# THE PROTECTING ELECTIONS GUIDE

The Guide to Knowing and Using the Integrated Framework for Protecting Elections

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# Acknowledgements

# Contents

# INTRODUCTION

This Guide is part of the Integrated Framework for Protecting Elections (hereafter the Framework). The Guide's purpose is to introduce the concept and resources that form the Framework and to chart avenues for its use.

Knowing and using all Framework elements may assist user organizations in devising and implementing a comprehensive effort to protect the integrity of elections.

## BACKGROUND

Democratic elections are essential for ensuring the functioning of democratic societies. However, when electoral challenges are of significant scope and not appropriately managed, they can undermine the integrity of electoral processes and the credibility of election results. Therefore, protecting electoral integrity is of existential importance for democratic societies.

### Challenges to electoral integrity

Electoral integrity challenges put electoral integrity to the test. They can vary between countries and within country regions. Also, they can change from election to election. Therefore, electoral integrity challenges may be examined, understood and explained in different ways.

One way is to distinguish between process- and context-related electoral challenges. Process-related challenges reflect the complexities of organizing technically sound elections, which cater to the rights of all citizens. They may include legal inconsistencies, institutional weaknesses, operational challenges, unreliable technologies, etc. Context-related challenges reflect complex environments in which elections may occur, such as complex security environments, social exclusions and polarization, corrupted democratic

**Electoral integrity challenges put electoral integrity to the test.**

institutions and processes, natural and human-made hazards, challenging information environments, etc.

One can also examine the motivations of those who perpetrate acts to undermine electoral integrity. Political actors might use this tactic to pursue personal or party electoral gains. In other instances, foreign adversaries, or organized crime or terrorist groups, may perpetrate acts against electoral integrity in order to disrupt and undermine elections, weaken democratic institutions and processes, and create crises in which they prosper.

Another critical lens for considering electoral challenges is examining the ways in which different challenges may reflect on the rights and participation of various individuals and groups, including women and marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities.

Regardless of the approach to studying and/or addressing electoral integrity challenges, it is essential to note that different challenges often reinforce one another. Ultimately, the variety and magnitude of challenges will indicate the risks to electoral integrity.

**When electoral integrity is undermined or lost, countries can experience political stresses, shocks and crises.**

### Consequences of undermined electoral integrity

When electoral integrity is undermined or lost, countries can experience political stresses, shocks and crises. These may lead to the dysfunction of democratic institutions such as parliaments and executive offices, preventing the normal functioning of societies. When governments are formed amid electoral controversies, they may lack domestic and international legitimacy.

Furthermore, the rejection of election results may cause social polarization or exacerbate existing tensions. When people take to the streets in order to protest their causes, the effects can paralyse societies. Demonstrations may lead to better democracies, but autocratic regimes may also brutally suppress protest. In environments of misinformation and disinformation, post-election protests may also be staged to seize power unlawfully or to force undemocratic power-sharing agreements. When the result is large-scale violence, outcomes may be tragic, involving scores of dead and wounded, sexual assaults, displaced persons and refugees, and devastated infrastructure. In the long run, the undermining of electoral integrity may result in economic downturns or protracted conflicts and crises, which sometimes send regional shockwaves.

The spectrum of potential human rights violations involved is vast—from disenfranchisement to existential threats. While this brings hardship to all, women, marginalized groups and already vulnerable members of society often pay the highest price.

### Why the Integrated Framework for Protecting Elections?

Electoral challenges have been confronted and studied for decades. Much of the related research, policy and action has evolved around efforts at international electoral assistance.

During the postcolonial period, the immediate focus was on ensuring that elections were free and fair. Anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (as promulgated by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966), 'free and fair' became a standard for electoral legislators and policymakers as well as for those assessing the quality of elections. Because of its succinctness and its connotations, 'free and fair' empowered national democracy champions and provided yardsticks for voters worldwide.

However, even when democracy is broadly endorsed, and when there is the best of intentions to organize free and fair elections, technical complexity and the cost of elections emerge as significant hurdles. Many transitional and developing countries faced such challenges. The 2005 'electoral cycle approach'—devised by organizations implementing electoral assistance programmes (i.e. experts from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), and broadly endorsed by electoral management bodies (EMBs) and donors—became a widely used model in electoral management and assistance work (ACE n.d.). By distinguishing between three periods (pre-election, election and post-election) and eight sub-phases, it brought much-needed order into the planning, financing and management of complex electoral processes.[1] Also, it helped to promote an understanding that elections are not stand-alone events but rather continuous and cyclical processes.

Nonetheless, good electoral management and generous international electoral-assistance efforts have limitations. When elections are organized in contexts where autocratic rule is deep-rooted, or where autocratic aspirations are strong and prevail among political actors, the existing systemic checks and balances may be too weak to guarantee free and fair elections. To address these gaps, the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security—convened by International IDEA and the Kofi Annan Foundation—accelerated discussion, research and action on strengthening electoral integrity. It defined 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' (Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security 2012: 6); it also provided a set of national and international recommendations to serve this end.

National and international actors responded to the Global Commission's call by strengthening research, policies and practices to consolidate electoral integrity. Yet, the landscape of electoral challenges is a shifting one. In recent years, the integrity of elections has been threatened in both new democracies and mature

**Even when democracy is broadly endorsed, and when there is the best of intentions to organize free and fair elections, technical complexity and the cost of elections emerge as significant hurdles.**

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[1]    Phases are: 1. The legal and institutional electoral framework. 2. Planning and preparation for the implementation of electoral activities. 3. Training and education 4. Registration of voters, political parties and election observers. 5. Electoral campaigning. 6. Voting operations. 7. Election results announcement. 8. Post-electoral phase.

ones. This landscape reflects national, regional and global political changes, as well as developments in the security, economic, environmental, technological and other sectors, implying the need for persistent work to advance the knowledge and practices needed for protecting electoral integrity worldwide.

The Integrated Framework for Protecting Elections, which is introduced by this Guide, should be understood as part of a broader effort to protect electoral integrity. However, it makes several specific contributions:

- First, the Framework focuses on promoting and supporting increased reliance on risk-management, resilience-building and crisis-management processes in protecting electoral integrity. These processes are widely endorsed by sectors that deal with high-stakes and high-risk matters, but their methodological use to protect elections is limited.

- Second, the Framework offers a unique collection of resources: to assist users in learning about key concepts for protecting elections, to help them assess and improve their policies and practices, to aid them in developing related skills and capacity, and to ensure gender sensitivity.

- Third, by compiling various resources for addressing specific electoral integrity challenges in a single database, the Framework supports users in identifying and unlocking synergies between different methods and resources.

Part 1 of the Guide introduces the Framework, provides definitions, explains the key underlying concepts and describes its elements. Part 2 charts avenues for implementing the Framework in practice.

Readers should note that this Guide significantly draws from, and builds on, the International IDEA discussion paper *Protecting Elections: Risk Management, Resilience-Building and Crisis Management in Elections* (Alihodžić 2023), International IDEA's broader portfolio on electoral risk management (International IDEA n.d.b; Alihodžić 2016; Vincent Alihodžić and Gale 2021) and lessons learned during elections in emergencies and crises (James, Clark and Asplund 2023). To enable easy reading and navigation through the Guide, citation of these resources—and of other knowledge that is common to electoral practitioners and researchers—is minimized. (All cited sources appear in the list of references.) In addition, each section in Part 2 contains text boxes that point to relevant experiences in different countries, collected through a set of original case studies conducted as part of the development of the Framework.

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Part 1

# INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTING ELECTIONS

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Part I of this Guide aims to build readers' understanding of the Integrated Framework for Protecting Elections by introducing its key terms and definitions, concepts and resources.

## 1. KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The spheres of policy and practice regarding electoral integrity operate with numerous terms, definitions and concepts. The key definitions proposed or adopted by this Framework include the following:

- *Protecting elections* is:
  - considered part of a broader effort to strengthen electoral integrity;
  - defined as the effort to prevent, withstand, or recover from negative occurrences that may undermine the integrity of electoral processes and results;
  - functionally situated in the sphere of EMBs' work but requires inter-agency and multi-stakeholder collaboration;
  - reliant on extensive use of risk-management, resilience-building and crisis-management methods; and
  - gender-sensitive and inclusive.

- *An election with integrity* is defined 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' (Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security 2012: 6).

- *Electoral risk* is the possibility of an occurrence that can negatively affect the electoral process.

- *Electoral risk factor* is something that increases risk. It may be either internal or external:
  - Internal risk factors (endogenous factors) are process-related conditions which may lead to increased electoral risks. They are election-specific and do not exist outside the electoral context.
  - External risk factors (exogenous factors) are context-related conditions which may lead to increased electoral risk. They are characteristics of the context regardless of the fact of whether elections are taking place or not.

- *Electoral risk management* is a systematic effort to improve knowledge about, and situational awareness of, internal and external risks to electoral processes in order to initiate timely preventive and mitigating action.

- *An electoral integrity challenge* is something that can put electoral integrity to the test.

- *Electoral vulnerability* is the exposure of the electoral process to harmful situations and actors.

- *An electoral threat* is a situation or actor that can exploit electoral vulnerabilities.

- *Electoral resilience* is the ability of electoral institutions and processes to maintain continuity in the face of stresses and shocks.

- *Electoral resilience-building* is a systematic effort to strengthen electoral institutions and processes to withstand threats, by resisting (= exhibiting perseverance), adapting (= adopting flexibility) or transforming (= making profound change as to how things are done).

- *An electoral crisis* is a situation marked by existing or unavoidable damage to electoral integrity, combined with a sense of urgency and high uncertainty.

- *Electoral crisis management* is an effort to prepare for, respond to, recover and learn from electoral crises.

- *Electoral integrity remedies* are resources—knowledge, training and assessment tools—developed to address one or several challenges to electoral processes.

- *Gender sensitivity* involves the consistent and systematic consideration of gender-based differences and inequalities—between women, men and non-binary people—in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of processes and outcomes, with a view to addressing systemic and structural constraints to gender equality, as well as facilitating the achievement of gender equality and inclusion.

## 2. KEY CONCEPTS

The Framework aims to ensure comprehensiveness in terms of: (a) the range of electoral integrity challenges addressed; (b) the types of electoral integrity safeguards covered; (c) the timing of intervention; (d) the types of capacities it strengthens, and (e) gender sensitivity and inclusivity.

### 2.1. Typology of electoral integrity challenges
Most electoral integrity challenges can be framed within one of the following categories.

**1. Autocratization and undemocratic electoral reforms ('democratic backsliding')**

These challenges comprise executive and legislative actions that undermine electoral integrity. Increasingly, politicians with autocratic mindsets use democratic elections in well-established democracies to come to power but then direct their attention to eroding democratic laws, institutions and processes to remain in office. This phenomenon is broadly known as democratic backsliding or autocratization. A crucial sign of this phenomenon is the erosion of the institutional independence of EMBs. When democratic institutions, including EMBs, cannot cope with such pressures, electoral integrity may be undermined.

**2. Hurdles and malfunctions in electoral management and dispute resolution**

These challenges denote paralysing complexities and unintentional failures in elections. The electoral process must cater to the rights and needs of various electoral stakeholders—such as political parties and candidates, their supporters, civil society observers and all eligible citizens, including marginalized individuals and groups. At the same time, the electoral process must adhere to strict procedures and timelines. The scope and complexity of this task mean that things may, and often do, go wrong for a variety of reasons—for example, logistical hurdles, technical and human error, external stresses, shocks and crises, or failures to deal effectively with disputes. Moreover, insufficient resources and funding may leave electoral management bodies understaffed or underfunded, rendering them unable to function properly. When such hurdles and malfunctions are of significant scale and are not adequately resolved, the integrity of the process may be undermined.

**3. Electoral malpractices (including fraud and corruption)**

This set of challenges reflects the dishonest actions of electoral stakeholders—national and foreign—aimed at securing electoral advantages. Such malpractices can range from interfering with critical electoral events—for example, committing voter registration fraud or election day fraud—to falsifying election results. Many electoral malpractices rely on corrupt behaviours, including widespread vote buying to bribe voters, or the bribing of poll workers or election administrators. Therefore, illicit and improper financing of, and

spending by, political parties—including the abuse of state resources—deserve special attention. Contexts lacking strong oversight agencies and capable civil society organizations are especially vulnerable to widespread electoral malpractices.

### 4. Violence (including gender-based violence)

> **Election-related violence is often a tactic to secure electoral advantage.**

Various actors can perpetrate physical or psychological violence in elections for different ends. Election-related violence is often a tactic to secure electoral advantage. Thus, political parties may mobilize or encourage their supporters to commit violence, while incumbent politicians may use their security apparatus to this end. Such acts of violence are directed against political rivals or their supporters, electoral administrators or critical electoral infrastructure and materials. Violence can also be the tactic of groups that do not seek electoral advantages as such but that wish to destabilize the functioning of democratic institutions by derailing electoral processes. Such perpetrators may include terrorist organizations, non-state armed actors, organized crime groups, etc. When elections occur in countries that are already experiencing large-scale communal violence, gender-based violence, terrorist attacks or criminal violence, navigating the electoral process through such violence may be particularly challenging.

Electoral violence often targets women and marginalized individuals and groups, including ethnic and sexual minorities and persons with disabilities. Women and marginalized groups in political and electoral roles often face targeted attacks—physical, psychological, sexual and digital—aimed at reinforcing traditional social and gender roles and deterring their engagement. The risk, threat or experience of such violence can discourage women and marginalized individuals from standing as candidates, serving as election officials or voting, thereby distorting political competition and deliberation. Ultimately, such violence erodes electoral integrity by undermining the principles of equality, inclusiveness and fairness.

