



# Global Trends in Electoral Administration

4 SEPTEMBER 2024



# A changing electoral focus

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- Radical changes in the thirty years since the 'third wave' of democratisation
  - From optimism of the 1990s to concern for the future of democracy
  - From consolidating democratic gains to protecting electoral integrity
  - From focus on institutionalising credible EMBs to creating sustainable electoral ecosystems
- Emergence of new priority issues
  - 1990s - logistics focus
  - 2000s – participation and technology implementation focus
  - 2020s – a developing security focus
- EMBs now have many more, more complex issues to deal with

# Emerging societal and technological threats

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- Unprecedented speed and scale of technology used by private sector actors to promote their own social interests
- The data powering technology allows targeting of vulnerabilities
- Deliberate attempts to destroy trust in expertise
- A resurgence of authoritarianism, which has an interest in showing democracy as being chaotic and elections as unreliable
- New technology makes electoral disruption much cheaper, and easier



# A different social environment

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EMBs are reacting to social environment changes

- Changed community expectations of their roles
- Need for a collaborative rather than dominant EMB
- Rising dictatorship of the digital age
- Political polarisation and reduction in social cohesion
- Expectations of electoral rights
- Impact of non–electoral factors

Some empirical studies claim global democratisation is back to 1985 levels

# Trends in EMB structure

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- Constitutionally-defined EMBs
  - From 11 in 1950 to 75 now
- Legally structurally-independent EMBs
  - In democracies: 70 in 2006, to 90
  - In non democracies: 49 in 2006, to 40
- V-Dem data:
  - No correlation between independent governance model EMB and extent of democracy
  - In States with constitutionally-defined independently structured EMBs there is less likely to be confidence in elections than in States with other EMB structures
  - In States where EMBs have more autonomy (not just structural independence) there is more likely to be greater confidence in elections

# Stakeholder integration

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- It used to be sufficient to build a credible EMB – other institutions rarely considered
- EMBs can no longer run elections as an isolated entity
  - Health authorities – pandemics (Ebola, COVID19, Mpox)
  - Emergency response agencies – climate change events
  - Security agencies – electoral integrity protection
  - Civil society – mobilisation, trusted explanation, inputs on needs



# Development of electoral ecosystems

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- Electoral processes now seen as a shared, whole of society issue
- One manifestation is the emergence of multi-stakeholder Election Integrity Assurance groups
- These require a common understanding of the unique culture of elections by sectors with different cultures, for example
  - Security sector and transparency
  - Unmoveable election deadlines not encountered in other sectors
- EMBs need to negotiate these cultural differences – as early as possible in the electoral cycle
- EMBs now need to engage widely with and rely on expert advice from other sectors throughout the electoral cycle



# A matter of trust

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- Decline in institutional trust, though EMBs tend to score relatively well
- But ... EMBs are under much greater and prolonged scrutiny, and election complexity is difficult to convey simply
- Less forgiving, more extreme political cultures: being transparent about mistakes can damage trust
- Trust generally approached as technocratic, structural, performance oriented
- Cultural changes resulting in trust more focused on identity and belief.
- Each identity group may have different beliefs, different 'facts', require a different approach from the EMB to build trust
- Positioning the EMB as **the** trusted source of electoral information
- EMB focus on **managing its reputation**



# Reputation management framework example - Australia

The Reputation Management System (RMS) guides, sustains and enhances internal awareness and capabilities relating to the key AEC **activities** and **priorities** which contribute to maintaining a positive and trusted view of the AEC and the Australian electoral process.



## Operational Excellence

Exemplify operational excellence by consistently delivering professional, impartial, high integrity federal electoral services that Australians can trust.



## Electoral Integrity

Maintain the perceived and actual integrity of Australian electoral processes and results.



## Meeting Expectations

Strive to meet stakeholder expectations by adapting to changing information and electoral integrity environments.



## Subject Matter Expert

Position the AEC as the foremost subject matter expert and authoritative source of information on federal electoral processes in Australia.



