



# STRENGTHENING ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODY COMMUNICATIONS WITH POLITICAL PARTIES IN ELECTIONS

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES  
AND PRINCIPLES



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



## Strengthening Election Management Body Communications with Political Parties in Elections: Practical Guidelines and Principles

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# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>ACCP</b>	Advisory Council of Political Parties, Canada
<b>AEC</b>	Australian Election Commission
<b>BRIDGE</b>	Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections
<b>BVAS</b>	Bimodal Voter Accreditation System
<b>CEC</b>	Central Election Commission (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan)
<b>CEPPS</b>	Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening
<b>CNE</b>	National Electoral Council of Ecuador (Consejo Nacional Electoral del Ecuador)
<b>COMELEC</b>	Republic of Philippines Election Commission
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DEPP</b>	Democratic Elections and Political Processes
<b>DIPAC</b>	District Inter-Party Advisory Committees
<b>DRG</b>	Democracy, Rights, and Governance
<b>ECN</b>	Election Commission of Nepal
<b>EMB</b>	Election Management Body
<b>EPPJC</b>	Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council
<b>FAQ</b>	Frequently Asked Questions
<b>GTOC</b>	Global Theory of Change
<b>IFES</b>	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
<b>IHEC</b>	Independent High Electoral Commission, Iraq
<b>INE</b>	National Electoral Institute (El Instituto Nacional Electoral), Mexico
<b>INEC</b>	Independent National Electoral Commission, Nigeria
<b>IPAC</b>	Inter-Party Advisory Committee (Ghana), Inter-Party Advisory Council (Nigeria)
<b>IPPCC</b>	Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission, Papua New Guinea
<b>KPU</b>	Komisi Pemilihan Umum, General Elections Commission of Indonesia
<b>MEC</b>	Malawi Election Commission
<b>NEBE</b>	National Election Board of Ethiopia
<b>PLC</b>	Party Liaison Committees, South Africa
<b>RIK</b>	Republic Election Commission, Serbia
<b>RIPAC</b>	Regional Inter-Party Advisory Committees
<b>TSE</b>	Superior Electoral Court (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral), Brazil/Supreme Electoral Court (Tribunal Supremo Electoral), Guatemala
<b>V-Dem</b>	Variety of Democracies datasets

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Election management bodies (EMBs) and political parties** play important accountability roles in democracies: EMBs as stewards of elections and political parties as key links between government and the public. While election management should be non-political, elections are fundamentally political contests, and the relationships between EMBs and political parties can be complicated. In some contexts, they can be fraught, mistrustful, or tenuous and lead to allegations and suspicions regarding the impartiality, inclusivity, and credibility of elections.<sup>1</sup> In others, working relationships between EMBs and political parties can be strong and collegial. Professional, effective engagement between EMBs and political parties can therefore play significant roles in strengthening electoral integrity.

Surprisingly, however, there is little research about good practices in communication and engagement between EMBs and political parties. This guide shares the key findings of original research conducted to begin to fill this gap. It identifies factors that shape how EMBs currently engage and communicate with parties, compares practical examples with established principles in communication and stakeholder engagement, highlights the mechanisms that EMBs use, and provides guiding questions and practical next steps. EMBs are the primary audience for this guide, but political parties, technical assistance providers that work with parties and EMBs, and the broader electoral integrity community of practice will also find it useful.

Engagement with political party stakeholders spans civic and voter education efforts; political finance and campaign monitoring; and registration, nomination, and election dispute resolution processes; and other parts of the electoral cycle. In some contexts, professional relationships, frequent communications, and formalization of coordination mechanisms between EMB and political party leaders and their staff foster trust-building and support credible elections. In others, no formal strategies or constructive relationships exist, and mistrust between EMBs and political parties may manifest in a variety of ways: frivolous election disputes, polarizing and hyper-partisan speech, incidents of political and electoral violence, the spread of disinformation about an EMBs' conduct, or others. Any systematic effort to plan and improve communication and engagement should be based on a clear-eyed understanding of institutional strengths and opportunities as well as weaknesses and threats.

**Any systematic effort to plan and improve communication and engagement should be based on a clear-eyed understanding of institutional strengths and opportunities as well as weaknesses and threats.**

Recognizing that these challenges will vary by country, this guide provides useful insights on strengthening communication and engagement between EMBs and political parties – particularly in the busy lead-up to and immediate aftermath of Election Day. It draws on extensive research spanning more than 50 countries. This first-of-its-kind research offers an improved understanding of how EMBs are engaging and communicating with political parties, particularly within the larger scope of EMB responsibilities. Desk research and interviews with technical and country experts globally were complemented by in-depth interviews with EMB leadership and with political party representatives and independent candidates in nine countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America.


<sup>1</sup> For example, see Busari, B. (2023, March 12). [Political Parties Can't Regulate INEC over BVAS, Top Official Fumes](#); Vanguard. Moleiro, S. (2023, May 9). [Tensions Emerge within Venezuelan Opposition as Deadline Approaches to Find a Candidate to Face Maduro](#). El País; The Korea Times. (2023, June 8). [Rival Parties Agree on Parliamentary Probe into NEC Hiring Scandal](#).




The research underscores that diverse factors frame how EMBs engage with parties. For example, **legal frameworks** vary considerably in the extent to which they define EMB-party engagement processes. Some are quite strict, limiting flexibility in how and when EMBs and political parties engage; others offer EMBs more autonomy to design their own approaches. Some legal frameworks say little about how EMBs can engage with political parties, which may paradoxically foster or stifle proactive and broad engagement, depending on the EMB's interpretation of its own powers.

EMB **mandates** also vary greatly across countries and can have important impacts on party engagement. For EMBs with oversight and enforcement mandates (for instance, to track compliance with political finance regulations), the need to balance monitoring and disciplinary responsibilities with support and information they provide to political parties can complicate these interactions. The research identified additional factors that have practical effect in shaping EMB-party engagement, including **resources** available for communication and coordination, EMB **leadership styles** and preferences, and the **political party landscape** (including, for example, the number and comparative strength of parties, party communication, and coordination preferences and capacities). These factors and other contextual considerations are outlined in Chapter 1 of this guide, and Annex 1 presents a complementary baseline assessment framework.



The research revealed what EMB leaders, political parties, and other electoral experts consider to be working well in EMB-party engagement, as well as the challenges they face. The research team linked assessments from election stakeholders to common communication principles, including **transparency** (including acknowledgement of errors), **impartiality and equity**, **timeliness** of outreach, and planning for **accessibility** and **inclusion**. Building opportunities for consultation – not only one-way communication – is important to bolster effective engagement between EMBs and political parties. This could involve engaging parties in planning for election-related lessons learned exercises, meeting agendas, or trainings, for example.




This guide also catalogues mechanisms and processes that EMBs commonly use to engage with political parties across electoral cycles, for both one-way communication and two-way engagement. The table below outlines common mechanisms employed across the countries researched, and the limitations or factors they must navigate to use those tools to good effect.


Communication Mechanism	Research Observations
 <p><b>Websites, portals, and applications</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Websites are useful for sharing information when they embrace open data principles and are broadly accessible.</li> <li>• Political parties may not have equal access to online platforms and applications, depending on internet penetration and the reliability of services.</li> <li>• Website content must be current to be valuable to users and build trust; this effort can be resource-intensive.</li> <li>• Searchable EMB websites designed for multiple audiences and in user-friendly formats make it easier for political parties to find information designated for them.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political party-specific pages or password-protected portals also provide mechanisms to communicate directly with an EMB, including through secure messaging and chat functionality. Email addresses and relevant phone numbers or extensions should be provided to help facilitate asking questions, submitting comments, or obtaining support.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Direct contact (mailing and messaging lists)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct mail can reach political parties and candidates directly with relevant information in a timely manner.</li> <li>• Direct contact may enable two-way communication if EMBs communicate by email or SMS (e.g., WhatsApp groups).</li> <li>• Social messaging group discussions can be challenging to manage and can benefit from established guidelines.</li> <li>• The tool is only as good as the contact lists used, which must be kept up to date.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Traditional media channels (print news, radio, and television)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional media is one of the most effective channels for sharing information. Because reputable outlets check facts and conduct investigations, their reports can help build trust and confidence.</li> <li>• Community radio stations reach audiences in local languages and in remote parts of countries. They are often trusted vehicles for information.</li> <li>• Information disseminated via traditional media tends to be one-directional and may not enable parties to request direct clarification on key messages (exceptions include call-in format radio shows or television broadcasts where a limited number of listeners or viewers can express what may be representative views and questions).</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Social media</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media channels are under EMB control; therefore, the narrative and timing are as well.</li> <li>• The number of followers is important, but also consider who is following (for example, traditional media and civil society followers can help share messages from social media more broadly through other channels in countries where internet access is not pervasive).</li> <li>• Social media can be an excellent channel – although it should not be the only channel – for time-sensitive announcements related to crises or changes in the electoral process.</li> </ul>



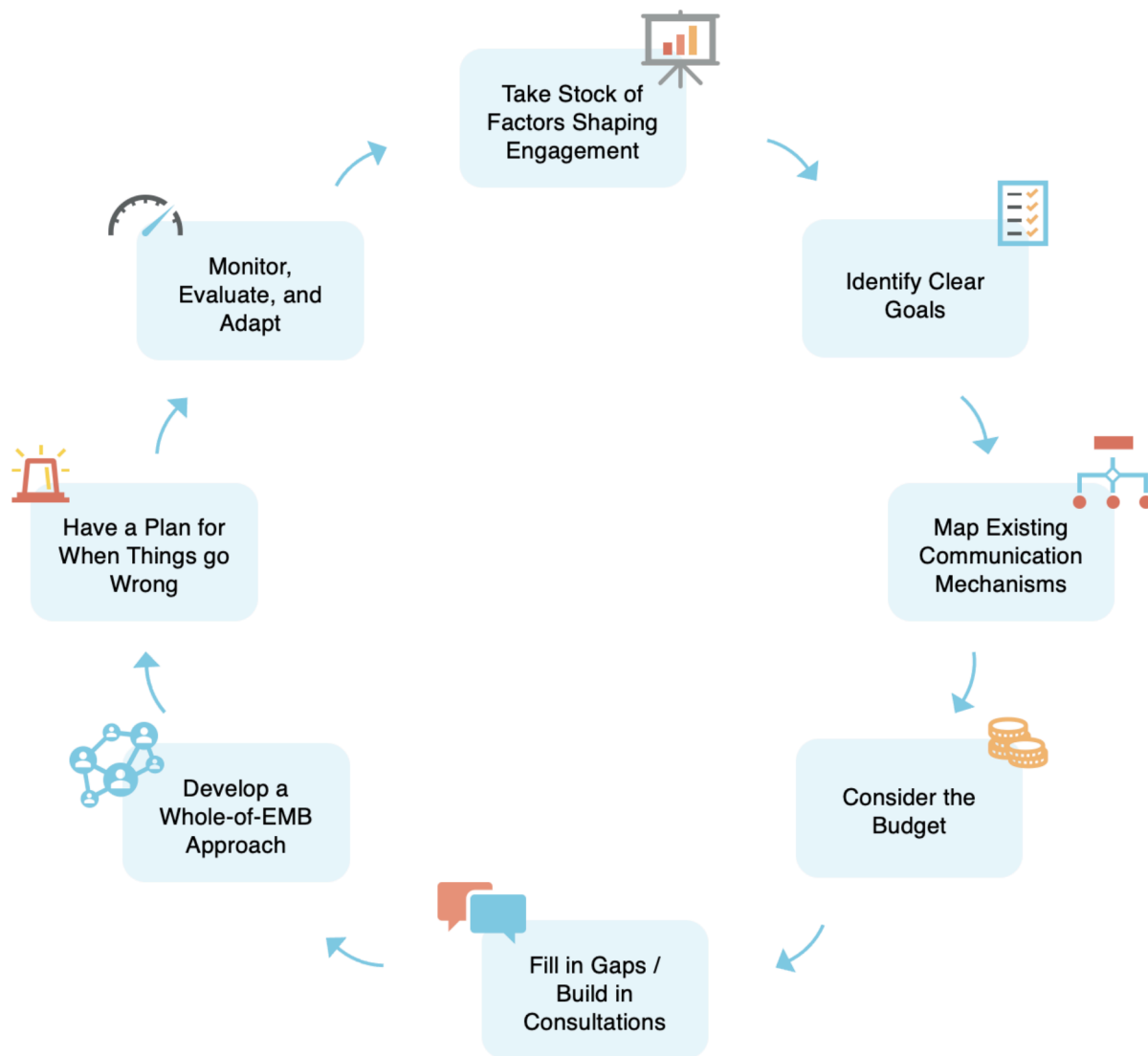
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media can be highly interactive and, as such, may require additional staff to monitor and respond to feeds and ensure content adheres to the codes of the site.</li> <li>• Comments will come from varied sources, including political parties. Parties may also contact EMBs through social media, which should be monitored to ensure important questions are channeled appropriately.</li> <li>• Political parties may not have equal access to online platforms and apps, depending on internet penetration rates and the reliability of services.</li> <li>• EMBs use social media to impart information to both political parties and voters. To make these resources useful for communicating to political parties, party-specific messages should be easy to locate and differentiated from general messages.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Working groups and consultations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working groups and other consultations with political parties can be good opportunities for two-way engagement.</li> <li>• Effective facilitation is important. A third-party facilitator may be more effective for constructive engagement than a political party or EMB facilitator in some contexts. A skilled facilitator sticks to the agenda and allows time for relevant comments, questions, or inputs from interlocutors.</li> <li>• In countries with many political parties, it can be difficult to balance inclusion and representation with the need to keep a group manageable and focused.</li> <li>• When working groups include members of political parties, the parties should be consulted on agendas.</li> <li>• Working groups may be costly and may require considerable time and input from participants.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Advisory councils</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent and semi-permanent advisory councils provide opportunities for two-way exchanges.</li> <li>• Advisory councils are often led by elected representatives who manage the agenda. The councils offer opportunities for parties to present ideas and concerns to EMBs in an organized fashion.</li> <li>• In countries with numerous political parties, it can be difficult to balance inclusion and representation with the need to keep a group manageable and focused.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advisory councils may be costly to manage and may require extensive time and input from those involved.</li> <li>• Depending on procedures for selecting advisory council members, these groups may mirror patterns of societal marginalization.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Trainings and information sessions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainings and information sessions can be opportunities to share in-depth information on new or complex processes and ensure parties have comprehensive information.</li> <li>• In countries with a large number of political parties, it can be difficult to balance inclusion and representation with the need to keep a group manageable and focused.</li> <li>• Without explicit guidelines for participation, party representation in training may be homogenous and not representative of its membership.</li> <li>• Trainings can be costly and time-consuming.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Events hosted by a political party</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to speak at events with significant political party attendance can allow engagement with parties outside of formal EMB-hosted events.</li> <li>• They can be useful occasions to share information, clear up misconceptions, build trust, and answer questions.</li> <li>• If not handled appropriately, EMB attendance at party-hosted events can be seen as biased or conferring advantages on certain parties, particularly if the EMB does not accept all invitations.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Informal engagement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal engagement can include open-door policies that welcome political parties to stop by an EMB at any time to ask questions and meet with commissioners, or engage with party representatives via messaging apps or outside the EMB, for example, over coffee or tea.</li> <li>• They can also be opportunities to bring together political representatives or candidates – who may find it difficult to meet publicly, or to cede ground in a public forum – to resolve contentious problems.</li> <li>• Insufficient transparency around informal meetings and communications can lead to allegations of partisanship or claims of mis- or disinformation.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent informal engagement may generate suspicion or perceptions that can decrease transparency and trust in an EMB.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Post-election lessons learned processes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging party representatives in lessons learned workshops, or conducting separate meetings with parties to integrate their views into lessons learned processes, can demonstrate openness to hearing about political parties' challenges and can help build trusting relationships outside the immediate electoral period.</li> <li>• Political parties can more meaningfully engage in lessons learned processes if they are notified well in advance and participate in planning.</li> <li>• In countries with many political parties, it can be difficult to balance inclusion and representation with the need to keep a group manageable and focused.</li> <li>• Inclusion of political party views must be meaningful; otherwise, consultations can set unrealistic expectations and do more harm than good.</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Communication mechanisms commonly used by EMBs across researched countries.**

Recognizing that EMBs operate in vastly different contexts, this guide offers EMBs and electoral assistance providers a series of practical steps to assess strengths, challenges, and opportunities around effective engagement with political parties. Chapter 4 outlines a pathway for building transparency into EMB communications and consultation practices and fostering meaningful consultation between EMBs and parties across the political spectrum (see Figure 1). These efforts will help to build trust and resilience, safeguarding institutional integrity. In addition to providing a foundational understanding of how EMBs and parties are engaging, the information in this guide can serve as a starting point for formalizing this aspect of electoral administration, and a launch pad for additional research.



**Figure 1: Practical Steps for Strengthening Engagement, as outlined in Chapter 4.**

Underlying this guide’s discussion is an assumption that EMBs and political parties are willing to improve communication and coordination, through a more efficient flow of accurate information. However, this is not always the case. In some contexts, especially if political actors in government have undermined the EMB’s autonomy so it cannot guarantee a fair electoral process,<sup>2</sup> even the most efficient and well-resourced communication channels might not build trust among political parties. In other cases, despite competent and proactive EMB communications, some political actors might purposefully dismiss available channels to antagonize EMBs, spread disinformation, and sow distrust in the electoral process. While addressing challenges related to EMB autonomy or the intentional spread of disinformation is not the focus of this guide, some Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) resources address these important concerns, including the CEPPS/International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) [Autonomy and Accountability Framework](#) and the CEPPS [Countering Disinformation](#) Guide.