### 5. Malicious online actions

Because online spaces have unique features, malicious online actions are considered a distinct category among challenges to electoral integrity, often forming part of broader, coordinated hybrid campaigns to undermine democratic processes. These threats can be perpetrated by both foreign and domestic actors, who exploit electoral vulnerabilities to influence voting patterns, destabilize democratically elected governments or erode public trust in the election itself. The tactics employed are varied and increasingly sophisticated. They include coordinated foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) by states or state-linked actors; the deliberate or unintentional spread of false information in disinformation and misinformation campaigns (noting that misinformation can also spread organically, because of public anxiety and misperceptions), cyberattacks on critical electoral infrastructure such as voter registration databases, and online harassment and hate speech aimed at intimidating participants. Women, especially candidates

and election officials, are disproportionately exposed to these threats through targeted online harassment and gendered disinformation campaigns. As digital technology advances, new risks emerge, with artificial intelligence (AI)—particularly generative AI—providing a powerful tool for malicious actors to create and amplify sophisticated false content at unprecedented scale and speed.

## 6. Lack of trust and negative public perceptions

A critical aspect of electoral integrity is ensuring that electoral processes—and consequently the results they produce—are broadly trusted. In this respect, popular perceptions are vital. When perceptions of electoral integrity are broadly negative, they may have concrete consequences, leading to challenges to, or the rejection of, electoral results—even if those challenges are based on incorrect information. A lack of trust and negative public perceptions may result from internal process-related weaknesses, media dynamics and public perception that undermine trust in democratic institutions—causing voter apathy—or as a result of intentionally antagonistic efforts.

## 7. Natural and human-made hazards

Challenges to elections may emanate from natural hazards, such as floods, heatwaves, earthquakes, tropical storms, wildfires and pandemics. Human-made hazards include situations (or conditions) such as wars and nuclear/biological incidents. When of significant scope and intensity, these events can damage or destroy critical infrastructure—national and subnational—for holding elections and cause displacement and hardships, preventing parties and candidates from running campaigns or citizens from casting their votes. Also, a declaration of a state of emergency—as the government's response to hazards that materialize—can undermine the integrity of the electoral process by limiting citizens' political rights and opportunities for equal contestation.

## 8. Exclusion and discrimination

Persistent patterns of exclusion and discrimination continue to limit the meaningful participation and representation of women, youth and marginalized groups—including persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities—in electoral processes. These challenges are often compounded at the intersection of multiple identities; for instance, young women or persons with disabilities belonging to minority communities may face overlapping barriers that further restrict their engagement and voice. Rooted in systemic inequalities, restrictive social norms, and unequal access to resources and opportunities, such exclusion can occur at every stage of the electoral cycle, discouraging individuals from registering, voting, running for office, or serving as election officials, staff or observers. When large segments of society are disengaged, whether deliberately or not, elections fail to capture the full diversity of voices and experiences within a population, thereby weakening the legitimacy of electoral processes and the results they produce.

**A critical aspect of electoral integrity is ensuring that electoral processes—and consequently the results they produce—are broadly trusted.**

One should note that elections often face multiple challenges. Antagonistic actors and external interference, when combined, reinforce one another, requiring significant effort and determination from EMBs, other institutions and societies at large to deal with them. Because challenges do not exist in isolation, neither should the efforts to protect electoral integrity.

## 2.2. Types of electoral integrity safeguards

There are different approaches to strengthening electoral integrity in the face of any challenge. This Framework distinguishes three key layers of electoral integrity safeguards: (a) legal safeguards; (b) institutional safeguards; and (c) management safeguards.

*Legal safeguards* are the backbone of electoral integrity. They typically include provisions in a national constitution and in election law and other related laws and by-laws. For every electoral challenge defined above, specific legal safeguards are likely to exist. If not, then they should. By declaring malpractices, violence and malicious interference in elections unlawful, and by defining sanctions for such behaviours, elections may be protected from them. Protecting elections in the face of autocratization is often achieved by ensuring constitutional checks and balances regarding the responsibilities for legislating elections, administering elections and resolving electoral disputes. Protecting elections against natural and human-made hazards requires the existence of transparent legal provisions for dealing with such situations in a collaborative and democratic manner.

*Institutional safeguards* refer primarily to national stakeholders' capacity to uphold electoral integrity in challenging situations. The mandate to organize elections—defined within the legal framework—can reside with one or more state agencies. Most commonly, EMBs include independent organizations responsible for organizing the registration of voters and political parties, developing election materials, establishing and operating polling stations, managing special voting arrangements, consolidating election results and so on. Other state agencies—such as those responsible for security, anti-corruption, regulation of the media and emergencies—as well as the judicial branch may be responsible for providing support, and for dealing with specific tasks or resolving disputes. In countries where electoral integrity is inherently threatened, specialized electoral justice institutions have a significant role in protecting elections. In order to perform their duties, their mandates need to be coupled with sufficient resources (human and financial) and skills to ensure impartiality and effectiveness in dealing with various challenges.

*Management safeguards* refer to the processes put in place by EMBs and other organizations to protect electoral integrity. These are important because even the best electoral laws and institutional arrangements will not always be sufficient to eliminate challenges. Therefore, the ability of electoral administrators to navigate ever-changing landscapes (political, security, environmental, etc.) remains of utmost importance for the conduct of credible elections. Whereas safeguarding electoral integrity is entrenched in the general design and management of electoral processes, many EMBs adopt additional

> ## Legal safeguards are the backbone of electoral integrity.

measures to deal more effectively with risks, threats and crises, primarily by putting risk-management, resilience-building and crisis-management processes in place.

The three types of electoral integrity safeguards are most effective when they are aligned. The legal framework is critical for ensuring that EMBs have strong grounds for acting impartially. Robust organizational resources and skills are critical for adopting and implementing risk-management, resilience-building and crisis-management processes. Once put into motion, these processes will provide critical feedback to the leadership of organizations charged with implementing elections, as well as legislators regarding the legal and institutional gaps that need closing.

**The three types of electoral integrity safeguards are most effective when they are aligned.**

### 2.3. Timing of interventions to protect electoral integrity

In terms of timing, interventions to protect electoral integrity—whether legal, institutional or management—can be focused on three phases: (1) preventing negative occurrences, (2) withstanding them, or (3) recovering from their negative impacts.

Figure 2.1. **The timing of electoral integrity interventions**
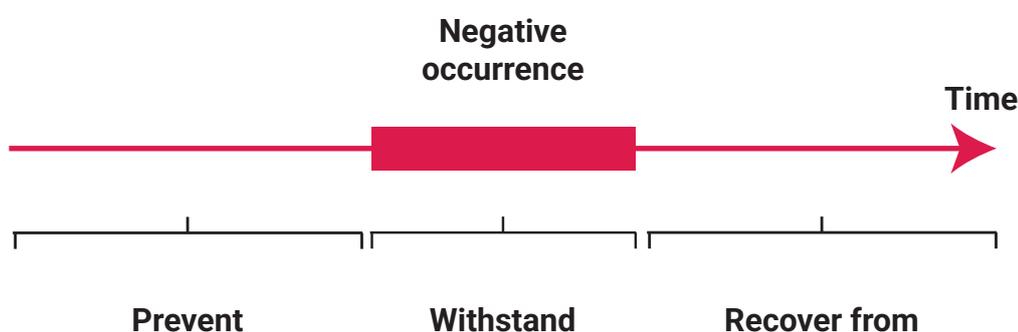


*Source:* Developed by International IDEA.

This concept may be applied to any challenge elaborated in Subsection 2.1 or to any of the three layers of electoral integrity safeguards elaborated in Subsection 2.2. Table 2.1 describes each type of electoral integrity safeguard in terms of preventing, withstanding or recovering from negative occurrences.

Accordingly, one challenge to electoral integrity can progress through different stages: it can be recognized as a risk before escalating into a threat and culminating as a crisis. This phenomenon can be illustrated through a hypothetical example involving the inaccuracy of voter registers on election day: this would fall under the category of 'hurdles and malfunctions in electoral management and dispute resolution'.

Table 2.1. **Matrix: Safeguards and timing of action**

|  | **Preventing negative occurrences** | **Withstanding negative occurrences** | **Recovering from the effects of negative occurrences** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Legal safeguards | Principles of prevention and precaution, aiming to eliminate negative occurrences, are inherently embedded in electoral laws. | Legislators typically aim to ensure that electoral law empowers stakeholders to deal effectively with any situation that emerges as a threat to electoral processes. | Legislators sometimes foresee situations where electoral integrity may be severely damaged, or lost, and chart pathways for restoring it. |
| Institutional safeguards | Robust mandates, optimized organizational structures and adequate resources allocated to EMBs will minimize the likelihood of things going wrong. | Robust mandates, resources, functional independence and operational agility will make EMBs more resilient in responding to different threats (stresses and shocks). | The existence of formal internal (organizational) and external (inter-agency) collaboration structures and contingency resources will help to respond and recover from crises. |
| Management safeguards | The establishment of systematic risk-management processes will enable EMBs to make informed and timely decisions to prevent and mitigate negative occurrences. | Resilience-building efforts will ensure that EMBs can withstand stresses and shocks from risks that materialize, without their negatively impacting electoral integrity. | Crisis-management processes and protocols will enable EMBs to prepare for, and deal with, situations where electoral integrity is significantly damaged or lost. |

*Source:* Developed by International IDEA.

The very notion that there may be some—even small—likelihood that voter registers may not be accurate, leading to disenfranchisement of eligible voters on election day, is a point when the risk is identified. Because the risk may or may not materialize, the integrity of the electoral process is not yet hampered. Assuming the risk is identified long before election day, an EMB will be able to scrutinize the voter registers' quality in a timely manner and address potential inaccuracies to prevent adverse occurrences on election day.

However, if the risk materializes—for example, many polling stations start reporting significant problems with the accuracy of voter registers on election day—it becomes a threat that exposes electoral officials, voters and political parties to stresses and shocks, ultimately endangering the integrity of the process and the credibility of the results. If an EMB is prepared for such situations and can maintain the continuity of its operations while safeguarding the election's integrity, it exhibits resilience. For example, an EMB may effectively redirect voters to polling stations where their names are in the register, or polling station committees may offer tender ballots to voters not listed. (A tender ballot is one placed in an envelope with the voter's details, to be considered—added to the other ballots—only if it is verified that the voter's name appears on the voter roll in another location and that the vote was not cast there.) Nevertheless, suppose that the EMB is unprepared for dealing with

large-scale inaccuracies, and that the voting process is stopped or continues at the expense of integrity. In that case, the situation could escalate into a crisis, requiring urgent responses to recover lost integrity by offering trusted solutions for putting things back on track. For example, an EMB with a crisis plan that foresees such a situation would be able to effectively communicate its key messages to the public and then advise and assist affected voters in taking steps to ensure that their electoral rights are upheld.

Some threats and crises may be unavoidable. However, when they surprise EMBs, that typically indicates that chances were missed to consider/identify them as risks. The same holds for threats and crises, where the latter often develop from the former. To ensure comprehensiveness in terms of the timing of interventions to protect electoral integrity, the Framework—at its core—promotes systematic implementation of three management processes (a) a risk-management process, as the appropriate method for dealing with risks; (b) a resilience-building process, as the appropriate method for dealing with threats; and (c) a crisis-management process, as the appropriate method for dealing with crises.

Understanding and considering these individual concepts when designing efforts to protect electoral integrity will help bring order into a somewhat hectic process. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 portray the relationship between key terms and concepts.

**Table 2.2.** Key features of risk management, resilience-building and crisis management in electoral integrity

|  | **Risk management** | **Resilience-building** | **Crisis management** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Focus** | Risks (= possible damaging events) | Threats (= tangible events, but no harm has yet occurred) | Crises (= damaging events that have occurred or are unavoidable) |
| **Causes and triggers** | Risk factors (internal and external) exist | Risks have materialized | Threats could not be withstood |
| **Consequences of ineffective action** | Risks escalate into threats | Threats escalate into crises | Failure (= continuity cannot be restored) |
| **Implementation** | Put in place a risk-management process (to identify, assess, analyse, communicate and treat risks) | Put in place a resilience-building process (to consider strategies for resisting, adjusting or transforming in the face of threats) | Put in place a crisis-management process (to prepare crisis protocols, initiate responses and ensure recovery and learning) |
| **Mitigation of negative effects in relation to the timing of negative occurrences** | Before | During | After |

*Source:* Developed by International IDEA.

However, one should understand and appreciate the significant overlap between the three management processes, in theory and practice. Therefore, when a stand-alone risk-management, resilience-building or crisis-management process is implemented, it will typically include elements of the other two processes. This is not a flaw but rather a result of logical thinking and evidence of the synergy between the three processes.

## 2.4. Types of capacities developed

Existing resources for protecting elections may be categorized in terms of the specific capacities they build, regardless of the challenges they address or the types of safeguard or timing of interventions. The Framework adopts an approach whereby distinctions are made between knowledge, training and resources for assessment and analysis.

*Knowledge resources* on electoral integrity include handbooks, academic articles, guides, policy papers, briefs, discussion papers, reports and similar publications. Their scope may range from specific electoral issues in a single electoral and country context to global challenges to electoral integrity. As a general rule, developers of knowledge resources aim to strengthen readers' understanding of the phenomena and inspire policy and action.

*Training resources* on electoral integrity include training curricula, courses and modules. They aim to enhance the knowledge and skills of electoral professionals and various electoral stakeholders through capacity-development events or spaces. Training resources are typically anchored in specific knowledge resource materials. Trainers often customize them to local contexts and relatable experiences in order to promote peer-to-peer interaction and reflection. Such a learning environment allows participants to better interpret and adopt novel concepts, including through altered attitudes and behaviours.

