FIRST INTERAMERICAN ELECTORAL TRAINING SEMINAR
November 17 – 21, 2008
Mexico City

WORKING DOCUMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The primary goal of the First Inter-American Electoral Training Seminar is to promote the improvement of the organization and administration of electoral processes and systems throughout the hemisphere. The Training Seminar is an initiative led by the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (GS/OAS) in collaboration with the Mexican Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the Latin American School of Social Sciences (FLACSO).

- The training seminar is focused on strengthening the credibility of electoral organisms through emphasis on three themes: (a) the need to improve electoral registries, (b) the need to support public financing of political parties and electoral campaigns, and (c) the need to strengthen electoral participation through civic education campaigns and poll worker training.

- The seminar's methodology consists of two areas: (a) it offers an academic and technical training facilitated by professors and experts in the field, and (b) it strengthens discussion and horizontal cooperation among electoral authorities with extensive experience in these specific areas.

- In order to generate practical improvements by way of the seminar, each scholarship participant should formulate a concrete initiative, based on the three principal themes of the training seminar, that will contribute to the improvement of a specific practice or incorporate some innovation in the institutional practices within their area of responsibility.

- The seminar will require active engagement on the part of the participants, who will answer a questionnaire about their experience before arriving at the seminar, and will formulate a proposal relating to the initiative mentioned above. During the course participants will refine their proposals and afterwards they will engage in follow up activities regarding its implementation. In addition, participants will be included in various dynamic group activities during the seminar, and some individuals will be asked to prepare a small presentation about the experience of their country in one of the three main thematic areas to serve as the basis for group discussions.

- To support the achievement of future application of the training seminar objectives, the seminar will be followed up on in three ways: (a) the dissemination of the seminar's materials and presentations, (b) follow up on the projects developed by the electoral authorities, and (c) course evaluation to diagnose the best ways to improve electoral authorities capacity in the medium-term.

INTRODUCTION

The First Inter-American Electoral Training Seminar seeks to promote the improvement of the organization and administration of the hemisphere's electoral processes and systems. The Training Seminar will be a high-level academic and technical course designed to train staff of the region's electoral institutions, as well as to foster horizontal knowledge transfer among them. In addition to providing instruction on a general curriculum regarding key electoral issues, the course will expand on three areas, or modules, including: 1) the improvement of voter registration lists, 2) political party and electoral campaign financing, and 3) strengthening electoral participation through the design of civic education programs and poll worker training.[1]

This First Training Seminar will be organized by the GS/OAS' Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) in collaboration with the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico (IFE), the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), and the Latin American School of Social Sciences (FLACSO). The seminar will incorporate professors, experts, and facilitators in the three main areas described above, along with methodologies and/or tools that the participants can put into practice in their countries. Additionally, the course will be a participatory training that uses the experiences and knowledge of the participants themselves in the form of case studies.

This first exercise will include 39 representatives of the electoral authorities from the OAS's 34 member states. These participants will be senior level employees within the electoral authorities, with at least five years experience in the electoral area, or with a specialization in one of the three thematic areas. In order to make the seminar the beginning of a process of continual professionalization, each scholarship participant will formulate a concrete initiative that will contribute to the improvement of a practice or that will incorporate some kind of innovation in the institutional practices within their area of responsibility that is linked to one of the three thematic areas of emphasis. To this end, the participants will formulate a preliminary proposal prior to their arrival in Mexico to participate in the seminar, and they will commit to turning in their definitive proposal at the end of the training, and to send the GS/OAS at least one follow-up report within six months after the conclusion of the training seminar.

BACKGROUND

It is possible to identify two basic periods of international technical support for the region's electoral authorities. The first period came at the time of the democratic transitions of the 1980's and 90's, and allowed for the establishment of electoral authorities as the institutions responsible for organizing and administrating elections. International assistance for democracy promotion invested in strengthening these entities as electoral organisms with basic necessary infrastructure. The main challenge that these institutions faced at the time was a lack of experience and knowledge in the organization of electoral processes. Thus international institutions provided technical assistance to various countries' electoral institutions to establish the basic infrastructure to organize elections.

---

[1] These issues were validated with the electoral authorities participating in the Fifth Inter-American Meeting of Electoral Authorities, held in Quito, Ecuador from April 23-24, 2008.

The second period, which is currently in progress, is characterized by a focus on the professionalization of the work carried out by these organizations. In recent years, electoral institutions have made a series of key advances. The consultation process and analysis undertaken to produce the publication, "The 2005-2006 Electoral Cycle in the Americas: A Review by the OAS General Secretariat", recognized that there has been a significant advance in the organization and management of electoral processes, and that there are positive tendencies with respect to the inclusiveness, cleanliness, freedom, and periodicity of elections, as well as the transfer of power. However, there are still issues that need to be addressed. One of the four areas identified by the GS/OAS as a priority to improve electoral systems has been the role of electoral authorities in the organization and administration of an electoral process.[2]

According to evidence from the electoral observation missions (EOMs) carried out by the GS/OAS between 2005-2007, as well as so far in 2008, the hemisphere's electoral authorities currently face the significant challenge of ensuring that all interested parties (including voters, political parties, etc) trust in the electoral process and perceive electoral institutions as credible. The level of confidence that citizens and political parties have in the actions of electoral institutions and in their management of electoral processes is critical, not only for the success of the electoral process itself, but also for the credibility of the government that ends up being elected into office. In the 2007 Latinobarometro survey, only 38% of citizens indicated that they had "a lot" or "some" trust in electoral tribunals.[3]

The best defense against criticism directed towards an electoral institution is for such entity to be highly professionalized, transparent, and impartial in carrying out its functions. Evidence gathered by the GS/OAS through its analysis and observations shows that there is at least a correlation between an electoral authority's level of professionalization and its credibility among the electorate and political parties. If an electoral authority's quality, precision, integrity and professionalism in organizing electoral processes increases, the probability that electoral processes will be perceived as credible also increases.