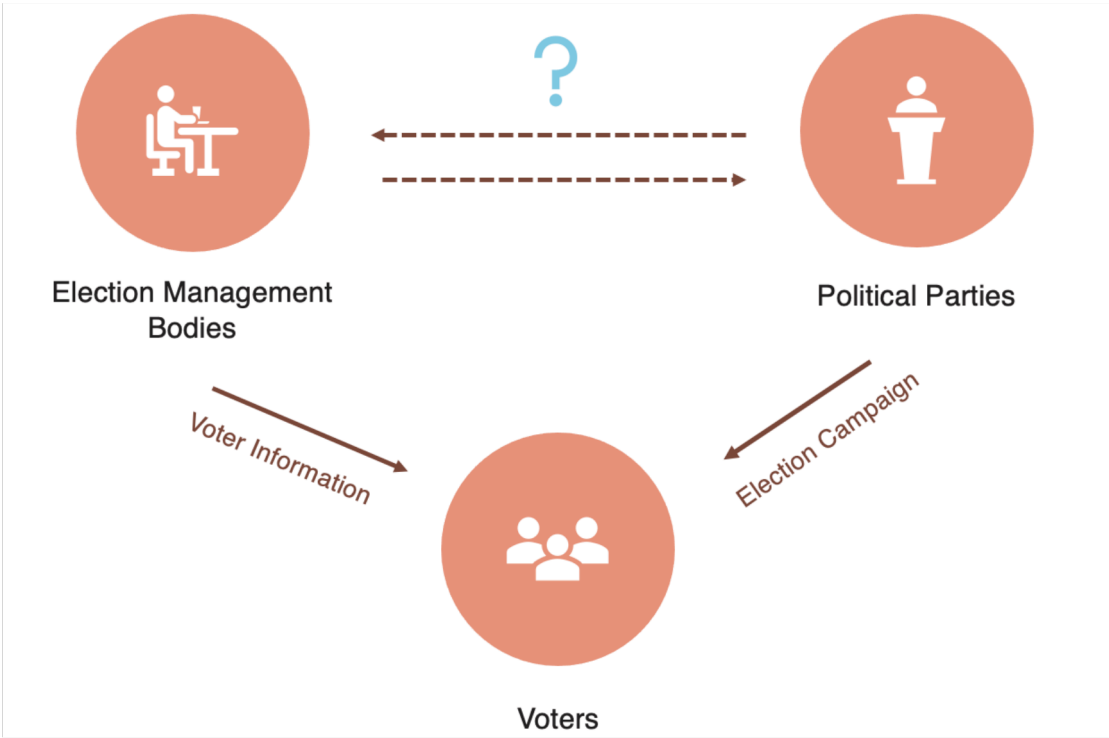
<sup>2</sup> Research from the Varieties of Democracy found that governments are increasingly attempting to undermine EMB autonomy. See Boese-Schlosser, et al. (2022). [Autocratization changing nature?](#)

# INTRODUCTION

# INTRODUCTION

**Clear and timely communications and coordination** between EMBs and political parties<sup>3</sup> are crucial for credible and inclusive election processes. The nature of these communications can significantly affect participation in elections, how the public perceives the integrity of electoral processes, and whether election results are accepted. Effective engagement helps ensure that EMBs can communicate election regulations clearly, foster party compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and processes, and understand and address parties' concerns to prevent them from turning into grievances. It can also facilitate parties' access to accurate information about the electoral process, minimizing the potential for misinformation to spread.

A survey of academic and practitioner literature reveals significant research around how political parties communicate with their constituencies – disseminating key messages and persuading voters to cast their ballots in favor of their preferred candidates.<sup>4</sup> Practitioners also frequently analyze EMB civic education and voter information initiatives, examining how voters receive content. Indeed, the tremendous uptake of social and other digital media has accelerated analysis of how political parties<sup>5</sup> and EMBs<sup>6</sup> can enhance messaging to voters. Yet engagement between EMBs and political parties remains almost completely unresearched.



**Figure 2: Research gap in the mechanisms of communication between EMBs and political parties. Solid lines represent existing relationship and research; dotted lines represent existing relationship and lack of research.**

<sup>3</sup>In many countries, independent candidates have the right to contest in elections and should receive the same communications and engagement as party-affiliated candidates. They should also have the same opportunity to provide comments and ask questions. It can be challenging to engage independent candidates at the same levels as established parties. While the research for this guide focused on parties, independent candidates should be considered in a political party engagement strategy whenever relevant.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Widmann, T. (2020). How Emotional Are Populists Really? Factors Explaining Emotional Appeals in the Communication of Political Parties. *Political Psychology*, 42(1), 163–181.

<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., Larsson, A. O. (2021). [The rise of Instagram as a tool for political communication: A longitudinal study of European political parties and their followers](#). *New Media & Society*. 25(10), 146144482110341.

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Morris, G. (2021, August 25). [Social Media Strategies for Election Management Bodies: A Tactical Guide to Expanding Voter Outreach](#). IFES | The International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

Given the often sensitive relationships between political parties and EMBs, it is vital to understand which communication and engagement mechanisms build trust and enhance interactions between those stakeholders during the election process. This guide helps to fill the gap by identifying practices that EMBs use to communicate with political parties. It offers a range of examples to showcase successes and lessons learned. The guide also offers approaches for political parties on how to engage constructively with EMBs.

## METHODOLOGY

This guide is based on a comparative global study of communication and engagement practices used by EMBs and political parties. The research team collected initial data through a desk review and interviews with diverse electoral stakeholders before analyzing the unique environmental factors that shape EMB-party communications and engagement; identifying core principles that guide positive EMB-party engagement; and mapping common communication and consultation mechanisms used to foster engagement between EMBs and political parties across the globe.

### **The desk research covered the following core questions:**

- How do EMBs currently approach stakeholder communications and engagement with political parties?
- What are good practices for EMB-stakeholder engagement with political parties in post-election periods?
- What range of information and assistance do EMBs convey to election stakeholders (and political parties in particular) through their online presence (including websites, smartphone apps, and social media)?
- What role do EMBs play in engaging with political parties? What mechanisms do they use (e.g., inter-party advisory committees, political party liaison committees)?

The research team examined a wide range of documents during the desk research, including EMB strategies and reports, academic articles, and program reports from election assistance providers. In total, researchers reviewed relevant information on EMB communication and engagement practices from 50 countries and the West Bank and Gaza region.<sup>7</sup> This process supported early identification of core challenges and contextual factors that shape how EMBs and political parties interact (see Chapter 1).

Concurrently, the team conducted interviews with CEPPS Regional Directors, Country Directors, and Advisors with experience in 25 countries.<sup>8</sup> The interviews focused on identifying factors that shape EMB and political party engagement. The research team selected countries to represent geographic breadth and different types of regimes as categorized by the Variety of Democracies (V-Dem) Project's datasets.<sup>9</sup> This series of interviews with electoral assistance providers prepared the team for the final stage of research: case studies and direct interviews with EMB representatives, political party representatives, and independent candidates regarding communication and coordination across the electoral cycle.

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<sup>7</sup> Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Croatia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Maldives, Mali, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Tanzania, Tunisia, Ukraine, Yemen, Zimbabwe, and the West Bank and Gaza region.

<sup>8</sup> Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Indonesia, Iraq, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Serbia, South Korea, and Tunisia.

<sup>9</sup> The team reviewed nine countries for additional research: "Regimes of the World" categorizations from the V-Dem Episodes of Regime Transformation dataset; EMB autonomy data from the project's core V-Dem dataset; and the Fund for Peace's Fragile State Index.

Case study selection was based on geographic breadth, access to key stakeholders and, where feasible, regime type (as identified by V-Dem). Based on an initial mapping exercise, the project team identified Brazil, Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Serbia. In addition to undertaking further desk review on those nine, the project team also conducted extensive interviews with electoral stakeholders, as summarized in the table below.

Country	EMB Representatives	Political Party Representatives, Independent Candidates, and Additional Experts
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member of the Office for Assistance with Parliamentary Articulation within Brazil's Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representative of the Avante Party</li> <li>Representative of Partido Social Democrático</li> <li>Representative of Movimento Democrático Brasileiro</li> <li>Representative of Partido dos Trabalhadores</li> <li>Representative of Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira</li> <li>Representative of the Cidadania Party</li> </ul>
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member of Political Parties' Affairs within the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representative of Ezema</li> <li>Representative of Social Democratic Party</li> <li>Representative of Prosperity Party</li> <li>Independent candidate</li> <li>External expert on election and political party legislation</li> </ul>
Ghana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deputy Commissioner of the Electoral Commission</li> <li>Member of the Ghana Electoral Reform Committee of the Election Commission</li> <li>Program Manager at the Ghana Center for Democratic Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representative of New Patriotic Party</li> <li>Representative of Convention People's Party</li> <li>Representative of People's National Convention</li> <li>Representative of Great Consolidated Popular Party</li> </ul>
Honduras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Member of the National Electoral Council</li> <li>Member of the Directorate of Political Organizations and Candidacies of the National Electoral Council</li> <li>External expert, former Councilor of the National Electoral Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representative of Liberty and Refoundation Party</li> <li>Representative of Liberal Party</li> <li>Representative of National Party</li> <li>Representative of Savior of Honduras Party</li> <li>External expert, former director of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy</li> </ul>



<p><b>Indonesia</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member of the General Elections Commission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representative of Prosperous Justice Party</li> <li>• Representative of Aceh Prosperous Justice Party</li> <li>• National Awakening Party</li> <li>• Representative of the Election and Democracy Association</li> <li>• Independent candidate of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of Nusantara</li> </ul>
<p><b>Iraq</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member of the Candidates' Affairs Division of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC)</li> <li>• Member of the Political Parties Registration section of the IHEC</li> <li>• Member of the Monitoring and Financial Audit section of the IHEC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representative of Imtidad</li> <li>• Representative of Kurdistan Democratic Party</li> <li>• Representative of Hikma</li> <li>• Representative of ethno-religious minority in Parliament</li> <li>• Representative of the Independent popular bloc</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nepal</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two former members of the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representative of Loktantrik Samajbadi Party</li> <li>• Representative of Rastriya Swantra Party</li> <li>• Representative of Unified Socialist Party</li> <li>• An expert on election observation/ civil society organization (CSO)</li> <li>• Elections analyst at BaahraKhari</li> <li>• Independent member of Parliament</li> </ul>
<p><b>Papua New Guinea</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expert who worked with the Policy Branch of the Electoral Commission and the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission (IPPCC)</li> <li>• Officer of the Policy Branch of the Electoral Commission</li> <li>• Member of the Funding and Disclosure branch of the IPPCC</li> <li>• Member of the Parties and Registration branch of the IPPCC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representative of National Alliance Party</li> <li>• Representative of Greens Party</li> <li>• Representative of New Generation Party</li> <li>• Representative of Paradise Kingdom Party</li> <li>• Manager, Political Parties, IPPCC</li> </ul>

<b>Serbia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member of Legal Affairs team at the Center for Research, Transparency, and Accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representative of Serbia Center Party</li> <li>• Representative of Green-Left Front</li> <li>• Representative of Serbian Progressive Party</li> </ul>
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**Table 2: Countries where additional research was undertaken, including extensive interviews with electoral stakeholders.**

## REPORT STRUCTURE

**CHAPTER 1** highlights factors that impact an EMB’s ability to communicate and engage with political parties in a timely and effective manner. For some EMBs, the legal framework stipulates how and when they can reach out to political entities. For others, capacity and financial resources are primary drivers of the format or frequency of communications and coordination. Additionally, EMBs that provide parties with support and information and also play key roles in oversight and disciplining parties for violations of election laws and regulations must carefully balance their support and oversight roles. The number of parties can also influence the types of engagement and communication activities that are possible. This section of the guide is a useful starting point for EMBs, donors, and technical assistance providers investing in stronger EMB-party communications. It provides questions that can be used in a practical self-assessment of context-specific challenges and opportunities.

**CHAPTER 2** focuses on research findings related to the key principles that drive constructive and effective EMB communication and engagement with political parties. These include:

- **Transparency:** Information is openly and proactively available to all parties;
- **Timeliness and comprehensiveness:** Messages are delivered to the right people at the right time;
- **Accuracy and coherence:** Communications about decision-making processes are clear and rooted in facts, data, and the legal framework;
- **Impartiality and equity:** All political parties are treated the same way with regard to information disclosure, outreach, and responses to questions;
- **Clarity and simplicity:** Information is easy to find and apply;
- **Frequency:** Communications are undertaken often, and continually;
- **Interactivity:** Communications include opportunities for discussion and dialogue; and
- **Accessibility and inclusivity:** Communications strategies include groups that are often marginalized from the electoral process.

These guiding principles should inform the quality of an EMB’s communication and engagement strategies with political parties and help determine which mechanisms are most useful in achieving specific goals.

<sup>10</sup> Our research is limited to the EMBs, political parties, and country examples referenced in this guide. Where we make general comments (e.g., “many stakeholders appreciate an EMB’s communication methods”), “stakeholders” refers to the EMBs and political parties we interviewed.

**CHAPTER 3** introduces direct mechanisms used by EMBs to promote both one-way and two-way information-sharing with political parties. The chapter includes practical examples and their key benefits and drawbacks. It also outlines which tools could help EMBs advance toward the principles outlined in Chapter 2, as appropriate to their contexts and communication goals.

**CHAPTER 4** outlines practical steps that EMBs can take to maximize the value and impact of their communications and coordination with political parties. It recognizes that many EMBs have strategic plans and communication policies in place that shape their engagement with a wide range of stakeholders including political parties. With this in mind, the research team focused on simple measures that complement, and can be integrated into, an EMB's planning processes and day-to-day operations to strengthen party engagement – regardless of variations in mandate, resourcing levels, or other factors that shape EMB communication and coordination practices.

# **CHAPTER 1:**

## **TAKING STOCK OF KEY FACTORS THAT IMPACT EMB-PARTY ENGAGEMENT**

**This chapter outlines several common factors that shape how and when EMBs, political parties, and candidates communicate and coordinate with each other across the countries examined for this research effort. It provides EMBs with user-friendly self-assessment questions to identify gaps and opportunities for enhancing engagement with parties and candidates in their unique political environments.**

To administer credible elections, EMBs must communicate effectively with key electoral stakeholders, including political parties. In addition to sharing electoral information that political parties require as part of effective electoral administration, engaging with parties can contribute to other strategic EMB goals and better prepare parties and candidates to fulfill their own roles in democracies. These goals may include building trust, strengthening an EMB's reputation, increasing voter turnout, bolstering election security, improving the transparency of the electoral process (including around implementation and enforcement of regulations regarding campaign finance and other matters), anticipating and preparing for crises, and enhancing inclusion.

Creating and maintaining effective EMB–political party relationships can be difficult, especially in highly polarized environments. However, the lack of effective engagement is at best a missed opportunity and at worst harmful to the credibility of both the EMB and elections.

**Our research identified six common factors that frame how EMBs engage with parties. These entail: 1) the legal electoral framework and EMB mandate; 2) oversight and compliance responsibilities; 3) EMB composition and reputation; 4) resourcing; 5) EMB leadership capacity; and 6) the political party landscape.** A crucial step that EMBs can take to ensure an appropriate approach is to begin with a stocktaking exercise that will identify how these factors impact their own communications and engagement with political parties. This chapter serves, therefore, as a self-assessment tool to identify gaps and opportunities in strategic EMB–party interaction.

## **LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND EMB MANDATE**

EMB–political party interaction is often shaped by legal frameworks. In some countries, engagement bodies or mechanisms and the frequency of engagement are stipulated by law; in others, the laws are silent on these matters and EMBs may have autonomy to determine their own approach. In addition, electoral legislation often specifies an EMB's mandate and scope of authority – dictating which aspects of the electoral process fall within its purview, with implications for political party engagement.

Laws that dictate the establishment and maintenance of certain mechanisms for engaging with political parties can be beneficial, ensuring that channels of communication are in place. On the other hand, over-legislating can limit flexibility to respond to emerging and evolving needs or be overly prescriptive about the subjects that may be addressed through those mechanisms. When laws are silent around EMB communications with political parties, there may be benefits or drawbacks. EMBs that have autonomy to establish their own communication and coordination with parties can meet engagement needs without strict legislation. Conversely, silence on communication requirements in the legal framework can enable an EMB to invest at a minimal level (or not at all) in communicating and coordinating with political parties. The legal framework on its own is not a sufficient predictor of levels of EMB–party engagement.

An EMB's legally mandated portfolio often shapes its engagement and relationships with political parties. In some instances, an EMB's mandate vis-à-vis parties may be limited to communicating information needed to contest elections and comply with requirements. Such information may include electoral calendar updates, administrative reforms, and registration deadlines. In other instances, an EMB's mandate regarding political parties may include activities like training parties (for example, on conducting voter outreach and education, complying with requirements, or political party observation or scrutiny on Election Day); arranging consultation meetings with parties to solicit input (on, for instance, changes to the election code or improved inclusion measures); organizing public debates for parties; or establishing, facilitating, and overseeing processes (e.g., party registration, codes of conduct, campaign finance monitoring, dispute resolution, or other aspects of the electoral process in which parties are highly engaged).



In **Indonesia**, Article 75 of the General Elections Commission (KPU) Regulation No. 8/2019 on the Working Procedures of the Election Commission sets strict guidelines prohibiting EMB members from meeting with election participants (such as political parties and presidential pairs) or campaign teams outside designated offices like the KPU Secretariat General, Provincial KPU Secretariat, and Regency/Municipality KPU Secretariat. Especially when mistrust among political actors is high, the imposition of stricter rules to prevent unequal access to information or to the EMB can be seen as positive.



In **Guatemala**, Article 130 of the Electoral Law requires the Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE) to meet with representatives from political parties monthly. In practice, during the election period, the TSE tends to call parties weekly. If there are no legal impediments, EMBs need not stick to the minimum mandated by law. Instead, they should gauge parties' needs and adjust the frequency of interactions and volume of information accordingly.

In **South Africa**, the Electoral Commission Act of 1996, Section 5(1)(g), establishes party liaison committees. The Regulations on Party Liaison Committees (PLCs) of 1998 and related amendments of 2021 regulate composition and function, noting that the Electoral Commission is “of the opinion that formal structures of party liaison committees will facilitate such liaison and co-operation [with political parties].” The PLCs operate at the national, provincial, and municipal/local levels and are “vehicles for consultation and co-operation between the Commission and the registered parties concerned on all electoral matters.” During the 2009 general elections, some polling stations ran out of ballot papers, causing long lines of frustrated voters. In response, the national PLC decided unanimously to allow those already waiting in line to vote. This decision prevented potential accusations of election mismanagement and violence.<sup>11</sup> EMBs should leverage their expertise and experience interacting with political parties to craft regulations (or advocate for laws) to shape more effective communication mechanisms and ensure their sustainability.

<sup>11</sup> Government of South Africa. [Amendments to the Regulations on Party Liaison Committees](#), 1998, as amended by Proclamation 35 in August 2021, § 9 (Amendment of Regulation 6).

## Questions that can help an EMB identify obligations and opportunities for communication under the law include:

1. To what extent is the EMB meeting its legal requirements to engage with parties?
2. What, if any, regulations restrict the EMB's engagement with political parties (e.g., that an EMB must engage all registered parties, or that limit certain interactions between EMBs and parties)?
3. To what extent does the EMB have autonomy to establish policies or seek legal opinions from the courts or other national institutions?
  - a. Beyond the courts, are there other national institutions (such as a human rights commission, a media commission, or gender working groups or commissions) from which the EMB may be able to seek guidance regarding communicating and coordinating with parties and candidates if the legal framework is silent on EMB-political party engagement?
4. What parts of the electoral process that involve parties fall within the purview of the EMB?

## OVERSIGHT AND COMPLIANCE RESPONSIBILITIES

EMB responsibilities for overseeing and enforcing compliance with the legal framework for elections vary significantly. Some EMBs may have the power to impose fines or sanctions for non-compliance or electoral violations; in other countries oversight and enforcement mandates may be held by external institutions (such as audit agencies or anticorruption commissions). In some countries, EMBs are responsible for training parties on compliance and holding them accountable to the legal framework or regulations pertaining to campaign financing, campaign activities, and codes of conduct. In such instances, they are responsible for penalizing the same political parties that they are charged with preparing for elections.