## Communication

Communicate clear, targeted and transparent messaging to increase Australians' understanding of, and maintain their trust in, electoral processes, results and the AEC.

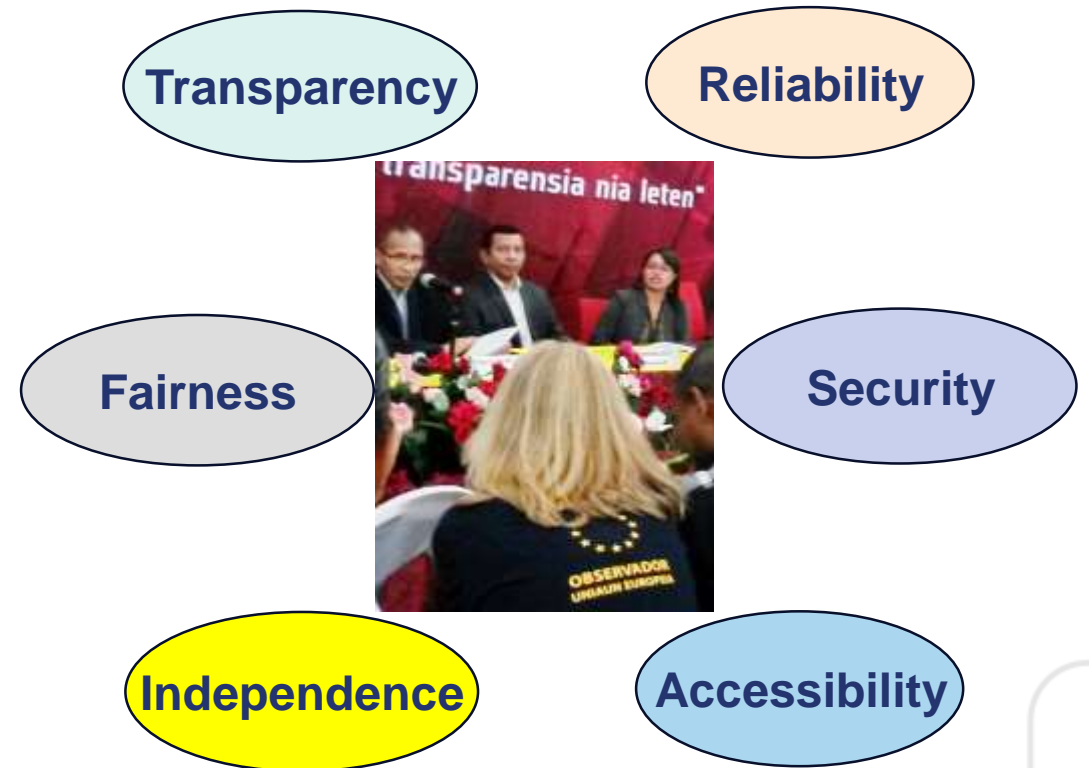


## Monitor and Respond

Actively monitor and respond to potential threats to electoral integrity, manage reputational risks and plan for crisis situations.

# More accountable decision-making

- Greater scrutiny of EMBs is requiring more robust and defensible decision-making
- Use of electoral integrity principles as a framework against which all major decisions must be assessed and publicly documented
- Elections Canada must document their consideration of the impact of policy decisions on accessibility, transparency, reliability, fairness, independence and security



