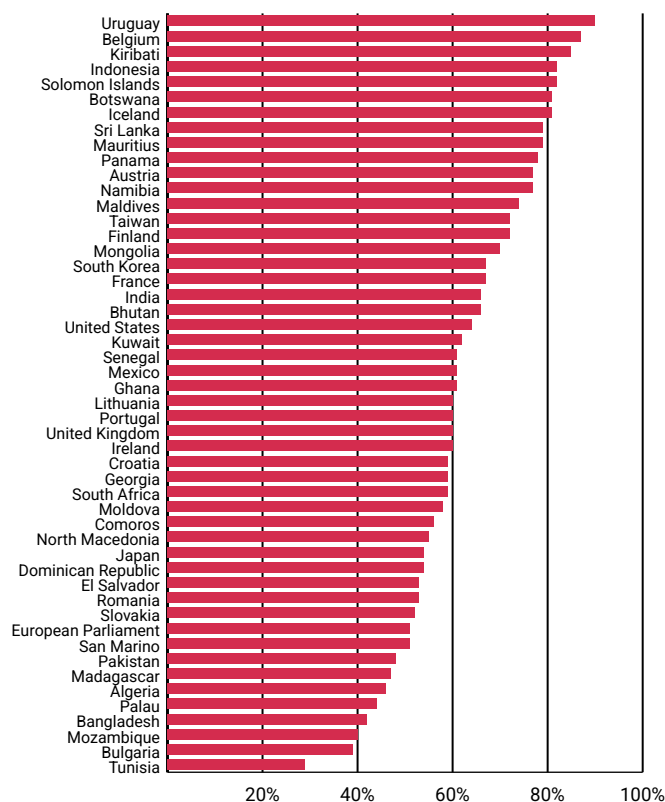
For EMBs, the trust-building challenge is to mitigate the genuine vulnerabilities inherent in special voting arrangements and new technologies, while also anticipating the critical or misleading narratives about those vulnerabilities. This challenge is particularly difficult for under-resourced or under-prepared EMBs, where delays or weak capacity on the ground can compound the problems in expanding operations and rolling out reforms. Relentless and often

### Box 8.1. Voter turnout in 2024

Voter turnout is not a direct proxy for electoral trust, but fluctuations can serve as an indicator of public sentiment. Figure 8.1 provides an overview of these trends and changes throughout 2024. In Japan, voter turnout plummeted following a money scandal that illustrated weaknesses in safeguards aimed at protecting the integrity of political finance (Gilson 2024).

High turnout can be the result of high stakes, as in France, where voter turnout was high compared with other recent elections. The 2024 parliamentary election saw a turnout of 66.7 per cent, higher than the 47.5 per cent average seen in the 2022 parliamentary election (International IDEA n.d.). In contrast, lower turnout can indicate political fatigue, as was the case with the UK snap election, where voter turnout was lower than for other recent elections. Previous elections saw turnouts of 69.3 per cent, in 2017, and 67.5 per cent, in 2019, but the 2024 election turnout declined to 59.8 per cent (International IDEA n.d.). A very low turnout or dramatic results may illustrate public exasperation or be the result of a political boycott—for example, the 6 October presidential elections in Tunisia, where the turnout was only 29 per cent and President Kais Saied won a second term with more than 90 per cent of the vote (Muia 2024).

Figure 8.1. Voter turnout in 2024



Source: International IDEA, Voter Turnout Database, [n.d.], <<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout-database>>, accessed 31 March 2025.

personalized online criticism (as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5) can impact an EMB's reputation and affect staff morale. The unpredictability of the context in which EMBs work and the vitriol about their work present new and profound

**Changes in voting technologies are closely tied to trust, in that a successful and smooth rollout is more straightforward in a high-trust environment.**

trust challenges for EMBs: they are expected to ensure electoral stability in an unstable world and familiarity when electoral processes are changing. Regardless of the justifiable and underlying reasons for any reform, changes in electoral procedures will be seen through a political lens, shaped by the particular national context, how the change is presented and how the changes are rolled out. Distrust can be compounded by operational problems that are seen to affect voters or candidates disproportionately or unfairly.