*Resources for assessment and analysis* of electoral integrity include surveys, checklists and various online databases and software applications for data collection and examination. Their outputs are critical for developing the situational awareness needed to make informed policy and action decisions. Assessment tools are used mainly for the periodic evaluation of a situation relating to overall electoral integrity or to the state of specific challenges at specific points in time, while analytical tools imply that developments are monitored continuously.

When efforts to protect electoral integrity involve knowledgeable organizations and individuals who have both skills and effective tools, their overall capacity to protect electoral integrity will be robust.

## 2.5. Gender sensitivity

'Gender sensitivity' refers to understanding and systematically considering the different economic, social and cultural needs and experiences of men, women and non-binary individuals, with the purpose of ensuring that no one is excluded or discriminated against because of these differences. This is

particularly important because: 'When laws, policies and programs take a "one-size-fits-all" approach, they often result in discriminatory or ineffective outcomes because the "one size" usually is modelled on one gender, without consideration for others' (Johnson 2022).

In the electoral management field, this area of concern affects everything—from the legal framework to registration, to the nomination of candidates, to voter outreach, to plans for election day, to polling place management, and to voter information and election assessment (UNDP and UN Women 2015).

## 3. KEY RESOURCES

The Framework comprises four key resources, as follows (their order indicating their anticipated sequence of use):

- The *Protecting Elections Guide* (this document) provides a theoretical background and introduces the Framework along with its related resources. It also charts practical avenues whereby national stakeholders may use the Framework.

- The publication *Protecting Elections Self-Assessment Survey* assists user organizations in systematically assessing the importance, scope and quality of their existing safeguards to protect electoral integrity. Such awareness is often critical when optimizing efforts to protect elections at the organizational and/or country level. A self-assessment methodology ensures that these efforts are methodologically sound, safe for the organization involved, gender-sensitive and conducive to ownership of the findings. When self-assessments are conducted by several national organizations with mandates to protect, or contribute to, electoral integrity, their individual findings may be used as comparative benchmarks for cultivating coordination, thus improving the effectiveness of the broader effort to protect electoral integrity.

- The publication *The Protecting Elections Training Curriculum: An Overview* was developed specifically to support users of the Framework in building practical knowledge and skills concerning key concepts of risk management, resilience-building and crisis management in elections. It offers activity-based learning by utilizing participatory adult education techniques, including simulations, to achieve specified learning outcomes. The curriculum combines relevant literature, case studies, election materials, websites and audio-visual resources.

- The Protecting Elections Resource Portal enables users to quickly find and gather comparative knowledge, experiences, policies and other resources to deal with specific electoral challenges. It takes the form of a database that consolidates more than 300 policy, practice and research resources—developed by EMBs, electoral assistance providers, academics

and donors—reflecting national, regional and global practices. The Portal enables users to search for resources according to the categories described in Part 1 of this Guide.

International IDEA's Electoral Risk Management Tool and associated resources, including internal and external risk factor guides, complement the Framework.

Part 2
# IMPLEMENTATION

## 4. KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTERS

The Framework may be implemented in numerous ways, depending on the specific needs of implementing organizations, the scope of an effort, and existing legal, institutional or management arrangements.

Part 2 of this Guide charts a broad and ideal-case scenario, in which the Framework is implemented as part of a government- or society-wide effort to protect electoral integrity. The proposed scenario is anchored in comparative good practices backed by a series of original case studies and lessons learned through testing and piloting the Framework between 2023 and 2025.

Accordingly, key steps to consider in implementing the Framework include:

- taking the initiative and establishing collaborative arrangements;

- developing a national baseline assessment and action plan;

- putting processes in place for dealing with risks, threats and crises;

- building capacity and promoting continuous learning; and

- ensuring that processes are gender-sensitive and inclusive.

These are discussed in Chapters 5–9.

**Efforts to protect elections should ideally bring on board a variety of national stakeholders, with relevant mandates, know-how and resources.**

## 5. TAKING THE INITIATIVE AND ESTABLISHING COLLABORATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Because electoral risks, threats and crises may be diverse, efforts to protect elections should ideally bring on board a variety of national stakeholders, with relevant mandates, know-how and resources. Who initiates the action, who participates, and how to coordinate it matters.

Since electoral integrity is a public good of high order for democracies, the initiative to protect elections often comes from high-level government bodies. However, in many instances, EMBs or organizations mandated to provide critical electoral support—such as law enforcement or security sector agencies—may initiate such efforts.

Based on existing experiences, one can draw up an initial set of questions for countries and organizations considering implementing the Framework. These are:

- Which national body is best positioned to initiate the holistic effort to protect elections (in other words, which body has the highest authority and/or convening power to ensure that the initiative receives attention and prompts the action of all responsible/relevant actors)?

- Which other state actors should be involved?

- Which non-state actors should be involved?

- Should the constellation and dynamics of meetings change—for example, over the electoral cycle or in relation to challenges addressed/in focus?

- Who should assume the leading coordination role (because once the process is established, the initiating agency may not be in the best position to continue leading the effort)?

- What steps should be taken to ensure that these processes are inclusive and gender-sensitive?

To answer these questions, the initiating organization(s) should consider inviting other relevant agencies and organizations to conduct self-assessments using the publication *The Protecting Elections Self-Assessment Survey* provided as part of the Framework. The results will generate a unique set of data which is valuable for understanding different perspectives regarding perceived challenges to electoral integrity; the importance of an effort to address those challenges; organizational mandates; the strength of legal, institutional and management safeguards; and practices, resources, gaps and overlaps (within and between organizations).

Learnings will help achieve shared understanding and create a robust process that all key stakeholders own.

**Box 5.1. Comparative experiences of initiatives and collaborative efforts to protect elections**

**Australia (Victoria): Inter-agency collaboration focuses on natural hazards and security threats** (see Martinez i Coma 2023)

In Australia, the Victoria Election Commission (VEC) is in regular contact with Emergency Management Victoria (EMV). When elections get closer, contacts intensify to the point that the electoral commissioner is represented at all State Emergency Management Team meetings. This approach started in 2018, and by building relationships with the emergency sector, the VEC works not in a vacuum but in cooperation. By liaising closely, EMV receives information on where all the election sites are, while the VEC receives information on, for example, natural disasters, security threats and other sorts of information that might impact the delivery of the election. The institutional relationship between the two agencies has been built progressively, and it has translated into the sharing of resources. For example, the Geographic Information System mapping teams of both organizations collaborate and share data. By using emergency response maps, the VEC can overlap their own to identify the electoral districts with the most flood-affected people.

**Brazil: A joint crisis committee brings together state and non-state actors** (see Tarouco 2023)

In 2018, a joint crisis committee was constituted in Brazil, bringing together the Superior Electoral Court's (TSE) high council and other authorities such as the public security minister, the attorney general and the president of the Brazilian Bar Association. During the 2018 electoral campaign, they focused on dealing with disinformation attacks against the TSE by working with the media and civil society on fact-checking. During the preparations for the local elections of 2020, which took place in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the committee ensured that state agencies coordinated various actions: for example, sharing information about the cycles of Covid-19 infection and working with the legislative branch on a one-month postponement of the election. Furthermore, the committee designed a special health protocol for the 2020 election, which included waiving the biometric identification of voters to prevent them from spreading the virus by touching the scanner lens.

The committee remained critical in addressing threats to general elections in 2022. That year, the emphasis was on reinforcing the legitimacy of the elections. The TSE created a Transparency Committee, which gathered many scholars from universities and several civil society institutions to address government accusations about fraud from inside the TSE.

**Canada: Electoral Integrity Framework facilitates inter-agency collaboration on protecting elections** (see Elections Canada n.d.)

Elections Canada created the Electoral Integrity Framework, acknowledging that 'threats—including criminal acts, terrorism, cyberattacks, domestic and foreign interference and attempts at spreading inaccurate information—are complex and reach beyond our borders and the realm of election management'. Therefore, Elections Canada coordinates with other federal organizations that contribute to election security, including the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (part of the CSE), the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Public Safety Canada and Global Affairs Canada.

**Kenya: Collaboration through a multiagency framework and bilaterally, but also opting out** (see Kamindo 2024)

Inter-agency collaboration on protecting electoral integrity takes place through the Election Security Arrangement Program, a multiagency framework led by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) for coordination, collaboration and partnership to address electoral security. Other actors include the National Police Service, the judiciary, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, the Independent Police Oversight Authority, the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management, the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties, human-rights civil society organizations and the media. Other instances of collaboration relate to the IEBC's engagements with individual organizations. For example,

**Box 5.1. Comparative experiences of initiatives and collaborative efforts to protect elections (cont.)**

collaboration with the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission is needed to monitor compliance with requirements for the nomination of candidates.

However, collaboration should not always be unconditional. During preparation for the 2022 general election, the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government initiated and established a National Multi-Agency Consultative Forum on Election Preparedness, comprising all ministries, agencies and departments responsible for the election cycle. The IEBC opted out, asserting that the Forum infringed IEBC independence and threatened to erode public trust in the Commission.

**South Africa: Intergovernmental collaboration during the Covid-19 pandemic ensured that by-elections could proceed as scheduled** (see Matatu 2023)

The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated broader collaboration between the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of South Africa and various government agencies in preparing for the conduct of the November 2020 by-elections. The Department of Health provided technical advice in developing health guidelines for the registration and voting processes. The Ministry of Home Affairs also assisted during the registration phase, while the government assured the IEC that additional resources would be available for personal protective equipment and other Covid-19-related expenditures. Throughout this process, the IEC communicated regularly with political parties, outlining the challenges and ensuring buy-in from stakeholders. The by-elections proceeded as scheduled, with a reported turnout of 37.83 per cent, which was in line with the turnout of previous by-elections unaffected by Covid-19.

**Sweden: A government-wide effort to protect the integrity of elections** (see Bay 2025)

Swedish governance and management of elections are decentralized, making the coordination among responsible actors an essential element of the Swedish system. Accordingly, the central component of the Swedish Government's initiative to protect the 2018 elections was the establishment of election cooperation networks. The initial national network was set up at the request of the Swedish Election Authority in 2017, and it brought together the election authorities and the central agencies responsible for the protection of the election. During the 2018 and 2019 elections, it was co-chaired by the Swedish Civil Contingency Agency (MSB) and the Swedish Security Service. The group met regularly before and during the elections in order to coordinate preventive efforts and to build joint capacity for responding to crisis situations.

In early 2021, the Swedish Election Authority and participating actors evaluated the arrangement and recognized the need to create a permanent election cooperation network in line with the European Commission's recommendation. The permanent network, created by the Swedish Election Authority in late 2021, involved the Election Authority, County Administrative Boards, the MSB, the Psychological Defence Agency, the Police Authority and the Security Service. The national cooperation network can appoint ad hoc expert-level working groups for specific thematic areas, such as communication coordination, cyber coordination, and the planning of scenarios and exercises. The network conducts regular assessments, planning and tabletop exercises before elections to identify risks, undertake preventive activities and plan responses for various attacks on the election system. During election periods, the network establishes an operational forum to strengthen government capacity to identify, counter and recover from threats to the election process.

**Ukraine: Inter-agency collaboration in protecting electoral integrity during armed conflict** (see Anguelova forthcoming 2025)

In order to protect the integrity of electoral processes during the period of armed conflict that started in 2014, the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Ukraine forged stronger collaboration with the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Police and other agencies. Areas of collaboration included the security of

Box 5.1. **Comparative experiences of initiatives and collaborative efforts to protect elections  (cont.)**

election infrastructure and the prevention of disruptions—including cyberattacks—as well as responding to physical threats against electoral actors.

In parallel, relationships with domestic non-governmental organizations and international organizations evolved from being adversarial to becoming collaborative. Civil society partners contributed to the development of electoral protocols, to voter education and to training manuals for police officers involved in election security. The CEC actively considered the recommendations from these stakeholders for refining practices across electoral cycles.

# 6. DEVELOPING A NATIONAL BASELINE ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN

The next important milestone in implementing the Framework is collaboration towards developing a national baseline assessment.

The assessment should, at a minimum, chart the following details:

- the main risks to electoral integrity and the underlying risk factors (both process- and context-related risk factors should be considered; see International IDEA guides on internal and external risk factors (Alihodžić et al. 2024a and 2024b))

- the likelihoods and impacts of risk (the electoral risk heat maps are a helpful tool for making such assessments and classifications: see Alihodžić 2024).

- the possible responses: typically, in addition to prevention efforts, a higher likelihood or severity of risks will warrant implementing measures to prepare for, and respond to, related threats and crises (see 2.3: : Timing of interventions to protect electoral integrity).

One should note that the above points align vital steps of risk-management processes, explained later (see 7.1: Implementing risk management). Therefore, organizations implementing formal risk-management processes will be well placed to contribute to, or lead, such exercises.

Developing a baseline assessment through a broad, inclusive and consultative process will serve several purposes. First, inputs from multiple and diverse stakeholders will ensure a diversity of perspectives, which, in turn, will contribute to the comprehensiveness of the effort. All participating organizations, whether state or non-state actors, will have a significant contribution to make. Second, ownership is crucial for action, for there is much evidence that organizations with a mandate to act are more inclined to do so when they own and trust the information and analysis. Finally, the baseline assessment proposed above will be compatible with the existing risk-management, resilience-building and crisis-management processes that some state actors may already implement.

**Box 6.1. Comparative experiences of assessments and plans for protecting electoral integrity**

**Peru: Post-election surveys inform protections of subsequent electoral cycles** (see Valverde and Rossi 2025)

In the immediate aftermath of the 2022 regional and municipal elections, the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) conducted a virtual survey targeting two specific groups: district coordinators, responsible for the administration at the district level, and rural population centre coordinators, in charge of rural jurisdictions within districts. A total of 2,384 surveys were sent to district coordinators, with 682 responses received (28 per cent), while only 371 out of 1,349 rural population centre coordinators responded (29 per cent). The survey responses were used to identify and understand problems that affected election day operations in order to analyse them and inform plans for conducting subsequent elections.