In order to contribute to the strengthening of electoral authorities' work, the GS/OAS has established the Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO), which is in charge of supporting electoral systems and institutions throughout the region. Through its operational sections, DECO seeks to collaborate with electoral authorities to strengthen their administrative, technical, legal, and institutional capacities, as well as to identify and disseminate information about good practices.

One of the activities that the department hopes to consolidate is carrying out annual Inter-American Electoral Training Seminars, which will be a process composed of academic and technical exercises that support the professionalization of electoral authorities throughout the region and boost horizontal cooperation. Consequently, the area that the training seminar seeks

---

[2] The other three factors include: (1) the state of electoral registries in the region and the identification of some areas that should urgently be addressed; (2) the status in the implementation of new technologies in the region and their application in some of the electoral processes between 2005 and 2006; and (3) conditions in the financing of political activities and the equal access to the media by all participants of an electoral race.
[3] Latinobarómetro Report 2007, p. 92.

to address is the continuous professionalization of the electoral authority, or in other words, the continuous strengthening of electoral institutions' staff and members' abilities, as reflected in better performance in the organization of elections.

Within the framework of this broad challenge, as well as taking into account the areas identified by the electoral authorities during the Fifth Inter-American Meeting of Electoral Authorities, held in Quito, Ecuador from April 22-24, 2008, the training seminar focuses on three issues identified as central to the organization of electoral processes, including: (a) the need to improve electoral registries, (b) the need to foster public financing of political parties and electoral campaigns, and (c) the need to strengthen electoral participation through civico-electoral education campaigns and poll worker training. The electoral authorities themselves claimed to have deficiencies in these areas, and expressed their desire to increase their levels of professionalization.

As mentioned above, the First Inter-American Electoral Training Seminar is an initiative led by the GS/OAS in collaboration with the Mexican Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the Latin American School of Social Sciences (FLACSO), in order to take advantage of their varied experience to facilitate the organization and execution of this initiative. Each of these organizations contributes an academic and technical area of expertise, along with important international experience. The Mexican Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) is a permanent, public autonomous organism, independent in its decisions and functions, and responsible for organizing federal elections in Mexico. It was created in October, 1990 by a constitutional mandate, and its functions are guided by five fundamental principles: certainty, legality, independence, impartiality, and objectivity. Since its formation in 1993, IFE's Coordination for International Issues has actively promoted technical electoral cooperation at the international level. Through different agreements and accords with diverse international organizations or electoral authorities from other nations, it has: participated in technical assistance and electoral observation missions in over 15 countries throughout the American continent; carried out diverse events to promote democracy and electoral training, including through publications. Particularly relevant for this project is the fact that IFE has taken advantage of its agreements and accords for international technical cooperation to carry out a large number of conferences, seminars, forums, courses and workshops, utilizing interdisciplinary and comparative electoral analysis perspectives that have facilitated horizontal cooperation between different interested groups at the international level.

For its part, in 2007, FLACSO celebrated 50 years of contributing to equality, social inclusion, democracy, and international cooperation between Latin American and Caribbean countries through the social sciences. Since its creation on April 16, 1957 in Santiago, Chile, by a UNESCO initiative – based on the recommendations from the First Regional Conference about South American University Education in Social Sciences which took place in Rio de Janeiro in March, 1956 – FLACSO has been dedicated to research, teaching, scientific dissemination and technical cooperation throughout the region. Since 1975, FLACSO adopted a decentralized system and as a result created new head offices throughout the continent. Currently, the FLACSO System is comprised of Academic Head Offices in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and of Programs in Cuba, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic. The General Secretariat is located in San Jose, Costa Rica. FLACSO contributes

academic and methodological weight to the training seminar; it has broad experience in linking teaching with research within a broad plurality of theoretic and methodological perspectives.

Finally, founded in 1995, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization, with 25 member states, that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. Its objective is to strengthen democratic institutions and processes. For its part, International IDEA offers strengths in the areas of knowledge resources, in the form of expert networks, databases, handbooks and websites; policy proposals to provoke debate and action on democracy; and assistance with democratic reform in response to specific national requests. It works together with policy makers, donor governments, UN organizations and agencies, regional organizations and others engaged in democracy building. Areas of expertise include: electoral processes, political representation processes, constitution-building processes, democracy and gender, democracy and security and democracy assessments. International IDEA works worldwide. Based in Stockholm, Sweden, it also has offices in New York and Brussels, Africa, Asia-Pacific and an extensive regional programme in Latin America.

METHODOLOGY

General Overview
The course methodology is built around its dual function to provide an academic and technical training by professors and experts in the field while at the same time fostering horizontal cooperation among electoral authorities. Additionally, recognizing that electoral processes are located within broader democratic challenges, the course will be developed in a manner which offers technical tools within their academic and political contexts.

