



PROSES

Project in Support of Enhanced Sustainability
and Electoral Integrity in Afghanistan

Brief Guidelines to Election Reporting

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About the Project

The European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) is a not-for-profit foundation headquartered in Brussels which promotes sustainable democratic development through the provision of advisory services, operational support and management of large projects in the electoral and democracy assistance. ECES is implementing the Project in Support of Enhanced Sustainability and Electoral Integrity in Afghanistan (PROSES) funded by the European Union through the Instrument contributing to Peace and Stability (IcSP). PROSES outcomes are:

Outcome 1: Electoral integrity vulnerabilities are proactively identified and reduced through administrative planning and actions.

Outcome 2: Increased capacity of electoral stakeholders to apply evidence-based and effective leadership approaches to the conduct of elections and the adjudication of election disputes.

Outcome 3: Measures contributing to the accountability and inclusivity of political and electoral processes through the broad participation of relevant electoral stakeholders with specific emphasis on women.

PROSES' activities feed into a comprehensive electoral integrity strategy based on the analysis of integrity vulnerabilities from previous Afghan electoral cycles, recommendations from EU EOM/EATs and an upcoming electoral political analysis. PROSES is supporting vital electoral stakeholders' efforts in promoting enhanced integrity and credibility of the electoral process. In brief, our overall strategy is multi-stakeholder: partnering and supporting all individuals, organisations and processes (civil society, media, political parties, EMBs, Government, justice system) that can play a role as agents for reform and change in the Afghan electoral process and democracy. To identify and support Afghan-led and Afghan-owned collective actions to mitigate fraud and malpractice through the work of alliances and coalitions with key Afghan players. While the tangible impact of many integrity actions will take time, the strategy intends to lay the foundations, through multiple actions and milestones, to produce changes in the mid-term and long-term by identifying agents for change and meaningful actions.¹

¹ Further read on electoral integrity can be found at <http://www.eods.eu/publications>

Introduction

Election observers are considered the guardians of any election. Their role implies impartiality and professionalism to enhance the confidence in the integrity of the polls for citizens, candidates, the media and many other stakeholders. Their presence can deter attempts of fraud and help to ensure that citizens can choose their governments and leaders freely. Election observers are also supposed to contribute to the quality of future electoral processes and eventually to the political and social stability of a country.

Critical key indicators whether elections are considered credible and transparent are the public reports published by these election observation missions. The most important ones are the preliminary statement, issued shortly after the polls, and the final report once all stages of an electoral process are completed. These reports are the result of months, sometimes years, of work.

Failure of election observers to present a thorough analysis and accurate assessment of verified facts and findings in these public reports could render all monitoring efforts useless and diminish the role of election observation.

Not all stakeholders, including media and the general public, have the necessary knowledge and insight in the underlying methodology to prepare these reports. They don't see the numerous internal reports with analysis, data and facts that are written and collected throughout an electoral process. The quality of these internal reports determines the credibility and impact of the observing organisation.

These guidelines aim at supporting citizen observer organisations to develop a more comprehensive and systematic approach to structured, fact-based and message-oriented reporting and drafting of constructive and achievable recommendations. All of which could be essential to enhance the integrity of future elections.

Additionally, this guide provides suggestions for public outreach, which is important to effectively communicate findings, conclusions and recommendations to a broader audience.

This guide is neither exhaustive nor exclusive, nor should it be followed to the letter. It intends to be a toolbox with suggestions for consideration. A toolbox that serves larger citizen observer organisations or coalitions with the capacity to observe all aspects of the electoral process countrywide, as well as smaller organisation with a more limited scope of observation.

The Groundwork

The foundation for effective election reporting is laid long before the first sentence of any report is written or the elections are even called. In fact, the foundation of election reporting begins with work that appears initially not even related to reporting: the planning of an election observation mission.

This planning of an election observation mission resembles the sketching of the blueprint of a house. The more systematic and strategic the groundwork, the more robust is the final building. This concerns not only the composition of an election observation mission but also reporting lines and schedule of activities.

Adequate preparation of the observation allows an observer organisation to compile verified information, accurate data and thorough analysis more efficiently, which results in more reliable public reports. In particular, the preliminary statement can benefit substantially from this approach, as its publication expedient is time-sensitive.

However, in an ideal world, an election observation mission does not invent the wheel all over for every election. Preferably, it considers an electoral process a cycle. This does not only allow building on previous structures and experience; but also findings and analysis. And equally important: This approach also covers all developments and events outside the actual election period.

Structure of an Election Observation Mission

Although there is no fixed model for an election observation mission, a well-defined structure, as part of a comprehensive methodology, will give any observation a head start. It allows systematic observation and comprehensive analysis. Particularly the development of the horizontal and vertical tasks and hierarchies is important. They have to be adjusted according to goals, objectives and the scope of observation. The configuration and responsibilities of the election observation mission, eventually define the effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting of an electoral process.

