

**GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES FOR ASSOCIATIONS AND ALLIANCES:  
THE LATIN AMERICAN CASE  
MANUEL CARRILLO  
FEDERAL ELECTORAL INSTITUTE OF MEXICO (IFE)**

International cooperation on electoral matters was born with the resurgence of representative democracy. In the decade of 1970 the process of democratization was accompanied by the promotion of human development and its stronger than ever impact on the opening of political systems and the expansion of freedoms. From then on, the electoral aspect of representative democracy has been singled out as a specific field for action and study, which has produced practices, the creation of institutions, research centers, think tanks, expert associations and mobilization of civil society, in order to legitimize and improve democratic practices in electoral processes to regulate access to power.

International cooperation on electoral matters has been able to create institutions, procedures, strategies, models, programs and centers of intellectual production with the purpose of fostering cooperation and enable the members of the international community to support the process of democratization in the world.

[Slide 1]

The process to create institutions and mechanisms of cooperation and exchange in order to foster the conduction of free and fair elections has been developed at an unprecedented global scale, but it was in Latin America where the first steps were made in that direction. In 1980, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS) created the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (IIHR) as an autonomous entity working on the promotion of human rights. Later on, with a wider view of human rights, the IIDH created the Center for Electoral Promotion and Assessment (CAPEL) in 1983 with the purpose of providing technical assistance on electoral matters and promoting free elections as part of the support given to the development of human rights.

On this basis, CAPEL played a key role in Latin America in order to create associations of electoral authorities in Central America (Tikal Protocol in 1985), in South America (Quito Protocol in 1989), and the whole American Continent (Inter-American Union of Electoral Organizations, UNIORE, in 1991). These associations were able to promote missions of electoral observation and technical assistance in order to ensure free and fair elections in the continent.

In 1990, the General Assembly of the OAS created the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, as an entity of the General Secretariat, with the purpose of fostering representative democracy. Between 1962 and 1990 the OAS participated in approximately 20 operations in the region, even if they were modest in size and time. Other regions have witnessed similar developments.

[Slides 2 and 3]

## II

Along the processes of democratization, some priority areas have been identified. There are three main stages in the evolution of international cooperation on electoral matters.

### FIRST STAGE. THE STRENGTHENING OF ELECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE (1970-1990)

The process of democratization beginning in the decade of 1970 reached many countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia. The main requirement that has been stated in democratic terms has been that of contributing to organize free elections. Most of the

countries involved in democratization processes have witnessed both citizen and political claims because of fraud and electoral irregularities that used to alter popular will. Therefore, the main purpose was to create different mechanisms and strategies that contributed to trustworthy elections. Observation played a fundamental role in this sense. Thus, a large number of organizations forming the institutional system drafted different programs of electoral observation.

There was also a more technical perception about the way to strengthen what has been called "electoral infrastructure", oriented to the same purpose. In this stage of the decades of 1970 and 1980, an important aspect covered by technical assistance missions was that of the registry of voters and the use of civil registries for electoral purposes. Another aspect covered by such missions was the juridical set of mechanisms that needed to be put in place in order to ensure the respect to political rights of citizens and candidates. At the same time, the first exercises of electoral justice were developed in the field of international electoral cooperation.

#### SECOND STAGE. INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING AND CONDITIONS FOR THE ELECTORAL CONTEST (1990-2000)

In this stage of international cooperation on electoral matters, new issues were incorporated into the picture, in order to contribute to the strengthening of electoral institutions and democratic procedures. Probably one of the issues requiring most assistance during this decade was that of the conditions for the electoral contest. In some countries, particularly in Latin America, the issues of the electoral agenda were substituted or expanded to include money and politics and access to mass media in order to promote the political offer of parties and candidates. There was great interest in the different models existing in the world, looking for ways to adapt them and make possible the existence of a stronger system of political parties.

In this stage the attention was no longer centered on issues referring to the electoral system, but anything related to the system of political parties. The subject of civic education also received special attention by the electoral bodies, because an integral and profound effort on civic education is required in order to contribute to the strengthening of institutions and democratic practices.

There was an important display of efforts aimed at strengthening electoral management bodies, particularly by emphasizing the ideal profile for the heads of steering bodies, an electoral service establishing the basis for professionalization and continuity, as well as the participation of other powers in the appointing of electoral officers.