**International IDEA: A decade and a half of electoral risk-assessment workshops** (see International IDEA n.d.c)

Since 2010, International IDEA has partnered with numerous EMBs to implement context overview workshops. These events gather together representatives of various national electoral stakeholders, involving election officials from headquarters and regional offices, the security sector and other state agencies with electoral mandates, civil society organizations, academia, etc. Between 2023 and 2025, these workshops were modified to align with the innovations introduced by the Integrated Framework for Protecting Elections. Typically, a single workshop combines several sessions in which participants identify process- and context-related electoral risk factors in specific country regions, classify risks (by assessing their likelihood and potential impacts) and consider options for action. Findings are consolidated in the event report, which serves as the departure point for developing a national action plan. Importantly, such events allow participants to establish a shared understanding of key concepts and broad ownership of findings.

**International IDEA: Protecting Elections Self-Assessment Survey** (2025)

International IDEA's Protecting Elections Self-Assessment Survey, developed and tested between 2023 and 2025, assists users in systematically assessing electoral integrity challenges, the importance of their mandate, and legal, institutional and management safeguards. The Survey includes a section for analysis of findings and for creation of the Protecting Elections Scorecard. Essentially, the use of the Survey will enable organizations to understand potential gaps and areas for improvement. Such awareness is critical for optimizing efforts to protect elections at the organizational and/or country level. When self-assessments are conducted by several national organizations with mandates to protect, or contribute to, electoral integrity, their individual findings can be used as comparative benchmarks for cultivating coordination, thus improving the effectiveness of the broader effort to protect electoral integrity.

**Sweden: Electoral security analysis in six steps** (see Bay 2025)

In support of the 2022 elections, the Election Authority developed a handbook for operational security analysis for the election administration, specifically to enable local and regional actors to better assess, prevent and defend against antagonistic threats to the election process. A six-step process is based on the Protective Security Analysis method outlined by the Swedish Security Service. First, a description of the election process is developed, considering local factors and conditions. Second, assets requiring protection (protected values) are identified and assessed based on the potential impact of a security breach. Third, potential threats to the election are identified, leveraging a national design basis threat assessment and local threat assessments. Fourth, vulnerabilities in the existing security measures are identified. Fifth, security measures are defined to address the identified vulnerabilities. Sixth, a comprehensive security plan is created, prioritizing actions based on risk level and assigning responsibilities. The method incorporates risk-assessment matrices, considering both the likelihood and consequences of threats, to guide decision making.

# 7. PUTTING PROCESSES IN PLACE FOR DEALING WITH RISKS, THREATS AND CRISES

Once relevant state agencies have developed a shared understanding of key electoral risks and risk factors, as well as their likelihood and severity, and charted options for action, they should link them with—or put in place— processes that ensure continuous collaboration. They should also ensure that efforts to protect elections are well calibrated to respond to a changing environment.

In this respect, three management processes—risk management, resilience-building and crisis management—may play crucial roles. Both governments and sectors that deal with high-stakes and high-risk goods may adopt these management processes. However, most EMBs use them insufficiently, if at all. The key correspondence between the general goals of the three processes and their application in an electoral context is outlined in Table 7.1.

**Table 7.1. Goals of the three management processes and their application in an electoral context**

| Key goal of the process | Electoral application |
| --- | --- |
| Risk management is primarily about preventing situations that may negatively impact objectives. | To identify and prevent negative occurrences that may undermine the integrity of electoral processes. |
| Resilience-building is primarily about ensuring continuity by withstanding stresses and shocks. | To strengthen electoral processes and institutions to withstand negative impacts from risks that materialize without losing continuity. |
| Crisis management is primarily about recovering from harmful impacts. | To ensure effective recovery when the integrity of electoral processes and institutions is significantly damaged or lost. |

*Source:* Alihodžić, S., *Protecting Elections: Risk Management, Resilience-Building and Crisis Management in Elections* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2023.44>.

This chapter outlines key elements of related processes to inform programming and implementation avenues that users of the Framework may pursue.

## 7.1. Implementing risk management

Electoral risk management is a systematic effort to improve knowledge about, and situational awareness of, internal and external risks to electoral processes in order to initiate timely preventive and mitigating action. Most commonly, the risk-management process includes five elements, as shown in Figure 7.1 and described below.

Figure 7.1. **Model of risk management process/cycle**
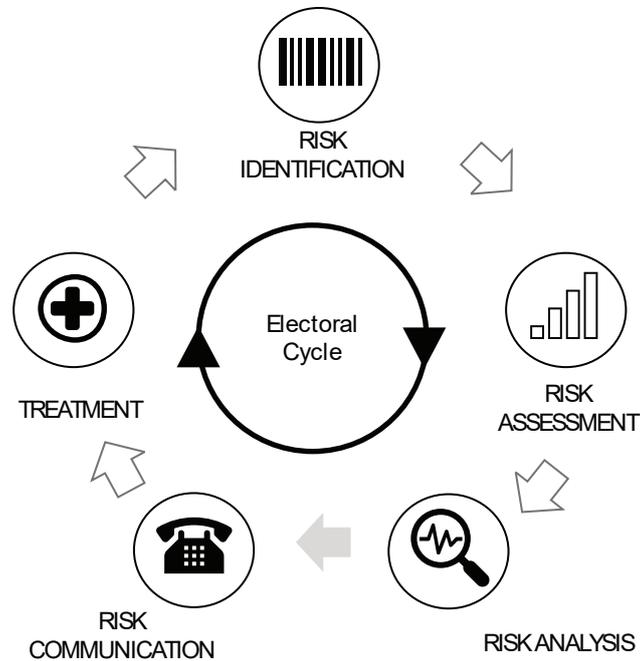


*Source:* Developed by International IDEA.

1. *Risk identification* entails consideration of possible negative occurrences (risks) and the factors (risk factors) that may contribute to them.

2. *Risk assessment* classifies risk factors according to their perceived likelihood and impacts. The Risk Heat Maps are a visual tool broadly used to assist in the risk classification process (see Figure 7.2).

3. *Risk analysis* entails collecting and examining risk data to understand whether risks are materializing. Observable indicators for different risk factors are determined, and data collection methods are developed and implemented (including gender-disaggregated data, when feasible). Importantly, this is an opportunity to analyse/distinguish developments in different geographical areas (the space dimension) and phases of the electoral cycle (the time dimension), the relationships between different risks, and whether effects vary in terms of demographic characteristics of the population (age, gender, ethnicity, race, etc.).

4. *Risk communication* ensures that all relevant teams and individuals within and outside an organization are risk-aware. Because many electoral risks are dynamic, communication should be time-sensitive and gender-responsive. Also, risk communication requires a culture that is properly attuned to risk.

5.  *Risk treatment* is when risk owners, such as the managers or leaders of an organization, take concrete steps to prevent risks from materializing— including escalation to other functional units or external organizations—or initiate mitigation measures, such as resilience-building and crisis-management processes.

Figure 7.2. **Examples of risk heat maps (3x3 matrix left, and 5x5 matrix right)**
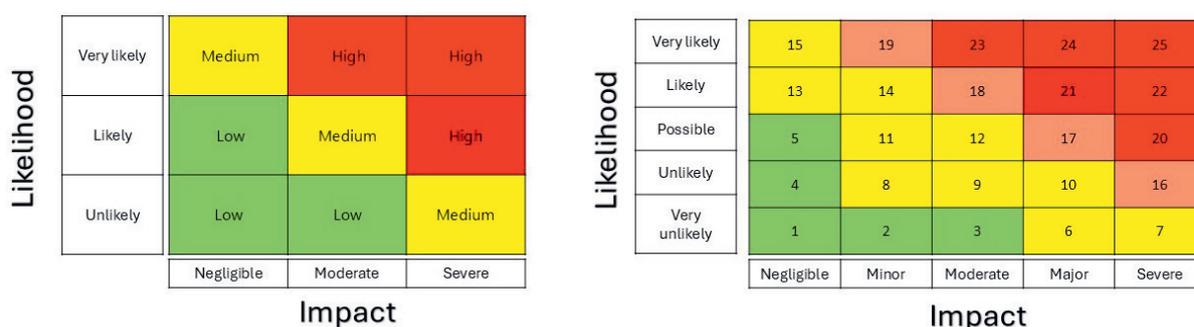


*Source:* Alihodžić, S., 'Electoral risk heat maps: At the Intersection of risk management, resilience-building and crisis management', 7 March 2024, <https://www.idea.int/news/electoral-risk-heat-maps-intersection-risk-management-resilience-building-and-crisis>, accessed 25 September 2024.

Risk management, once established, should be a continuous effort. Risk management in elections is, therefore, described by International IDEA as 'a systematic effort undertaken to improve knowledge about and situational awareness of both internal and external risks to electoral processes in order to initiate timely preventive and mitigating action' (Alihodžić 2016: 10). To assist with identifying different risks, observable indicators and data collection methods, International IDEA offers a gender-sensitive framework that distinguishes between, and describes, 26 process-related risks and 16 context-related risk factors (Alihodžić et al. 2024a and 2024b).

When adopting risk management, an organization typically requires the establishment of a risk-management framework that includes formal guiding documentation—such as a risk-management policy and decisions about allocating responsibilities and resources—and the building of a positive risk-management culture and capacity. Therefore, the institutionalization of risk management in an EMB or any other organization must be supported by the leadership; it must be built on processes and utilize resources that already exist, ensuring sustainability, and it should benefit from collaboration with other state agencies (for more, see Vincent, Alihodžić and Gale 2021 and the Protecting Elections Resource Portal).

One should notice that many organizations tend to tackle threats and crises as part of formal risk-management processes. Because of significant overlaps, this may sound logical and practical. However, because every method has its nuances, blurring risk management with resilience-building and crisis

management may not be the most optimal arrangement. Instead, these may work best in synergies (Alihodžić 2023). Subsections 7.2 and 7.3 introduce resilience-building and crisis management in that spirit.

**Box 7.1. Comparative experiences of electoral risk-management processes**

**Brazil: Risk management process informs strategic decisions on allocation of funds and the focus of preventive efforts** (see Tarouco 2023)

The Superior Electoral Court's (TSE) institutional risk-management policy establishes guidelines, responsibilities, a process and a committee for risk management. The policy must be followed in every unit and by each administrator in the TSE. Once identified and assessed at the unit level, the list of risks is reported to the TSE's Department of Strategic and Socio-Environmental Management, an advisory office ancillary to the general director, which, among other roles, plays the role of a risk-management unit.

The risks are ordered according to priorities, with thresholds for risk tolerance and appetites. Thresholds are strategic decisions necessary in order to allocate budgetary funds and focus efforts on risks considered more serious or more probable (a cyberattack against the EMB's systems, for example) as opposed to those considered less probable (for example, an attack on a headquarters) or unavoidable (a natural disaster). In coordination with the Department of Strategic and Socio-Environmental Management, each TSE unit develops a protocol for risk management and takes appropriate steps. The risk register is reviewed periodically.

The primary efforts to prevent institutional risks in Brazil are fighting disinformation and protecting the tallying and adjudication systems. The functioning of these systems is critical to the TSE because their failure could compromise its operational capacity and its legitimacy.

**International IDEA: Findings of the 2019–2020 EMB survey on risk management in elections** (see Vincent, Alihodžić and Gale 2021)

The findings of a global survey conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission and International IDEA in 2019–2020 on the state of risk management in elections, which collected responses from 43 EMBs worldwide, confirmed the implementation of risk management to varying degrees.

EMBs were asked how they managed risks:

| Options included (multiple selections possible) | No. of responses |
|---|---|
| Through our regular, organic and self-initiated management practices | 30 |
| Through formal risk management processes applied in some areas of our work | 12 |
| Through formal risk management processes integrated into all areas of our work | 11 |
| Other | 7 |

**Box 7.1. Comparative experiences of electoral risk-management processes (cont.)**

EMBs were asked about common components of their EMB risk management frameworks:

| Options provided (multiple selections possible) | No. of responses |
| --- | --- |
| A register that records risks | 29 |
| Tools to evaluate and assess risks | 27 |
| Risk identification procedure | 27 |
| Risk analysis method | 25 |
| Risk communication procedure | 22 |
| A documented risk policy | 20 |
| Allocation of resources | 20 |
| Tools to treat risks | 19 |
| Risk training materials | 15 |
| Appropriate authority, responsibility and accountability for risk management | 14 |

**Kenya: Over a decade of formal risk management** (see Kamindo 2024; and Vincent, Alihodžić and Gale 2021)

In Kenya, risk management is a legal requirement for public institutions. Public finance management requires the accounting officers of all public institutions to establish and maintain appropriate risk-oversight and -management systems.

Electoral risk management experiences date back to 2009, when the Interim Independent Electoral Commission, a precursor to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), established the Audit, Risk and Compliance Directorate. However, risk management remained ad hoc, project- or activity-based and stand-alone (not integrated with other electoral processes). In 2011, the IEBC began collaborating with International IDEA to strengthen risk management by piloting International IDEA's Electoral Risk Management Tool (ERM Tool) during the preparations for, and conduct of, the 2013 general elections. Since then, the IEBC has been taking incremental steps in developing and strengthening its risk-management framework. The risk-management policy statement outlines the organization's commitment to manage risks and its responsibility for the maintenance of an effective and transparent system for doing so. Monitoring and evaluation are embedded in the framework to get feedback internally as well as from external stakeholders: this ensures continuous learning and a focus on emerging risks.