The training seminar's methodology is designed to allow participants to tackle the three main thematic areas from their contextual perspective in order to collect the greatest amount of information from the presenters, case studies, and experience of their colleagues. From a perspective of adult education, the training seminar is based on the idea that participants will deal with issues relevant to their work; that they will be able to practically utilize the content of presentations and that, in areas that have become routine, they will be able to rethink processes that are considered as given so that they can discover the best ways to improve practice and procedures.

Organization of the training seminar's working sessions
Regarding the structure of the work of the training seminar, the three macro themes will be introduced in the form of plenary sessions during the mornings, followed by an open discussion to address participant's questions. During these sessions, each of the three themes will be situated within an academic and theoretical context that is linked to its content: the integrity of the electoral process, the quality of democracy, and the participation and legitimacy of democracy.

Afterwards, the seminar will hold discussion panels where invited presenters will be able to expand upon and/or operationalize the theme of the day. These panels will be composed of a combination of professors, experts, practitioners, and international cooperation representatives in order to discuss the sub-themes that have been identified as priorities for the training seminar.

These sessions will be followed by an analysis of case studies in the particular theme, where participants will have the opportunity to listen to real cases of (successful and/or failed) solutions to problems that were brought up during the preceding macro level sessions. These cases will be shared through participant presentations, which will be selected based on a questionnaire filled out by participants prior to arriving at the course. The presentations will be divided into working groups in order to present issues relevant to national experiences or the participants' particular interests.

Finally, the working groups will permit participants to indentify the most significant characteristics of the particular theme in respect to their national context. This methodology is designed so that each participant can look at contrasts with colleagues that will permit them to identify gaps within that which is considered acceptable and / or optimal within their national context, in light of the diversity of regional experiences, the development of their electoral system, and the primary challenges they face. In addition, the practical application of the presented knowledge on the three focal themes will be based on participant proposals to carry out necessary improvements based on their own diagnosis (see below). Participants will have the opportunity to attend and participate in group work for each of the three macro themes, and therefore they should bring to the training seminar information about their national context for each theme.

Adaptation and application of training seminar content to regional experiences
In order to ensure the relevance of this practical application to the national context, participants will be responsible for active participation prior to their arrival at the course. Once chosen by the Selection Committee, each participant will receive a questionnaire on his/her personal experience within the course's focal areas as well as the experience of their institution. This questionnaire will be used to adapt the professors' presentations to the participants' level of experience in these areas and with respect for the challenges faced by each country. These questionnaires will only be shared with course organizers and professors.

In addition, the questionnaire will be used as a basis for the selection of relevant case studies for the working groups, and some participants will be asked to prepare a presentation on their country or institution's experience to guide the group discussion and to promote the horizontal transfer of knowledge. To this effect, the training seminar counterpart organizations will select some representative national experiences and will provide the representatives of these countries or organisms with terms of reference to facilitate the preparation of this presentation.

The purpose of the second preparatory component is to assist each participant to formulate a concrete action initiative that will contribute to the improvement of some practice or introduction of some innovation in the work within their institutional responsibility. This initiative will be based on the impressions, knowledge and experiences exchanged during the training seminar and will focus on one of the three themes examined in the training seminar.

To this effect, participants will formulate a preliminary proposal before arriving in Mexico to participate in the training seminar. During the course, this proposal will be refined through exchanges with colleagues, the content of the expert presentations, and the group work sessions.

Toward the end of the course, participants will turn in a proposal that will serve as a basis for subsequent work based on the training seminar's content. These projects will also form the basis for follow-up on the part of the GS/OAS at the end of the course, as all participants will have to commit to presenting at least one report about the results and implementation of this project after returning to their country. In this manner, the product of the project, relative to the central themes of the course, will be sustainable component given its extension before and after the course to improve the follow-through and expansion and to promote the exchange of information between participants.

Simulation exercise to unify and apply lessons learned to political realities
As a concluding activity of the training seminar, the seminar will carry out a simulation exercise that permits different groups of participants to confront common problems in each of the areas of the course themes. The idea is that participants can identify problems and develop strategies that will allow them to create and propose a realistic solution (within given contextual limitations). In this exercise, participants should identify actors, resources and minimum necessary conditions to be used in each case to successfully face demands placed by the exercise's conditions.

As a unifying exercise, this final part of the course will bring closure through emphasizing connections between the topics necessary for a credible electoral process. In addition, the exercise will highlight other questions and areas that the training seminar should focus on in future meetings.

Procedural evaluation, presentation of results, and definition of future actions
Finally, the training seminar will introduce a self-evaluation mechanism for participants to identify the most significant gains they obtained in the training seminar. At the same time, they will be able to provide feedback on the most relevant elements of the course and the general categories of strengths and weaknesses within each of the macro course themes. This process will include sharing information that permits the configuration of support networks between participants. After the training seminar participants will receive an inventory of tools, cases, bibliographic materials, and resources that will enable each participant to continue expanding their knowledge within each of the themes. Finally, participants will be given instructions about the follow-up work and will identify those responsible for facilitating future work.