Changes in voting technologies are closely tied to trust, in that a successful and smooth rollout is more straightforward in a high-trust environment. Conversely, technological reforms can spark controversy or undermine trust, underlining how the technical and the political are inseparable in electoral reform processes; that is, trust can be the deciding factor when determining whether a reform is perceived as a success or a failure. For example, electronic voting machines (EVMs)—widely used and accepted in India—were nearly introduced in Botswana in 2019 but were ultimately rejected because of the public’s ‘mixed feelings’ and vocal assertions about their vulnerabilities and claims that certain rights could not be guaranteed ([Afrobarometer 2017](#)). Namibia was the first African country to introduce EVMs in 2014 but reverted to paper ballots for similar reasons, following a constitutional court decision ([Electoral Commission of Namibia 2023](#)). Similarly, the failure of a pilot Internet voting system (iVote) in three local government elections in New South Wales, Australia, in 2022 has made other states less willing to embark on similar schemes ([Kwan 2022](#); [James, Clark and Asplund 2023: 94](#)). Vote-anywhere systems underwent a smooth introduction in British Columbia, Canada (see Box 8.2), in 2024, and a bumpy one in Namibia ([Links 2024](#)).

The Election Commission of Namibia is known as one of the most stable and experienced EMBs in Africa ([Siegle and Cook 2024](#)), accustomed to serving the country’s voting population of just under 1.4 million. Their experience of preparing for the 27 November 2024 elections, however, illustrates well the twin logistical and reputational difficulties of rolling out complex electoral reform in a moment of political change. Trust building among political parties and stakeholders was tested again and again—in respect of the vote-anywhere reform, the procurement of suppliers for ballot papers, the decision to announce the results of early voting before election day and the decision to extend voting by two additional days to accommodate the problems that had arisen on polling day.

The Namibian experience illustrates the interlinked virtual or vicious spiral between logistics and trust that is typical for electoral management. Steps introduced in the voting process, such as manually entering voters’ details and recording the details on ballot stubs, contributed to delays that plagued the election. The election was marred by the overheating and malfunctioning of the voter verification technology, delays in ballot distribution, long queues that explained the emergency decision to extend voting by several days and the delayed announcement of the results ([Al Jazeera 2024](#); [Links 2024](#); [Muyeghu 2024](#)). These logistical issues were interpreted by some observers as evidence

of unfairness ('voter suppression') (Groenewald 2024) or incompetence (Groenewald 2024; Links 2024).

Whether warranted or not, these narratives of unfairness or incompetence are examples of typical challenges to morale and reputation caused by electoral reforms or mishaps as discussed in earlier chapters. A story about an election can linger longer than the explanation of what happened or explanations of the steps that have been taken to avoid future incidents. In 2024 a commission of inquiry into postal elections in Poland declared that introducing an 'envelope voting' experiment during the pandemic was an abuse of power and outside the limits of the law (Polish News 2024). Because of the controversy and resulting lack of trust in how it was handled, any possibility of introducing mail-in ballots in the future was set back (Polish News 2024).

The case of British Columbia (see Box 8.2) provides a hopeful story of incorporating trust building into the introduction of vote-anywhere technology and tabulators. The reform was introduced with few issues and no pushback from voters or political stakeholders, meaning that these practices can be smoothly incorporated as standard practice from now on.

## 8.2. TRUST BUILDING AS AN EXPLICIT AGENDA ITEM

Declining trust in electoral processes is fuelled and exacerbated by narratives spread through digital platforms. When narratives alleging fraud are coordinated or amplified by algorithms, they can disrupt the orderly transfer of power and incite violence. Given the potential threats to societal stability and regional security, regulating or mitigating the potential harms stemming from the online environment is at the top of the policy agenda. EMBs worldwide are experiencing unprecedented public scrutiny that is pushing previously under-the-radar election operations into the spotlight. A viral image can trigger a disproportionate narrative—or one that is entirely disconnected from reality. For example, an image of someone carrying a ballot box or of a truck approaching a counting centre can be shared and reshared on social media as alleged evidence of wrongdoing—when the reality may be innocuous; after all, ballot boxes need to be moved at some point, and trucks do pass counting centres.<sup>14</sup>

In response to these contextual challenges, EMBs are intentionally prioritizing trust building and seeking ways to quantify, monitor and reinforce public trust. The closed-door, EMB-led Canberra to Stockholm Exchange<sup>15</sup> involved candid discussions about security, cybersecurity and misinformation, highlighting

**Declining trust in electoral processes is fuelled and exacerbated by narratives spread through digital platforms.**

<sup>14</sup> An episode of *This American Life* on public trust and distrust in the 2024 US and Venezuelan elections describes the phenomenon of 'narratives' through the stories of those implicated. The episode, titled 'The Official Unofficial Record', 22 November 2024, is available at <https://pca.st/podcast/3782b780-0bc5-012e-fb02-00163e1b201c>.