The IEBC's risk-governance structure comprises several committees at the headquarters and in county offices, while the risk owners are the CEO, directors and county election managers. All IEBC staff are expected to take personal responsibility by adhering to the risk-management policy and procedures. The post-election evaluation of the 9 August 2022 general election revealed that the 'risk management structure adopted by the commission allowed for the systematic identification, analysis and mitigation of risks' (IEBC 2022: 102).

**South Africa: A mature electoral risk-management practice** (see Matatu 2023)

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) has a long track record of integrating risk management into its approach to protecting electoral integrity. It first introduced risk management more than two decades ago, following a National Treasury requirement that all state-funded institutions maintain an up-to-date risk register. Currently, the IEC employs a comprehensive risk management policy, methodology and framework. These tools are based on the principle that

**Box 7.1. Comparative experiences of electoral risk-management processes (cont.)**

management should be held accountable for designing, implementing, monitoring and integrating risk management into its day-to-day activities, and that the governing body of an organization should identify emerging risks as part of its monitoring functions.

Within the IEC Secretariat, the risk-management portfolio falls within the remit of the chief financial officer, who serves as the accounting officer in accordance with the terms of the Public Finance Management Act of 1999. To monitor the annual risk-implementation plan, the IEC established the Executive Risk Management Committee, which meets on a quarterly basis. Its mandate is to monitor identified strategic and operational risks and mitigation plans, ensure compliance with national laws and regulations, and prevent and detect fraud.

**Sri Lanka: Risk management as part of generic management processes** (see Ranatunga 2025)

Electoral risk management in Sri Lanka is being developed incrementally from the generic management process. Since 2015, the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL) has published two participatory strategic plans, both of which account for risks to electoral integrity. The 2022–2025 plan distinguishes between economic, political, environmental, institutional and market management/implementation categories of risk. The ECSL also planned for a risk register, although progress remained unclear at the time of the development of the case study.

**Ukraine: An incremental development of institutional risk management processes and tools** (see Anguelova forthcoming 2025)

There has been a clear trajectory in the evolution of risk-management processes and capabilities within the Central Election Commission (CEC). In 2014 and the years that followed, risk management was largely reactive and ad hoc. Therefore, efforts and information about risks—and about measures taken to prevent and mitigate risks—remained fragmented across departments, there being no centralized database or knowledge-management tools for systematizing risk responses. From 2020, risk-management processes became more consistent, inter-agency coordination became more structured, and electoral safeguards were applied more systematically.

In 2021, an effort towards the full institutionalization of risk management began. A working group on strategic planning was formed within the CEC to explore risk-management strategies and tools, including the potential integration of International IDEA's electoral risk-management software. Although not all processes are fully formalized, the CEC has been able to assess risk in relation to its key activities, particularly during budgeting, procurement planning and operational coordination with other state institutions. These actions have signified a growing internal culture of risk identification and mitigation.

## 7.2. Implementing resilience-building

Electoral resilience-building is a systematic effort to strengthen electoral institutions and processes to withstand threats that materialize from risks. Contingent on contexts and types of threats, resilience-building strategies may focus on resisting, adapting or transforming:

- *Resisting* is about staying on course without changing how things are done. The ability to resist threats is essential when a change in how things are done would undermine electoral integrity. For example, EMBs will need to resist any reform that can undermine voters' rights or disturb a level playing field for political parties and candidates.

- *Adapting* concerns the introduction of temporary changes to how things are done in order to withstand impermanent threats. Adopting flexibility is essential in environments where the threats are not considered permanent or long-lasting. An example of this was the modification of elections during the Covid-19 pandemic—including the adoption of special voting arrangements—to deal with health threats. Typically, changes are reversed when the threat is no longer present.

- *Transforming* is about making permanent changes to how things are done. The need to transform may be necessary for dealing with threats resulting from new realities considered to be permanent—reflecting political, security, technological, socio-economic, environmental or other types of development—which demonstrate that the ways in which things are done is no longer optimal. For example, the rise of social media platforms has forced EMBs to transform their communication and outreach methods.

Organizations implementing risk-management processes will be able to focus resilience-building efforts where they are most needed by assessing the likelihood of, and negative impacts of, risks. Strategies of resisting, adapting or transforming may include the implementation, or strengthening, of legal, institutional or process-related safeguards. Details on specific actions are beyond the scope of this Guide, but the Protecting Elections Resource Portal is useful in identifying relevant resources.

Table 7.2 provides indicative (common-knowledge) examples of actions for building resilience in the face of some threats and vulnerabilities.

Table 7.2. **A comparative overview of resilient responses**

| Threat and vulnerability | Strategy | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Resist** | **Adapt** | **Transform** |
| Violence at polling station locations threatens the lives of voters, observers and polling station staff. Insecurity may lower participation (turnout) and undermine electoral integrity. | The EMB and security sector agencies work closely to ensure that the presence of security personnel is adequate to ensure that all polling stations are safe for all voters, observers and polling staff, including women. | Owing to specific circumstances, the EMB, security sector agencies and political actors agree to decrease the number of polling stations while extending the voting time for the forthcoming elections, to ensure that voting takes place only in secure locations (for all voters, including women). | The EMB employs security experts as permanent staff, adopts a new gender-sensitive security protocol and introduces organization-wide security training. |

Table 7.2. **A comparative overview of resilient responses (cont.)**

| Threat and vulnerability | Strategy | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Resist** | **Adapt** | **Transform** |
| Floods threaten polling stations by damaging and/or destroying sensitive materials and preventing voters from accessing polling stations, thus undermining electoral integrity. | The EMB and civil contingency agencies work closely to ensure that the electoral plan is strictly followed while protecting all citizens (including already vulnerable individuals and groups), electoral officials and sensitive materials from floods. | Alternative locations, on high ground, for polling stations during the forthcoming elections are identified. Kits for waterproofing sensitive electoral materials are delivered. Alternative means of transportation are made available to voters in need, including women. Provisional voting arrangements are introduced. | A study on the impact of climate change on elections provides evidence that floods increasingly threaten the conduct of elections during a specific season. Provisional voting arrangements are adopted as permanent. The election date is changed to a period that is less prone to floods. |
| Rejection of election results without grounds threatens electoral integrity. | The EMB works with other stakeholders, including state agencies, political parties and civil society, to increase transparency and ensure timely investigation and the fair resolution of electoral disputes. | The EMB works with other stakeholders, including state agencies, political parties and civil society, to understand exceptional circumstances that may lead to the rejection of election results and to implement ad hoc measures that can ensure the integrity of results in such situations. | The EMB works with other stakeholders, including state agencies, political parties, civil society and legislators, to deliver a set of reforms that will strengthen the safeguards of electoral integrity—for example, the adoption of new technologies for transmitting and publishing results. |
| High levels of discrimination and violence against women in elections (VAWE) threatens the participation of women, whether as election candidates or voters, thus undermining electoral integrity. | The EMB works closely with other state agencies, political parties, civil society and the media to put in place mechanisms for preventing VAWE, building resilience to it, and ensuring that the adverse effects of VAWE incidents on electoral integrity can be reversed. | To address exceptional circumstances, the EMB introduces temporary measures that ensure the accessibility, safety and security of women candidates and voters throughout the electoral cycle (for example, by introducing separate lines for women at polling stations and female polling workers, ensuring that all (or the most critical) polling stations are in public places). | The EMB adopts gender-mainstreaming measures and mechanisms in all aspects of its management to respond to changes in social norms and practices. The EMB also introduces new gender-sensitive and inclusive civic and voter education as ways to transform social norms and practices. |

*Source:* Developed by International IDEA.

One should not lose sight of the fact that resilience-building is a fluid concept in terms of the programming scope and desired objectives and achievements. Programming electoral resilience may occur at the level of individual organizations possessing a mandate to protect electoral integrity, or it may include government- or society-wide efforts.

Organizational resilience is defined in *ISO 22316: 2017* as 'the ability of an organization to absorb and adapt in a changing environment to enable it to deliver its objectives and to survive and prosper' (International Organization for Standardization 2017: E). In that sense, the ISO's 'coordinated approach' emphasizes the importance of the commitment of leaders and top management, adequate resources, a structure that makes it possible to achieve effective coordination and mechanisms to ensure that investments in resilience-building activities are appropriate. Moreover, the coordinated approach requires systems that support implementation, arrangements to evaluate and enhance resilience, and communications to improve understanding and decision making.

However, as defined by International IDEA, democracy is a complex system of many elements, the quality of which determines its overall condition (see International IDEA n.d.a; Tufis and Hudson 2024). This is shown in Figure 7.3.

**Figure 7.3.** **The Global State of Democracy Indices Framework**
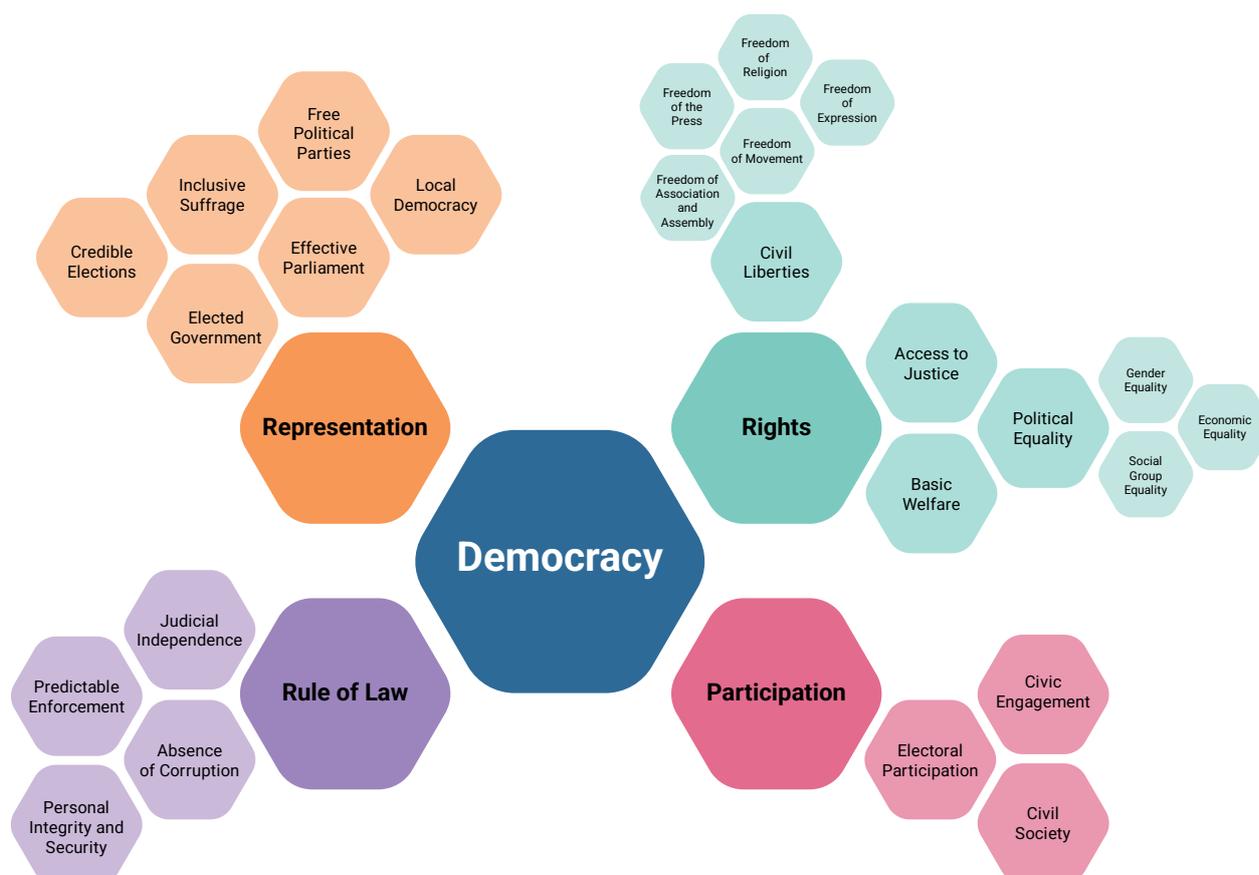


*Source:* International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy 2025: Democracy on the Move* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2025.53>.

Whereas Credible Elections constitute one of the model factors (under the category Representation as shown in Figure 7.3), one can posit that when other democratic factors are strong, electoral processes will be more resilient to stresses and shocks resulting from flawed internal processes or external disturbances.

Therefore, comprehensive electoral resilience-building will typically require a broad effort to engage and coordinate the various state and non-state organizations that play an important role in upholding democracy. For this to happen, theory and practice emphasize five key conditions (a) a common agenda of concerned organizations; (b) a shared measurement and information system; (c) mutually reinforcing activities; (d) continuous communication; and (e) backbone support organizations (Alihodžić 2023).

Finally, one should note the fluidity of the objectives and achievements of resilience-building efforts, whether at the level of the individual organization or system-wide. For example, building resilience to a specific threat may require transformation, which—once achieved—may increase or create vulnerabilities in relation to another threat. A broadly known example is the introduction of electronic voting machines (EVMs). The act of switching from ballot papers to EVMs is truly transformative in terms of how elections are implemented. However, many EMBs have been challenged on the grounds that EVMs may be prone to glitches or might be tampered with. This has pushed EMBs' resilience-building from a transforming mode into one of resisting.