Applying such penalties could affect an EMB's relationships with key electoral stakeholders (including powerful individuals, such as members of Parliament). Some may perceive (or spin) the application of penalties –or lack thereof – as an EMB's act of political bias or inappropriate exercise of political influence in elections. Clear communication around different mandates and transparency around how decisions of eligibility or sanctions are made are therefore critical.



In **Croatia**, the State Election Commission publishes all political parties' financial reports – both for elections and regular financing of political parties and candidates – in searchable and open data formats.

In **Nigeria**, the Independent National Electoral Commission registers political parties while also monitoring their finances and arranging for annual audits of party funding and accounts. The commission subsequently publishes a report on audit findings.<sup>12</sup>

EMB's can consider such strategies to increase transparency and enable oversight by parties as well as the public. Data transparency also contributes to the perception that the EMB treats political parties equally, including in how it applies penalties.

<sup>12</sup>An example of Croatia's searchable database of political party financial reports linked to 2020 elections can be found on the State Electoral Commission's website. See State Election Commission of the Republic of Croatia. (n.d.). [Elections for Members of the Croatian Parliament 2020](#). For information regarding the INEC's mandate see Independent National Electoral Commission. (n.d.). [The Commission – INEC Nigeria](#).

**Questions that can help an EMB evaluate its preparedness to engage and communicate about potentially sensitive or contentious responsibilities and decisions include:**

1. At what points in the electoral cycle does the EMB engage with political parties? Does the EMB consider those interactions holistically as part of their overall party engagement and communication strategy?
2. When the EMB plays a role in educating political parties and enforcing party behavior that deviates from the legal framework, how are these aspects of its mandate clearly communicated or delineated from each other?
3. What mechanisms does the EMB have in place to ensure transparent decision-making in determining eligibility to run or holding parties and candidates accountable for political finance reporting deadlines or campaign behavior (as relevant, according to their mandate)?

## **EMB COMPOSITION AND REPUTATION**

The erosion of trust in elections globally is a pressing concern. Political polarization intensifies as faith in democratic institutions wanes, leading to diminishing trust in public officials. For example, the 2021 Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Survey, conducted across 28 countries, found that government officials and politicians are among the least trusted groups.<sup>13</sup> Trust in institutions often rests on perceptions of their performance, ability to deliver for the people, and autonomy. In the case of EMBs, voters' perceptions of an election may be influenced by the EMB's efforts at transparency or their level of independence from other government entities. As EMBs grapple with heightened tensions and increasing political polarization, it is even more imperative to implement measures that exhibit EMB neutrality and professionalism during the election process, including in communications and collaboration with political parties.<sup>14</sup>

In some countries, an EMB's leadership may include members of various political parties, or political parties might directly influence the nomination and appointment of the EMB's members as a



The Electoral Commission of **Ghana** keeps records of its official engagements with political parties and other public engagements with key stakeholders and makes them available through various media. All meetings are recorded, and minutes taken, and those records are made available to all political parties after the meeting through multiple channels (e.g., WhatsApp, letters). Ahead of meetings, the commission normally shares the prior meeting's minutes with invited stakeholders. The commission also keeps records of invitations for Inter-Party Advisory Committee meetings sent to political parties and official responses and correspondence from political parties to the commission. All these records are generally available to stakeholders on demand.

In **Pakistan**, escalating political polarization led the Election Commission of Pakistan to interact in person with political parties only in the presence of media to prevent perceptions of bias and safeguard the commission's independence.

To the extent possible, all EMBs should keep comprehensive, organized, and easy-to-access records of interactions with political parties so they can better defend against accusations of bias or unequal treatment. Depending on the degree of political polarization in the country, EMBs might have to put more or less effort into publicizing these records.

<sup>13</sup> Ipsos. (October 2021). [Global Trustworthiness Index 2021. Who Does the World Trust?](#)

<sup>14</sup> Emmons, C., C. Vickery, and C. Shein. (September 2022). [Democracy and the Crisis of Trust](#). Foreign Policy. The authors observe, "trust can be tied to institutions: how well they perform or appear to deliver for the people, and whether they function autonomously."



formal part of their selection process. Newer political parties, or those without seats in the legislature, may not provide input into the process for appointing EMB commissioners. Research findings suggest that this can lead to some parties having more formal or informal access to information and influence than others.

Parties without such access may feel underrepresented or suspicious of those with greater access to the EMB's overall operations. This perception of bias may lead to parties being less willing to interact with EMB members constructively (or at all). Similarly, EMBs may be reluctant to share information openly. EMBs should be conscious of these dynamics when considering the best avenues and mechanisms for effective communication with political parties.

**Questions that can help an EMB determine effective mechanisms and tactics in environments with high levels of mistrust or accusations of partisanship toward the EMB include:**

1. If relevant, what allegations, accusations, or disinformation exist against the commission?
2. What data, evidence, and accountability mechanisms are available to dispel such accusations? For example, what do third-party sources – such as studies published by think tanks or academics, or election observation reports – say about the EMB?
3. Does the EMB communications strategy include key messages and mechanisms for countering false narratives?
4. To what extent does the EMB demonstrate its values (including impartiality) through actions (e.g., transparent decision-making, use of mechanisms for parties to share concerns and work with the EMB to resolve problems)?
5. What opportunities exist outside the election period to promote trust and a reputation for impartiality through engagement and communications with political parties (for example, do parties and candidates engage in post-election lessons learned meetings? Are they consulted as part of the EMB's strategic planning process)?

## **EMB RESOURCING**

Respondents cited budgetary constraints as an obstacle for some EMBs interested in strengthening communications, expanding engagement efforts, or training political parties. While some interlocutors believed they had sufficient funds to engage with political parties in some way during the election period, a number mentioned that resources were scarce outside the electoral period.

EMBs take different approaches to budgeting for communication and engagement, and the funds needed to support outreach to, or dialogue with, political parties could fall across different budget lines (such as staff salaries; consultant fees; web hosting and website security costs; travel and event hosting costs; design and printing expenses; or funding SMS, media airtime, and other dissemination activities). Further, communications costs may be shared across several departments (such as IT, public relations, communications, or training teams). Taking a proactive and thoughtful approach to mapping the wide range of expenses associated with political party engagement (including costs for digital and in-person engagement and physical and human resource) and ensuring that these are accounted for in EMB budgets, can be a complex but important step toward ensuring resources are available for communications and coordination across the election cycle.



**Mexico's** Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE) has four offices tasked with engaging political parties: the Executive Directorate for Prerogatives and Political Parties, the Oversight Technical Unit, the National Social Communication Office, and the Gender Equality and Non-discrimination Technical Office. Each office receives a portion of INE's budget to staff distinct roles to support political party involvement.<sup>15</sup>

Where resources allow, EMBs can consider dividing tasks related to interactions with political parties among different units, ensuring enough staff are dedicated to this engagement. It is crucial, however, that the units coordinate well with each other to avoid issuing mixed messages or confusing parties.

**Questions that can help an EMB structure a strategic approach to communicating and engaging with parties within existing budgetary parameters include:**

1. Is funding allocated for political party engagement and communication, including salaries for liaisons or dedicated departments responsible for engaging with parties?
2. Is funding for political party communications a single budget line, or does it appear in the budget under different activities (for example, in a line for candidate nomination and party registration or election dispute resolution)?
3. To what extent are resources allocated for political party communication and engagement for the interim period between elections?
4. What external resources, if any, could fill any EMB budget shortfalls?
5. What are the costs of the EMB's mechanisms for communicating and coordinating with parties and candidates? Are these the most cost-effective available to the EMB? Could any new or different tools help lower costs (for example, for travel for events, or paper and printing expenses)? Would a transition to these new forms of communication and coordination positively or negatively impact EMB transparency, accessibility, or inclusivity?
6. What partnerships could the EMB leverage to offset costs of communicating and coordinating with political parties (for example, could the EMB partner with other government agencies or offices to share costs for outreach and events)?

<sup>15</sup> Instituto Nacional Electoral. (2022, December 15). [Aprueba INE presupuesto para el Ejercicio Fiscal 2023 luego del recorte avalado por la Cámara de Diputados.](#)

## KEY CONSIDERATION: STAFFING FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Some EMBs designate a point person or maintain a unit dedicated to political parties and candidates at the national level (and sometimes also at subnational levels, which is particularly important in large or highly populous countries). The mandates of these individuals or departments can vary from fielding party questions to proactively disseminating targeted information to stakeholders, tracking campaign finance deliverables and obligations, managing party or candidate registration, convening events on aspects of the electoral cycle, and other tasks. EMBs with points of contact or departments that take care of political party engagement may have protocols and structures related to engagement and can provide a level of consistency and transparency in how such relations are handled.

In **Brazil**, for example, the TSE Office for Assistance with Parliamentary Articulation deals exclusively with political party communications. In **Ethiopia**, the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) Political Party Unit organizes biweekly meetings to keep parties informed. In **Iraq**, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) has a Political Parties Department, established by law. Among other responsibilities, it registers parties, handles election day coordination, and monitors campaign finance. The IHEC ensures that each governorate office and its national office has a designated political parties department or point of contact to provide accessible communication for party representatives. In **Papua New Guinea**, a separate body, the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission (IPCC), is responsible for party registration. In **Mexico**, the special Political Parties and Benefits Unit functions within the INE and deals with party registration and oversight. To facilitate political party engagement, all parties that have a seat at the INE also have offices in the same building. In **Indonesia**, the KPU has local branches and liaison officers to facilitate closer collaboration with political parties.

Having dedicated staff committed to political party communications can help ensure that political parties have a clear line of communication with the EMB and know whom to reach out to for assistance or with questions. Dedicated staff may also be able to provide more immediate and tailored responses to ad hoc requests from parties. Of course, there are cost implications for establishing a separate team or liaison to handle party communications, and not all EMBs work under this model. In **Nepal**, the ECN's legal department handles most party communications on specific matters prescribed in the Political Party Relations Act. In some commissions, such as in **Nigeria**, an election commissioner is responsible for political party engagement.

# EMB LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

One of the most significant determinants of successful political party communication and engagement that interviewees identified is EMB leadership. Previous research distinguishes between concepts of electoral management, which relates to handling “technical, operational, and logistical aspects of an election,”<sup>16</sup> and electoral leadership, which relates to leaders’ capacity to identify and address both internal and external challenges in elections and shepherd forward change in mindsets and behaviors to uphold the integrity of election processes.

When the head of an EMB is seen as biased or ineffective, the perceived lack of integrity or leadership can impede development of productive EMB–political party relations. Conversely, common traits associated with effective electoral leadership in the study included openness, integrity, and commitment to team-building and democratic decision-making. Common tasks or competencies associated with strong leadership included resisting political manipulation, strengthening institutional independence, confronting prejudice, motivating and influencing others, leading through crises, transforming mindsets and behaviors, and building and maintaining external relationships.<sup>17</sup>

Effective election leadership can be cultivated over time as the knowledge and skills to accomplish these tasks are honed through training and practice. Further, when an EMB has an effective president, chair, or commissioners whom parties particularly like and trust, certain steps can institutionalize good practices and protect constructive relationships. For example, if EMB leaders gain trust and build relationships with parties and candidates by co-designing meeting agendas or identifying core training needs, these practices can become more standard and can keep the door open for communication.

**Questions that can help an EMB explore opportunities to maximize the benefits of charismatic leadership to further effective EMB–party communication and engagement include:**

1. To what extent does the current EMB chair engage effectively and naturally with parties? Are other senior EMB officials well-suited to engaging parties across the political spectrum?



In the lead-up to **Ethiopia’s** 2021 elections, the NEBE faced several challenges that contributed to a two-week delay in voter registration and clerical errors in the preparation of select ballot papers, which were missing candidate names. The NEBE’s chair engaged with parties and the public when these issues emerged – holding press conferences, issuing formal apologies, and explaining the errors and delays and actions taken to advance electoral processes. An interlocutor for this research noted that the chair’s transparency and open engagement with the public and parties around the errors helped to build trust in the electoral process.

Acknowledging and being honest about mistakes and challenges does not necessarily make EMBs look weak. It can be beneficial for electoral authorities to own the institution’s mistakes and lead the narrative, focusing on reporting accurately on causes of problems and paths the EMB is taking to solve them.

<sup>16</sup> 16 Shein, E., K. Ellena, C. Barnes, and H. Szilagyi. (2020, February 28). [Leadership in Crisis: Ensuring Independence, Ethics and Resilience in the Electoral Process](#). IFES | The International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

2. What traits or strategies have effective leaders exemplified or employed in your institution's history that can be replicated?

## POLITICAL PARTY LANDSCAPE

The number of parties and the nature of their internal policies and external coordination capacities also play a role in effective EMB–political party engagement. While the EMB should often take the lead on communications, parties also have responsibilities to proactively raise issues and suggestions to the EMB.

Parties are generally best placed to identify the types of information they lack and to determine their preferred methods for receiving information at different points in the electoral cycle. Political parties also have a responsibility to share information in a timely manner, including the names of liaison officers, contact lists, candidate lists, leadership changes, coordinated responses to proposed legal amendments, and grievances.

In countries where there are many parties (sometimes numbering in the hundreds), convening parties for consultation and two-way conversation becomes more complex, as does ensuring equitable sharing of information.



In **Nepal**, Chapter 10 of the Political Parties Act (2017) allows for the ECN to organize consultation meetings with political parties on the electoral system, laws related to elections or referenda, political party finance, and other ECN policies as the commission deems appropriate. This requires political parties to engage with the ECN if they are invited to such meetings. Although the law does not require the ECN to include all political parties in these discussions, not doing so could encourage the exclusion of smaller, less influential parties.

If an EMB cannot include all political parties in meetings or consultations, it is important to be upfront about its criteria for including or excluding parties and to ensure excluded parties have access to what has been discussed.

In **Kenya**, the Political Parties Act of 2011, Section 38, establishes the Political Parties Liaison Committee at the national and county levels “to provide a platform for dialogue between the Registrar, Commission, and political parties.” The committee has felt empowered to call publicly for an independent elections audit and a national dialogue.<sup>18</sup>

**Questions that can help an EMB fulfill its obligations to treat all parties equally and solicit necessary inputs from parties during its communication and engaging planning include:**

1. How are decisions made about which parties to invite to consultations, roundtables, or other interactive engagements? Are criteria transparent, equitable, representative, and published?
2. What channels does the EMB use to receive information or feedback from parties (e.g., website forms, political party call-in lines, regular committee meetings)?
3. Which communication and engagement channels do political parties prefer to use?

<sup>18</sup> [Political Parties Act of 2011, 2022 Revised Edition](#), § 38.3, Establishment of Political Parties Liaison Committee. (2022). Mwangi, I. (2023, September 25). [Political Parties Liaison Committee Calls for Audit of 2022 General Election Results](#). Capital News. Nyaga, B. (2023, July 17). [Political Parties' Liaison Committee Calls for National Dialogue](#). KBC.

4. Which political parties or candidates, if any, may be left out of opportunities to receive or share information? What barriers may contribute to this lack of communication and coordination?
5. Does the EMB invite or require both men and women to participate in events, and does it reach out to both men and women in its communications? Do both men and women attend and participate equitably in consultations and meetings?

## **CHAPTER 2:**

# **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

**This section on communication and engagement principles provides high-level guidance on standards and practices that can enhance EMB communications with political parties. EMBs can use this information to define the goals they wish to pursue in their political party engagement strategies.**

EMB communication policies or engagement strategies generally focus on shaping outreach and coordination among diverse actors – from political parties and candidates to voters, CSOs, journalists, and state institutions. Regardless of the intended audience or partner, understanding and adhering to basic principles of effective communication and stakeholder engagement can help guide and strengthen communications and coordination. These principles are largely procedural or descriptive in nature, indicating how an EMB should communicate with political parties. Taken together, the principles can help EMBs develop effective political party communication and engagement strategies, increase their accountability to key stakeholders, ensure engagement is accessible and inclusive, and increase trust in the institution and the electoral process:

- **Impartiality and equity;**
- **Transparency;**
- **Timeliness and comprehensiveness;**
- **Accuracy and coherence;**
- **Clarity and simplicity;**
- **Frequency;**
- **Interactivity; and**
- **Accessibility and inclusivity.**

This chapter looks at each of these principles and provides guidance on how to promote them in designing political party outreach and engagement plans or reaching out to parties.



## **IMPARTIALITY AND EQUITY**

**Communicating and engaging with all political parties equitably is vital to preserving impartiality**

Engagement between EMBs and political parties should be equitable and equally available to all parties when possible. EMBs should be judicious about ensuring their engagement does not show favoritism to any party. Information shared with one party should be equally available to others to prevent any suspicions of bias or favoritism. Small parties and independent candidates should receive the same treatment as more dominant parties and their members. When an EMB spokesperson is or has been affiliated with a party, it is even more important to demonstrate the EMB's values in every interaction and to root all comments and decisions in clear data or evidence to counter any allegations of partisanship.



Communication between parties and individual EMB members is common. A majority of political party representatives interviewed for this research indicated that they often reach out to members of the EMB whom they first met and with whom they have built professional relationships over time – preferring direct points of contact to hotlines or other communication mechanisms. Many countries have no rules against parties contacting individual commissioners or a regional EMB office manager. This approach has both benefits and disadvantages. On the positive side, it can result in timely responses and two-way communication. But it can also lead to accusations of partisanship or favoritism. Such conversations are often not matters of public record and so may generate suspicion and speculation. In addition, parties or individuals who are not acquainted with any commissioners may be at a disadvantage in obtaining the same information – and being able to influence conversations and perhaps even actions within the EMB.

**Guiding questions to evaluate impartiality and equity include:**

1. Does the EMB treat all parties and candidates equitably and provide the same access to information?
2. Are small or new parties, independent candidates, candidates who are members of marginalized groups, and other less established parties or candidates included in all events, mailing lists, and communication efforts?
3. When it is necessary to convene a small group of party representatives, especially in countries where parties can number in the hundreds, are the EMB's criteria for participation clear, equitable, and fair?
4. Are minutes or other documents related to meetings with individual parties made public?
5. Does the EMB have a code of conduct or other rules for members and staff to ensure impartiality?
6. In cases of closed social media groups, are invitations to all relevant stakeholders issued equally and without bias?
7. Does the EMB compile and publish questions from parties to ensure no party receives special advantage – whether real or perceived?
8. Based on how they are used in your context, can communications in closed channels such as WhatsApp create perceptions of partisanship, or result in meetings with individual party representatives? Consider who has access to these channels, what records are kept regarding communications on these channels, and how they are shared.

**Recommendations:**

1. Stick consistently to facts, evidence, and the law when communicating with political parties.
2. Publicize minutes of meetings with parties, including any decisions made, and have party representatives who attended endorse the minutes when feasible.
3. Ensure that the criteria for inclusion in convenings of political parties and EMBs is clear, equitable, and publicly available.
4. Develop a code of conduct to ensure EMB members' impartiality when engaging with political parties.



