

## Transliteration - Therese Pearce-Laanela – Electoral Integrity and Costs

00:00

Erik: Hello and welcome to International IDEA's session on budgeting and financing of elections. My name is Erik Asplund, working as a programme officer here at International IDEA, and with me today I have Therese Pearce-Laanela, the head of Electoral Processes unit.

00:21

Q (Erik): Therese, how can one measure the integrity or quality of elections?

00:28

A (Therese): At its very simplest, it is the trust of the people and the political actors. This trust is manifested in the form of accepted results and an orderly transition of power, following a well-run election. That would be approximately how you would measure quality. Of course, in that picture, the verdict of expert witnesses plays in and that might be the media that people listen to, journalists and so forth. It could be observer groups or senior diplomats, for example, who weigh in. It could be things that are said on social media that play in to how people perceive those elections or perhaps specialized academics. There are people whose specialized knowledge weighs into that. Unfortunately, the clean links between a well-run election and an accepted result is not always so simple or so straightforward. That can be thwarted by misunderstandings about what has happened or how rumors about mistakes that have happened play out or are understood. There are also, maybe, people in whose interest it is to discredit the elections. So, sometimes the link between *well-run elections* and *accepted elections* is not so straightforward.

01:58

Q (Erik): Thank you. Now, why is trust so important for an electoral management body?

02:05

A (Therese): I mentioned the word trust because somehow that is the fundamental. The one outcome that you want when organizing an election is accepted results. Accepted has two parts: one part is a correct result, an accurate result, that reflects the will of the people as expressed in the ballot boxes; but it also means a trusted result, so that these political stakeholders, the political actors and the voters accept that that result is the correct one. And so, trust is somehow essential, it is foundational to running elections; but it also makes elections much easier to run because all transactions are made easier when there is trust between different people, different parties and so forth.

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Q (Erik): How does an election management body gain the trust of the people?

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A (Therese): There are a number of ways and there is no simple strategy, but the most basic one is of course delivery over time. So an election management body who can consistently deliver election that people can see is well run, will be more trusted to do so in the future. It also has to do with behaviors. When people meet with an authority, they expect to see respect, some kind of procedural justice and they expect to see fairness in

the way they are treated. So the way that election management body staff behave in the frontlines during registration, during candidate registration; that has a big impact on peoples' trust in addition to delivery. Finally, another aspect that is important to take into consideration, is *pathways of redress*. I guess we might say, is that if something goes wrong or if some person feels that the process has been unfair, there needs to be pathways to take care of that distress. So pathways that create certainty are helpful to building trust as well.

04:17

Q (Erik): On that note, is trust expensive? What do you think?

04:21

A (Therese): Funnily enough, and this is well known in the business community, it is in fact distrust that is expensive. When you do not have trust in society, when you have distrust in society, it makes transactions more expensive because you have to have a third-party guarantee for anything that happens. It makes transactions more complicated. A process that is not trusted requires many additional security mechanisms. This could be perhaps very high-quality ballot papers that can be very expensive to procure, or armored cars to transport ballot papers and so forth. So, in high-trust societies, some of those things are not needed in the same ways as they are in low-trust election environments.

05:18

Q (Erik): Thank you, Therese. Now, many electoral management bodies are legitimately under-resourced. What advice would you be able to give an election management body to obtain more funds or to better use the resources that they already have?

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A (Therese): This is hard, and this is something we are discussing in a number of our regional offices right now, with many stakeholders. Interestingly, this is the case in all types of countries. Even the most well-developed democracies have an extraordinary pressure on public agencies to cut costs at a regular basis and they have difficulties justifying their budgets each time they put them forward; but this is a particularly difficult issue for countries that are transitioning from a high level of electoral assistance to running their elections with governmental funding. So this is an issue that faces many. It is a hard one, but one thing that we are learning is that step one is a conversation. If we think about societies, if we think about elections as a societal endeavor, rather than as an event, then the conversation is a societal conversation about the type of electoral democracy that we want to see.

Who do we want to be involved in that electoral democracy? What does this representation look like in our country? Who is represented and how do we bring in the most marginalized? Now, that kind of a conversation can lead to a reframing of the idea of cost of elections to being in fact an investment in an electoral democracy or an investment in the society that we would like to see. There are of course some kind of tried and true tips for keeping costs reasonable, and that is in general taking advantage of the normal means of transportation, communication, recruitment that are normally used. So that is not importing something that is different in particular for an election, because that drives costs up; so using the normal means of communication. Also another possible tip is inter-agency coordination. Because elections only happen on an

irregular basis, taking advantage of resources that exist within other agencies, whether it is taking advantage of teachers and schools, or whether it is taking advantage of an authority that has a fleet of cars; this kind of inter-agency cooperation can be helpful to spread the burden. If we take the example of cyber-security right now, that is an area in which inter-agency cooperation helps spread both knowledge, risks and also costs.

08:24

Erik: Thank you very much, Therese, and thank you very much for watching.

08:27

Therese: Thank you so much. Really, a more interesting topic than we might imagine.

*This transcript has been lightly edited to enhance readability and clarity without changing the sense of the points made by the discussants.*

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