Box 7.2. **Comparative experiences of resilience-building processes**

**Brazil: A range of resilience-building strategies tailored for dealing with specific threats** (see Tarouco 2023)

Electoral risks have materialized as threats to integrity on several occasions. These instances have included electoral fraud, health hazards related to the Covid-19 pandemic and political attacks on the voting system. Each prompted long- and short-term resilience-building efforts. The 1994 fraud involving polling and the tallying of results in Rio de Janeiro resulted in the annulment of elections and repeat voting. The resilience-building measures for the subsequent 1996 elections were transformative, replacing ballot papers and boxes with electronic voting machines. Biometric identification (fingerprint scanning), gradually introduced from 2008, is set to be completed by 2026, thus eliminating voter identification fraud. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) withstood stresses and shocks by adapting, introducing some flexibility in how things were done. It worked with other agencies on introducing special health protocols for the 2020 election and waived the biometric identification of voters to avoid virus transmission from touching the scanner lens. Finally, when the TSE was faced with an unfounded allegation of irregularities, it resisted attacks by standing its ground and—through the creation of a Transparency Committee composed of scholars, civil society figures and representatives of public institutions—addressed the accusations.

**Kenya: Resilience-building decisions challenged by the High Court** (see Kamindo 2024)

In order to build resilience to electoral fraud, in 2017 the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) of Kenya introduced an Integrated Elections Management System for voter verification, a voter ID and transmission of results. In order to strengthen integrity further, the IEBC declared, in 2022, that voters would be identified using biometrics only. However, a political party alliance (Azimio la Umoja One Kenya Party) challenged that decision,

**Box 7.2. Comparative experiences of resilience-building processes (cont.)**

resulting in a High Court decision compelling the IEBC to use a printed register. The IEBC responded by rapidly developing a guideline on the use of a printed register and dispatching it to returning officers. However, on the eve of the general election, the Court of Appeal—deciding on the appeal of another political alliance (United Democratic Alliance)—set aside the High Court orders on the use of a printed register. The IEBC then had to communicate that development, reversing the earlier instructions on the use of a printed register. This situation created procedural inconsistencies on election day, which were noted and reported by election observers.

**Poland: Civil society as a key actor in withstanding threats to electoral integrity** (see Vashchanka 2025)

From 2018, the government carried out far-reaching electoral reforms, followed by smaller-scale amendments in 2019 and more substantive amendments in 2023. These reforms entailed restructuring the National Electoral Commission (NEC) by decreasing the number of judges and increasing the number of political party nominees, introducing more government control over the appointment of the head of the NEC's executive arm—the National Electoral Office—as well as creating a central voter register and modifying the voting and counting processes.

In an environment marked by political polarization and mutual mistrust, such reforms were met with much resistance from opposition parties, independent institutions and civil society actors. In numerous instances, they voiced their concerns and acted through parliamentary processes and within the broader public space. Perhaps the most vivid example of resisting the government's action—which was perceived to be undermining electoral integrity—took place in the context of the presidential election in 2020, amid the Covid-19 pandemic. In this instance, the ruling party voted through a bill to hold the election solely by postal voting and so bypassed the NEC, giving the authority to the minister of state to print ballots and conduct other election preparations. In response, several candidates threatened a boycott; civil society organizations and the ombudsman questioned the legality of ongoing preparations, while some municipalities refused to hand over voter lists to the postal service.

This outcry resulted in a reversed decision and elections held by in-person voting in polling stations, with postal voting as a supplementary channel.

**Peru: Withstanding natural hazards through flexibility in the allocation of polling stations** (see Valverde and Rossi 2025)

In Peru, heavy rainfall during rainy seasons can cause landslides, block roads and produce a rapid increase in river levels. If such events coincide with election activities, they may limit voter mobility, leading to disenfranchisement. The Covid-19 pandemic had a similar effect on the voting process. To mitigate adverse effects on participation, the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) has increased the number of polling stations and introduced the platform Choose Your Polling Station, which allows voters to select the most appropriate polling location in their district. In parallel, the ONPE ensures that all locations are capable of operating in the event of a natural hazard. If sites do not meet the minimum conditions identified, they are replaced by alternative sites.

**South Africa: Adjusting and transforming in the face of new threats** (see Matatu 2023)

The Covid-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC). Municipal by-elections were scheduled to take place during the second quarter of 2020, with nationwide municipal elections due to be held no later than 1 November 2021. In the face of health hazards, the IEC approach was to request flexibility in terms of the election dates from the Electoral Court. The Court approved the postponement of the by-elections despite the fact that this violated the legislated period for filling vacancies. The Electoral Court's justification pointed to a limited understanding of the virus, a lack of safety measures in place and limits on political parties' campaigning opportunities. The postponement enabled the IEC to plan for by-elections under new Covid-19 protocols.

When it came to dealing with misinformation and disinformation threats, the IEC's resilience-building approach combined several strategies. During both the 2019 general election and 2021 local government elections, the

Box 7.2. **Comparative experiences of resilience-building processes (cont.)**

Commission partnered with Media Monitoring Africa to combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation. The system, known as Real411, provided a platform for the public to report digital harms, including disinformation. The aim was to ensure that online content was assessed and addressed in an independent, open, transparent and accountable manner. Moreover, the IEC signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with social media companies such as Google, Meta and TikTok in order to reduce the spread of online misinformation and disinformation, including during any potential crises (Nkanjeni 2023). The MOUs provide a framework to remove content that is demonstrably false, among other measures.

**Sri Lanka: Cases of resistance, adaptation and transformation** (see Ranatunga 2025)

Sri Lanka implements a spectrum of resilience-building efforts—combining measures to resist negative impacts and to adjust to circumstances or transform in the face of changing landscapes.

Resisting is typically applied when it comes to threats to electoral security—for example, the large-scale bombing attacks that took place seven months before the 2019 presidential election. To ensure electoral continuity in a safe environment, the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL) deployed 72,808 members of the Sri Lanka Police and the Special Task Force. The mobilization of police and the request for military support are within the ECSL's constitutional powers.

Adaptation is applied to situations where the threat is not permanent and flexibility will not undermine electoral integrity. Such was the case in navigating elections during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the face of health hazards, the ECSL moved the election date twice. Despite challenges to such decisions, an inclusive decision-making process managed by the ECSL, which included various state and non-state actors, ensured that there was overall acceptance.

Understanding the potential impact of natural and human-made hazards has had a transformative effect on how government agencies collaborate. A Joint Election Emergencies Operation Unit (JEEOps) was first established as an ad hoc body in 2019 to deal with security concerns during Sri Lanka's presidential elections that year. Since then, a JEEOps has been operational during all subsequent elections, and its focus has expanded to include natural hazards.

**Sweden: A whole-of-society approach to building resilient electoral processes** (see Bay 2025)

Central to Sweden's strategy to protect elections is a whole-of-society approach that emphasizes building societal resilience. Swedish resilience-building efforts are focused on maintaining public confidence in elections, as well as on the physical security of electoral actors and processes, cybersecurity and election-day disturbances.

Maintaining public confidence was a crucial aspect of Sweden's efforts to strengthen the resilience of its electoral system for the 2018 and 2019 elections. The concern was that even minor incidents or unsubstantiated allegations of fraud could significantly undermine trust in electoral integrity. To address that concern, the Swedish Civil Contingency Agency (MSB) implemented several key resilience-building efforts. The focus was on:

1. *Electoral communications capacity*. A comprehensive handbook for public sector communicators was developed so that they would have the skills to identify and effectively respond to disinformation narratives about the election process.
2. *Media partnerships*. Together with the Election Authority, the MSB partnered with a broad range of news organizations offering state-wide coverage to provide accurate information about electoral procedures, to dispel common misconceptions, to prevent the inadvertent spread of disinformation, and to improve the media's own capacity to identify and counter disinformation.
3. *The online information environment*. The MSB worked closely with social media platforms to ensure the prompt removal of fake accounts, facilitate the dissemination of accurate voter information and respond promptly to public concerns.

Box 7.2. **Comparative experiences of resilience-building processes (cont.)**

4. *Information literacy*. Public awareness campaigns were launched to encourage citizens to think critically about the information they encountered, and to enable them to identify and disregard disinformation, particularly when the content was emotionally charged.
5. *Research and monitoring*. The MSB commissioned research to monitor online information and identify potential information influencing campaigns.

In terms of ensuring the security of the election itself, the efforts of security-sector agencies encompassed the countering of domestic extremism, the safeguarding of vulnerable areas and the protection of candidates and electoral officials.

Significant investments were made to bolster the Election Authority's cybersecurity defences in preparation for the 2018 election. These efforts continued, and expanded, through preparations for the 2022 and 2024 elections, when the National Cybersecurity Centre also set up a task force to help protect the election infrastructure.

In order to address the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic ahead of the 2022 general election, the Election Authority closely monitored the situation and worked with the Public Health Agency to provide recommendations to ensure that voters felt safe from infection and were not deterred from voting.

**Timor-Leste: Resisting measures that could undermine electoral integrity** (see Maley 2023)

Timor-Leste held a presidential election in 2022, during the Covid-19 pandemic. To curb infection, a government decree included a provision that would have required voters who displayed symptoms of Covid-19 to be transferred to the nearest isolation centre so that they could vote there. That was plainly unworkable for the Technical Secretariat of Electoral Administration (STAE)—the body responsible for organizing all national elections—since there were very few such centres nationwide and no resources to ensure the transfer of the voters. The STAE's response, therefore, was to ignore the provision, making only passing reference to it in the documentation provided to polling staff, while also excluding it from staff training programmes and doing nothing to publicize it. That approach attracted no criticism. While the STAE's disregard of the provision might have been unworkable in a more litigious society, it aligned with the situation on the ground. The Timorese EMB's approach reflected, in part, resistance to diverge even slightly from mechanisms that had worked successfully in the past and in which there was strong public confidence; it also appeared to be driven by the fact that in a country where infectious diseases such as malaria and dengue fever remain common, Covid-19 simply had less capacity to shock the public than in countries where large-scale communicable diseases had been largely eliminated. Overall, the 2022 polling process went smoothly, with no evidence that the election produced either a spike in Covid-19 infections or a decrease in turnout on a scale suggesting a major unwillingness on the part of voters to participate.

**Ukraine: Resilience in the face of aggression and large-scale intimidation of election officials** (see Anguelova forthcoming 2025)

During the preparations for the 2014 presidential elections (originally scheduled for 2015), separatist forces threatened election officials and their families with death, residences were raided, election officials were abducted, and election materials were seized or destroyed. Whereas many election officials demonstrated defiance by holding meetings in secret at undisclosed locations, and by continuing electoral preparations albeit in a threatening atmosphere, the CEC authorized the relocation of District Election Commissions from conflict zones to safer areas.

The traumatic experiences of 2014 served as an impetus for reforms in electoral security planning. In subsequent elections, particularly in 2019 and 2020, no similar scale of violence or abductions occurred, in part because non-government-controlled areas were excluded from the elections, law enforcement was professionalized, and practices related to electoral security were revised. In the face of ongoing hybrid threats—and with support from domestic and international partners—the CEC strengthened contingency planning, improved coordination with security services and enhanced cybersecurity protections, thereby connecting reactive crisis-response strategies with prevention and resilience-building efforts.

### 7.3. **Implementing crisis management**

Electoral crisis management is a systematic effort to prepare for, respond to, recover and learn from electoral crises. 'Electoral crisis' was earlier defined as a situation combining significant threats to electoral integrity, a sense of urgency and high uncertainty.

Across organizations and sectors, crisis-management processes can take different formats. The most common elements are reflected in Figure 7.4 and include the following:

- *preparedness*: activities undertaken in the pre-crisis period, when practical ways for responding to potential crises are considered, and crisis plans are developed;

- *crisis response*: putting crisis plans into action; and

- *recovery and learning*: steps to mitigate the negative effects of crises and restore continuity, while taking measures to ensure that such crises are avoided in the future.

When crisis management is coupled with risk-management and resilience-building processes, the latter two will already have covered significant ground. First, they will have pointed to possible negative occurrences that may have significant negative impacts on electoral integrity, creating crises. Second, it is

Figure 7.4. **Model of the crisis-management cycle**
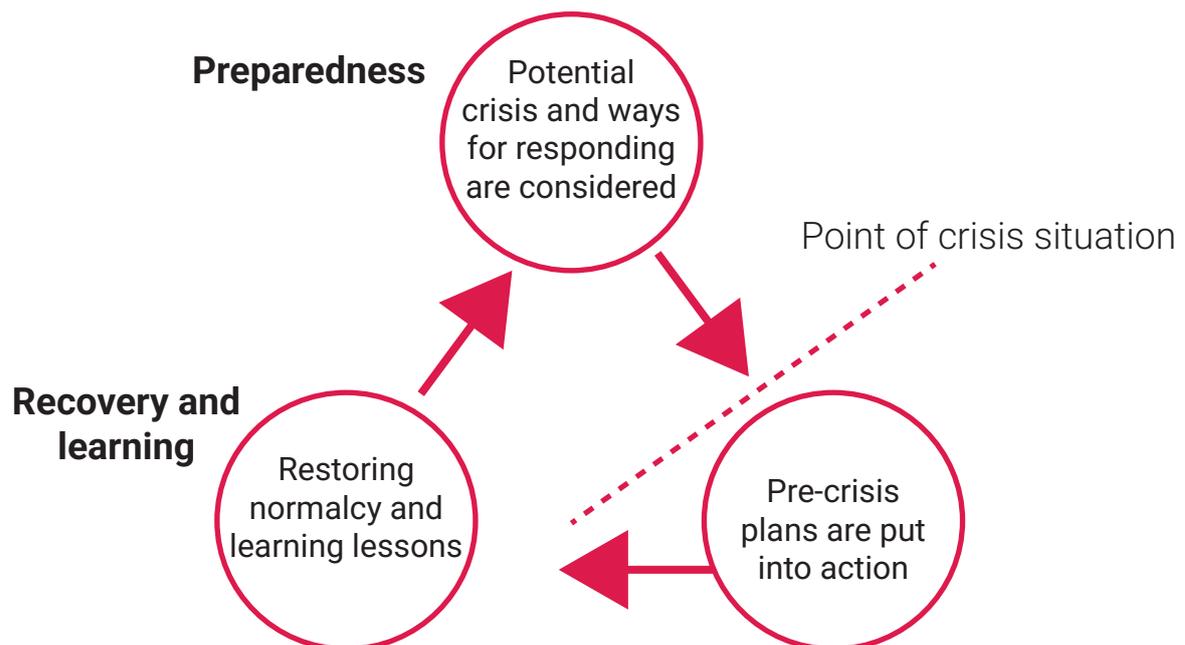


*Source:* Developed by International IDEA.

fair to assume that efforts to prevent risks from materializing, or to withstand stresses and shocks when they do, will have reduced the number of crises to cope with. Nevertheless, because risk management and resilience-building will not always bring success, it is wise to develop crisis plans for possible situations that may have severe impacts on electoral integrity, even if their likelihood is not necessarily very high.