# A plethora of planning

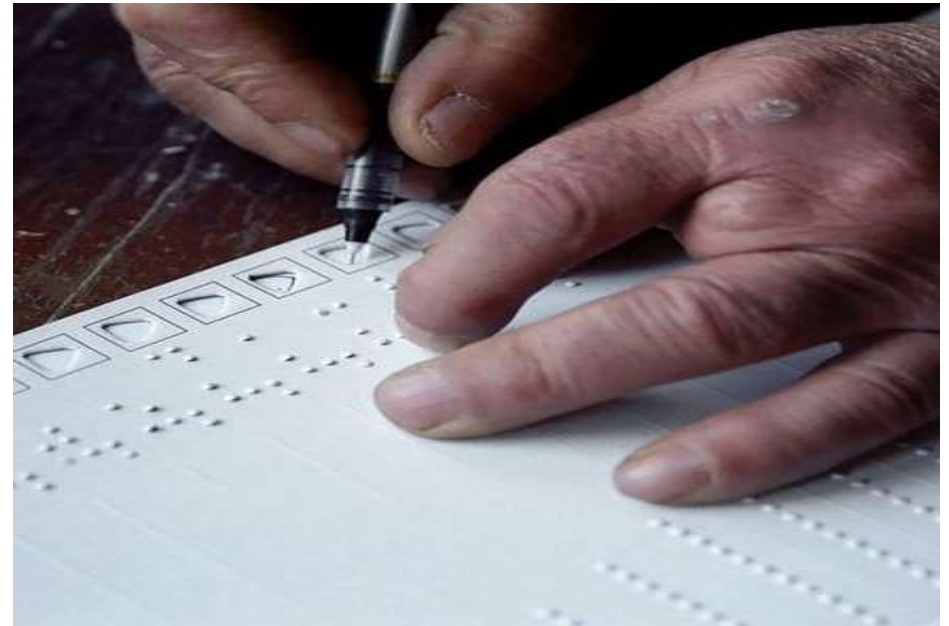
- Some EMBs now view planning as a first line of defence
- Planning is trending from an internal organisational tool to an external accountability mechanism
- Initial step from operational process planning to strategic planning with accountable goals and objectives.
- Strategic planning is now being augmented by multiple specific strategy plans, including
  - Fraud control
  - Risk management
  - Crisis response
  - Reputation management
  - Inclusion
  - Communications and outreach
  - Electoral service charter



# Inclusion

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- Society fracturing into multiple identities, each with its own demands
- Disability access to electoral processes
  - Ballot accessibility
  - Information accessibility
  - Disability access monitoring
- Gender inclusion
  - Gender quotas administered by EMB now in 71 countries
- Lowering of age thresholds: to 16 years old in 8 countries; 17 years old in 3.
  - Youth education challenge for EMB





# Expansion of voter services

## Out of country voters

- Now widely acknowledged as a right: available in 114 countries
- Extension of those non-residents eligible to vote
- Extension of facilities provided (France, Estonia – internet; New Zealand – email voting)

## Provision of 'safe spaces' for voting by different communities

## Advance/early voting

- More widely available; extension of those eligible to vote in advance

## Postal voting

- Ballots available on line
- Write in ballots (Canada) – negative impact on invalidity

## EMBs are having to manage push back

- Claimed lack of integrity in these voting methods
- Political unrest at voting before campaign period has finished
- Exacerbated by numbers of advance/postal voters during COVID



# Digital transformation

- Digitised election processes
  - Need an existing high level of trust to be effective
- Use of digital technologies and spaces as sites of persuasion
- Emergence of GenAI
- International human rights framework has not been adapted to address these digitisation challenges
  - No consideration of corporate actors – focused on States and individuals



# Disinformation, truth and censorship

- Growing challenges to the existence of a common set of facts, and EMBs cannot rely on traditional media 'gatekeepers' to define and defend these
- Foreign interference not new, or a trend, but more publicised
- Decline in EMB relationships with social media companies – different values
- EMBs are now:
  - developing pro-active crisis communication plans to anticipate and respond to false narratives
  - 'pre-bunking' on social media of expected disinformation about electoral processes, rather than waiting to respond or hoping social media platforms will act
  - focusing on raising media literacy, not just providing electoral information.
  - deepening relationships with State security and communications agencies
- Increasingly widespread calls for EMBs to act as arbiters of political truth



# Dealing with GenAI

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- Tools being developed, or implemented to use GenAI for electoral tasks such as
  - non-complex correspondence
  - biometrics/identity matching
  - voter register maintenance
  - fraud detection
  - signature verification
  - generating information materials and responses to inquiries
  - ballot counts
- Malign political/electoral uses of GenAI are increasing exponentially
- Many AI tools deliver outputs that remove the context that helps us to assess information accuracy, source and integrity.
- Most EMBs do not have the tools or capability to detect and deter malign GenAI material