## TRANSPARENCY

### Strengthened and institutionalized transparency contributes to trust and accountability

Engagement between EMBs and political parties should be equitable and open to all parties whenever possible. Some issues may need to be addressed behind closed doors (for example, if sensitive information, such as voter data, is involved). EMBs should always weigh risks related to lack of transparency and make efforts to report on the conclusions of those activities, including the signatures of participants. Adopting consistent strategies of openness and transparency, rooted strongly in evidence, data, and the legal framework, may help EMBs build trust with political parties.

EMBs should strive to increase their transparency with political parties regarding key issues in the electoral process. For instance, the transparency and efficacy of electoral dispute processes in **Georgia** have been questioned for years – with many legal cases reportedly “denied admissibility or dismissed on merit, many without due consideration.”<sup>19</sup> To address this problem, the Central Election Commission (CEC) launched a free, online, searchable appeals register of all relevant documents related to complaints filed with election administrators throughout elections.<sup>20</sup> This platform enables parties and members of the public to see how many election appeals cases were registered and whether or how they were resolved. It also enables observers to access opinions for further analysis.<sup>21</sup> To increase the transparency of campaign finance, which was problematic in **Brazil** against the backdrop of broader political corruption challenges,<sup>22</sup> the TSE publishes campaign finance data in a portal that contains detailed information on all donors and suppliers as well as campaign incomes and expenditures.<sup>23</sup> In **Croatia**, the election commission publishes all campaign data in a format that enables researchers, watchdogs and political parties to import published information into analytical software.<sup>24</sup> Proactive transparency is also seen in **Malawi**, where the EMB posted its Strategic Plan for 2023–2028 (detailing all EMB activities and deadlines relevant to parties) on its website and introduced the document to political parties, CSOs, and other electoral stakeholders in an in-person launch event.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (March 2021). Georgia [Parliamentary Elections, 31 October 2020](#): ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report. See also: Kadagidze, N. and S. Tskhakaia. (2019). [Research Analysis of Electoral Dispute Resolution](#). Council of Europe.

<sup>20</sup> [Central Election Commission of Georgia](#). (n.d.). [Appeals Registry](#).

<sup>21</sup> Council of Europe. (June 2020). [Electoral dispute resolution Toolkit for strengthening electoral jurisprudence](#).

<sup>22</sup> Financial Times. (November 2019). [Perpetuating Incumbents: Brazil's New Election Law](#).

<sup>23</sup> Tribunal Superior Eleitoral. (2022). [Divulgação de Candidaturas e Contas Eleitorais](#).

<sup>24</sup> State Election Commission of the Republic of Croatia. (n.d.). [Financial reports on the financing of election campaigns](#).

<sup>25</sup> Malawi Electoral Commission. (August 2023). [Strategic Plan 2023-2028](#). Malawi Election Commission. (2023, August 18). [MEC Launches Strategic Plan and Operational Plan](#).

## **KEY CONSIDERATION: OPENNESS TO SCRUTINY**

In some countries, citizens are free to inspect any element of the electoral process and obtain information without impediment. In others, observers' rights and duties are regulated by laws or by-laws tailor-made for partisan and non-partisan observers. Since the early 1980s, most elections have also been monitored by international observers from international organizations, delegations, or countries.

Among other benefits, electoral observation can help evaluate an EMB's work and, if conducted professionally, increase trust in the EMB. Professional relationships should be established and maintained with all interested observers, including those from political parties. Where there is interest, all observers should be accredited without unnecessary restrictions and have the opportunity to observe the electoral process throughout its duration.

Political parties in most countries have the right to send political party representatives (sometimes called party agents or scrutineers) to observe various parts of the electoral process. In some countries the process can be contentious, as party representatives engage directly with EMB polling agents during busy and sometimes highly charged activities such as voting, counting, or voter registration.

Party representatives sometimes lack understanding of their roles and may overstep. Conversely, EMB agents with a poor understanding of the legal framework may prevent party representatives from exercising their full rights. Coordination between parties and EMBs to ensure there is adequate understanding of respective roles can make a significant difference. Transparent access to relevant manuals, documents, and information – for example, through trainings – can help build trust and support more peaceful election processes.

### **Guiding questions to evaluate transparency:**

1. Are political parties aware of EMB interactions with other parties, and do they have access to the information shared between them?
2. Are EMB session or meeting notes and decisions proactively published when appropriate?
3. Do party observers understand which processes they can observe?
4. Is information available that outlines the laws and procedures governing different electoral activities?
5. Are there clear communication lines and rules of interaction governing interactions between political party observers and EMBs at different levels?

## Recommendations:

1. Publicize interactions, responses, and information provided to each political party (for instance, through periodic reports posted online) to enhance transparency and ensure others can use the same information.
2. Livestream EMB informational sessions and other convenings with political parties and candidates; make recordings available.
3. When closed-door meetings are necessary, provide minutes or summaries of decisions, validated by all participating parties.
4. Consider aggregating questions from different parties and candidates and sharing responses broadly via a list of frequently asked questions so all parties can benefit from the same information.
5. If accepting invitations from political parties to participate in individual meetings, ensure the criteria for acceptance are clear and that the EMB has sufficient personnel and resources available to respond equitably to all requesting parties.
6. Engage diverse and gender-equitable delegations from political parties in lessons learned events where they can share any findings from party representatives.
7. When making documents transparent and accessible to political parties, also consider the needs of party observers.



## TIMELINESS AND COMPREHENSIVENESS

### **Getting the right messages to the right people at the right time – including independent candidates, small and regional parties, and marginalized groups**

The key challenge of any effective communication effort is getting the necessary information to target audiences when they need it. Thus, EMBs should provide information to political parties and candidates on time, and they should provide enough information so political parties fully understand what they need to know to fulfill their responsibilities. In particular, content related to new, relevant EMB decisions or changes in the electoral process or legislation should be communicated quickly and allow sufficient time for stakeholders to react and adjust their actions accordingly – no matter when they occur during the electoral cycle.

In addition to general announcements of key electoral dates and activities, political parties may also need information on emerging crises; dis- or misinformation campaigns; and any scheduling, process, or procedural changes. Getting the necessary information to this group requires effective preparation and tailored communication mechanisms.

EMBs should provide political parties with all relevant information at their disposal so they can participate fully in the electoral process. Many EMBs interviewed for this research identified their websites, general public communications, email, social media, and even paper correspondence as effective ways to share key information with parties. EMBs should make available both lasting information (e.g., electoral codes, regulations, and requirements) and dynamic developments (e.g., new decisions about the electoral process) through different communication mechanisms to ensure equitable access by all parties.

Increasingly, EMBs worldwide invest substantial resources in internet portals and apps that make communication with political parties faster and more efficient, lower costs, and increase party engagement. **Ecuador, South Africa, and New Zealand** feature password-protected portals for political party representatives on their websites. In **Nepal**, the ECN has a strategy to “increase the use of social media in election information and voter education,” and it committed to coordinating and cooperating with political parties to get information on the elections out to voters through these online channels.<sup>26</sup>

In some countries, alongside contemporary communication mechanisms, EMBs still deliver information in hard copy, and it is not uncommon for parties to pick up documents at EMB offices, for example in **Nepal**.

Some EMBs indicated that the most challenging time for them is during elections, when they are preoccupied with logistics and operations. During these times, parties may find it more difficult to get timely answers from EMBs.

### **Guiding questions to evaluate timeliness and comprehensiveness:**

1. Can political parties and their members – without relying on party leadership serving as gatekeepers – find all the information they need through the different mechanisms that the EMB makes available?
2. Does the EMB release information far enough in advance to provide adequate time for parties to comply and prepare (for example, by completing forms, reviewing voter lists, generating support for nomination bids, or complying with political finance regulations)? Is the information released in a format that is accessible to parties, including independent candidates, small and regional parties, and marginalized groups?

### **Recommendations:**

1. Ensure all relevant information for political parties and candidates to participate fully in the electoral process is available through physical documents at EMB offices as well as on EMB websites and other online platforms or via text message.
2. Consult with political parties and other electoral stakeholders to understand gaps or challenges they have faced in obtaining comprehensive and timely information on electoral processes in the past. Use this feedback to inform future planning and communication practices.
3. Proactively publish election information online or disseminate it through other mechanisms (e.g., news bulletins and mailing/SMS lists).



## **ACCURACY AND COHERENCE**

### **Communication about decisions is clear and rooted in facts, data and law to build trust**

Information presented to political parties should be accurate, cohesive, and consistent across channels and messengers; both the language of the messages and the ideas they convey must make sense. EMBs should ensure their channels are up to date and information is harmonized. Internal sharing and coordination of information across EMB departments and offices (including those that operate at the national, regional, or local levels) is also necessary to ensure messages to parties at all levels remain consistent. **Nepal's** ECN, for example,

<sup>26</sup> Election Commission, Nepal. (n.d.) [Policy on the use of social media in Electoral Management, 2077](#).

employs a consensus-based decision-making model in which all five commissioners must agree to release a unified statement to maintain consistent messaging. Information should be shared across all channels simultaneously to ensure every political party receives the message without delay, regardless of the communication mechanism used. This will prevent the dissemination of incorrect, discrepant, or confusing messages.

#### **Guiding questions to evaluate accuracy and coherence:**

1. Is the information that the EMB issues always accurate?
2. Is it consistent across all channels, and across the EMB, both nationally and regionally?
3. Do current lines of internal EMB information sharing and coordination regarding party engagement (across departments and offices) support cohesive, consistent messaging?
4. Are systems in place to ensure local EMBs have all relevant information and can process and share it as necessary?

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Develop communication strategies and protocols to double-check and vet before release.
2. Develop social media protocols for electoral authorities to prevent them from disseminating inconsistent information and undermining each other or the EMB.
3. Ensure web pages and other online communication vehicles are updated diligently and that outdated or inaccurate information is removed from all platforms, especially if these are the main mechanisms for communicating with political parties.



## **CLARITY AND SIMPLICITY**

### **Easy-to-find information that is also easy to use**

EMBs should strive to present and disseminate information in a manner that is easy for political parties to understand. While messages to the public are often targeted and simplified, information provided to political parties can be burdensome to understand and assimilate, particularly for smaller and less experienced parties. Information presented to political parties should be clear and straightforward. It should facilitate interpretation of complex legal and regulatory language relevant to their work and assist them to understand the electoral process and their roles and responsibilities within it.

For instance, in many countries campaign finance reporting and rules can be poorly understood or difficult for parties to report on. While some parties that skirt the rules may intentionally manipulate the process to their advantage, others may lack the knowledge and skill to report accurately and on time. Several representatives from smaller political parties interviewed across case study countries cited challenges in understanding and complying with financial tracking and reporting requirements, making it difficult to meet deadlines. In another interview, an interlocutor stated that some parties do not have the legal expertise to engage effectively in reform efforts or to file complaints.

Parties generally prefer low-cost engagement that is not time intensive. They often appreciate simplified processes, fact sheets, and forms (rather than long documents containing legal jargon). Parties also highlighted that searchable websites with clear sub-pages are most useful, especially when the sites place all documents relevant to parties or candidates in one section or link to them from one page.

EMB trainings for political parties can help them better understand relevant information and comply with election requirements. Useful training topics include:

- General election procedures (for new parties);
- Candidate nomination process, procedures, and forms;
- Party registration process, procedures, and forms;
- Campaign finance process, procedures, and forms;
- Election dispute process, criteria, and filing;
- Reformed or amended procedures, processes, and forms; and
- Roles and responsibilities for party agents or representatives on Election Day.

For instance, the NEC in **Ghana** trains party observers ahead of elections, including on vital election processes and various forms, such as those used to file challenges. In **Ukraine**, interlocutors identified Building Resources in Democracy Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) trainings<sup>27</sup> on different aspects of the electoral process as good mechanisms for building trust and communication between the EMB and parties. Funding or other resource limitations can prevent the EMB from conducting trainings, although the international community sometimes steps in to provide support for such initiatives. In **Indonesia**, the KPU has organized presentations, trainings, and testing for political parties related to online portals that support political party operations and candidate registration. Based on feedback from parties, both systems were improved; interviewees evaluated the systems rather positively and said they contributed to building trust toward the KPU. However, minor logistical problems still occur during peak registration times.

### **Guiding questions to evaluate clarity and simplicity:**

1. Is information that the EMB discloses clear, concise, and easy to understand?
2. Are processes straightforward and not unnecessarily bureaucratic?
3. Does an EMB have direct, open lines of communication through which parties can receive clarification, if needed?
4. Does the EMB involve political parties in selected processes to educate and build trust?

### **Recommendations:**

1. Avoid unnecessary jargon or complicated language. Assume the political parties include first-time candidates who are not very familiar with the electoral process.
2. Look for ways to simplify processes to save parties money and time.

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<sup>27</sup> BRIDGE is a “modular professional development program with a particular focus on electoral processes” overseen by the Australian Electoral Commission, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IFES, United Nations Development Programme, and United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. See [Building Resources in Democracy Governance and Elections](#) and [About Bridge](#). <https://bridge-project.org/>.

3. Use infographics, videos, and other methods to disseminate information in a condensed and easy-to-understand way; tailor them to different audiences.
4. Organize trainings and other events to increase political parties' understanding of the EMB's operations and legal framework, as well as other election requirements.



## FREQUENCY

### **Communicate early, often, and continuously whenever possible**

EMB communication with political parties is important throughout the electoral cycle. Communication plans should provide for a specific number of messages over specific time periods as part of strategic EMB- party engagement.

Depending on their mandates, EMBs have different communication timelines. Temporary EMBs tend to communicate with parties exclusively during the election period, while EMBs that function as permanent bodies have the potential to communicate throughout the electoral cycle. Generally, EMBs with broader mandates tend to communicate more often and more continually.

A large majority of political party representatives interviewed across case study countries indicated that EMBs often meet with political parties when there is a specific deliverable (such as nomination period notifications) or a request for feedback or invitation to offer input (for example when developing new regulations or a code of conduct), but they rarely meet with parties otherwise. These opportunities tend to occur during the lead-up to an election. For example, the IHEC Political Parties Department in **Iraq** is responsible for party registration, electoral campaigns, and election day operations, and thus does not typically engage with parties outside the electoral period. In **Serbia**, the Republic Election Commission operates only during elections, and thus has little or no communication with parties outside of this period.

Political parties may find it useful to engage with the EMB outside the election period, particularly when electoral laws are being modified. For example, political parties in **Guatemala** are invited to provide input on new regulations and amendments to electoral legislation during designated comment periods. For political parties, training on the electoral process and specific procedures can be useful during interim periods to demonstrate continual communication when the permanent EMBs are not as busy with election administration responsibilities.

#### **Guiding questions to evaluate frequency:**

1. Is the EMB able to communicate new developments quickly?
2. Do political parties and candidates have access to relevant information on time or ahead of key processes?
3. Does the EMB communicate messages multiple times through multiple mechanisms?
4. Does the EMB communicate about crises in real time?



## Recommendations:

1. Develop long-term communication strategies or shorter communication plans to design, implement, and evaluate communication activities with all stakeholders, including political parties as key target audiences. The plans should include specific social media strategies.
2. Develop crises communication plans to establish procedures and define messages to be delivered when problems arise.



At least some communication channels between EMBs and political parties should allow two-way engagement so parties receive information and can request clarification, offer feedback, and provide inputs to inform relevant decisions. Political party representatives from seven of the nine case studies conducted for this research expressed concern that EMB communications are often one-sided and there are few opportunities for direct engagement or feedback. Some smaller and regional parties across all nine case study countries indicated that EMBs do not invite them to attend meetings and that even general, one-way communications are limited.

In **Indonesia**, a network of political party liaison officers, WhatsApp groups, and a 24/7 help desk to assist parties and candidates during registration enable two-way communication between the KPU and political parties. KPU live-streams on YouTube also support two-way communication through the chat function.

## Guiding questions to evaluate interactivity:

1. Can political parties interact directly with the EMB to ask questions or request clarification? Is information available online, in person, or both?
2. Can political parties interact directly with the EMB to provide inputs and influence decisions?
3. Does the EMB have systems in place to respond promptly to queries?
4. Does the EMB adapt its approach based on evolving circumstances or feedback from political parties?

## Recommendations:

1. Embed features to increase interactivity in general communications (such as by encouraging political party representatives to engage with the message and ask questions or respond to serious queries on social media posts).
2. Develop accountability mechanisms to show political parties how and the extent to which their inputs have been incorporated into EMB decision-making, lessons learned processes, and strategic and operational planning.
3. Use roundtables, working groups, focus groups, or advisory councils to hear what parties have to say, respond to questions, and jointly tackle problems that threaten the electoral process.

4. Clearly publicize how to reach the EMB points of contact who will handle communication with and provide equitable access to all political parties.
5. Involve regional EMB offices in engagement and communication plans, as they are often the first points of contact for parties or candidates outside the capital. Assess whether they can assist in reaching out to small regional parties and underrepresented groups.
6. Work with all political parties to ensure buy-in and agreement on documents such as new policies, regulations, and codes of conduct, where possible.



## ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

### Engagement focused on inclusion for marginalized groups

EMBs should aim to connect with all political parties. They should make those communications available and accessible to all members of parties, not just leadership – building relationships of trust with both larger and smaller political actors. This inclusive outreach requires that the information they share be accessible in both content and format. Thus, it should be available on- and offline; in relevant languages; using clear and simple language to accommodate those with lower levels of literacy; through written, audio, and visual formats; and tailored to persons with disabilities.

Many EMBs strive to publish information in open and searchable formats that allow analysis by a wide range of stakeholders. In addition to ensuring that data is widely accessible, EMBs should pay attention to the accessibility needs of members of marginalized groups – including women, persons with disabilities, and members of minority ethnic, language, or religious groups – who may face additional barriers to participation within their parties and in political life in general. Because women candidates face some of the stiffest competition within their own parties rather than in cross-party contests,<sup>28</sup> it is essential that the EMB does not rely only on party leadership to disseminate information to all candidates. IFES research has found that, in some cases, this information, including critical information on electoral law, filing deadlines, and electoral dispute resolution processes, is not always shared equally with all candidates. And women candidates are less likely than men to receive critical information.

Most EMB interlocutors across case study countries could not identify specific actions they were taking to engage with parties to support greater inclusion, beyond legally binding quotas. While effective EMB- party engagement is not a panacea, it can support greater inclusion. In **Nepal**, the ECN publishes information about and helps enforce a complex quota system that requires parties to engage women, minorities, and others (defining percentages for the number of women candidates and for candidates representing different ethnic groups that must be included in party lists for proportional representation– list elections).<sup>29</sup> Some EMBs provide sign language interpretation at their media conferences, such as in **Georgia** and **Iraq**, where media statements are also issued in Braille.

#### Guiding questions to evaluate accessibility and inclusivity:

1. Is information that the EMB publishes available in open and searchable formats?
2. Is information that the EMB issues available in all relevant and minority languages?
3. Is the information available in formats that people with disabilities can access?
4. Is accessible information available to people with low literacy?