GENERAL CURRICULUM

The general curriculum will unify the three course modules within a general framework of the general challenges for democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean. The training seminar will begin with a plenary session that seeks to connect the participants' roles as staff members of electoral institutions with the performance of representative democracy in their countries. In addition, presentation of the three themes will ensure its academic and political contextualization, and will allow for knowledge exchange within participants' specializations.

The course's counterpart organizations have identified a macro level topic that will be discussed within each session, including: the integrity of the electoral process for the session on improving voter registration lists; the quality of democracy within the area of political party and campaign

financing; and democratic credibility and legitimacy for the session on citizen participation through civic education and poll worker training.

In addition, there are two cross-cutting topics within the three main areas that will be discussed as part of the general curriculum: the inclusion of under-represented groups in electoral processes and the relationship of electoral authorities with civil society groups and political parties.

Regarding the first of these two topics, an important component of the general curriculum is emphasis on the inclusion of two key groups that have been traditionally under-represented in the region's electoral processes: women and indigenous populations. Although this inclusion is relevant to all three course areas, it will be emphasized in the sessions on electoral campaign financing and on civico-electoral education and training. As a result, participants will be provided with expert knowledge on the experience of social inclusion within a democracy in these two specific areas.

With respect to the second cross-cutting academic topic, quality relations between electoral authorities, civil society and political parties are fundamental if electoral authorities are to carry out their work in a transparent manner and to recognize the need for mechanisms for access and dialogue with citizens. Within the conceptual framework for democracy, carrying out the citizens' will in decision-making is not only done directly through the vote, but also through the incorporation of their interests through institutions that intermediate between individuals and the state. Additionally, the criticisms directed at the electoral authorities' credibility have been linked in some cases with perceived exclusion of citizen wishes in decision-making.[4] The relationship between these institutions is particularly relevant to the training seminar with respect to the following issues: civil society and political party access to the voter registration lists; political party and campaign financing systems, where the relationship between the electoral authority and the media is also relevant; and the design of a civic-electoral campaign in coalition with various actors.

IMPROVING VOTER REGISTRATION LISTS

The voter registration list, or voter registration roll, refers to the permanent and definitive record of all citizens that are able to vote. Through a process of updating and purging (exclusion of those who are unable to vote) it becomes a dynamic record of voters that serves as a basis for each electoral process. It is a fundamental tool for the good exercise of democracy, and should include, in a precise and unequivocal form, pertinent information for citizens that are authorized to vote.[5]

There are two primary reasons why it is important to have an updated registration list that reflects the real composition of citizens able to vote: empowerment of the citizenry through suffrage, and the security of the electoral process to avoid the potential for fraud and illegal identification. To fulfill these two key functions that tie the state to its citizens, the electoral

---

[4] As an example, refer to the study "The electoral process from the viewpoint of civil society"/ "El proceso electoral desde la óptica de la sociedad civil," FLACSO Costa Rica, 2006.
[5] GS/OAS. Documento- Plan Operativo para la Auditoria Integral de Registro Electoral.

authority plays an important role as the actor that carries out processes of purging, updating, and modernization of the voter registration list, as well as informing the electorate about the need to update their information.

In Latin America, the voter registration list is a vital instrument that has exhibited great advances, but at the same time many require further improvements given deficiencies in integrity, reliability, security, and accessibility. These weaknesses are due to various causes, including: the inefficiency of manual processes, the deterioration of paper versions of civil registries, the lack of mechanisms for verification and control, high levels of under-registration, poor institutional structures in the voter roll entities, lack of employee training, and the limited use of technology that contributes to their systematization.[6]

Among the deficiencies identified in the analysis published by the GS/OAS, in some of the observed cases the quality of the voters' registration lists were questioned, and calls were made for their updating and modernization (with the use of new registration, auditing, and purging, etc.).[7] These weaknesses not only leave the electoral process open to questioning, but also limit the role of the state in empowering its citizenry to participate in their democracy. In order to improve the capacity of the electoral authority to improve the record's quality and therefore mitigate this type of questioning, this First Training Seminar will focus on the following themes: access for verification, inspection, and observation, purging, and mechanisms for control of the voters registration list.

Access for verification, inspection, and observation of the registration list
A key factor in the formation of a voter registration list that fulfills its central purpose of guaranteeing suffrage and avoiding electoral fraud is the process of verification, inspection, and observation by political parties and civil society. This process implies the need for good coordination between electoral authorities and political parties. In many countries, there is a legal framework that confers upon citizens and political parties the right to verify the information on the voter registration list, and to verify if they are legally eligible to vote. This verification and inspection is generally manifested through the publication of the list in electoral authority offices, on the internet, or through a call center.

Another component of the electoral law tends to be a provision that allows political parties to observe the voters' registration list before it is purged. The electoral authority is obligated to make a declaration regarding each of these observations, pointing out which were appropriate or not and justifying their decision. Together with the possibility for citizens to declare a complaint during inscription or to correct their information on the roll, these access mechanisms form a key part of the control of the list's quality.