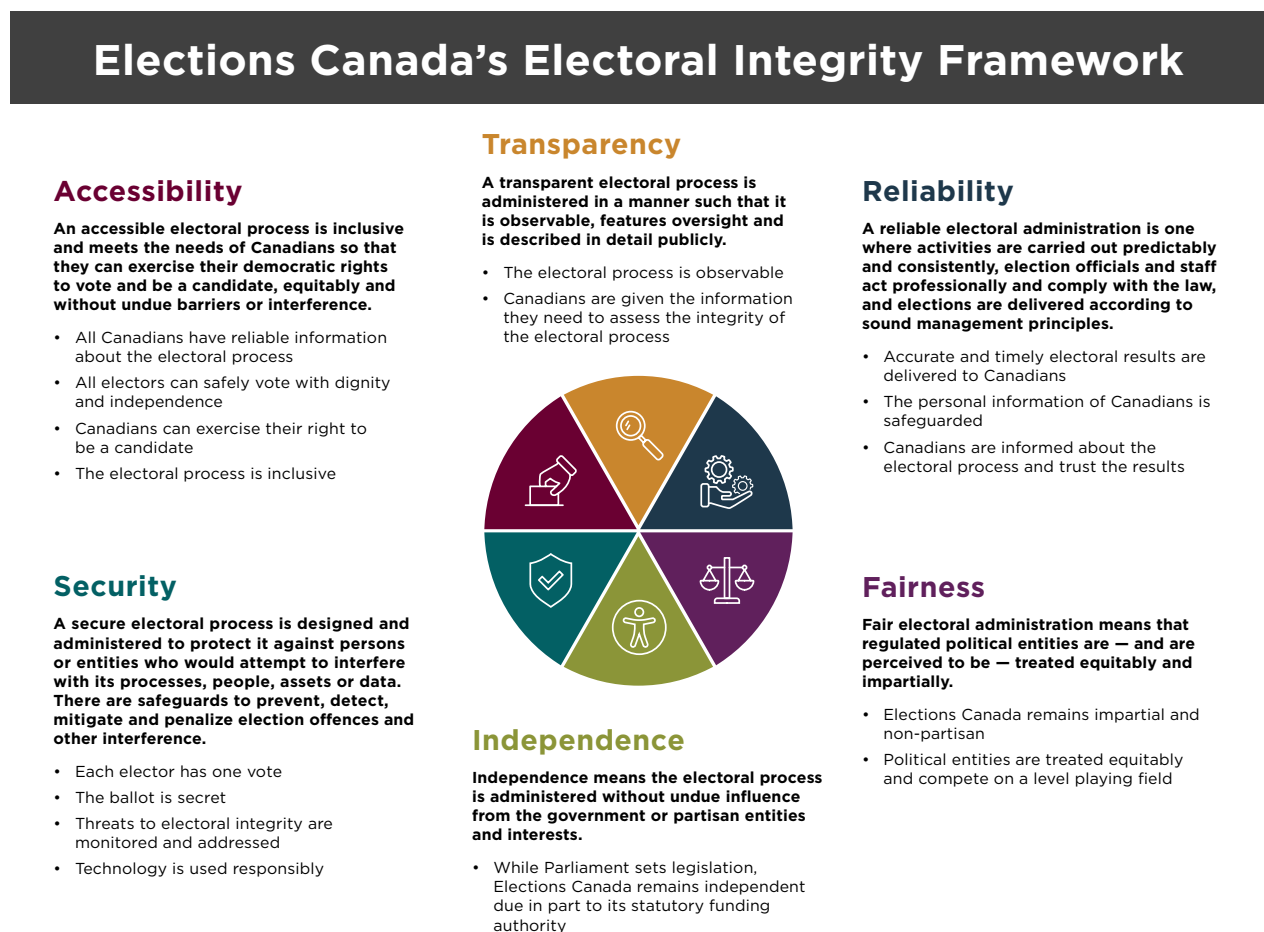
<sup>15</sup> The Canberra to Stockholm Exchange is an EMB exchange series that the Australian Electoral Commission and International IDEA initiated as the Canberra Series. When the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish Election Authority subsequently joined, it was rebranded as the Canberra to Stockholm Exchange.



community trust building as an antidote to pressing concerns ([Australian Electoral Commission 2024a](#)).