<sup>28</sup> Waugh, R. (2024). Electoral Justice for All: A Practitioner's Guide to Increasing Women's Access to Electoral Justice (working title). Manuscript in preparation. Please contact [media@ifes.org](mailto:media@ifes.org) with inquiries.

<sup>29</sup> IFES. (2022). [IFES Nepal Federal and Provincial Elections 2022 FAQ](#).

5. Can political parties and candidates in urban, rural, and remote areas access information issued by the EMB without impediment?
6. Does the EMB intentionally or unintentionally exclude any regions, parties, marginalized groups (e.g., women, persons with disabilities), or individuals (e.g., independent candidates) from outreach, consultations, or the dissemination of information?

**Recommendations:**

1. Ensure information is available in all relevant local languages, including sign language.
2. Familiarize political parties with the communication mechanisms available to them, including how to navigate web pages and online platforms.
3. As needed in areas of low internet penetration or among populations with low literacy, consider alternative ways to share information (such as bulletin boards at EMB offices, radio or street theater, local points of contact).
4. Ensure communication channels are accessible so persons with disabilities who wish to participate as candidates or party representatives have full access to information.
5. Consider a public repository documenting each party's achievements toward quotas as a means to promote legally mandated inclusion efforts.
6. Consult with gender units or focal points and review any gender strategies and action plans within an EMB. Identify opportunities to tailor communications to and coordinate with women's wings, individual women in political parties, or women running as independent candidates.
7. Provide women candidates and first-time candidates with dedicated training opportunities covering electoral laws and regulations, key deadlines, available resources, and electoral dispute resolution processes.
8. Consult with gender units or focal points and identity-based party wings to ensure that electoral dispute resolution processes are inclusive and accessible and that information about them is widely disseminated to members of marginalized groups.
9. Consider hosting post-election reviews with diverse and representative groups of men and women across political parties (through interviews and anonymous surveys) to better understand whether any gender- or other identity-related information gaps were experienced during the election.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF CORE COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES IN TIMES OF CRISIS<sup>3</sup>**

The eight principles listed in this chapter are critical in building institutional resilience, which is essential in periods of crisis.

Electoral crises may unfold due to external factors (such as severe weather events or outbreaks of disease) or factors related to the elections themselves (for example, election violence, targeted disinformation campaigns sowing mistrust of election leaders, procurement controversies, errors that result in disruptions to the timely delivery of electoral materials). Regardless of the root causes of escalating tension, having established relationships with key stakeholders, and knowing where to go for timely accurate information, is critical to maintain trust in electoral processes. Those relationships should be central to keeping all electoral stakeholders – including parties, candidates, and voters – abreast of changing circumstances. Informed political parties that have respect for the EMB and confidence in the data they are receiving can become allies in managing public expectations and perceptions during a crisis. Conversely, when trust is lost, political parties can be the cause of a crisis or can intentionally or unintentionally inflame tensions by perpetuating harmful narratives.

Respectful relationships with parties, built over time through reliable communication and two-way engagement, can build EMB resilience to shocks. Continued communication and engagement during crises can ensure political parties become allies in protecting an electoral process that is foundational to the country's democracy.

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<sup>3</sup>This text was adapted from Leadership in Crisis, Op. cit. This paper drew on prior research on public sector crisis management. See, in particular, Drennan, L. T., McConnell, A., and Alastair Stark. (2007). Risk and Crisis Management in the Public Sector. (2nd ed.). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

# **CHAPTER 3:**

# **COMMUNICATION MECHANISMS**

**This section maps the communication mechanisms that the interviewed EMBs use most commonly to communicate and coordinate with political parties, identifies how those mechanisms can help EMBs strengthen adherence by applying the principles of good communication, and outlines potential benefits and key considerations before using them for party engagement.**

Most EMB representatives who participated in this study do not have specific political party engagement or communication plans, but they engage with parties in different ways. This guide highlights the most common tools and mechanisms that EMBs use to engage with parties and describes when they might be most appropriate to meet specific goals.

## EMB WEBSITES, PORTALS, AND APPS

EMB use websites, web portals, and apps to reach the public. Many common features of EMB websites are also of interest to parties and are accessible at a user's convenience. Some EMBs have dedicated web pages for political parties. These pages may include links to party-specific regulations, guidance on candidate registration or financial reports, complaint procedures, political party contacts,<sup>31</sup> recordings or livestreams of meetings between EMBs and political parties, or meeting notes from EMB–political party convenings. A large subset of the political party representatives and independent candidates interviewed in case study countries identified the ability to download or complete forms

**A large subset of the political party representatives and independent candidates identified the ability to download or complete relevant forms and templates electronically (for example, registration and nomination forms, general funding and campaign finance reporting templates, complaint forms) as valuable.**

and templates electronically (for example, registration and nomination forms, general funding and campaign finance reporting templates, complaint forms) as valuable – as well as information on how parties and candidates can contact the EMB if they have questions, or a mechanism on the website to submit documents or a queries to staff or chatbots.

The websites of certain EMBs (such as those in **Canada, Croatia, Ecuador, Indonesia, New Zealand, South Africa**, and the **United Kingdom**) have password-protected portals for political party representatives, enabling them to share targeted and potentially sensitive communications securely. Interviews with party representatives in **Indonesia** highlighted that the KPU operates separate online platforms for political parties (Sistem Informasi Partai Politik) and candidate registration (Sistem Informasi Pencalonan). The KPU also provides 24/7 help desk assistance via email, chat (WhatsApp), online meetings (Zoom, Google Meet) and in-person consultation at the national and regional levels to assist with registration and respond to questions.<sup>32</sup>

One benefit of these online resources is that political parties can access them at their convenience. Some EMBs like the IHEC in **Iraq** routinely release statements about their activities, such as candidate nominations, in the lead-up to an election and publish the statements on their websites. On Election Day, the website publishes turnout rates throughout the day and voting results at the end of the day. In **Croatia**, voters can review their personal data and polling station location by entering their personal identification number in the E-Voters app, which also enables political parties to verify voter lists.

<sup>31</sup> Election Commission Nepal. (n.d.). [Sample Contact List](#).

<sup>32</sup> The research team interviewed several stakeholders in Indonesia. These conversations clarified that political parties in Indonesia tested both platforms, and the KPU implemented their recommendations. Both systems have assigned field verification officers, but political parties suggested that verification decisions be made public and systems the updated regularly during peak registration times to ensure the reliability of data on candidates.

In **Georgia**, the Central Election Commission publishes a searchable appeals registry<sup>33</sup> where parties and others can access documents and decisions on all submitted appeals and other information.

The reach of websites and apps has some limits. For example, they may not be equally accessible for persons with disabilities, up to date, or user-friendly across all jurisdictions. It is also important to maintain alternate forms of communication with political parties – particularly where internet penetration is uneven or access is inconsistent. Accessibility and inclusion are also key factors to consider in website and app design.

Benefits	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Equity</b> – All audiences can access authoritative information at the same time.</li> <li>• <b>Transparency</b> – Information is in the public domain and accessible to all electoral stakeholders with internet connectivity.</li> <li>• <b>Timeliness and comprehensiveness</b> – Tailored, detailed messages can be uploaded in real time in response to unfolding events.</li> <li>• <b>Clarity and simplicity</b> – Clear way of disseminating and navigating information.</li> <li>• <b>Frequency</b> – They are easy to update regularly and proactively as consistent, trustworthy sources of information for electoral stakeholders.</li> <li>• <b>Interactivity</b> – They can be a means for parties to reach EMBs.</li> <li>• <b>Inclusivity</b> – Accessible, inclusive, and easy- to-read information tailored for target audiences can dramatically improve the EMB’s reach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EMB websites, portals, and apps are most useful if they provide current information, forms, and policies. This requires dedicated personnel and coordination.</li> <li>• Parties based in remote areas may not have consistent internet access and must be reached in other ways.</li> <li>• Developing and posting high-quality content that addresses the needs of different audiences requires time and engagement.</li> <li>• Engaging parties in developing of portals that are intuitive and easy to use can be time-consuming.</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Benefits of and Considerations for EMB Websites, Portals, and Apps.**

<sup>33</sup> Central Election Commission of Georgia. (n.d.). [Appeals Registry](#).

## WHAT FACTORS CAN MAKE EMB WEBSITES AND APPS MORE EFFECTIVE AS COMMUNICATION TOOLS?

While websites and apps are often key communication tools for EMBs, their effectiveness for outreach depends on their structure (e.g., being organized in a user-friendly way and easy to navigate), along with the quality, timeliness, accessibility, and machine-readability of the information presented. EMBs can take concrete steps to make their websites more user-friendly for political party representatives and independent candidates who represent traditionally marginalized populations in political processes, including persons with disabilities and individuals from language minorities.

### Accessibility

In line with accessibility principles, many EMBs make their websites and other forms of media accessible for persons with disabilities. In **Armenia**, for example, the Central Election Commission updated its website for compatibility with screen reader technology, which enables users with visual disabilities to better navigate the platform. All content posted to an EMB's website, as well as the architecture of the site, itself should be formatted for compatibility with screen readers. One way to do this is through the use of alt text (descriptive text that describes and provides context for visual items in online content). Features like high-contrast mode or the ability to change font sizes can also make websites more accessible.

### Language and Literacy

EMBs should also consider potential language and literacy barriers as they prepare content for websites and apps. EMBs in countries with multiple official languages and different ethnic or linguistic minority groups should plan and budget for the preparation and dissemination of important information on elections in a timely manner and equally in all relevant languages. They should make efforts to include sign language interpretation or captions on video content to make it accessible for persons with disabilities. EMBs should also create content that is easily understood by persons with intellectual disabilities or low literacy, as well as non-native speakers of a language. One solution is to offer text in easy-read format, which simplifies content and illustrations. In **Australia**, for example, the Electoral Commission provides easy-read guides on different aspects of the election cycle.

### Open Data

EMBs should follow open data standards whenever possible to make information available to political parties and candidates, as well as the public. Core principles for maintaining open data in elections stipulate that that data should be (1) timely, (2) granular, (3) available at no cost, (4) complete, (5) analyzable, (6) non-proprietary, (7) non-discriminatory, (8) license-free, and (9) permanently available. Information provided in accordance with these principles benefits the public and election observers – and political parties as well. For instance, open data regarding ballot qualifications can support deeper understanding of rules and processes for registering candidates; and open data around election complaints and disputes can help parties and candidates navigate the process for submitting complaints peacefully and tracking them through all phases of the dispute resolution mechanism.

Interested in Learning More?



Visit the National Democratic Institute's Open Election Data Initiative at [openelectionsdata.net](https://openelectionsdata.net).



## DIRECT CONTACT (MAILING AND MESSAGING LISTS)

Another popular mechanism for engaging with parties is direct contact via postal mail, email, or messaging (e.g., WhatsApp). **Indonesia's** KPU and its regional and local branches, for instance, use 575 WhatsApp groups to share information directly with authorized party liaison officers. Parties use the groups to pose questions and raise common issues. The generally congenial tone of the WhatsApp groups, including holiday wishes or jokes during quieter times, helps to keep relationships between the EMB and parties positive, even if the political landscape is more contentious. During elections in **Nepal**, the ECN issues a daily bulletin to a mailing list and publishes it on the ECN website.<sup>34</sup> Some political parties noted, however, that they were not included in the mailing list.

Benefits	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Equity and inclusion</b> – If lists are current, EMBs can reach all candidates or all party representatives with the same messages at the same time.</li> <li>• <b>Timeliness</b> – Prompt communication as events happen.</li> <li>• <b>Frequency</b> – Messages go out to target stakeholders as many times as necessary.</li> <li>• <b>Interactivity</b> – Can enable rapid two-way engagement between EMBs and political parties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electronic lists have limited use in areas with low or unreliable internet penetration.</li> <li>• Direct contact is ineffective if contact lists are not complete and current. In countries with numerous parties, updating lists can be difficult and time-consuming.</li> <li>• The efficacy of two-way communication depends on bandwidth to respond to communications.</li> <li>• Messages directly to individuals that are not part of the public record can lead to real or perceived lack of transparency.</li> </ul>

**Table 4: Benefits of and Considerations for Direct Contact.**

## TRADITIONAL MEDIA (PRINT, RADIO, AND TELEVISION)

EMB worldwide use traditional media broadly to channel relevant and interesting election information to the public. These modes of communication may directly target political parties or be geared toward more general audiences. Traditional media play important roles in featuring content from EMB press releases and press conferences that is often relevant to parties. In some countries, traditional media outlets are legally obliged to publish key information about elections supplied by EMBs. In **Croatia**, for example, all print media and gazettes publish the electoral calendar and bylaws pertaining to elections. In **Papua New Guinea**, the newspapers publish the writ marking the commencement of the electoral period, as mandated by law.

<sup>34</sup> ECNs' websites include past bulletins. See, for example, Election Commission, Nepal. (n.d). [Local Election E- Bulletin](#) (numerous bulletins, in local language). Election Commission, Nepal. (n.d.). [Bulletin](#) (seven bulletins from December 2014 to July 2016).

Traditional media can be cost-effective for disseminating information relevant to parties in a public and transparent manner. Often, EMBs receive free or subsidized airtime on state or public television and radio stations. EMBs are also sometimes legally required to monitor public media to ensure equal and equitable exposure for all parties. In some countries, EMBs also organize and facilitate televised political debates. In **Ecuador**, this practice initially decreased trust between political parties and the Consejo Nacional Electoral (CNE); however, as the quality of debates improved, trust between the CNE and political parties increased.

Radio is often a primary means for reaching remote rural communities that may have limited access to internet, print, or television and/or populations that may have lower levels of literacy. And community- based radio broadcasts in local languages are critical for regional parties and candidates running in local elections. Local EMB officials often speak on radio about elections and “dos and don’ts” during the campaign period. In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, for instance, the EMB’s participation in radio shows has helped disseminate information on elections to the public across a large country with limited literacy, infrastructure, and connectivity.

Legislators should consider formalizing relationships between EMBs and traditional media by mandating EMBs to provide certain information through television, radio, and newspapers, and, as possible, by requiring media outlets to give EMBs airtime or print space to conduct outreach. Even when not required by law, EMBs should pursue relationships with and leverage trusted media outlets to convey relevant messages.

Benefits	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Transparency</b> – Communicating the same message to all audiences ensures consistency.</li> <li>• <b>Timeliness</b> – News programming is, by definition, timely; interviews can often be scheduled quickly, especially at times of crisis or other unfolding events.</li> <li>• <b>Interactivity</b> – Call in-shows offer some interaction.</li> <li>• <b>Accessibility and inclusivity</b> – Can result in broad reach and support information sharing in local languages (e.g., via community radio).</li> <li>• <b>Openness to scrutiny</b> – Some media outlets fact-check messages provided by an EMB and ask follow-up questions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print media can take time to reach audiences, especially in countries with limited transportation infrastructure.</li> <li>• Limited infrastructure can reduce television and internet access.</li> <li>• Public service announcements, especially on television, require preparation and can be costly to air or publish.</li> <li>• In certain countries, a pay-to-play model of journalism limits the amount of coverage EMBs can afford.</li> <li>• EMBs do not always control the final messages communicated via traditional media, and some media outlets make changes that support their political biases.</li> <li>• EMBs must exercise discretion when accepting invitations to talk shows or as panel guests; the presence of certain parties could compromise their impartiality.</li> </ul>

**Table 5: Benefits of and Considerations for Traditional Media.**

## EMB SOCIAL MEDIA

Increasingly, EMBs use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), YouTube, and TikTok for outreach. In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the EMB recently announced the opening (and subsequent extension) of the candidate nomination period through its Instagram, Facebook, and X accounts. In **Nepal**, the ECN is active on X during the electoral period, sharing information such as electoral dates and procedures. In **Indonesia**, the KPU streams actions (such as vote counting<sup>35</sup>) and podcasts<sup>36</sup> on YouTube, where it also responds to questions through chat and an accompanying transcript.

These forms of communication have significantly increased electoral authorities' capacity to communicate quickly – and in real time – and to reach larger audiences. But they also have downsides. For example, the engagement-based algorithms that social media platforms use may cause key audiences to miss important posts in their news feeds. Some social media platforms are improving their search tools and enabling users to pin important news. Even with these improvements, effectiveness still depends largely on users being attentive to social media or searching for EMBs' pages. If different EMB departments, regional offices, or commissioners can post on their own accounts without internal coordination, messaging may also lack consistency. In **Serbia**, for instance, political parties' designated EMB representatives become members of the “extended committee” of the Republic Electoral Commission during the election period and can communicate independently of the commission. Doing so can lead to conflicting messages.

While communication through traditional media is often one-directional (from EMBs to their audiences) social media is easier to use for two-way engagement. EMBs may also opt for dedicated social media presence that addresses a specific political party audience (as opposed to content designed for voter education, for example). Such engagement requires dedicated personnel to monitor and respond to or remove comments, as stipulated by an EMB's social media strategy and policies (where they exist) and a country's legislative framework (e.g., laws against hate speech or defamation).

Communication on social media platforms is usually less formal than on other channels. This can require a shift in how EMBs generally issue information and require additional resources to craft and adapt messages. Some EMBs embrace this. For instance, the **Australian** Electoral Commission (AEC) maintains accounts on Facebook, LinkedIn, X, and YouTube; partnered with TikTok to disseminate an election guide; and conducted an “Ask Me Anything” session on Reddit. The AEC uses informal language and references pop culture trends to broaden its engagement.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the Republic of the **Philippines** Commission on Elections (COMELEC) uses TikTok to present updates on key information, answer questions, and share details about the electoral process.<sup>38</sup>

Because it is often easier and less resource-intensive to use social media than to create communication campaigns for television or radio (and to coordinate with those outlets to air them), some EMBs prioritize online media as their main communication channels. Election authorities must keep in mind, however, that some segments of the population can be left out from and alienated by messages that are limited to the online space – particularly older people who may not be familiar with technology or individuals in remote areas with poor internet access.

<sup>35</sup> General Elections Commission of Indonesia. (2024). [Vote Counting Simulation](#) (presenting ballot paper design and 2024 election form). YouTube Channel of the Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia.


<sup>36</sup> General Elections Commission of Indonesia. (2024). [#PodcastKPURI Episode 4: Logical, Critical, Creative vs Democracy??](#) YouTube Channel of the Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia.

<sup>37</sup> Miller, M.E. and F. Vinall. (2022, May 14). [The Twitter Account Defending Australian Democracy](#). The Washington Post.

<sup>38</sup> Tik Tok. [TikTok and COMELEC Team Up to Encourage More Filipinos to Vote](#). (2022, April 18).