Purging the voter registration list
One of the specific preoccupations that arose from the recommendations of various electoral observation missions in the 2005-2006 period was the need to purge the voter's registration list

---

[6] GS/OAS, 2007. Project profile - "Technical Assistance to the Superior Electoral Tribunal of El Salvador 2007-SPA 0710".
[7] (Ciclo 52)

in order to create a more updated and reliable record.[8] The significance of having an updated voter's registration list is focused on two points: the security of the list itself and the affirmation of the vote for those eligible to exercise it. In some countries it is particularly difficult to purge deceased people and the names of emigrants from the voter's registration list. This tends to devalue the real numbers of the voter's roll and overestimate the level of absenteeism. In other cases, the existing legislation does not facilitate the purging of the list, or there are no explicit residency requirements needed to vote. Nevertheless, a purging system is essential for the credibility of the registry in itself, given that audits base the level of reliability on this practice. Because of this, carrying out a purge is central to citizen confidence as much as political party observation.

Quality control mechanisms
Another complex and necessary issue related to the voter's registration list are the mechanisms that guarantee quality control so that citizens who are eligible to vote exercise their rights to suffrage. These mechanisms include processes of citizen verification to update information related to their residence, names, ages, occupations, and deaths. Verifying this data is a process that involves the technology of maintaining the list, bi-directional verification of the quality of the list (from the list to the voter and vice versa), and the public verification of the list by the citizenry and political parties during a process of objections and corrections.

In addition, to ensure the proper formation of a voter registration list, one needs to take into account the need to control the quality of its data sources. In some countries, voter registration and the formation of the list is carried out by the electoral institution itself, while in others, these responsibilities are found in various institutions, for instance within the Civil Registry. This results bin a need for the electoral organism to solicit voter information from these other institutions ahead of the electoral process.[9] Controlling these primary sources of the list depends on the quality control mechanisms of these sources. Nevertheless, if these sources lack good quality controls, the final result can affect the integrity of the electoral process, as the passage of outdated information can result in an inflated electoral registration list and erroneous data.

The technical, statistical, and programmatic processes for these mechanisms vary widely in terms of quality and professionalization within Latin America and the Caribbean, and therefore are critical to the credibility of one of the central functions of the electoral authority. Taken together, these quality control mechanisms influence not only the credibility and integrity of the registration list, but of the electoral process itself.

---

[8] Between 2005 and 2006, in Central America the SG/OAS deployed Electoral Observation Missions to El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In South America, it observed elections in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Perú and Venezuela. In the Caribbean it observed elections in Guyana, the Dominican Republic, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Saint Lucia. Of these, seven were presidential, three parliamentary, seven legislative (five concurrent and two non-concurrent) and four municipal or regional. During this same period two referendums were observed: one in Panama regarding the expansion of the canal and one in Bolivia on regional autonomy. In Bolivia, the SG/OAS also observed the election of members of a Constituent Assembly. The SG/OAS also had a limited presence in the presidential and legislative processes in Costa Rica and Mexico.
[9] (Ciclo 52)

Based on the aforementioned, the need to improve voters' registration lists constitutes a priority for the GS/OAS and the countries throughout the hemisphere. Despite advances in this area, many countries need support not only to increase the levels of professionalization of the electoral authorities in this area, but at the same time in bringing them tools to improve the various aspects that have generated doubts about the quality of the list.

POLITICAL PARTY AND ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN FINANCING

The issue of political financing is critical for the member states of the OAS, and this significance is reflected in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The charter states that special attention should be paid to the problems associated with the high costs of electoral campaigns and to the establishment of a balanced and transparent system for the financing of political parties.[10] The effective compliance with political financing laws is important in order to maintain and strengthen confidence in electoral institutions and processes, and also to avoid inequalities in citizen electoral participation.[11]

Before expanding on the topic of political financing, it is important to stress its significance and relevance to the quality of democracy. Within a democratic system, citizens participate in decision-making via the collection and representation of their interests by interlocutory institutions. This is a fundamental role for a strong political party system, as the space where ideological platforms are concentrated. Additionally, the strength of the debate of ideas and policies through a strong party system can assist in avoiding unilateral decision-making by the executive branch within a so-called "delegative democracy," which is characterized by a strong executive that rules without consulting the institutional checks and balances.[12] Consequently, measures that focus on strengthening the role of political parties to adequately represent citizen interests have become a priority for strengthening the quality of democracy throughout the hemisphere.

To ensure that an election is competitive and guarantees equal conditions for candidates, a basic premise is to guarantee equity through political financing, or in other words, that there is equality in the conditions to enter into the electoral game. In recent years, the regulation of political party financing has become a significant challenge as concerns about foreign funding have increased. Such funding can compromise the autonomy of political parties and political authorities once they are in a position to perform their functions. In addition, there is the problem of political financing by narcotrafficking groups or other actors that seek to challenge state control over public security. These types of cases not only affect citizen confidence in the democratic system, its institutions and the electoral process, but they also affect the ability of that system to represent the interests of the citizenry and the possibility for a candidate to be elected in a equitable fashion.

---

[10] Organization of American States, Inter-American Democratic Charter. Article 5.
[11] José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the Organization of American States. Inaugural ceremony of the XXXVII General Assembly of the OAS, Panamá, June 3, 2007.
[12] Guillermo O'Donnell, 1994. "Delegative Democracy?" Journal of Democracy 5, p 55-69.

The First Inter-American Electoral Training Seminar will touch upon three key themes in the area of political financing: key considerations in the development of a financing law, spending controls and compliance, and access and equity in terms of the media and women's participation.