Elections Canada's electoral integrity framework (see Figure 8.2) is an example of an approach that places trust building at the forefront, emphasizing core values of independence from political pressure, operational reliability and transparency of processes ([Elections Canada n.d.](#)). By putting security and fairness on an equal footing, the framework signals to staff and stakeholders that the 'softer' dimensions of election management are taken seriously.

Figure 8.2. Elections Canada's electoral integrity framework



Source: Elections Canada, Electoral Integrity Framework, [n.d.], <<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=abo&dir=fra&document=index&lang=e>>, accessed 15 April 2025.

In British Columbia, the introduction of a wide range of new technologies for the 2024 provincial elections prompted a focus on messaging that emphasized the values of non-partisanship and the processes and procedures in place to ensure integrity ([Elections BC n.d.a](#)). This focus on explaining the integrity of the process aligns with an approach that is often used in the justice sector:

people are more likely to accept an outcome (e.g. of a court case)—even if it is unfavourable—if they believe that the process that led to the outcome was trustworthy (Tyler 2003).

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is managing its reputation by improving its public communication to monitor and rapidly respond to narratives that undermine trust. In addition, it is piloting innovative programmes to strengthen front-line operations, such as its Operational Leaders Programme, which is investing heavily in ongoing skills development for outpost staff through hands-on training opportunities and peer support, upgrading training facilities and experimenting with readiness exercises for temporary election workers (Australian Electoral Commission 2023, 2024b, 2025).

The AEC writes the following in its corporate plan ‘Maintaining citizen faith in the electoral process, and trust in electoral outcomes, is the overarching aim of all election management bodies. Failure to achieve this can lead to disputed elections, mistrust and democratic instability. The AEC must continuously adapt to an increasingly unpredictable environment to deliver successful electoral events into the future’ (Australian Electoral Commission 2024c).

Fiji’s newly adopted strategic plan puts trust at the centre of its mission to ‘deliver electoral services that have the trust and confidence of our stakeholders’ (Fijian Elections Office 2023). To heal previous rifts in stakeholder relationships, multi-stakeholder community trust building was introduced as an intrinsic part of the strategic plan and ongoing work programme (see ‘Collaboration’ and ‘Stakeholder Engagement’ as one of the strategic pillars in Figure 8.3). In practice, this type of trust building involves systematic and formalized cooperation with organizations that have established positions that are deeply rooted in Fiji’s communities and that are able to reinforce accurate information about the electoral process in language and ways that resonate locally (Chand 2024).

The lessons learned from the Swedish Election Authority’s performance during the European Parliament elections in 2024 highlighted concerns about how confusion surrounding party registration and the ballot system could be politicized or misinterpreted as partisan (Valmyndigheten 2024). These concerns built on the findings of a commissioned report that focused specifically on how and why Swedish elections are trusted, in light of criticism of the ballot paper system and fears that American-style attacks on electoral integrity could spread to an otherwise highly trusted Swedish agency and process (Cederholm Lager, Oscarsson and Solevid 2023).

The examples from highly trusted EMBs show that even the most stable electoral democracies are no longer complacent when it comes to electoral trust or assumptions that the results of an election will be accepted. Since many of the threats facing elections, such as foreign interference and extreme weather events, are beyond the scope or mandate of EMBs, we are also seeing greater inter-agency cooperation to address potential threats. Responding

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**Maintaining citizen faith in the electoral process, and trust in electoral outcomes, is the overarching aim of all election management bodies.**

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**We are also seeing greater inter-agency cooperation to address potential threats.**

**Figure 8.3. Fiji's guiding principles, strategic pillars and goals**

### Guiding Principles

Guided by our mission and in realising our vision, we commit to uphold the following Guiding Principles:



### Strategic Pillars and Goals



Source: Fijian Elections Office, Strategic Plan 2024–2027 (Suva, Fiji: Fijian Elections Office, 2023), <<https://www.feo.org.fj/storage/2024/01/Strategic-Plan-1.pdf>>, accessed 15 April 2025.

effectively under the pressures of an election requires trust between agencies and officials. To this end, we are seeing an increase in joint training and risk-management programming, as well as the appointment of liaison officers across security, civil contingency, intelligence and infrastructure work. Finland, for example, has an election security cooperation group that includes the Ministry of Justice (which serves as the EMB), the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Cyber Security Office and the secretary of the Security Committee.