# Cybersecurity

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- EMBs now need to deal with cyberattacks aiming to shut down a system, steal personal information, or change information within a system
- Voter registers particularly attractive (Turkey 2016, UK 2022)
- EMBs now 'failure planning' - utilising robust back-up systems
- EMBs now collaborating with security agencies to protect data and systems
- Some EMBs are also
  - Considering decentralising data to limit impact of successful attacks
  - Offering assistance to political parties to improve their cybersecurity



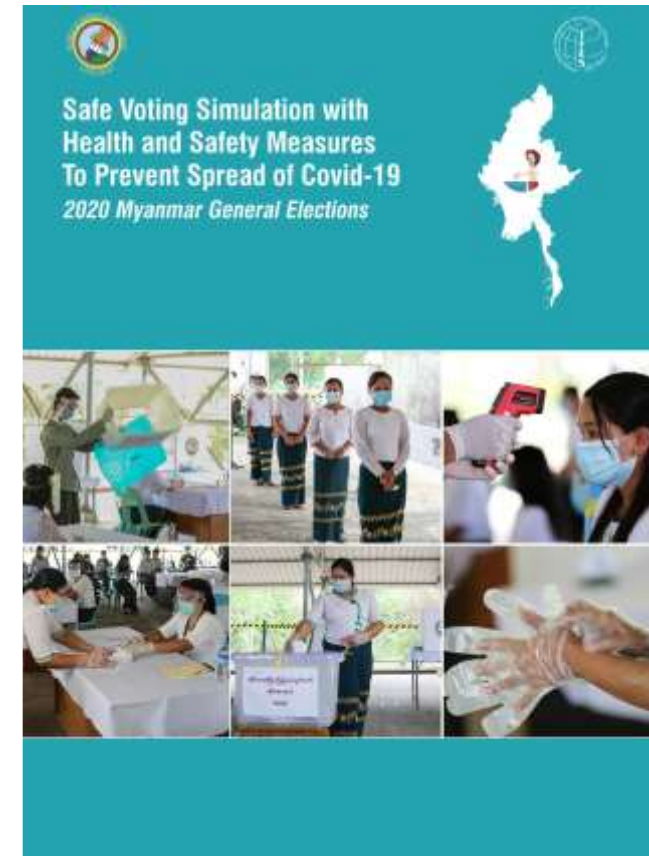
# Staffing .... training and security

- Increasing complexity of elections, greater scrutiny and potential for small errors to be amplified through social media into crises, requires better trained staff
  - Some EMBs reverting from 2000's-style cost effective on-line or remote training for temporary election staff to multi-day in-person training sessions
  - Personal and on-line security training for election period temporary staff now more common
- EMBs increasingly need to provide protection for staff
  - US data claims one-third of election officials have been threatened; two-thirds fear for their families' safety



# Managing impacts of non-electoral/political factors

- Impacts of, for example, pandemics, internal and external migration and climate change
- EMBs development of more extensive crisis management plans and rapid response teams
  - Appropriate methods and locations for voting
  - Countering disrupted campaign and voting/counting operations
- Expertise of other agencies is required to collaborate with EMB, for example on
  - Health safety
  - Determining voter eligibility
  - Catering for the diaspora: logistics of registration and voting, dealing with potential malign influences
- Some EMBs are now being given limited powers to amend rules to deal with a crisis – justified after election



# In summary ...

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- The range of issues EMBs have to deal with would be unimaginable to an electoral administrator of 30 or even 20 years ago
- EMBs are still searching for effective responses to many of these challenges – often reactive rather than pro-active. Major trends are towards

Developing  
collaborative  
electoral  
ecosystems

Restoring  
institutional  
trust

Emphasis  
on electoral  
integrity and  
security

Further  
expanding  
voter rights  
and  
services

Meeting the  
challenges of  
rapid  
technological  
change



# Thank you