Considerations in the development of a financing law
According to the GS/OAS' analysis of the 2005-2006 electoral cycles, it is vital to guarantee public financing of political activities, with the goal of guaranteeing a certain degree of equal opportunities for all candidates. At the same time, legislation should ensure the transparency of private funding sources and uses. Within the hemisphere, there are various levels of political party financing, with some countries recently beginning to think about and debate the establishment of a financing system and others that have been implementing such a system for decades.

Among the key considerations for the development of a law is the need to learn from various models and experiences of political finance compliance. Some models have broad coverage that includes obligations for disclosure, spending controls, public financing and citizen access to information, while other models are lax or nonexistent. In regards to Latin America and the Caribbean, a 2003 USAID study claimed that in these two regions less information is required about party and candidate financing than in the majority of other regions throughout the world.[13]

Regarding political financing legislation, a 2005 study carried out by the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico in collaboration with the GS/OAS explains that within the debate about new legislation or reform processes, there are several primary criteria that need to be considered. Specifically, these are: direct public financing; indirect public financing via free access to electronic media or special tax incentives and exemptions; regulations on the origin and levels of financial donations; overall limits on campaign spending; limits on hiring publicists; and auditing systems for public financing.[14] It is important to point out that there is no formula for the best combination of these factors, generating both challenges and dilemmas for the regulation of and reforms to existing financing regimes.

Within the region, there are different visions, mechanisms, and methods for state support to political parties. For example, one of the themes of debate is the value of having permanent public financing for regular party activities in addition to an allocation for campaign expenses. Currently, public resources are used to finance both regular and campaign activities in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, and Paraguay. With the exception of Bolivia, political parties in these countries have access to public financing based solely on their legal recognition as a party.[15] In the Bolivian case, a percentage of the vote is required as a prerequisite for access to public finances.[16] Nevertheless, in those states that have

---

[13] United States Agency for International Development. Manual de Financiamiento de la actividad política: Una guía para fomentar la transparencia en las democracias emergentes. November, 2003, p. 37.
[14] Carlos Navarro Fierro, 2005. Regimenes de financiamiento y fiscalización y garantías de equidad en la contienda electoral, Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico and the Organization of American States.
[15] Dr. Leonardo Valdés Zurita, "El Fortalecimiento de la Confianza Ciudadana en los Procesos Electorales: la Función de las Autoridades Electorales en el Financiamiento Político y la Participación Electoral" Presentation at the Fifth Inter-American Meeting of Electoral Authorities, April 23, 2008.
[16] Carlos Navarro Fierro, 2005. Regimenes de financiamiento y fiscalización y garantías de equidad en la contienda electoral, Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico and the Organization of American States, p. 35.

methods of payment for public financing in the aforementioned areas, the characteristics of those payment criteria also vary, not least in terms of how to carry out effective financial accounting for the resources provided by the government.

Spending controls and compliance
Even when a financing law exists, the norms, procedures, and instruments for political financing auditing and control are only able to strengthen the confidence of voters and political actors (parties, candidates) in the political process when they are properly implemented. For this reason, both countries with an advanced system and those that are just initiating the debate share the challenge of developing and implementing effective compliance mechanisms.

In order to comply with national legislation, it is vital to strengthen electoral organs, along with their human, financial, and technical resources, which at times are scarce. Additionally, another determining element for effective compliance is the political will necessary to require transparency for political entity and candidate spending. Electoral authorities should possess the necessary capacity to carry out actions that permit the citizenry to obtain complete information about the use of campaign resources, as well as those used during non-electoral periods. If recent trends continue, campaign costs will rise significantly in the future, and the constant regulation of the application of financing legislation will therefore become a fundamental tool to assure voters that electoral processes are fair and transparent.

Access and equality in financing regimes: media and gender perspectives
One important issue to stress in the area of access and equality of political financing is the question of the impact of media on electoral spending.[17] According to the GS/OAS' analysis, equal access to mass media is a challenge within the region, given that not all countries assure candidates free and equal time. Because of this, access to information and the provision of public knowledge of politics depends on available public resources in many countries. This has generated a debate regarding the role of the media in elections. According to the analysis, it is important to recognize that mass media are not necessarily neutral actors, and thus there is a challenge to ensure that all candidacies are represented.[18]

Both analysts and political leaders agree that the centrality of the mass media in electoral campaigns throughout the Americas has significantly contributed to the high costs of campaigns. Some studies estimate that television, radio and surveys account for between 60% and 80% of total political campaign costs. In Latin America, 15 out of 17 countries studied have implemented some form of media regulation, with the goals of such regulation being to reduce costs, obtain greater transparency in the electoral process, and promote greater equality in the political arena.[19] Nevertheless, the debate on access and use of the media for electoral ends continues, particularly given that there is no legislative panacea that guarantees equal access to the media and their transparent financing.

---

[17] Organization of American States. El ciclo electoral 2005 – 2006 en las Américas: Un balance de la Secretaría General de la OEA. 2007, p.50.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid, p. 55.