## 8.3. CONCLUSION

The year 2024 was marked by a generalized sense of flux, characterized by a plethora of snap elections, dramatic weather events, profound geopolitical shifts and polarizing politics. The super-cycle framing and the high-profile elections held in 2024 focused the attention of both the media and the public

### **Box 8.2. British Columbia 2024 legislative assembly elections: Fortuitous conditions, operational excellence, regulatory thoughtfulness and institutional trust**

The British Columbia case illustrates fortuitous conditions, operational excellence, regulatory thoughtfulness and institutional trust.

On 19 October 2024 the Canadian province of British Columbia conducted its 43rd election for the provincial Legislative Assembly. A decision to radically modernize the electoral process through the use of electronic voting books (laptops containing voter information), a range of special voting arrangements and technologies was carefully weighed against the risks of voter distrust ([Elections BC 2024](#)). Ultimately, the benefits—service for voters in the form of vote-anywhere arrangements and the speed of the vote count—outweighed the disadvantages ([Elections BC n.d.b](#)). The risks naturally included the possibility of technical malfunctions, but of greater concern was the possibility of a spillover of distrust from the United States into Canada. Officials were concerned the implementation of technological changes would invite polarized discussion on polling station technology in general and Dominion Voting Systems in particular, as had been experienced south of the border ([Stewart III 2024](#)).

Despite challenges that included torrential rains, landslides, power outages, remote communities, a polarized political climate and wafer-thin margins in some districts, the elections—including the new technologies—were conducted smoothly, demonstrating a high level of trust, acceptance of delays to recount votes in close districts and little or no criticism on social media.

So, what was the secret? Much was fortuitous—a democratic culture of civility and a legacy of trust in the well-resourced and highly competent EMB, Elections BC. However, innovative legislation and meticulous planning should also be highlighted.

Distrust in electoral processes is often amplified by social media narratives—whether they are generated organically based on citizen concerns or are politically motivated and deliberately divisive. Efforts to regulate the information environment can be equally divisive, as they have to find a balance between what could be perceived as ‘draconian’ limitations on freedom of speech and an unregulated online space where facts about electoral processes and candidates co-exist alongside fiction. Moreover, regulating the information environment may be ineffective without investigative and enforcement mechanisms.

The legislation proposed in British Columbia was specific (limited to facts about the electoral process or candidates), time-bound (from the pre-election period until the announcement of results) and enforceable. A dedicated investigations team, public outreach and special powers enabled a rapid and comprehensive response from the identification of false information to the issuance of take-down orders.

on issues that impact trust in electoral management and EMBs. This focus amplified concerns about foreign interference, propelled political interest, and highlighted the need for investments in electoral integrity and other measures.

EMBs are acutely aware of these dynamics and, at best, are incorporating trust building into their strategies and working modalities. They are making an effort to explain their processes, changes and decisions, to collaborate with other societal actors to counter disinformation, and are working closely with those at the front lines of electoral trust—temporary election workers and community-level political and civil society actors.

### Box 8.3. Dispute resolution

An election's credibility is often closely tied to its ability to resolve disputes. Successful dispute resolution in an election often means resolving challenges to the outcome in a way that complies with legal guidelines. Depending on the type of challenge, dispute resolution can impact contestation, participation, deliberation and adjudication (Venice Commission 2020).

Where long-standing grievances exist, slow or inadequate dispute resolution processes can result in protests, rejection of the results and questions about the legitimacy of the elected leadership. In Pakistan, for example, less than 20 per cent of election petitions were resolved eight months after the 2024 general election. The many delays resulted in legal deadlines being missed, and many cases are still pending (Khan 2024). Inefficiency can plague an EMB's dispute resolution efforts—that is, disputes are not addressed in a timely and orderly manner and through appropriate mechanisms.

In contrast, the Maldives provides an example of proactive dispute resolution, where the Anti-Corruption Commission responded to campaign malpractice prior to the election. In addition, the Election Commission emphasized the importance of its codes of conduct, thereby promoting public trust and integrity (Richards n.d.).

In some cases, issues of transparency can impact public confidence. Following the contested election in Georgia in 2024, the lack of a dispute resolution process left questions about vote rigging unaddressed, with both the incumbent party and the European Union rejecting the election results (European Parliament 2024; ODIHR 2024).

The Global State of Democracy 2024 report indicates that in the period between May 2020 and April 2024, approximately 20 per cent of global elections were subject to legal challenges. Such challenges were recorded in every region of the world but were prevalent in mid-performing democracies (International IDEA 2024).

In the face of disputes regarding issues such as media bias, incumbency abuse, unaddressed vote buying and voter intimidation, unresolved disputes can erode electoral integrity and trust in the electoral system.