Benefits	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Transparency</b> – Because interactions between a party representative and the EMB are in the public domain, all parties can benefit from the EMB’s responses.</li> <li>• <b>Timeliness and frequency</b> – Social media messages by an EMB can respond immediately to unfolding events or be scheduled for posting at appropriate times or intervals during the electoral cycle.</li> <li>• <b>Clarity and simplicity</b> – The EMB controls the message and can share information as necessary at little or no cost.</li> <li>• <b>Interactivity</b> – Social media provides opportunities to engage in two-way communication, if the EMB has adequate staff to respond to messaging.</li> <li>• <b>Accessibility</b> – Anyone with a mobile phone and connectivity can access these sites. Some, like Facebook, automatically translate posts and add alt text to images.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political parties are among many audiences that can access social media. Tailoring messages is difficult for political party-focused social media accounts.</li> <li>• It may be necessary to recruit staff with specialized experience to maintain a consistent and social media effective presence.</li> <li>• Parties based in remote areas may not have consistent internet access.</li> <li>• Social media requires regular monitoring and a consistent voice for EMB responses to comments, necessitating a significant time commitment.</li> <li>• Costs are associated with dedicating resources to create social media content, managing social media accounts, advertising on social media, securing official accounts, and taking advantage of specific features.</li> <li>• Social media comment sections can be contentious and subject to the rampant posting of misinformation.</li> <li>• Social media may have some accessibility limitations that pose restrictions for users with disabilities.</li> </ul>

**Table 6: Benefits of and Considerations for Social Media.**

**Interested in Learning More?** 

IFES’s [Social Media Strategies for Election Management Bodies: A Tactical Guide to Expanding Voter Outreach](#) provides platform-specific tip sheets on how EMBs can make the most of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and messaging apps like WhatsApp. The guide includes strategies to use across platforms, guidance on hosting live video events, suggestions for using social media partnerships to expand the reach of content, and messaging strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# COLLABORATIVE WORKING SESSIONS AND WORKING GROUPS

EMBs may engage with political parties in one or more meetings to discuss, gather inputs about, or decide on elements of the electoral process. These events are often consultative, with participants providing input to the EMB or, at times, other branches of government. In **Kyrgyzstan**, for example, 14 members of Parliament representing different parties were invited to participate in an ad hoc election legislative reform interagency working group led by the Kyrgyz Central Election Commission (CEC) during summer 2022 (the working group was still operating at the time of writing).<sup>39</sup> In **Ukraine**, working sessions and working groups frequently bring together EMB representatives, members of Parliament, and other stakeholders to advocate and work toward reforms. In March 2020, for instance, the Central Election Commission convened a working group to address the integration of new technologies into elections. In March 2023, three new working groups were launched to address challenges in convening post-war elections (such as updating the national voter register and reaching out-of-country voters).<sup>40</sup>

In addition to discussing electoral reforms, working groups involving EMBs and political parties can focus on other themes of common interest, such as the political engagement of youth or enhancing women's representation in politics. For example, in 2022 the **Dominican Republic's** Junta Central Electoral organized a working group on women's participation that brought together women from different political parties. Such initiatives can foster interparty dialogue and engagement by promoting collaboration among members of opposing parties.

**Thematic working groups organized by EMBs] can foster interparty dialogue and engagement by promoting collaboration between members of opposing parties.**

Engaging parties in electoral reform proposals or in developing regulations can be a useful way to ensure legal changes, regulations, and commitments are realistic and accepted by political actors; this also helps improve compliance. In **Nepal**, as in other countries, the EMB has worked closely with political parties to develop a code of conduct.

Effective engagement between EMBs and parties sometimes requires ad hoc working sessions to solve problems, address crises, and understand disconnects between what parties need to know to perform their roles effectively and what the EMB communicates. In **Ethiopia**, after consultation with parties, the NEBE agreed to share certain election-related forms via email, WhatsApp, and Telegram to reduce the cost and time required for party representatives to pick up hard copies.

*Ad hoc* consultations are often most effective when formal mechanisms are in place for EMBs and parties to engage – such as, for example, the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) in **Nigeria** and the Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council (EPPJC) in **Ethiopia**. In countries without formal or functioning mechanisms, political parties may resort to judicial interventions to address common or easily settled issues.

*Ad hoc* meetings are sometimes open to the media and other interested attendees. At times, however, it may be useful to hold such meetings by invitation so contentious discussions can take place without anyone losing face. During the 2022 election, **Brazil's** TSE managed to get 31 of the country's 32 political parties to sign an agreement to ban the dissemination of disinformation. The agreement followed a two-day meeting that required collaboration and

<sup>39</sup> As highlighted by interviews with CEPPS/IFES staff, the most recent legislative working group focusing on elections launched its work in summer 2022 and was still operational as of early 2024.

<sup>40</sup> Electoral assistance newsroom – Electoral assistance – [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int), (2020, April 12.) [Electoral Assistance Newsroom – The Council of Europe, Council of Europe](https://www.coe.int/en/web/electoral-assistance/newsroom). Deprez, F. (2023, October 4). [Ukraine is Already Working on Its Next Election](https://www.coe.int/en/web/electoral-assistance/newsroom). Foreign Policy.

dialogue among parties. *Ad hoc* focus groups to elicit feedback on civic education messaging or EMB performance during post-election assessments or lessons learned exercises<sup>41</sup> can also ensure the needs of parties and the EMB during elections are heard and considered.

Benefits	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Transparency</b> – Making the topics and decisions of working groups or roundtables public can increase the transparency of electoral processes and public trust.</li> <li>• <b>Interactivity</b> – Collaborative sessions are opportunities for structured engagement and input from political parties. They can help build trust, foster, more effective reform, and increase the likelihood of acceptance and compliance.</li> <li>• <b>Transparency and interactivity</b> can promote interparty dialogue, mitigate polarization, and prevent conflict.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing inclusion and representation with the need to keep a group manageable and focused can be challenging, especially in countries with a large number of parties.</li> </ul>

**Table 7: Benefits of and Considerations for Collaborative Working Groups and Roundtables.**

## PERMANENT OR SEMI-PERMANENT ADVISORY COUNCILS

Like thematic working groups, advisory councils are intended to provide a mechanism for structured interactions between EMBs and political parties on specific issues. Committees or councils can be permanent or temporary (activated during certain periods). Election advisory councils or committees are generally composed of members of the largest parties or parties with seats in Parliament and EMB representatives; others are open to representatives of all registered political parties in a country.

Such councils can help parties consolidate their ideas prior to engaging with the EMB to raise concerns or suggestions and provide a formal mechanism for engagement. They can be initiated by EMBs but are sometimes convened by government assemblies or by other groups, such as CSOs or international partners. In some cases, the electoral legal and regulatory framework mandates the establishment of the councils or committees; others may be established voluntarily. In countries with hundreds of registered political parties, councils initiated by parties with sitting members can enable objective consultation among a manageably sized group. The councils can engage other technical experts for advice and options. Protocols are generally devised to set out meeting frequency, membership, logistics, structure, and agendas; whether sessions are open to the media; and the council’s mandate and objectives. In some structures, such as in **Nigeria**, political parties set the agendas that frame the meetings. In others, such as in **Ghana**, the EMB sets the agenda.

<sup>41</sup> Darnolf, S., C. Murphy, and H. Roberts. (2024, January 23). [Lessons Learned Processes: Advancing to the Next Elections](#). IFES | The International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

**Nigeria's** IPAC, as the umbrella body for registered political parties, often makes public statements about aspects of the electoral process. The IPAC also makes recommendations to the INEC on behalf of parties. Mechanisms like this enable parties to coordinate and present information to the EMB in a useful manner and consider the views of opposition and ruling parties, limiting accusations or criticisms of partisanship.

**Mechanisms like [inter-party advisory councils] enable parties to coordinate and present information to the EMB in a useful manner and consider the views of opposition and ruling parties, limiting accusations or criticisms of partisanship.**

In **Ethiopia**, Proclamation 1162/2019 established the EPPJC,<sup>42</sup> which has played a role in enhancing party participation in political processes and engagement with the NEBE.<sup>43</sup> The EPPJC comprises all registered political parties at the national and regional levels, with internal organs and guiding documents for its operations.<sup>44</sup> While the NEBE deputy chair engages with political parties and the EPPJC, according to a memorandum of understanding,<sup>45</sup> NEBE also provides financial assistance to parties to participate in EPPJC activities and secure administrative support and office space for party operations. According to political parties, the EPPJC reduced the number of inquiries to NEBE by political parties by consolidating issues among parties and addressing them on the spot.

Similarly, in **Canada**, the Advisory Council of Political Parties, administered by Elections Canada, provides the “Chief Electoral Officer with advice and recommendations relating to elections and political financing” and provides a place for “open dialogue between Elections Canada and registered political parties.”<sup>46</sup>

In **Ghana**, the IPAC forum is a key mechanism for communication and coordination between the EMB and political parties at the national level. The IPAC typically meets monthly during election years and irregularly in non-election years. The EMB uses IPAC meetings to discuss and share information with political parties and other key stakeholders about its plans and programs for election management and electoral processes. Historically, the IPAC has also been a key forum for building consensus on key electoral reforms in each election cycle. The EMB presents drafts of election reforms and the regulatory framework (constitutional instruments for input from political parties before they are submitted to the Attorney General and then to Parliament). IPAC's Electoral Reform Sub-committee, with political party representation, has developed many key electoral reform proposals. Ghana's EMB also set up regional and district inter-party advisory committees (RIPACs and DIPACs). Multi-day RIPAC and DIPAC meetings follow IPAC meetings to filter down the issues discussed and agreed upon at the IPAC.

Given the important role of advisory councils or committees in facilitating cross-party collaboration, engagement, and coordination with EMB representatives, and the influence of some committees on EMB decision-making, party representatives often consider committee seats as positions of leadership or influence. As such, men from dominant identity groups within political parties often fill those roles. Accordingly, such structures, while generally considered effective avenues for facilitating communication and coordination between EMBs and political parties, can replicate entrenched norms, power dynamics, and marginalization within parties. However, groups focused on youth, gender considerations, or Indigenous issues, or other types of advisory councils, can help ensure that EMB-party engagement addresses matters of concern to people with marginalized identities.

<sup>42</sup> Federal Negarit Gazette of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. (2019). [Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation, No. 1162/2019](#).

<sup>43</sup> Fana Broadcasting Corporation. (2022, March 11). [EPPJC Calls Up On Ethiopians To Play Active Role In Forthcoming National Dialogue](#).

<sup>44</sup> NEBE.org.et. (n.d.). [Political Parties Joint Council | National Election Board of Ethiopia](#). Fana Broadcasting Corporation. (2022, October 19). [NEBE, Joint Council Sign MoU](#).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Elections Canada. (2020). [Advisory Committee of Political Parties – Terms of Reference](#).

**[Inter-party advisory committees], while generally considered effective avenues for facilitating communication and coordination between EMBs and political parties, can replicate entrenched norms, power dynamics, and marginalization within parties. However, groups focused on youth, gender considerations, or Indigenous issues, or other types of advisory councils, can help ensure that EMB-party engagement addresses matters of concern to people with marginalized identities.**

Benefits	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Impartiality</b> – Involving all parties limits accusations of partisanship or bias.</li> <li>• <b>Transparency</b> – Making the topics of discussion and decisions of councils public can increase both the transparency of electoral processes and public trust. Councils can demonstrate that EMBs and political actors act professionally in advancing electoral integrity, improving the functioning of electoral processes, and responding to public needs and priorities.</li> <li>• <b>Interactivity</b> – Facilitating cross-party collaboration, engagement, coordination, and communication with the EMB.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating the activities of advisory councils can be costly and time-consuming for EMBs.</li> <li>• Roles on advisory councils, if not inclusive, can replicate entrenched norms, power dynamics, and marginalization.</li> <li>• Dedicated EMB staff time is needed to prepare agendas, promote attendance, release information about discussions and decisions, and follow up on decisions.</li> </ul>

**Table 8: Benefits of and Considerations around Advisory Councils.**

## TRAININGS AND INFORMATION SESSIONS

Making information available online about the electoral process is necessary but sometimes insufficient to ensure that certain types of dense, complex, or new information are useful to political party and candidate stakeholders (for example, amendments to laws and important changes in party responsibilities for the next election cycle). In an emerging democracy, the cycle itself can be new and unfamiliar. And certain processes – such as financial reporting – can require specialized knowledge. To prepare parties for elections, EMBs may invest in informational meetings, trainings, and workshops to provide information on key topics such as those, as well as changes to election and political party laws, candidate registration procedures, observer registration processes, and electoral dispute resolution.

In **Nepal**, for example, the ECN led trainings for political parties on the complex quota system set out in the country’s laws, helping parties ensure the diversity of candidates on their lists. In **Brazil**, as in many countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, the TSE held virtual meetings



representatives of political parties on measures they should take to prevent the spread of the virus during party activities and polling. In **Papua New Guinea**, political party representatives are offered training before they observe electoral processes. In **Indonesia**, the KPU organizes informational meetings on political party and candidate registration and verification, and the use of online platforms. The KPU uses Zoom for meetings on electoral issues to enable low-cost access, facilitate wider participation, and prevent unintentional exclusion. In **Ethiopia**, the NEBE organizes meetings to inform parties of their legal obligations related to general assemblies, disclosure of documents, and other topics.<sup>47</sup>

It is generally within EMBs' purview to host meetings and trainings on electoral processes and other matters according to their areas of responsibility. To that end, they should organize the events in an impartial manner and make meeting notes public. However, financial and other resource constraints – particularly if many parties or candidates contest an election – may prevent the holding of such events, or lead EMBs to limit invitations to certain parties. For example, in **Nepal** only major parties are traditionally invited to meetings. In **Tunisia**, the Independent High Authority for Elections invites parties for meetings based on parliamentary composition. However, EMBs in **Georgia, Indonesia, and Croatia**<sup>48</sup> have used online meeting tools, customized videos for political parties, and webinars to reach wide audiences.

Inclusion is another key factor in planning electoral trainings and webinars. Sida-funded research<sup>49</sup> conducted by IFES found that political party representatives do not always provide women candidates with adequate or accurate information about electoral regulations, complaint procedures, and other aspects of election processes. Even when EMBs communicate effectively with political party leadership, information may not make it to all candidates. Because women are more likely to be excluded – intentionally or not – from less formal communications, the result may be a poorer understanding of election procedures.

Selective inclusion of candidates and parties in election trainings can cause perceptions of inequitable access to information; in some cases, this has led to court cases against EMBs. In other instances, the inability to include hundreds of parties and/or candidates has limited opportunities for more in-depth training and information sharing.

If an EMB cannot include all political parties in meetings or events due to resource constraints or logistical challenges, it should explain its rationale and selection criteria transparently and publicly. Any event materials, such as meeting minutes or recordings, should be made public. Wherever possible, the EMB should use technology to facilitate the inclusion of as many people as possible.

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<sup>47</sup> Addis Standard. (2022, February 16). #ASDailyScoop: [Electoral Board tells incumbent, 25 other political parties to convene general assembly within one month.](#)

<sup>48</sup> See State Election Commission of the Republic of Croatia. (n.d.). [Financing of election campaigning in the elections of members of representative bodies of local and regional self-government units.](#)

<sup>49</sup> Waugh, Electoral Justice for All, op. cit.

Benefits	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Accuracy and coherence</b> – Common questions or concerns identified and answered together support consistent communication to all participants.</li> <li>• <b>Clarity and simplicity</b> – Targeted, focused on one or a few topics, facilitating in-depth information absorption.</li> <li>• <b>Accessibility and inclusivity</b> – Online meetings can lower participation costs; ensure equitable treatment regardless of sex, geography, or minority status; and include CSOs, independent experts, and the media as well as political parties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depending on the range of participants, trainings and information sessions may be seen as biased or conferring advantages on certain parties.</li> <li>• Information imparted in trainings may not reach all party members and candidates due to logistical challenges or communication barriers within parties.</li> <li>• It can be costly to host trainings or information sessions in countries with many political parties, especially those based far from the capital or regional EMB offices.</li> <li>• Where an EMB lacks competencies or resources, or if it is viewed with distrust, it may need to draw on external expertise.</li> </ul>

**Table 9: Benefits of and Considerations for Trainings and Information Sessions.**

## PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PARTY-LED EVENTS

Political parties can initiate engagement with EMBs. In **Ethiopia, Croatia**, and the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, for example, EMBs accept invitations from political parties or CSOs to speak and engage at events such as conferences and workshops. These are often important venues for significant two-way communication and opportunities to clear the air when processes are targets of disinformation and skepticism.

Some EMBs avoid in-person meetings with individual parties to guard their perceived impartiality and independence. In **Iraq**, IHEC member include judges who want to be seen as unbiased. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the EMB is not required to engage directly with political parties and tends to avoid doing so.

When appropriate, EMBs should generally accept invitations and participate in events organized by all political parties that pertain to EMB responsibilities. To ensure full impartiality and accountability, information about EMB participation should be shared proactively through appropriate public communication channels.

Benefits	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Transparency</b> – EMBs can enhance their profiles and partnerships with political parties and CSOs, building trust and easing tension. Parties may be motivated to propose improvements to electoral procedures, knowing that the EMBs are partners and come to the meetings that parties initiate.</li> <li>• <b>Interactivity</b> – EMBs can gather information needed for legal reforms and gain insight into party operations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be seen as biased or conferring advantages on certain parties, particularly if only some invitations are extended or accepted.</li> <li>• Requires investment of time by EMB staff, including those participating in political party events to which they are invited.</li> <li>• Events are often concentrated in more populous areas, potentially omitting smaller parties that represent rural communities or underrepresented ethnic, linguistic, or religious groups.</li> </ul>

**Table 10: Benefits of and Considerations for Party-led Events.**

## INFORMAL MEETINGS

This guide defines informal engagement as non-formal or unscheduled meetings between EMBs and political parties, often conducted casually and based on personal relationships between EMB members and party leaders. Where informal engagement is welcomed, such communication can enable parties and EMBs to reach agreements that may not be achievable in public fora, where political campaigning priorities may take precedence over consensus-building or where face-saving may be more difficult. In **Indonesia**, EMB-party relations are maintained in part by the EMB's open-door policy, with political party representatives welcome to stop by the EMB office for coffee and a chat. Respondents from other EMBs, including those with partisan commissioners, noted that party representatives may call commissioners they know, bypassing official channels.

During research, one interviewee disclosed that EMBs have resolved sensitive matters in closed-door discussions with representatives of some or all parties – but could not have done so in public due to the subject matter or the participants' unwillingness or inability to appear to compromise publicly.

Informal engagement carries risks, the foremost of which is insufficient transparency; closed-door discussions can lead to allegations of partisanship or to mis- or disinformation against EMBs and parties. They also can lead to inequity in the information shared, since some parties may be privy to the insights, comments, or personal opinions of individual commissioners. Informal engagement also risks confusion or inconsistency when commissioners hold differing opinions. Thus, the benefits and disadvantages of any informal engagement should be carefully considered.

Benefits	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interactivity</b> – Informal interactions can help keep relationships between EMBs and political parties positive and constructive, enable them to reach agreements that might not be achievable in public fora.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overuse of informal engagement can create transparency concerns and lead to allegations of partisanship or claims of mis- or disinformation.</li> <li>• Access is not necessarily equal for all political parties.</li> <li>• Consistent messaging is not always ensured when communication is informal. Representatives of a single party can receive different messages from different contacts at the EMB. And parties that are not included in the interactions may not receive the same information shared with others.</li> </ul>

Table 11: Benefits of and Considerations for Informal Engagement.