Electoral crisis management—whether it concerns one organization or involves inter-agency or society-wide collaboration—should lead to the development of a detailed action plan (for example, a contingency or an if–then plan), which will specify steps to mitigate a crisis. There are numerous examples and templates of crisis-management plans in circulation. However, common process-related questions are:

- Who develops the initial crisis plan?

- Who approves the crisis plan?

- Do resources exist for implementation?

- Who ensures familiarity with the plan among all relevant individuals/ stakeholders?

- Who revises and updates the plan, and how often?

- Who/what is the decision-making person/body during the crisis?

- What are the crisis-communication plans and protocols (internal and external)?

- Who takes a record of actions and results, and how do they do this?

- Who ensures that lessons are learned and shared with all relevant actors, and how do they do this?

- How is gender sensitivity integrated, and representation/participation ensured throughout?

Practice has shown that, if done correctly, planning will pay dividends by enabling EMBs and other stakeholders to deploy their resources rapidly. When the crisis is over, it is essential that post-crisis discussions are honest, inclusive and constructive, and that they deliver actionable guidance about how to be better prepared for inevitable future crises.

**Box 7.3. Comparative experiences of electoral crisis-management processes**

**Kenya: Elections as national periods of turbulence, crises and reform** (see Kamindo 2024)

Kenya has experienced election-related violence since the onset of multipartyism. However, the scale of election-related violence following the 2007 general election pushed the whole country into a crisis, which was only stopped through the broad engagement and support of the international and regional community. The mediation efforts took place by way of a National Dialogue and Reconciliation Committee chaired by Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General and then Chair of the African Union's Panel of Eminent African Personalities. The recovery path for electoral integrity was long, and it included a review of constitutional and legal frameworks governing the conduct of elections, including an EMB mandate and structure. In 2013, Kenya conducted peaceful and credible elections.

However, when the presidential election took place in 2017, the Supreme Court declared the results invalid, asserting that it had not been conducted in accordance with the Constitution and applicable law. The ruling was unprecedented. It created a crisis within the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and anxiety across the country. The crisis was compounded by the withdrawal of the main opposition candidate from the repeat presidential election, who outlined several reasons, including a lack of electoral reform to address the gaps highlighted by the Supreme Court. The crisis was resolved through a High Court ruling that all candidates who had participated in the annulled presidential election be included on the new ballot.

In response, the IEBC introduced a new practice of posting all result forms from polling stations and constituencies to a public portal on the its website. This effectively meant that anyone could do the tallying, and the measure was broadly seen as an improvement in transparency. Given the new confidence that this move created, the IEBC signed a memorandum of understanding with the Media Council of Kenya (MCK), allowing media outlets to tally and display results for the presidential election. However, because of a lack of an agreed sequence of tallying, media outlets displayed different results, and some local media outlets stopped displaying results, without providing an explanation to the public as to why. This triggered doubts, confusion, anxiety and the perception among the population that the election results were being rigged. By the time that the MCK clarified the situation, social media channels were already awash with speculation, casting doubt on the results. This demonstrates how measures to prevent one type of crisis can cause a different one.

**South Africa: Contingency planning and financial flexibility are key to crisis preparedness** (see Matatu 2023)

Building on the requirements of its governance structure, the Electoral Commission of South Africa's (IEC) approach to crisis management includes standard operating procedures and contingency plans for a wide variety of possible events, although not every eventuality can be covered. Additionally, the IEC's straight-line budgeting process provides it with flexibility in dealing with the unexpected costs that often arise during crises. This adaptability, combined with existing operating procedures, is a critical element of the IEC's crisis preparedness.

**Sri Lanka: The Disaster Management Centre and other state agencies support EMB in emergency preparedness** (see Ranatunga 2025)

For each election, the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL) compiles an operational plan, taking into account risks across all 25 districts. Prior to the 2019 presidential election, the ECSL—in collaboration with the Disaster Management Centre and the Ministry of Public Administration—produced a national planning document titled 'Right to Vote Amidst Disasters: Guidelines and Operations Plan for Election Emergencies'. Furthermore, such planning documents were produced for elections that followed in 2020 and 2024. Over the years, contingency planning has addressed adverse weather conditions, animal attacks, fires, tsunamis and Covid-19, among other challenges. The 2024 operational plans for both the presidential and general elections included details of rainfall forecasts and possible flood situations.

Box 7.3. **Comparative experiences of electoral crisis-management processes (cont.)**

However, the ECSL's readiness was somewhat diluted by limits to the enforcement of guidelines and relevant legal acts. The indefinite postponement of local elections in 2023—ostensibly because of the financial collapse of 2022—drew the Commission into a crisis. It could only recover once the much-delayed local elections were held on 6 May 2025.

**Sweden: An evolving electoral crisis-management network** (see Bay 2025)

Maintaining regular crisis-management coordination was a priority for the Civil Contingency Agency (MSB) ahead of the 2018 elections. Therefore, the MSB hosted weekly coordination conference calls with all agencies responsible for crisis management, including County Administrative Boards. In the months leading up to the elections, these calls included election security as a standing agenda item, reinforcing existing crisis-management protocols applied to election incidents, including disinformation attacks. To facilitate swift communication among authorities, the MSB also compiled a comprehensive contact list of individuals involved in conducting and securing the election. This contact list ensured that authorities at all levels could quickly reach counterparts at other agencies.

Before the 2022 elections, the response structure changed partially, when the Election Authority took over responsibility for the (now permanent) election cooperation network. This network continued to work in a similar way as previously, with monthly scenario-based discussions to enhance joint capacity for responding to crises. For elections to the European Parliament in 2024, the network further developed its cooperation, contributing to the integrity and security of Sweden's electoral process.

**Ukraine: Trade-offs at the heart of efforts to maintain electoral continuity in the face of crises** (see Anguelova forthcoming 2025)

In 2014, the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Ukraine faced serious crises arising from the seizure of State Voter Register facilities by illegal armed groups in occupied Crimea and eastern Ukraine. This action compromised both sensitive voter data and the safety of election staff. In order to prevent unauthorized access and further abuse, the CEC implemented the temporary closure of approximately 40 registration management bodies in affected areas. By securing the State Voter Register and adjusting electoral procedures, the Ukrainian electoral authorities were able to preserve continuity of operations in other parts of the country.

Another crisis was of a security nature, resulting from the widespread campaign of kidnapping, intimidation and physical attacks that targeted the staff of District Election Commissions. Ultimately, it made voting impossible in 14 out of 22 districts in the Donetsk region, and in 10 out of 12 districts in the Luhansk region, disenfranchising more than 4 million citizens. The CEC responded with ad hoc crisis-management decisions aimed at enhancing security arrangements so as to—wherever possible—maintain continuity without endangering the lives of electoral officials and voters. Although the effects of some of these tactics were limited, because of complex circumstances and a lack of integrity among local police, these efforts evolved over time into more formalized security protocols.

## 8. BUILDING CAPACITY AND PROMOTING CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Electoral management bodies and organizations with related mandates need to ensure that their officials have sufficient knowledge and skills to deal with risks, threats and crises, while also ensuring gender sensitivity. Vigorous training and professional development programmes for permanent staff, as well as for those with temporary roles, enhance such capacity and culture.

Frequently, national electoral stakeholders implement training and development programmes in cooperation with international providers of election assistance or with peer EMBs that have a good track record of protecting electoral integrity under challenging circumstances. Such programmes can benefit from embedding and utilizing the numerous knowledge and analytical resources offered by the Integrated Framework for Protecting Elections. Moreover, the Framework offers the original training curriculum for building practical knowledge and skills related to risk management, resilience-building and crisis management in elections: this can be used as a stand-alone resource for developing capacity.

Contingent on their internal capacity and resources, user organizations should consider establishing ownership of the training programme or engaging external experts to implement it.

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**Box 8.1. Comparative experiences of capacity development and continuous learning to protect elections** (see International IDEA Protecting Elections Project: International IDEA 'Protecting Elections', n.d.c)

As part of its Protecting Elections Project, International IDEA implemented a number of training events aiming to strengthen the capacity of partner organizations to protect electoral integrity. The training typically involved an event lasting 2–3 days, facilitated by a team of 3–5 trainers and working with up to 30 participants—senior to mid-level staff—representing various national organizations with a mandate to protect elections. It is important that gender balance, among both trainers and participants, is ensured and that diversity is promoted.

The curriculum included several simulation exercises that put theoretical concepts and methods into practice by engaging in role play in order to simulate responses to threats and crisis situations in elections. All activities were gender-sensitive.

The training scenarios were aimed at strengthening and developing practical knowledge and skills to:

- understand and recognize electoral risks, categorize them, detect signs that they are materializing and—when required—prompt action through relevant communication channels;
- understand threats and vulnerabilities, and select relevant resilience-building strategies to withstand threats from risks that materialize; and
- understand crises, and initiate, contribute to, or develop crisis-management plans for recovering from undermined or lost electoral integrity.

Prior to the face-to-face workshop, participants would typically complete a short self-learning online course (2–3 hours).

**Kenya: A multi-stakeholder approach to the training of EMB risk champions** (see Kamindo 2024)

Training in the collection, analysis and reporting of risk data is an important component in risk prevention and mitigation and an integral part of risk management undertaken by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) in Kenya.

Every electoral cycle, the IEBC's chief executive appoints risk champions among the staff of the Commission. For the 2022 election cycle, a total of 55 risk champions were appointed, including 14 women. The risk champions are responsible for coordinating the identification, analysis, evaluation and reporting of risk, and for updating the risk

**Box 8.1. Comparative experiences of capacity development and continuous learning to protect elections** (see International IDEA Protecting Elections Project: International IDEA 'Protecting Elections', n.d.c) (cont.)

register. The Risk Management Department coordinates the cascaded training, which is delivered by a trained core team drawn from the IEBC and other institutions (such as the National Police, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution and the judiciary). The IEBC envisages progressive training in risk management for all permanent staff so as to enhance and entrench risk awareness and prevention, and to promote continuous learning.

**South Africa: The chief electoral officer ensures that lessons learned from a crisis are shared with relevant actors** (see Matatu 2023)

At the start of an electoral cycle, the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) organizes workshops with its staff to identify and consider various risk factors, including those related to the global economy. The workshops also aim to assess the possible impact of a risk that transpires, including whether it could disproportionately affect under-represented or marginalized groups.

The integration of a risk-management approach to project planning and delivery throughout the IEC has required investment in human resources. The IEC has undertaken initiatives to promote a culture of risk management by raising awareness (through a Risk Awareness Week as well as year-round activities), by involving staff in risk identification, and by training staff on the Commission's policies and frameworks. This strategy is similar to the IEC's previous integration of other cross-cutting themes into its work, such as gender equality. Staff members' input is also solicited during the formulation of risk management–related policies. These capacity-building measures have all served to develop a culture of risk management within the IEC, ensuring that all staff integrate risk considerations into their daily activities.

Moreover, the IEC's policies and processes take into account lessons learned from challenges and crises. After an event, the IEC leadership convenes a national debriefing, where the chief electoral officer and other senior staff reflect on what has gone wrong and how it might be prevented in future. The findings are compiled in a report, and the relevant departments are tasked with implementing the solution. This was the process followed during the introduction of voter management devices ahead of the 2021 municipal elections in order to address the issue of double voting (as experienced in 2019).

**Sweden: Electoral management bodies and the Civil Contingency Agency develop a risk and vulnerability assessment guide** (see Bay 2025)

In order to enhance regional and local election authorities' capacity to conduct thorough risk and vulnerability assessments in the light of evolving challenges, the Civil Contingency Agency (MSB) collaborated with the Elections Authority and the county of Västra Götaland. Together, they developed a risk and vulnerability assessment guide, which was distributed to all election authorities before the 2018 elections. Additionally, some municipalities received hands-on training in implementing the guide's recommendations. To further bolster municipal capabilities, the MSB partnered with subnational authorities to disseminate information about election protection and the new assessment guide to all localities. Ahead of the 2022 elections, the risk and vulnerability assessment guide was updated with a new chapter on election security: this described tasks, roles and responsibilities, planning, risks and vulnerabilities, and training and exercises—to strengthen efforts towards election security at the local level.

For both the 2022 and the 2024 elections, the Election Authority also offered digital training and workshops to the regional and local election authorities to further support their ability to assess and prevent electoral risks from materializing.

## 9. **ENSURING THAT PROCESSES ARE GENDER-SENSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE**

Gender sensitivity and inclusiveness are both the means to, and the ends of, any effort to protect electoral integrity.