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## Chapter 9

# CONCLUSION: SUPER-CYCLE LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT

By the end of 2024, 1.6 billion people across 74 national elections in 62 countries<sup>16</sup> had cast ballots. The outcome was accepted in the vast majority of these national elections. While people were allowed to vote freely for their preferred candidate—and many did so, with an average global voter turnout of 61 per cent—others were not. Indeed, there were elections held in 2024 where every effort was made to mimic free elections but no intention of tolerating a result other than an incumbent win, whether by controlling the slate of candidates or hindering the publication of results, as in Venezuela.

Institutions, regulatory frameworks and global norms established in previous generations to ensure a level playing field for elections were sorely tested. Domestic, foreign and non-state actors used money and media to influence or undermine elections unduly on every inhabited continent, including high-profile cases in Georgia, Romania and the USA. Setbacks seen in 2024 also included problems that are neither new nor unique, such as instances of vote buying, electoral violence, the circumvention of political consensus on electoral reform and the undermining of the independence of electoral management bodies (EMBs).

Technological shifts, societal tensions, migration and climate change are altering how voting is arranged and how EMBs prepare for elections and engage with stakeholders. There was no room for complacency in even the most established democracies in 2024, with elections held in the face of extreme temperatures or technology failures, from India to Namibia.

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**By the end of 2024,  
1.6 billion people  
across 74 national  
elections in 62  
countries had cast  
ballots.**

<sup>16</sup> Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Chad, Comoros, Croatia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Finland, France, Georgia, Ghana, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Kiribati, Kuwait, Lithuania, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, Mozambique, Namibia, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, San Marino, Senegal, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Togo, Tunisia, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Uzbekistan and Venezuela.

The resilience and leadership shown by those working to deliver the many elections held in 2024 when confronted with such challenging circumstances point to key lessons and implications for the future.

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### 9.1. TRUSTWORTHY DELIVERY OF ELECTIONS

Delivery challenges in the elections covered by this review included maintaining accurate voter registers; recruiting, training and retaining enough temporary staff to administer polling; addressing technology-related problems; and enforcing campaign finance regulations. Those responding to these challenges focused on improving working conditions and training, communicating proactively with the public throughout the electoral cycle, and bolstering organizational capacity to identify risks and navigate unforeseen situations and narratives as they arose. Delivering the core functions of an electoral process while addressing these ongoing and evolving challenges requires adequate and sustainable funding.

This report has highlighted the dangers of impunity for electoral malpractice and shown that the annulment of an election is a drastic measure that should not be taken lightly. Election results are more likely to be accepted when an EMB delivers on its mandate and is recognized as doing its best even in the most difficult circumstances, and when political actors refrain from undermining the EMB's reputation for short-term gain.

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### 9.2. SAFEGUARDING ELECTORAL REFORM

In a world shaped by shifting demographics and technological advances, electoral reforms can drive efficiency gains and innovation to bolster election delivery and voter participation. As this report warns, however, incumbents can use changes to electoral processes and institutions to entrench power, exclude the opposition and disenfranchise citizens. These threats highlight the importance of electoral reform processes and safeguards.

The well-designed electoral reform processes showcased in this review involved transparent and well-defined procedures and milestones that encouraged political consensus building and carefully explained rollout steps.

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**The review points to in-person and online aggression against election workers and electoral institutions.**

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### 9.3. SECURITY AND DUTY OF CARE

The review points to in-person and online aggression against election workers and electoral institutions, with implications for recruitment, training and security measures. Women in various electoral roles, whether candidates or electoral officials, and those known as members of particular societal groups

are disproportionately affected as targets in that they are subjected to cruel, disparaging attacks that are directly related to their identity. More broadly, incidents of government-sponsored violence, clashes between political actors and violent attacks on election workers, as described in this report, are anathema to the idea of elections as a celebration of democracy and citizen engagement.

Measures outlined in the report to mitigate or address aggressive behaviour include strengthening legal protections, empowering domestic watchdogs, enforcing interparty codes of conduct and supporting international judicial processes. Improving data collection through mapping, observation reports and assessments builds an evidence base for effective interventions, while coordinating efforts across sectors with relevant mandates and expertise, such as EMBs, security agencies, civil society and technology companies, is critical for prompt, responsive action when emergencies arise.