Finally, another challenge in the area of equality in political financing is that of the inclusion of a gendered perspective. This is an important issue to consider, as evidence shows that the absence of such a dimension in financing systems negatively affects women. This is due to the fact that the domestic workload and the need to take care of the household and dependents continues to impede women's participation in public and political life on a par with men, and therefore they require additional support.[20] In the Caribbean, women face more obstacles than men in terms of their participation in political life, and one of these obstacles is specifically a lack of access to financing.[21]

The inclusion of women in political parties and systems is not only a question of justice, but it is also of marked interest for the parties and political system in themselves, given that gender equality is related to the legitimacy of politics and above all in terms to its representative foundations. If political parties and systems continue in the future to impede female participation, the impact could be an increase in political illegitimacy.[22]

In conclusion, political financing is an area that presents important challenges throughout the region, and there is still much to be done to guarantee equity in electoral and democratic processes. By strengthening their capacity to contribute to debates about the form of financing systems and compliance with these systems, electoral institutions have a key opportunity to directly affect the quality and functioning of their country's democracy.

PROMOTING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: CIVIC EDUCATION AND POLLWORKER TRAINING

Recently, academic literature has begun to recognize that citizen participation in the discussions and decisions that affect their lives, through political liberties and dialogue with the state, are relevant factors in the strength of both the country's democracy and socio-economic development.[23] One of the primary tools for this type of participation is their vote, and therefore, electoral participation is critical for the country.

This conceptualization of the necessity of citizen participation is tied to the recognition that citizens not only enjoy the right to vote, but they also have a responsibility to participate politically. In the Latin American and Caribbean context, several countries have laws that require electoral participation via an obligatory vote, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay,[24] while others require citizen participation as poll workers. The quality of this second form of

---

[20] Griner, Steven y Daniel Zovatto, Ed. De las Normas a las Buenas Prácticas: El Desafío del Financiamiento Político en América Latina. San Jose, Costa Rica: Organization of American States and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), 2004, p. 144.

[21] Griner, Steven y Daniel Zovatto, Ed. From the Grassroots to the Airwaves: Paying for Political Parties and Campaigns in the Caribbean, Guatemala: Organization of American States and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), 2005, p. 70.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Sen, Amartya, 1999. Development as Freedom, Random House; United Nations Development Programme, 2004, La Democracia en América Latina.

[24] ACE Project Network: http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/705390376

participation gives the citizenry an intimate view of the work of the electoral authority, as it serves to train them in their role as a poll worker.

These requirements present both an opportunity and a challenge for the electoral authority, testing the credibility and legitimacy of the institution as well as its role as the organizer of the electoral process. Strategies to increase electoral participation in this regard are focused in two areas: to increase both the level and quality of electoral participation. In the First Inter-American Electoral Training Seminar, these two themes will be addressed from the perspective of the role the electoral authority plays.

Increasing electoral participation levels
During recent decades, and due to causes that vary depending on the context, electoral participation has diminished throughout the world, [25] and the Americas have not been exempt from this phenomenon.[26] Yet while overall levels of participation have diminished, a positive element is that approximately 50% of the population tends to participate in elections.[27]

Nevertheless, these statistics are not encouraging in a period in which the majority of impediments to participation by historically excluded groups have been eliminated (both for voters and for candidates). During the first half of the 20th century, in some countries suffrage was restricted based on criteria of class and gender. Later in the century, in the forties and sixties, for national political reasons, parties with specific ideologies were banned, and in the eighties regions such as Central America imposed voting restrictions as a result of the lack of state capacity to assure the safety of candidates and voters. Today, all of these obstacles to participation have been overcome, and there is a trend to introduce legal norms that aim to create greater opportunities for citizen inclusion. This is the case, for example, in the majority of Latin American countries that have passed laws that establish quotas for female representation on parliamentary candidate lists.[28]

In this sense, throughout almost the entire region, an increase in electoral participation has been perceived as one of the most visible faces of the democratic construction process.[29] As a result, the sustained implementation of initiatives that stimulate electoral participation contribute to the underpinning of electoral institutions as organs dedicated to the values and principles of the democratic system, providing citizens equality in the access to decision-making spaces.

The literature stresses several variables as particularly influential regarding the level of electoral participation, but two are particularly relevant to this context: the existence of compulsory voting

---

[25] It is worth mentioning that this project does not attempt to make a comparative analysis of electoral participation levels in the various countries throughout the hemisphere, rather to provide the electoral authorities with general tools on how to incentivize citizen participation in electoral processes.

[26] International IDEA, 2006. Engaging the Electorate: Initiatives to promote voter turnout from around the world, p. 20.

[27] As evidence of this, for example, the OAS observed the following electoral participation levels in the 2005-6 electoral cycle: Bolivia (84.5%); Colombia (45.3%); Costa Rica (65.2%); Ecuador – 1st round (59.5%); Ecuador – 2nd round (76.0%); El Salvador (41.4%); Guyana (68.3%); Nicaragua – Presidential (61.2%); Panamá (43.3%) Perú – 1st round (88.7%); Perú – 2nd round (87.7%); Perú – Regional (87.4%); República Dominicana (56.5%); Santa Lucia (58.5%); Venezuela (74.7%).

[28] United Nations Development Programme, 2004. Democracy in Latin America, p. 91-92.

[29] Ídem, p. 151.

laws and effective sanctions for their application, and citizen perception of the cleanliness of the electoral process. In respect to these two variables, the electoral authority and its actions are determinant factors.