## POST-ELECTION LESSONS LEARNED EXERCISES<sup>50</sup>

Learning and adaption occur within EMBs across the electoral cycle, and post-election lessons learned exercises are common in many jurisdictions. They offer EMBs and other electoral stakeholders opportunities for reflection and further planning. In many countries, political parties engage in some manner in the post-election lessons learned process. In **Ethiopia**, for instance, parties are among those invited to validate the EMB’s lessons learned after each election. In **Nepal**, an extensive EMB-led lessons learned process involves consultations at the district, provincial, and national levels. All involve political parties. In **New Zealand**, the Legal and Policy Division is legally mandated to include individual party feedback in the election commission’s post-election report to Parliament. Genuine engagement, including responsiveness in implementing related recommendations, can contribute to strengthening relationships and trust.

Generally, political parties are best able to prepare for and contribute meaningfully to post-election lessons learned processes when they have at least a few months of advance notice of the exercises – and when EMBs engage political parties in planning for the lessons learned process itself.<sup>51</sup> Early coordination can increase party buy-in for (and cooperation in) subsequent learning processes, enabling them to provide feedback on their key priorities from the start and giving them time to weigh their key concerns and challenges in advance of discussions.

<sup>50</sup> Post-election lessons learned exercises, sometimes called after-action reviews, are generally led by EMBs. The guiding principles, formats, and methodologies for these exercises can vary greatly but, in general, the goal of these initiatives is to gather insights on strengths and weaknesses, identify challenges, and develop recommendations for improving electoral processes and reducing barriers and stakeholder frustrations in the future. For more information on post-election lessons learned exercises, see Darnolf, S., C. Murphy, and H. Roberts, H. [Lessons Learned Processes: Advancing to the Next Elections](#). (2024, January 23). IFES | The International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Benefits	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Timeliness and comprehensiveness</b> – Dedicated time to review and build ownership and buy-in for recommendations.</li> <li>• <b>Interactivity</b> – Political party feedback can contribute to improved electoral processes. In addition, acting on political parties' recommendations can increase parties' perceptions of EMB responsiveness and thus enhance trust in the institution.</li> <li>• <b>Accessibility and inclusion</b> – Engaging more stakeholders, either directly or through representatives, contributes to an inclusive lessons learned process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially in countries with numerous political parties, it can be difficult to balance inclusion and representativeness with the need to keep the exercise manageable and focused.</li> <li>• Political parties can engage more meaningfully in lessons learned processes if they are notified of such exercises well in advance of elections and are involved in planning for the processes.</li> </ul>

Table 12: Benefits of and Considerations for Lessons-Learned Exercises.

## HOW POLITICAL PARTIES CAN STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION WITH EMBs

The research underpinning this guide focused primarily on the concrete steps that EMBs can – and do – take to strengthen communication with political parties, even in sensitive environments. During interviews with EMBs and political party representatives in the nine case study countries, several recommendations emerged regarding how political parties can also play leading roles in strengthening coordination and communication with EMBs. Observations and recommendations from diverse interlocutors are included in this guide to encourage dialogue and understanding between EMBs and political parties about their mutual responsibilities for maintaining positive communications.

### Respect legal obligations and understand EMB operations

Political parties should seek to understand an EMB's operations, including mandates and authorities, composition, resources, communication and engagement mechanisms, and responsible staff. In some contexts, a EMB's dual responsibility for oversight and provision support and information critical to the electoral process may intersect uncomfortably with its application of sanctions for non-compliance or violations. Clear understanding of legal frameworks, deadlines, and reporting processes, and respect for the full breadth of an EMB's mandate, can help avoid heightening tensions. Parties can also engage proactively in reform efforts to ensure the legal frameworks and regulations that EMBs apply for sensitive topics, like party registration and funding, are fair and transparent.

#### ***Guidance for parties:***

1. Respect all legal requirements regarding registration and operations.
2. Proactively publish and share requested information with responsible oversight bodies.
3. Request training from EMB bodies, if needed, on fulfilling compliance requirements.
4. Advocate for evidence-based changes to the legal framework or regulatory environment that support the implementation of recommendations from nonpartisan observation missions.
5. Participate fully in consultative and decision-making activities or bodies organized by EMBs to ensure the priorities of your party and supporters are represented.
6. Before engaging with the EMB or its local offices or branches, ensure that relevant party representatives and staff become acquainted with the EMB's operations. Stay up to date on policy and personnel changes.

### Assign proficient and reliable liaison officer(s) to work with the EMB

Each party should designate an officer to liaise with the central EMB and any local branches. The primary role of liaison officers should be to establish and maintain good working relationships with EMBs at all levels to obtain, submit, and disseminate information. Their names and contact details should be available to the EMBs.

#### ***Guidance for parties:***

1. Ensure liaison officers are familiar with an EMB's role and mandate, and the legal framework.

2. As a good practice, liaison officers should have strong communication skills or be trained to communicate with the EMB at all levels.
3. Inform the EMB of a new liaison officer's contact details in a timely manner.
4. Make sure that the information obtained at meetings with EMBs is documented clearly and shared across the party in a timely manner. Follow agreed-upon communication protocols in handling sensitive information obtained from the EMB.

### **Closely follow the EMB's website and direct communications to parties through other mechanisms**

While the content of EMBs' websites may vary, political parties should closely monitor all information shared on these official channels, including content or pages designated for parties. In addition to presenting data and information, the EMB website can provide parties an overall assessment of the EMB's transparency, which may be useful in determining advocacy efforts or media statements.

#### ***Guidance for parties:***

1. Assign staff to follow the EMB's website(s) at all levels. Channel necessary information across the party and ensure it has an internal communications strategy for disseminating relevant updates in a timely manner.
2. Subscribe to EMB bulletins and other publications and distribute them internally, as appropriate.
3. Map all EMB mechanisms and evaluate them continually to gather data for public outreach and advocacy purposes.

### **Closely follow and engage with the EMB's social media channels**

The degree to which an EMB communicates with the public and political parties through social media depends on factors including internet penetration, connectivity, and social media adoption. Regardless of whether the EMB uses social media to communicate with political parties, parties should closely follow the EMB's profiles and engage constructively. EMBs frequently leverage several channels to communicate with parties, including websites and social media. For instance, they may use WhatsApp or Telegram in outreach to various stakeholder groups. Identifying and setting up processes for consistent and timely monitoring across all these channels can be a valuable way to stay up to date.

#### ***Guidance for parties:***

1. Connect all political party profiles with EMB profiles on all social media platforms.
2. Engage professionally and constructively with EMB social media channels, respecting general social media rules (e.g., no use of derogatory or inflammatory language).
3. Track common hashtags related to elections, and tag EMBs in posts with follow-up clarifications and questions about content where appropriate.
4. In anticipation of connectivity issues, develop alternate methods for disseminating relevant information to internal audiences.

## Be attentive to portals designated for political parties

Some EMBs use specialized portals for political parties – usually for registration, funding, nominations, campaign expenditures, or complaint resolution to decrease costs, increase accessibility, and provide transparency. Good practice shows that engaging political parties in developing, using, and evaluating such portals can contribute significantly to their success.

### **Guidance for parties:**

1. When invited, contribute to the development of web portals and apps for political party engagement.
2. Ensure timely and adequate submission of requested information and documents.
3. Provide timely and cordial feedback to the EMB if the portal or app does not perform properly.
4. Contribute to and request regular evaluations of party-designated portals or apps based on data and user experience.

## Take part in EMB-organized activities

In some countries, political parties may sit in on EMB sessions and are permitted to vote on EMB decision-making; in others, commissioners' meetings are not open to the public, or parties' participation might be limited. However, EMBs may organize less formal gatherings such as working groups, events, and informational meetings, that might allow for broader participation, particularly if they occur online. Political parties should take advantage of all opportunities and present themselves and their causes or issues regularly, constructively, and in a timely manner and stay informed of their outcomes.

### **Guidance for parties:**

1. If permitted, political parties and candidates should participate in all EMB events or sessions at all levels, or obtain session minutes, if available.
2. When EMBs must limit participation or their invitation rules are unclear, parties and candidates should advocate for the formulation and enforcement of clear rules for engagement.

## Foster communication and organize joint activities with other parties

It is common for political parties to interact through myriad communication mechanisms and on varied topics. Where EMBs do not organize structured events with political parties, or if a need for cross-party collaboration or information sharing arises, parties can initiate joint events based on their priorities and agendas. They can also communicate virtually. In some countries, parties have established WhatsApp groups and designated liaison officers to facilitate the exchange of communication related to EMB operations or other electoral matters.

### **Guidance for parties:**

1. To the extent possible, establish and maintain working relationships with all political parties at all levels.
2. Assign liaison officers to foster communication with other parties and follow their operations.
3. Initiate and organize events in cooperation with other parties to discuss common priorities with EMBs and other stakeholders (e.g., government institutions, CSOs.)

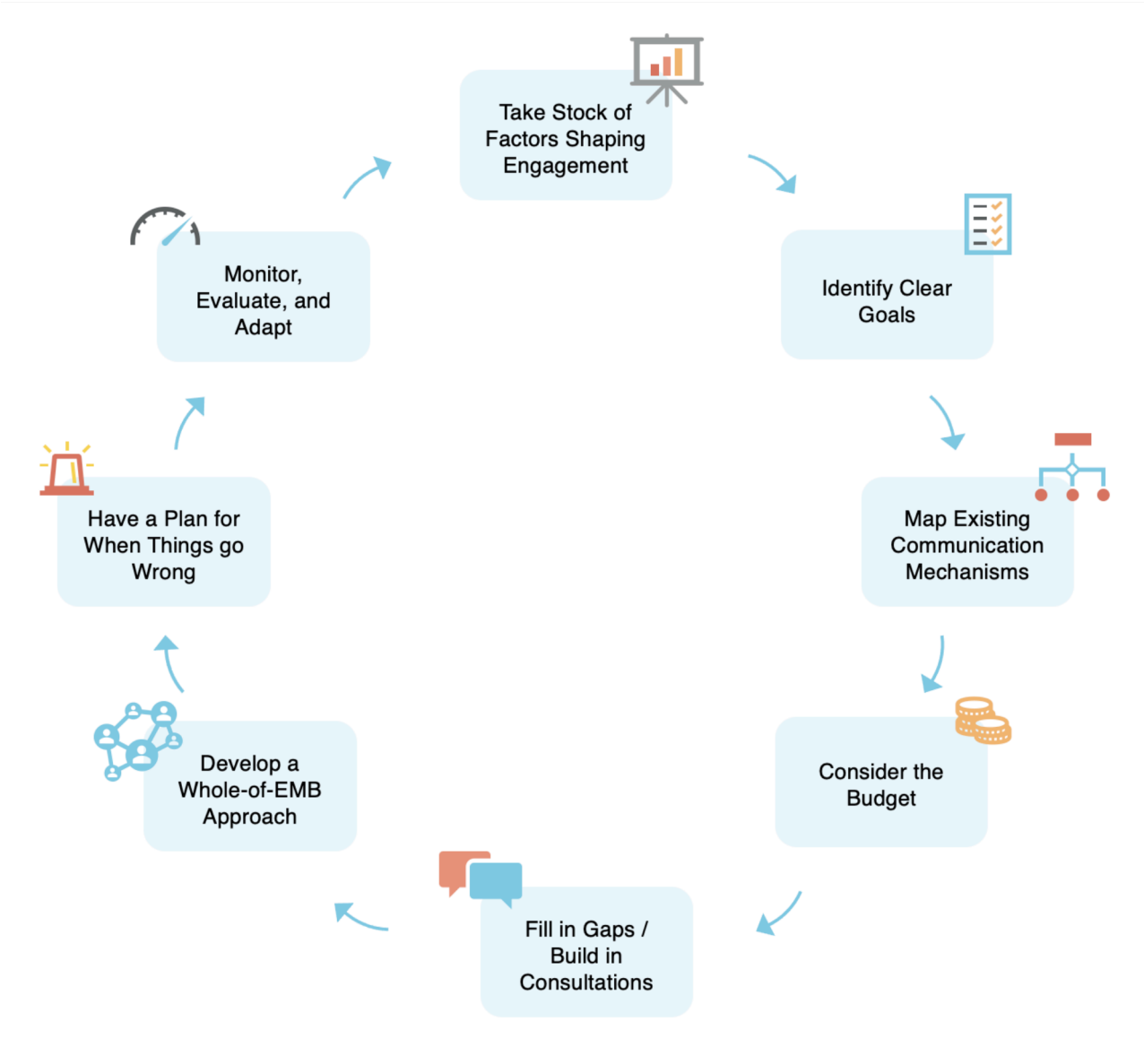


## **CHAPTER 4:**

# **ENHANCING EMB ENGAGEMENT WITH POLITICAL PARTIES - *PRACTICAL STRATEGIES***

The research conducted for this guide found that EMBs generally have a clear understanding of their obligations to engage with political parties, and they engage and communicate through varied mechanisms. What is lacking in most cases, however, is a holistic, strategic approach to engagement that draws on comparative global practice. This guide attempts to bridge the gap by demonstrating the broad range of tools and mechanisms that EMBs around the world use.

This section proposes practical steps that busy EMBs can take to maximize the impact of their engagement and communication with political parties. It situates the guiding questions outlined in Chapter 1 (*Taking Stock of Key Factors that Impact EMB–Political Party Engagement*) and Chapter 2 (*Guiding Principles for Communication*) within a process that an EMB can use to evaluate its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges for engaging with political parties and to develop plans for future engagement.



**Figure 3: Practical Steps for Strengthening Engagement**

## STEP 1 – TAKE STOCK OF FACTORS SHAPING EMB ENGAGEMENT WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

An important first step in creating a strategic communication and engagement strategy is to understand how the EMB currently invests in its relationship with political parties and candidates. Chapter 1 outlines several key internal and external factors, including resourcing levels, legal frameworks, and political party trust in an EMB, that shape the working relationships and communications between EMBs and political parties. Commencing with honest stock-taking to understand how these factors shape relationships with parties in additional contexts can help ground planning and engagement in terms of what is feasible and necessary for an EMB to fulfill its mandate.

### Useful outcome of stock-taking exercises:

- ✓ Parameters that impact EMB engagement are clear.

### Action items:

- ✓ Map parameters that impact EMB engagement.
- ✓ Use the printer-friendly assessment framework in Annex 1 to map parameters.

## STEP 2 – IDENTIFY CLEAR GOALS

Political party engagement and communication should support the EMB's goals and values. In addition to ensuring stakeholders have the information they need to support inclusive and credible elections, some local contexts present other challenges that an EMB can mitigate through more effective interaction with parties. For example, some countries face significant mis- or disinformation, including some that parties or their supporters disseminate, that threatens an EMB's credibility. In other contexts, electoral violence might be perpetrated at least in part by political parties. Accusations of partisanship by an EMB that is perceived as close to a specific party may challenge the EMB's independence and the unbiased nature of election administration. In some countries, new regulations are poorly understood by parties, or compliance with regulations is low. In others, an EMB may have a strategic goal to improve inclusion, but youth, women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable or marginalized groups are not adequately represented as candidates or in party administration.

### Useful outcomes of goal setting:

- ✓ Goals for political party outreach and engagement clearly reinforce specific EMB strategic goals and values, as well as communication strategies.
- ✓ Political party goals and strategies support context-specific needs or issues such as trust deficits, disinformation, new regulations, or insufficient inclusion.

### Action Items:

- ✓ Develop targeted set goals and strategies for communicating with political parties.

- ✓ Use the printer-friendly worksheets in Annex 2 to assess and strengthen alignment with communication principles presented.

## STEP 3 – MAP EXISTING COMMUNICATION MECHANISMS

Applying the learning discussed in this guide, EMBs can consider who within the organization is responsible for communicating with parties, when in the electoral cycle, and using which mechanisms. This mapping can help identify where the EMB has strong working relationships, effective consultation, and information dissemination practices that may be worth replicating across departments. It can also identify potential overlaps in outreach.

### Useful outcome of mapping communication mechanisms:

- ✓ The EMB has a clear understanding of where communication and engagement occurs across the electoral cycle, including gaps and concentrated communication and engagement needs.

### Action items:

- ✓ List all EMB staff across departments who engage with parties, including their contact information and the type and purpose of their engagement.
- ✓ List all mechanisms that the EMB uses to engage and communicate with parties. Use the typology of communication mechanisms described in Chapter 3 to assist in this process.

## STEP 4 – CONSIDER THE BUDGET

Many EMBs' budgets are developed and approved at the national level. In some contexts, EMB budgeting is linked to the electoral cycle. Regardless of when budgeting takes place, it is important to think of the costs of specific party engagement or communication well in advance. Detailed budgets often accompany strategic plans, reinforcing the value of including political party engagement and communication in EMB strategic and planning documents. When budgets are linked to specific goals (Step 2) and anticipated results, it can be easier to justify the addition of line items related to party communication and engagement. However, even when EMBs have severely limited budgets, they can leverage cost-effective mechanisms for communication and consultation.

### Useful outcomes:

- ✓ Political party engagement initiatives are sufficiently resourced and supported by budget line items.
- ✓ Low-cost mechanisms such as social media posts, press releases, and direct messaging are integrated into plans when budgets are limited or are identified as communication channels if crises have not been budgeted for.
- ✓ Funds are available for communicating with parties when unforeseen challenges require urgent consultation.

### Action items:

- ✓ Map costs (including for staffing) for political party communication well in advance of budget development cycles.
- ✓ Reserve contingency funds for urgent communication or consultation needs.

## STEP 5 – FILL IN GAPS IN ENGAGEMENT, ADDING OPPORTUNITIES TO COMMUNICATE AND CONSULT

While nearly all EMBs engage in some one-way communication to political parties, this research effort found that two-way communication is also necessary to build consensus and trust, increase compliance, and solve problems that impact all electoral stakeholders. Several of the communication mechanisms outlined in Chapter 3 are appropriate to two-way communication – particularly in-person events such as trainings and working sessions. EMBs can also consult with political parties when planning for such events – not only during the events themselves. Consulting with political parties on agendas for meetings and working sessions, or including parties in planning for a post-election lessons learned exercise can help to direct conversations and increase party buy-in.

### Useful outcomes of fostering communication and consultation:

- ✓ Political parties have established, well-known, current, and user-friendly channels for finding the information they need to participate fully in the electoral process.
- ✓ Advisory groups, working groups, or designated meetings address challenges that impact all electoral stakeholders – such as legal amendments, adapting processes to accommodate persons displaced due to violence or climate disasters, or responding to crises or disinformation – to build consensus and find joint solutions.

### Action items:

- ✓ Develop an organizational policy that outlines when EMBs may accept invitations to speak at political party events.
- ✓ Develop and publish a schedule of trainings and information sessions for political parties on important concepts. The schedule should include online events when holding them in person is cost-prohibitive or otherwise impractical.
- ✓ Set up internal processes and reminders to ensure that information on EMB websites and social media is updated regularly.
- ✓ Consider using web forms, hotlines, designated email inboxes, social media commenting, direct messaging, or other mechanisms to enable parties to reach the EMB with questions or suggestions. Before launching these tools, ensure that staff have ample time to monitor systems and provide timely responses.