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#### 9.4. PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

From the pandemic onwards, preparing for the unexpected has become the new reality for election administrators. This report illustrates this reality through a step-by-step examination of how natural hazards are disrupting electoral processes at levels unimaginable in the recent past, making it imperative for policymakers and election officials to consider climate adaptation in their planning and decision making and to incorporate risk management, resilience building and crisis management into their work.

While operational training and professional development aimed at protecting elections during emergencies and crises are essential, EMBs cannot do this work alone, and future-proofing electoral processes comes with a cost. This cost requires timely and impartial funding. Further investment and whole-of-government support for EMBs will help guarantee that elections can be held in challenging weather or security-related conditions. Such investment can be supported by policy-oriented conversations about the designation of elections as part of critical infrastructure.

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**From the pandemic onwards, preparing for the unexpected has become the new reality for election administrators.**

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#### 9.5. ATTENTIVENESS TO THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT SURROUNDING ELECTIONS

Addressing harmful online actions and threats requires moving beyond reactive responses and adopting proactive, pre-emptive measures through well-structured inter-agency cooperation. Building resilience to misinformation and disinformation requires a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach. Early detection, situational-awareness systems and enhanced cooperation across sectors help pre-empt the escalation of misleading information. Credible

institutions play a critical role in mitigating the impact of misinformation and disinformation when they are seen as reliable sources of information.

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**Electoral integrity challenges are multifaceted and complex.**

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## 9.6. INCREASED INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

Electoral integrity challenges are multifaceted and complex, often going beyond what an electoral management body can prevent, withstand or recover from. Managing challenges often requires a whole-of-government or whole-of-society approach in the face of cyberthreats, misinformation and disinformation, extreme weather events or election-related violence. Effective election protection requires the formal engagement of a broad range of stakeholders, each bringing relevant mandates, expertise and resources to the effort. EMBs will benefit from regular coordination with other government agencies, civil society organizations and media throughout the electoral cycle while upholding their independence.

The sheer number of elections in 2024 provided an opportunity to assess the profound changes in how elections are conducted and the increasingly complex contexts in which they are held. The challenges visible in 2024 are shaping the global democratic landscape in 2025 and beyond. Already in 2025 we see electoral management bodies leading inter-agency cooperation, multi-stakeholder dialogue and transnational conversations to address existing and future threats to electoral integrity. It is incumbent on democracy actors to support them in these efforts.

# Annex A. 2024 Electoral Management Survey

**Table A.1. Overview of surveyed countries inclusion measures**

EMBs that covered gender equality in staff training programmes in 2024	EMBs that covered gender equality in stakeholder training programmes in 2024	EMBs that implemented measures to improve accessibility for disadvantaged groups, including women, people with disabilities, the elderly and LGBTQIA+ individuals in 2024
Albania, Argentina, Bangladesh, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Canada, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, Georgia, Guyana, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Romania, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, United Kingdom, Zambia	Albania, Bangladesh, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Canada, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, Georgia, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Romania, São Tomé And Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Zambia	Albania, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, France, Guyana, Hungary, Iceland, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Romania, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, United Kingdom, Zambia

*\*Note that these countries implemented accessibility measures for some disadvantaged groups but not all.*

Source: T. S. James, H. A. Garnett and S. Campion, 'Electoral Management Survey 3.0', Electoral Integrity Project, 2025, <<https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/data-3>>, accessed 27 March 2025.

**Table A.2. Have any elections in your country in the last five years been adversely affected by natural hazards other than Covid-19 (e.g. floods, wildfires, earthquakes)? If so, which election(s) and in what way?**

	Frequency	Country
<b>Yes</b>	13/50 (26%)	Australia, Canada, Croatia, Ecuador, Fiji, Georgia, Kenya, Lebanon, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, Tuvalu
<b>No</b>	37/50 (74%)	Albania, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Dominica, El Salvador, France, Guyana, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Peru, Portugal, Romania, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, South Africa, Sweden, Tunisia, United Kingdom, Zambia

Source: Compiled by the authors using data from T. S. James, H. A. Garnett and S. Campion, 'Electoral Management Survey 3.0', Electoral Integrity Project, 2025, <<https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/data-3>>, accessed 27 March 2025.