To counter the decline in electoral participation through the improvement of citizen perceptions of the cleanliness of the process, different strategies have been developed to involve citizens in civico-electoral education campaigns. Under the general framework of civico-electoral campaigns fall three types of activities: voter information campaigns about electoral logistics; voter education that seeks to increase citizen recognition of the value of their right to vote and to boost their participation; and long-term general civic education about concepts of democracy, rights, participation, and representation.[30]

These three levels of civico-electoral campaigns involve different actors and have different goals, but voter education is the most pertinent to the medium-term goal of increased participation. Electoral authorities, as guarantors and executors of the electoral process, are called upon to implement strategies to promote participation through this medium-term process. In addition, civil society should be promoting campaigns on this type of information, which makes good coordination between the electoral authority, civil society, and the media important in order to minimize duplication and maintain consistent information.[31]

Within the category of voter education, one can further classify the various strategies to boost participation: a) information campaigns about the voter registry, the type of election, and the election process itself; b) publicity campaigns that are focused on motivating the voter to go to the polls; c) involvement of grassroots groups to inform, register, or mobilize voters; d) educational programs that are focused on instructing certain target groups about the democratic system and its processes; and f) vote promotion, offering material compensation as a reward for participation.

Regarding electoral participation, the analysis carried out by the GS/OAS suggests that, among other things, there is a need to design more training programs, and depending on the geographic area, more materials in indigenous languages. In addition, this analysis recognizes that certain groups, such as indigenous and afro-descendent populations, remain under-represented in some areas and decision-making positions, which makes it imperative to attend to national differences and increase ethno-cultural considerations in electoral procedures.[32]

Given this need to target campaigns toward a specific group, an important issue for voter education campaigns that is yet nascent in Latin America and the Caribbean is campaign impact measurement. Carrying out an analysis of the information needed by a specific group, formulating indicators for the campaign goals, and analyzing the resulting impacts on electoral participation would not only help to create a less costly and more effective campaign, but would also improve the targeting of the message to under-represented populations to directly increase their participation and faith in the electoral process.

---

[30] European Commission, 2006. Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance, p. 96.
[31] Ibid, p. 96 -97
[32] Organization of American States. El ciclo electoral 2005 – 2006 en las Américas: Un balance de la Secretaría General de la OEA. 2007, p. 49.

Improving the quality of electoral participation
The type of citizen participation as poll workers varies throughout the region. In some countries such work is carried out voluntarily by citizens and groups, while in other there are legal requirements for citizen participation, for example in Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. In both cases, the electoral authority is responsible for providing these citizens with sufficient training to carry out the process.

Poll workers have very diverse capacity levels relative to their work, some which present challenges to their fulfillment of their function, for example in terms of their level of knowledge of electoral processes or their level of literacy. Because of this, the electoral authority needs to be able to develop materials and trainings that are relevant for all of these possibilities. In addition to these general educational and experiential challenges on the part of the participants, there is a need to assure their capacity to administrate a trustworthy electoral process bound by integrity.

The key parts of poll worker training cover the following areas: the receipt of electoral materials, vote tallying and verification, management of the polling station and the closure of voting, special cases such as political party and candidate voting, and the posting of results. Additionally, during the election, poll workers are in charge of imparting justice, since their role can directly influence the respect for the freedom, effectiveness, and secrecy of the vote, as well as the authenticity of the tally and the results of the vote, in other words, the credibility of the electoral process.[33] As a result, without sufficient capacity within poll centers, the impartiality and effectiveness of the election can show weaknesses in the effective outcome of the electoral process. Therefore, the role of the electoral authority in training so that these processes are carried out efficiently and justly is critical.

LOOKING AHEAD: FOLLOWING UP ON THE TRAINING SEMINAR

The training seminar has not been designed as a training event with a beginning and end, but rather as the beginning of a continual professionalization process through various activities that are connected around a common goal: improving the capacities of electoral authorities. Because of this, the follow-up from this first iteration of the seminars will take various forms that will fit within this continuous process: dissemination of course materials and presentations, follow up on the electoral authorities' projects, and course evaluation to conduct a diagnostic of the needs for improving electoral authorities' trainings in the medium term and to be able to offer programs and activities relevant to their needs.

The course materials will be disseminated via their publication and in an electronic format that can better reach regional electoral authorities. As a result, the courses will be able to use these reference materials to create a basis for strengthening the participant's knowledge of the principle course themes. Based on the methodology of the group sessions, an inventory of tools, cases, bibliography and resources will also be provided in order to allow each participant to continue expanding upon each one of the themes.

---

[33] Jorge Valladares Molleda, 2001. "Mesas de votación" Palestra Electoral, Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru, Portal de Asuntos Publicos.

In following up on the participants projects, the proposals that are refined and presented during the course should be applied upon the participants' return to their country. As a course requirement, participants will have to present at least one follow-up report on the application of the course material within the first three months. These reports will serve as a tool for exchange between the participants in order to create networks of horizontal cooperation follow-up regarding these projects.

Finally, this First Inter-American Electoral Training Seminar will serve to diagnose the strengths and challenges of the electoral authorities within these three areas. This feedback process will thereby provide future participants with the correct information and in an appropriate format, thereby establishing this training seminar as the beginning of a larger continuous professionalization process with an end goal of impacting the improvement of electoral authorities' credibility and thereby democratic processes throughout the region.

For more information, please contact:

Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian,
Coordinator of the Electoral Studies Section, DECO:
bmunoz@oas.org
+1 202 458 6146

Charlotte McDowell
Specialist in the Electoral Studies Section, DECO:
cmcdowell@oas.org
+1 202 458 3814