## STEP 6 – DEVELOP A WHOLE-OF-EMB APPROACH

EMB engagement with political parties or candidates is rarely handled by only a single department. Therefore, a whole-of-EMB approach is important. Even EMBs with departments or points of contact for interacting with political parties often have other spokespeople, especially at the board level and in regional offices, who communicate messages to the media that parties and candidates should hear. EMB focal points for gender, youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups often have mandates that span all electoral stakeholders, including parties and candidates. Training departments may be tasked with providing educational programs for parties and candidates, and legal departments often address disputes over rules and regulations and will often engage parties for input on legal or policy reforms. Candidate nomination, observer accreditation, and campaign finance monitoring may require interactions with parties. Communications and public relations departments often use specific strategies and communication mechanisms they use for different stakeholders – and, given their roles in communicating key messages, should include political party communication as a specific part of their communications strategies and plans.

Using an institution-wide approach, EMBs can ensure coordinated strategic and departmental plans and good practices for stakeholder engagement, rooted in consultation and communication about EMB's strategic and communication priorities.

### Useful outcomes of a whole-of-EMB approach:

- ✓ Staff across the EMB receive clear information on overarching goals for interaction with political parties.
- ✓ A process for interdepartmental coordination ensures cohesion and coherence when mechanisms or the timing of messaging overlap.

### Action items:

- ✓ Develop and consistent core messages for use across departments in engaging with political parties.
- ✓ Integrate political party communication and engagement considerations into the strategy and planning documents of all relevant departments, as well as overall EMB strategic documents.

## STEP 7 – HAVE A PLAN FOR WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Elections are often beset with significant threats and challenges. It can be particularly difficult – even overwhelming – for EMBs to manage or respond to situations when trust with some or all parties is lost; mis- or disinformation is rampant; the reputation of specific commissioners has been challenged; or crises such as wars, terrorism, or natural disasters threaten the electoral process. EMBs cannot resolve entrenched conflicts or violence in the country. However, given their responsibility to conduct peaceful elections, some commissions find it helpful to work alongside political parties to try to defuse tensions or address problems that threaten their shared interests. Maintaining open channels of communication with parties through regular, good faith efforts can help parties and EMBs to work as partners to tackle such problems to the extent possible.

### **Useful outcomes in planning for when things go wrong:**

- ✓ The EMB's crisis management plan considers risks that may involve political parties and includes contingency plans, with associated budgets where possible.
- ✓ The EMB has established relationships with party liaisons early (ideally, during non-election periods) to facilitate communication between EMB and parties during crises.
- ✓ Mechanisms are in place to convene EMB and party representatives, such as an advisory committee, online forum, or other familiar physical or virtual meeting space and attendee list.

### **Action items:**

- ✓ Assess which of the EMB's mechanisms for coordinating with political parties may continue to operate during a crisis. Consider whether these resilient mechanisms will enable the EMB to maintain timely and open communication with political parties in the event of a crisis.
- ✓ Review the EMB's crisis management plan, if one exists. Assess whether it prepares the EMB to maintain open and timely communications with parties in the event of a crisis. Consider amending the plan, if necessary, to account for communication and coordination needs.

## **STEP 8 – MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EMB–POLITICAL PARTY ENGAGEMENT**

Knowing whether EMB communication and engagement with parties yield meaningful results will determine the budget and effort to allocate in subsequent years. EMBs should establish a system for monitoring, evaluating, and adapting their political party engagement strategy over time.

### **Useful outcomes in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of EMB–political party engagement:**

- ✓ All EMB staff who engage with parties understand what success looks like and are know whether it has been achieved.
- ✓ EMB-party communication and engagement strategies and activities are tied to clearly articulated goals and metrics that can be measured over time.
- ✓ A system is in place to set targets for key outcomes and to monitor indicators of the success (or failure) of EMB-party engagement at regular intervals.

### **Action items:**

- ✓ During a lessons learned exercise, analyze and present findings on the extent to which the EMB achieved its goals for party communication and engagement.
- ✓ If learning process findings and related action plans are consolidated into a report, publish and disseminate it broadly, both within the EMB and to other electoral stakeholders, including political parties.

## **GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR LONGER-TERM EVALUATION, LEARNING, AND ADAPTATION**

1. Did specific mechanisms reach parties and candidates? Which are worth repeating?
2. What information reached its targets? How can the EMB determine whether the process was successful?
3. What additional mechanisms should the EMB use to address any gaps?
4. Was it possible to engage parties as partners to manage, mitigate, or prevent crises? If so, what worked and should be repeated? If not, what changes can be made?
5. Are there any legal restrictions to productive engagement? Are legal amendments necessary?
6. Were there other constraints to productive engagement? How can they be addressed before the next election?



## CONCLUSION

All the interlocutors interviewed for this research recognized political parties and candidates as key electoral stakeholders. Those from EMBs were cognizant of the various factors that frame their engagement and, in addition, recognized that they have information that political parties need and must be communicated to them. All EMBs interviewed were already reaching political parties in some way through common communication and engagement mechanisms. However, EMBs differed in their assessments of how environmental factors (outlined in Chapter 1) shape their engagement with parties, and they used different types and combinations of communication mechanisms to reach political party audiences.

Based on foundational research, this guide offers a structure through which EMBs can take stock of the factors that shape their engagement with parties, a list of good principles that underscore all engagement and communication, a menu of mechanisms for interaction, and steps that they can take to ensure their engagement with political parties is aligned with the institution's values and objectives.

CEPPS will incorporate these findings into its electoral assistance programming and encourages EMB partners, as well as political parties and other interested actors, to also use this material to reflect on the quality and effectiveness of communications mechanisms they use. While good EMB communications alone cannot guarantee political parties will perceive an election as credible, it is a necessary step in building a relationship of trust between these key actors.

# ANNEXES

# ANNEX 1: BASELINE ASSESSMENT: OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR EMB– POLITICAL PARTY ENGAGEMENT

## Legal Framework and EMB Mandate

1. To what extent is the EMB meeting legal requirements to engage with parties?
2. What, if any, legal restrictions are there on EMB-engagement with political parties (e.g., that an EMB must engage all registered parties, or that limit certain interactions between EMBs and parties)?
3. To what extent does the EMB have autonomy to establish policies or seek a legal opinion from the courts or other national institutions?
  - a. Beyond the courts, are there other national institutions (such as a human rights commission, or a media commission, or gender working groups or commissions) that the EMB may be able to seek guidance from regarding communication and coordination with parties and candidates if the legal framework is silent on EMB–political party engagement?
4. What parts of the electoral process that involve parties fall within the purview of the EMB?

## Oversight and Compliance Responsibilities

1. What are the points in the electoral cycle when the EMB engages with political parties? Are these interactions seen holistically as part of overall party engagement and communication strategy?
2. When the EMB educates political parties and even enforces party behavior if it deviates from the legal framework, how are these aspects of its mandate communicated?
3. What mechanisms does the EMB have in place to ensure transparent decision-making about eligibility to run or holding parties and candidates accountable for political finance reporting deadlines or campaign behavior, as relevant?

## EMB Composition and Reputation

1. If relevant, what allegations, accusations or disinformation exist against the commission?
2. What data, evidence, or checks and balances are available to dispel such accusations? (what do third-party sources, such as studies by think tanks or academics, or election observation reports say about EMB neutrality and professionalism)?
3. Does the EMB communications strategy include key messages and processes for countering false information about partisanship?
4. To what extent does the EMB demonstrate its values (including impartiality) through actions (e.g., transparent decision-making, use of mechanisms for parties to share concerns and work with the EMB to resolve problems)?

5. What opportunities exist outside of the election period to promote trust and a reputation for impartiality by engaging and communicating with political parties? For example, do parties and candidates engage in post-election lessons learned meetings? Are they consulted as part of the EMB's strategic planning process?)

## **EMB Resourcing**

1. Is funding allocated for political party engagement and communication, including salaries for liaisons or dedicated departments responsible for engaging with parties?
2. Is funding for political party communication a single budget line, or does it appear across the budget under different activities (for example, rolled into a line for candidate nomination and party registration, or election dispute resolution)?
3. To what extent are resources allocated for political party communication and engagement for the interim period between elections?
4. What external resources exist, if any, that could fill any EMB budget shortfalls?
5. What are the costs of the EMB's current mechanisms for communication and coordination with parties and candidates? Are these the most cost-effective mechanisms available to the EMB? Are new or different tools available that could help lower costs (e.g., travel for events, paper and printing expenses)? Would these new forms of communication and coordination positively or negatively impact EMB transparency, accessibility, or inclusivity?
6. What partnerships could the EMB leverage to offset the costs of communication and coordination with political parties? For example, are there other government agencies or offices with which the EMB could partner to share costs for outreach and events?

## **EMB Leadership Capacity**

1. To what extent does the current EMB chair engage effectively and naturally with parties? Are other senior officials within the EMB well suited to engage parties across the political spectrum?
2. What traits or strategies have effective leaders exemplified or employed in your institution's history that can be replicated?

## **Political Party Landscape**

1. How are decisions made about which parties to invite to consultations, roundtables, or other interactive engagements? Are criteria transparent, equitable, representative, and made public?
2. What channels does the EMB use to receive information or feedback from parties (e.g., website forms, political party call-in lines, regular committee meetings)?
3. Which communication and engagement channels do political parties prefer to use?
4. Which political parties or candidates, if any, may be left out of opportunities to receive or share information. What barriers may contribute to this lack of communication and coordination?
5. Is the EMB inviting or requiring both men and women to participate in events, and does it reach out to both men and women in its communications? Are men and women attending and participating equitably in consultations and meetings in practice?

## ANNEX 2: COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES ASSESSMENT WORKSHEETS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Principle: Impartiality and Equity			
Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
1. Are all parties and candidates treated equitably and receiving the same access to information?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
2. Are small or new parties, independent candidates, and other less established parties or candidates included in all events, mailing lists, and communication efforts?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
3. In cases when it is necessary to convene a small group representing parties, especially in countries where the number of parties can be in the hundreds, are the criteria for participation clear and fair?			
<i>Comments:</i>			

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
4. Are minutes or other documents related to meetings with individual parties public?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
5. Is there a code of conduct or other rules for EMB members and staff to ensure their impartiality?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
6. In cases of closed social media groups, are all relevant stakeholders included without bias?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
7. Does the EMB compile and publish questions that parties submit to ensure no party receives special advantages – real or perceived?			
<i>Comments:</i>			

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
<p>8. Based on how they are used in your context, can communications in closed channels such as WhatsApp create perceptions of partisanship, or result in meetings with individual party representatives? Consider who has access to these channels, what records are kept regarding communications on these channels, and how they are shared.</p>			
<p><i>Comments:</i></p>			
<p align="center"><b>Analysis and Planning</b></p>			
<p><i>What are the EMB's strengths regarding impartiality and equity in engagement with political parties?</i></p>			
<p><i>What are the EMB's challenges or gaps regarding impartiality and equity in engagement with political parties?</i></p>			
<p><i>What strategies or actions could the EMB consider to overcome the challenges and gaps outlined above? Are sufficient human and financial resources available to support these changes?</i></p>			

## Principle: Transparency

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
1. Are political parties aware of EMB interactions with other parties, and do they have access to the information shared between them?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
2. Are EMB session and meeting notes and decisions published proactively, when appropriate?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
3. Do party observers understand which processes can be observed?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
4. Is information available that outlines the laws and procedures governing how different electoral activities take place?			
<i>Comments:</i>			



Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
5. Are there clear communication lines and rules of interaction between political party observers and EMBs at different levels?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
<b>Analysis and Planning</b>			
<i>What are the EMB's strengths regarding transparency in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What are the EMB's challenges or gaps regarding transparency in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What strategies or actions could the EMB consider to overcome the challenges and gaps outlined above? Are sufficient human and financial resources available to support these changes?</i>			

## Principle: Timeliness and Comprehensiveness

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
1. Can political parties and their members – without relying on party leadership serving as gatekeepers – find all the information they need through the various mechanisms that the EMB makes available?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
2. Is the information released far enough in advance to provide parties adequate time to comply and prepare (for example, by completing forms, reviewing voter lists, generating support for nomination bids, complying with political finance regulations, etc.)? Is the information released in a format that is accessible to parties, including independent candidates, small and regional parties, and marginalized groups?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
<b>Analysis and Planning</b>			
<i>What are the EMB's strengths regarding timeliness and comprehensiveness in engagement with political parties?</i>			

*What are the EMB's challenges or gaps regarding timeliness and comprehensiveness in engagement with political parties?*

*What strategies or actions could the EMB consider to overcome the challenges and gaps outlined above? Are sufficient human and financial resources available to support these changes?*

## Principle: Accuracy and Coherence

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
1. Is information issued by the EMB accurate?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
2. Is information issued by the EMB consistent across all channels, and across the EMB (nationally and regionally)?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
3. Do existing lines of internal EMB information sharing and coordination regarding party engagement (across departments and offices) lead to cohesive, consistent messaging?			
<i>Comments:</i>			

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
4. Are systems in place to ensure local EMBs have all relevant information and can process and share as necessary?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
5. Are the EMB's contact lists maintained and up to date?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
<b>Analysis and Planning</b>			
<i>What are the EMB's strengths regarding accuracy and coherence in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What are the EMB's challenges or gaps regarding accuracy and coherence in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What strategies or actions could the EMB consider to overcome the challenges and gaps outlined above? Are sufficient human and financial resources available to support these changes?</i>			

## Principle: Clarity and Simplicity

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
1. Is information disclosed by the EMB clear, concise, and easy to understand?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
2. Are processes straightforward and not unnecessarily bureaucratic?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
3. Does an EMB have direct, open lines of communication for parties to receive clarification, if needed?			
<i>Comments:</i>			

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
4. Does the EMB involve political parties in selected processes to educate and build trust?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
<b>Analysis and Planning</b>			
<i>What are the EMB's strengths regarding clarity and simplicity in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What are the EMB's challenges or gaps regarding clarity and simplicity in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What strategies or actions could the EMB consider to overcome the challenges and gaps outlined above? Are sufficient human and financial resources available to support these changes?</i>			

## Principle: Frequency

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
1. Is the EMB capable of communicating new developments quickly?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
2. Do political parties and candidates have access to relevant information on time or ahead of key processes?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
3. Does the EMB communicate messages multiple times through multiple mechanisms?			
<i>Comments:</i>			



Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
4. Does the EMB communicate about crises in real time?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
<b>Analysis and Planning</b>			
<i>What are the EMB's strengths regarding frequency in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What are the EMB's challenges or gaps regarding frequency in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What strategies or actions could the EMB consider to overcome the challenges and gaps outlined above? Are sufficient human and financial resources available to support these changes?</i>			

## Principle: Interactivity

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
1. Can political parties interact directly with the EMB to ask questions or request clarifications? Is information available online, in person, or both?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
2. Can political parties interact directly with the EMB to provide inputs and influence decisions?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
3. Does the EMB have systems in place to respond to queries in a timely manner?			
<i>Comments:</i>			

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
4. Does the EMB adapt its approach based on evolving circumstances or feedback from political parties?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
<b>Analysis and Planning</b>			
<i>What are the EMB's strengths regarding interactivity engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What are the EMB's challenges or gaps regarding interactivity in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What strategies or actions could the EMB consider to overcome the challenges and gaps outlined above? Are sufficient human and financial resources available to support these changes?</i>			

## Principle: Accessibility and Inclusivity

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
1. Is information that the EMB publishes available in open and searchable formats?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
2. Is information issued by the EMB available in all relevant and minority languages?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
3. Is information issued by the EMB available in formats accessible for people with disabilities?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
4. Is accessible information issued by EMBs available to people with low literacy?			
<i>Comments:</i>			

Guiding questions	Yes	Partially	No
5. Can political parties and candidates in urban, rural, and remote areas access information issued by the EMB without impediments?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
6. Are any regions, parties, marginalized groups (e.g., women, persons with disabilities) or individuals (e.g., independent candidates) intentionally or unintentionally excluded?			
<i>Comments:</i>			
<b>Analysis and Planning</b>			
<i>What are the EMB's strengths regarding accessibility and inclusivity in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What are the EMB's challenges or gaps regarding accessibility and inclusivity in engagement with political parties?</i>			
<i>What strategies or actions could the EMB consider to overcome the challenges and gaps outlined above? Are sufficient human and financial resources available to support these changes?</i>			

## ANNEX 3: ABOUT THE DEPP LEARNING AGENDA

The Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) comprises nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organizations dedicated to advancing and supporting democratic practices and institutions around the globe. Established in 1995, CEPPS pools the expertise of three premier international organizations dedicated to democratic development: the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, the International Republican Institute, and the National Democratic Institute.

The Democratic Elections and Political Processes (DEPP) Learning Agenda is CEPPS’s first consortium-wide learning initiative. It is designed to guide and synchronize CEPPS partner programming and research, evaluative, and learning activities supported through USAID’s DEPP Cooperative Agreement. The DEPP Learning Agenda aims to advance the democracy, rights, and governance (DRG) sector’s understanding of interventions that effectively and sustainably promote self-reliant, citizen-responsive, and resilient democratic governance and respect for human dignity, rights, and rule of law.

The DEPP Learning Agenda features **five core themes**. Those themes were selected based on their alignment with and importance for testing the DEPP Global Theory of Change (GTOC), which is relevant to DEPP programming and programming across the DRG sector.

DEPP Theory of Change	Learning Agenda Core Themes
<p><b>IF</b> all individuals have access to information pertaining to their rights, equal opportunity to participate in political processes, and the power and space to freely voice and advocate for their interests,</p> <p><b>AND IF</b> political representatives, governing bodies, and oversight institutions have the power, will, and capacity to exercise accountability and deliver services to all,</p> <p><b>THEN</b> the democratic ecosystem will be responsive to the needs and concerns of all individuals in society and resilient to risks and shocks.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inclusive accountability through citizen participation in electoral and political processes;</li> <li>2. Inclusive accountability through multi-party systems of representation;</li> <li>3. Inclusive accountability through an engaged civil society and independent media;</li> <li>4. Inclusive accountability through checks, balances, and oversight across independent and government institutions; and</li> <li>5. Inclusive accountability through transnational bodies and coalitions.</li> </ol>

The DEPP Learning Agenda and the DEPP GTOC focus on the accountability relationships between key stakeholders in a democracy – citizens, political parties, civil society, and media, government institutions and oversight bodies, and transnational bodies and coalitions – to explore ways that each stakeholder group can leverage its respective democratic mechanisms to ensure that government is inclusive, responsive, and accountable to all its citizens.

The DEPP Learning Agenda helps DEPP partners prioritize where we invest our time and resources in a cohesive and strategic way, enable partners to gather evidence for the DRG sector while also testing the GTOC under DEPP.