**Table A.3. Are any of the following natural environmental factors impacting the work of your organization?**

<b>Extreme weather events</b>	<b>Frequency of respondents</b>	<b>Country</b>
On a regular basis	1/33 (3%)	Tuvalu
Often	3/33 (9%)	Cameroon, Papua New Guinea, Peru
Occasionally	16/33 (48.4%)	Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, Guyana, Kenya, Liberia, New Zealand, Norway, Romania, Samoa, South Africa, Zambia
Never	13/33 (39.3%)	Albania, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cabo Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, Czechia, France, Hungary, Iceland, Lebanon, Sierra Leone, Sweden
No response	17	Argentina, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Georgia, Latvia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritius, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Slovakia, Tunisia, United Kingdom

Source: Compiled by the authors using data from T. S. James, H. A. Garnett and S. Campion, 'Electoral Management Survey 3.0', Electoral Integrity Project, 2025, <<https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/data-3>>, accessed 27 March 2025.

**Table A.4. What measures are in place in your country to prevent electoral processes from being adversely affected by natural hazards (floods, wildfires, earthquakes, etc.)? Select all that apply.**

Prevention measure	Frequency	Country
Environmental policy	7/50 (14%)	Bangladesh, Cameroon, Canada, Costa Rica, Liberia, the Netherlands, São Tomé and Príncipe
A lead person responsible for environmental issues	2/50 (4%)	Cameroon, Canada
Contingency plans	29/50 (58%)	Albania, Bolivia, Cameroon, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Denmark, Dominica, Ecuador, Fiji, France, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Portugal, Romania, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Tuvalu, United Kingdom
A specific risk management framework	12/50 (24%)	Albania, Bolivia, Cameroon, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Kenya, Latvia, New Zealand, South Africa, Tunisia
Special voting arrangements (e.g. remote or early voting options)	8/50 (16%)	Australia, Canada, Fiji, Iceland, Liberia, New Zealand, Norway, São Tomé and Príncipe
Inter-agency cooperation	22/50 (44%)	Albania, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, Dominica, El Salvador, Fiji, Georgia, Hungary, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Slovakia, Samoa, Tunisia, Tuvalu
Other	6/50 (12%)	Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Georgia, Senegal, Romania

Source: Compiled by the authors using data from T. S. James, H. A. Garnett and S. Campion, 'Electoral Management Survey 3.0', Electoral Integrity Project, 2025, <<https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/data-3>>, accessed 27 March 2025.

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# About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 35 Member States founded in 1995, with a mandate to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

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## WHAT WE DO

We develop policy-friendly research related to elections, parliaments, constitutions, digitalization, climate change, inclusion and political representation, all under the umbrella of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We assess the performance of democracies around the world through our unique Global State of Democracy Indices and Democracy Tracker.

We provide capacity development and expert advice to democratic actors including governments, parliaments, election officials and civil society. We develop tools and publish databases, books and primers in several languages on topics ranging from voter turnout to gender quotas.

We bring states and non-state actors together for dialogues and lesson sharing. We stand up and speak out to promote and protect democracy worldwide.

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## WHERE WE WORK

Our headquarters is in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

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## OUR PUBLICATIONS AND DATABASES

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# About the Electoral Integrity Project

An independent academic study founded in 2012, the Electoral Integrity Project addresses three questions:

- How and when do elections fail throughout the electoral cycle?
- What are the consequences of failed elections, such as for security, accessibility and trust?
- And what can be done to mitigate these problems, based on academic evidence?

The Electoral Integrity Project produces innovative and policy-relevant research comparing elections worldwide. It publishes the annual Global Electoral Integrity report and holds regular open workshops and conferences. The project is directed by Dr Holly Ann Garnett and Professor Toby S. James and is housed at the Royal Military College of Canada, Queen's University in Canada, and the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom.





In 2024, a record-breaking 1.6 billion people across 74 national elections in 62 countries cast ballots in the space of a single calendar year. This was the result of a convergence of electoral cycles in different countries, leading to the description of 2024 as a ‘super-cycle’ election year. The number of elections taking place all over the world, organized under different conditions in varying contexts, highlighted the challenges that election stakeholders need to navigate to deliver on their mandates. This report, the first of its kind, sets out to identify and discuss electoral integrity challenges to global elections that emerged during the 2024 super-cycle year, drawing on the work of international IDEA and the Electoral Integrity Project.

This global report seeks to provide a cross-country analysis while taking a multidisciplinary approach to identifying lessons learned from the 2024 election year and to make those lessons accessible not only to specialists, such as academics, journalists and election practitioners, but also to a broad public that is interested in elections as a fundamental pillar of democracy. The report is the result of close collaboration between peers and has grown out of numerous and varied discussions, analyses and interpretations, providing both a summary of trends observed over the course of 2024 and reflections upon which good practice and policy can be based.