#### THIRD STAGE. THE QUALITY OF ELECTIONS

The third stage of international cooperation on electoral matters was characterized by a combination of factors. On the one hand the process of democratization was neither uniform nor linear in the 140 countries where elections were being held. On the other hand, in the 93 countries where a transition to democracy had been experienced, each country presented very particular requirements and needs for the development and strengthening of democratic institutions and practices.

[Slide 4]

In the 19 countries forming Latin America, with the exception of the Caribbean region, there are at least 20 electoral issues currently being analyzed in order to improve electoral management. Out of the 20 issues, five are considered to be the most relevant nowadays:

1. Funding, financial oversight and equity in the conditions for the electoral contest. This important issue has five levels of discussion:

- o Financing sources
- o Totally private.♣

Mixed (public and private). What proportion is most adequate?

- o Funding amounts and whether funding should be provided both during electoral periods and in non-electoral periods.
- o Transparency and accountability
- o Financial oversight, and
- o Equal access to the mass media.

There are twelve Latin American countries currently discussing and applying some measures on this area: Argentina, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras and Mexico.

2. Out- of-country voting. There are at least seven countries in Latin America where this issue is being discussed. How to guarantee the political rights of migrant workers? what is the source of political rights, nationality or residency? Such conditions are being discussed in Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay. A couple of months ago, both Ecuador and Mexico passed legislation on the subject.

3. Internal democratization of political parties. The Latin American countries are discussing the role of the electoral authority in order to solve controversies within the political parties. Both for the selection of candidates and to gain access to top positions in the parties. This subject is being discussed in eight countries of the region: Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Chile, Nicaragua and Mexico.

4. Registry of voters. In spite of the fact that the process of democratization in Latin America began in the decade of 1980 and the registry of voters was one of the first subjects on which countries worked intensely, 25 years later there are still problems in this area. The main aspects of the discussion are the enrolment of people reaching voting age, since there are significant gaps. There is also the problem of updating the electoral roll due to changes of address and demise of citizens, which constitute the greatest challenge to have an updated roll, as well as the security measures for identity pieces or voting cards. All this requires important financial resources, as well as a permanent and very professional electoral administration. This subject is being discussed in at least eleven countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Venezuela, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina.

5. Civic education and vote promotion. There is a problem being faced by practically all the countries in the region, that of abstentionism. There is a strong sense of disappointment with politics, politicians and parties. This has produced lower levels of turnout in elections. Costa Rica, Panama and Mexico have begun to develop programs of civic education and vote promotion, particularly with the young population, in order to attempt putting a stop to this tendency.

#### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. The main challenge of the international system for cooperation on electoral matters is the creation of a new functioning model based on better procedures of communication and coordination, in order to direct with greater efficiency the international resources destined to cooperation. Up to now, this international system has functioned in a highly decentralized manner. This explains why the needs and requirements of the different electoral bodies asking for the support of the international community have not always been attended in an efficient manner.

On the international sphere, an integrated system of information able to organize supply and demand of electoral assistance in the world is badly needed. After 30 years of collaboration, we require now a new system of information, communication and

understanding in order to evaluate the results of international cooperation on electoral matters.

2. We also need to modify the methodology for technical assistance. Financial resources are very important, but it is even more important to be clear about the purposes and aims of technical assistance. Clear objectives and an adequate methodology to optimize the use of resources will in turn make the results of such international technical assistance more efficient and effective. In Latin America we must strengthen democratic institutions, and in order to do so we need the support of the international community, beyond financial resources which are important but not sufficient to this end. International cooperation can help electoral management bodies to establish a sense of direction for institutional action.

3. In the last two centuries, humanity has witnessed different democratizing impulses or "waves". But only the one starting in the last 30 years of the 20th century was accompanied by international bodies specialized on elections and the promotion of democracy. Consequently, the different associations of electoral organizations from all over the world must find places where we can build windows of opportunity that can help us overcome the walls of isolationism. In this sense, both international organizations and associations of electoral authorities must face the challenge to create this new international order on elections. This is the greatest challenge of all. Finding a way to really strengthen the democracies of the 21st century.