The UN's resources on gender mainstreaming (UN Women n. d.) and promoting gender equality in elections (UNDP and UN Women 2015)—among others—highlight the importance of gender-sensitive institutional structures, processes, rules and norm*s*. In terms of institutional structures, EMBs and inter-agency collaborative forums tasked with protecting electoral integrity must ensure the systematic integration of considerations regarding gender and inclusion, as well as meaningful participation and representation of women and marginalized groups at all levels. Diverse perspectives and lived experiences will broaden the understanding of how electoral risks and threats may impact different groups, hence ensuring that rules, norms and processes to protect electoral integrity are sensitive to the challenges, rights and needs of all citizens. Active engagement of men as allies in gender-mainstreaming efforts, the establishment of gender focal points or dedicated committees, and gender-sensitive budgeting are broadly recognized as strengthening the gender sensitivity of any effort.

Gender-sensitive and inclusive institutional structures, rules and norms, and processes are therefore means (tools) for achieving one of the key ends (goals) of electoral integrity, which is the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups in elections. The involvement of women and marginalized groups—whether as voters, candidates, election officials, observers or service providers—must be recognized not simply as being beneficial, but also as being essential to the legitimacy and credibility of the process. The increased public representation of women and marginalized groups will pay dividends by further strengthening electoral integrity.

The following questions can help electoral stakeholders assess and strengthen gender sensitivity and inclusiveness in their efforts to protect electoral integrity:

- Is due consideration given to how electoral risks, threats and crises may impact the rights—including security and participation—of women and marginalized groups?

- Are gender-equality and participation indicators defined, assessed and analysed, and are related findings appropriately communicated and used to inform efforts to protect elections?

- Are efforts to manage risks, build resilience and respond to crises gender-sensitive?

- Are women and marginalized groups actively included in related decision making, leadership and positions of responsibility?

- Are efforts to develop capacity to protect electoral integrity gender-sensitive regarding content and participation?

- Is there dedicated gender expertise, such as gender focal points or committees, within organizations and inter-agency groups mandated to protect electoral integrity, which can drive and support gender-sensitive initiatives and actions?

- Are post-election evaluations of electoral integrity gender-sensitive, including through the provision of gender-disaggregated data?

- Are sufficient resources allocated to ensure that gender equality and inclusion are effectively embedded in, and supported by, efforts to protect elections?

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**Box 9.1. Comparative experiences of gender sensitivity and inclusion in protecting elections**

**Brazil: Enforcing gender quotas as a vital aspect of electoral integrity** (see Tarouco 2023)

Brazil has a very sizeable gender disparity in candidacies and elected offices. Political parties sometimes violate the gender quota, which requires that at least 30 per cent of the candidates on each party list be women. For example, they register fake candidates just to fulfil the legal requirements, or they refuse to share resources proportionally for campaigns by women candidates. In response, the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) established two ways to resolve these problems. One is the creation of checks to distinguish fake candidacies from real ones by examining women candidates with no votes, no campaign activity and no campaign spending. The second is the imposition of a harsh punishment on the political party responsible—namely, nullifying the entire list of candidates. As adjudication is a lengthy process, discovering fraud in the gender quota can oust some male candidates even after they have been sworn into elected office.

In 2020, the TSE nullified all the votes given to municipal councillors in a city in Alagoas state who belonged to the Brazilian Democratic Movement. The party had put fictitious female candidates on its list. After a lengthy investigation and adjudication process, the fake candidates were identified because they lacked votes, spent negligible amounts in the campaign, presented identical expense reports and did not perform any campaign activity. Consequently, all four men from that party elected in 2020 to that municipal legislature lost their offices in 2022. To address the recurring problem of fraud in gender quotas, and based on recommendations from the Organization of American States, the TSE created in 2019 a permanent committee (TSE Mulheres) that investigates the issue.

**Kenya: From crisis to reform—strengthening gender equality in Kenya's elections** (see Kamindo 2024)

The disputed presidential election in 2007 was marked by large-scale sexual and gender-based violence. The path out of the crisis was broad reform, including of the constitution and electoral laws. Addressing gender-based discrimination and violence was integral to the reforms. In a ground-breaking move towards correcting the historical marginalization of women in elective positions, the 2010 Constitution introduced a gender quota. Nevertheless, only 23 women were elected to the 290-member National Assembly in 2017, all through singer-member constituencies. In 2022, this number increased to 30.

The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission's gender and social inclusion policy is clear on the institutionalized inclusion of women and marginalized groups in all internal affairs of the Commission. However, implementation of the policy is being carried out progressively and with some difficulties. The 2022 elections were

Box 9.1. **Comparative experiences of gender sensitivity and inclusion in protecting elections (cont.)**

conducted with the same deficiencies identified in 2017, notably campaign finance regulation that disadvantaged marginalized groups such as women, youth and people with disabilities. Moreover, considering the high risk of election-related sexual and gender-based violence—faced especially by women candidates—a gender-sensitive approach in the risk-management framework is notably lacking.

**Poland: The role of gender in democratic backsliding and recovery** (see Vashchanka 2025)

It is widely perceived that during the period between 2018 and 2025, Poland went through a process of democratic backsliding and recovery. Importantly, gender featured prominently in both phases. The restriction of gender equality and civic space was a clear feature of a broader authoritarian turn, with feminist and gender-equality organizations facing delegitimization and pressure. Yet, these same actors were central in organizing mass protests and mobilizing younger voters, linking rights-based struggles with democratic participation. Beyond the traditional election watchdogs, their activism broadened the scope of civic engagement and contributed to safeguarding electoral integrity.

**Sri Lanka: A multilayered effort to boost and protect women's participation and representation** (see Ranatunga 2025)

Despite the distinction of Sri Lanka having had the world's first woman prime minister and woman president, a broader women's representation remains a challenge. With the help of international organizations such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the Electoral Commission of Sri Lanka has undertaken several initiatives since 2015 to boost the representation of women and other marginalized groups in electoral politics and within its own ranks. A 25-per-cent quota of women candidates—implemented at the local level in 2018—led to a dramatic increase in the number of women elected (from 89 to 2,300). It remains to be seen whether this will be sustained in the long term, and whether numerical representation can lead to substantive gains in gender equality.

The fact that Sri Lankan politics and elections have historically been characterized by heightened violence has been proposed as one reason for women's low participation. During both the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2024, observers cited increased instances of online gender-based harassment of women candidates, indicating a vulnerability that requires redress. The voting rights of internally displaced persons also need addressing, nearly 17 years after the end of civil war in 2009.

**South Africa: Gender sensitivity as political and electoral management culture** (see Matatu 2023)

After the 2019 general elections, South Africa was ranked 16th in the global rankings of women in national parliaments, with 179 women (45.3 per cent) in the National Assembly. The high ranking is partly because some political parties instituted voluntary gender quotas for national, provincial and local government candidate lists. For example, the African National Congress, which obtained the largest share of the vote in 2019, applies a voluntary 50/50 quota policy, as well as a candidate placement strategy, ensuring that men and women are given equal chances of being elected.

Nevertheless, while significant strides have been made in improving the representativeness of elected leaders, this has yet to translate into improved social and economic positions for women. As levels of gender-based violence remain high, the Electoral Commission of South Africa is making numerous efforts to ensure that gender sensitivity is integrated into risk-management processes and culture.

**Box 9.1. Comparative experiences of gender sensitivity and inclusion in protecting elections (cont.)**

**Sweden: No room for complacency—gender mainstreaming and collaboration to protect women in elections** (see Bay 2025)

The Swedish legal framework strongly emphasizes the protection of political rights and the promotion of inclusive participation. While there are no legislated quotas for gender or minority representation, many political parties have voluntarily adopted measures to enhance diversity among candidates and elected officials. This commitment has contributed to a high degree of gender balance in political bodies—for instance, in 2022 women were elected to 45.8 per cent of seats in the national parliament.

Nevertheless, the Swedish Agency for Psychological Defence finds that gender-based information influences activities such as disinformation, disproportionately affecting women and heightening the risk of self-censorship and reduced participation of women in public spheres. At the same time, the incident-reporting mechanisms developed for the 2022 and 2024 elections have not included specific questions about gender, nor have the reports on lessons learned from recent elections addressed gender specifically.

Assessments of the Swedish Gender Mainstreaming in Government Agencies programme have shown that successful gender-mainstreaming efforts in Sweden require (a) engagement from the leadership and (b) legitimacy within a given organization. As for election protection, evaluations have also shown that inter-agency collaboration can play a crucial role in amplifying the impact of gender-mainstreaming initiatives. Encouraging cooperation between agencies has contributed to addressing sector-specific challenges in gender equality.

**Ukraine: A push for gender equality through enactment of a new Electoral Code** (see Anguelova forthcoming 2025)

The equal rights of men and women, including in public and political life, are guaranteed by the Constitution of Ukraine. Subsequent legislation, such as the Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men (2005) and the Law on the Principles of Prevention and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine (2012), has had broad effects. Since 2014, political parties have been required to include statutory quotas, ensuring at least 30 per cent representation of both men and women on party lists for parliamentary elections. In 2015, a revised version of the Law on Local Elections introduced a similar requirement at the local level, mandating that 'the representation of individuals of the same sex in electoral lists of candidates for local council deputies in multi-member constituencies shall be at least 30 per cent of the total number of candidates'. This marked a major step towards gender parity at the community level.

Nevertheless, these provisions initially lacked enforceability. Therefore, political parties often ignored the quotas, and Territorial Election Commissions accepted and registered local lists regardless of their (non-)compliance. The Central Election Commission and the courts did not systematically challenge non-compliance, weakening the intended effect of the legislation.

In early 2020, a significant shift occurred with the enactment of a new Electoral Code. The Code raised the gender quota to 40 per cent and made it legally binding, requiring electoral commissions to reject non-compliant party lists. It also introduced a placement rule: at least two out of every five candidates on party lists had to be of the same gender. Despite implementation inconsistencies, women's representation improved significantly in the 2020 local elections. Women made up 44.2 per cent of all candidates, up from 35.0 per cent in 2015. They accounted for 36.0 per cent of elected local officials overall, a striking increase from just 4.7 per cent in 2015. On regional councils, women held 28.4 per cent of seats, while in localities with fewer than 10,000 voters, they made up 41.7 per cent of councillors. Nonetheless, disparities persisted at the executive level: only 16.8 per cent of mayoral and community-head positions were won by women, and just 9.3 per cent of cities had female mayors.

## 10. **OTHER WAYS TO USE THE FRAMEWORK**

Regardless of whether robust efforts and systems to protect electoral integrity exist already, or small-scale efforts are considered, elements of the Framework can be used selectively or progressively to (a) strengthen knowledge; (b) strengthen capacity (skills and culture); (c) improve situational awareness (assessment and analysis); (d) improve management processes; and (e) promote and improve gender sensitivity and inclusivity.

*The Framework as a knowledge resource*. The Framework consolidates and points to numerous knowledge resources developed by practitioners and providers of international and national electoral assistance, including academia and organizations that observe elections. Therefore, the Framework's Resource Portal and this Guide offer original insights that can advance users' comparative knowledge and a general understanding of challenges to electoral integrity, as well as safeguards and options for action. Because the Resource Portal assigns tags to individual resources, users can quickly customize knowledge resources according to their particular interests.

*The Framework as a capacity-development resource*. The Framework offers several streams for developing capacity. First, users with advanced training capacity—such as training centres associated with EMBs and other organizations—may use the Training Curriculum offered by the Framework to build practical knowledge, skills and culture across their organizations. Additionally, they can offer such capacity-development opportunities to other organizations. These may include national stakeholders, such as relevant state agencies, civil society organizations or political actors.

*The Framework as an assessment and analysis resource*. The importance of informed decision making cannot be overstated when it comes to elections. The Framework's Self-Assessment Survey assists user organizations in systematically assessing the importance, scope and quality of their existing safeguards in order to inform their management and capacity development processes. The Resource Portal consolidates many tools for assessment and analysis, and organizations may consider using them to strengthen the quality of their decision-making processes. Such tools exist as publications or in online/electronic form. International IDEA's new Electoral Risk Management Tool (ERM Tool) software fully aligns with the Framework. Therefore, it will be an asset for organizations that aim to integrate a risk and action register with cutting-edge tools for assessment and analysis (geographic information systems, trend analysis, risk heat maps). Also, the Resource Portal is integrated into the ERM Tool.

*The Framework as a resource for improving management processes*. Electoral management lags behind many other sectors in adopting and implementing risk-management, resilience-building and crisis-management methods and processes. The Framework can help foster an understanding of the benefits and programming avenues for increased use of these methods by national electoral stakeholders.

*The Framework as a resource for promoting and improving gender sensitivity*. This Guide and all other Framework resources are developed in a way that integrates and promotes gender sensitivity. Gender-based discrimination and violence are highlighted as critical challenges to electoral integrity; gender sensitivity is entrenched in assessments, learning and capacity-development efforts. Therefore, the Framework can be a resource for promoting gender sensitivity in advancing electoral integrity, and a resource for those who know little about the concept but wish to learn more or put it into practice.

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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.

## 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.

## 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.

## OUR PUBLICATIONS AND DATABASES

We have a catalogue with more than 1,000 publications and over 25 databases on our website. Most of our publications can be downloaded free of charge.

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This Guide presents the Integrated Framework for Protecting Elections, a practical tool designed to help electoral practitioners, policymakers and democracy support actors safeguard the integrity of elections. It introduces the Framework's concepts and resources, offering guidance on how to apply them to strengthen electoral systems and prevent integrity risks. By integrating risk-management, resilience-building and crisis-management processes, the Framework provides a comprehensive approach for anticipating, mitigating and responding to threats that can compromise democratic elections.

Grounded in decades of research and practice, and informed by International IDEA's global expertise, this publication equips readers with methods and tools for assessing vulnerabilities, designing effective interventions and promoting inclusive, credible electoral processes. It encourages collaboration among institutions and stakeholders to build sustainable, gender-sensitive and context-appropriate responses to evolving electoral challenges. Ultimately, the Guide aims to foster greater confidence in elections as the foundation of democratic governance.