An example of good practice for the setup of a full-fledged observation mission comprises:

- Management or leadership (e.g. Head of Mission, Deputy Head of Mission)
- Analysts as part of a core team who are assigned to specific areas of observation such as the legal framework, the election administration, the political sphere, media, among others. (see the full table of the horizontal organisation below).

This top layer constitutes the headquarters of the mission and tackles mostly matters at the central level. This includes, for example, central election commission and its structure, the electoral complaints commission, judiciary, leadership of political parties, media, etc.

The headquarters is usually complemented with observers who collect the information in the field. They are categorised as:

- Long-term observers based in all provincial capitals or similar strategic places. Preferably they are already deployed for voter, candidate and political party registration. Long-term observers are active in the field until well after election day to observe also tabulation of results and adjudication of possible complaints. Their area of observation and responsibility of reporting covers all elements of the electoral process on a provincial and local level.
- Short-term observers who are usually deployed around election day throughout the country in a maximum number of polling stations to monitor the polling, counting and – if feasible – parts of the tabulation of results.

Depending on the observation framework, regional or provincial coordinators might be added.

Possible Organisation of a Core Team and Respective Areas of Observation	
Legal Analyst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal framework • Compliance with international standards • Fundamental freedoms related to elections • Complaints and appeals process • Political finance regulation etc.
Electoral Analyst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election administration • Regulatory framework • Electoral offences and their adjudication, etc.
Political Analyst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General political environment • Election campaign environment • Election campaign financing, etc.
Media Analyst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media landscape • Media analysis (quantitative and qualitative) • Media legislation and regulation by the respective authorities for equal media coverage and advertisement • Social media, etc.
Data Analyst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of the voter register (gerrymandering) • Quantitative analysis of data from the field, particularly around election day, etc.

This table is an example, reflecting the most relevant positions and is not exhaustive.

Depending on particularities of the elections, additional core team analysts such as for campaign finances, social media, gender & persons with disabilities might be added. The final structure and division of tasks also depend on factors such as goals, objectives and funding of the observing organisation.

Usually, a core team is completed with additional members such as observer coordinator – serving as a link between observers in the field and headquarters – and a press officer who maintains the contact between the observer organisation and the media. This person is also responsible for public outreach, press releases, etc. (See Communication Strategy.)

Correlation between Structure and Reporting

The structure of the observation mission correlates directly with the reporting lines. These lines should be developed well, with a distinct definition of roles and responsibilities. The channels of communication between mission members and hierarchies must be precise and reliable.

Short-term observers report to long-term observers; long-term observers to the core team and the analysts of the core team to the leadership. The exception is electronically submitted forms, particularly on election day which are directly analysed at the headquarters. All these internal reports feed eventually into the public statements and documents.

It is critical to keep these internal reports confidential. Published out of context, they might distort public perception of the overall observation.

All information from the field must be verified and put in context. Also, field reports from one area do not necessarily represent the situation in the entire country. This should be particularly taken into consideration when publishing ad hoc statements and incident reports.

Reporting by the Core Team

The core team analysts collect information at the central level and also evaluate material from the field. Their assessments contribute to regular internal interim reports on the electoral process as a whole but also on specific topics. The core team prepares the preliminary statement and the final report. Ideally, their sections for the interim internal reports are written in a way that the content can be easily used in the public reports and statements.

Reporting by Long-Term Observers

Long-term observers are the extended arm of the core team in the region. They follow all aspects of the electoral process in their area of responsibility and provide regular reports to the core team. Those reports often correlate closely with the election calendar and also serve as the basis for interim reports. Core team analysts frequently task them with specific requests to get detailed information for further analysis.

Reporting by Short-Term Observers

Short-term observers are the eyes and ears of an observation mission on election day. They collect quantitative and qualitative data in polling stations throughout the country and follow counting and certain stages of tabulations where applicable. Those data are collected through specific forms based on quantitative and qualitative methodology.

All observers should receive a proper briefing on how to interact with the media. They should be encouraged to provide basic facts such as the composition of the mission, duration and mandate. They should not comment on specific incidents or findings in their area as this can distort the overall assessment and harm the credibility of the organisation. (See also the chapter on strategic communication.)

The Need for a Timeline

Elections are not a single event; they comprise many different smaller events. Election commissions usually publish a comprehensive election calendar early in the process. This calendar comprises all relevant elements and milestones that are equally important for an election observation mission. Some examples are voter registration, registration of candidates and parties, the campaign period, election day and announcement of results.

A good practice for an observation mission is to establish its own timeline and to align it with the calendar of the election commission. It should reflect all elements of the observation throughout the entire electoral process. This includes the different types of reports, dates, deadlines, venue, and responsible persons. Any changes in the official calendar should be immediately incorporated into the internal timeline.

Synchronising the internal observation calendar helps to increase the probability of achieving the goals and objectives of the observing organisation. It also promotes all elements of internal and external reporting to work effectively and in support of each other.

Beyond the Basic Timeline

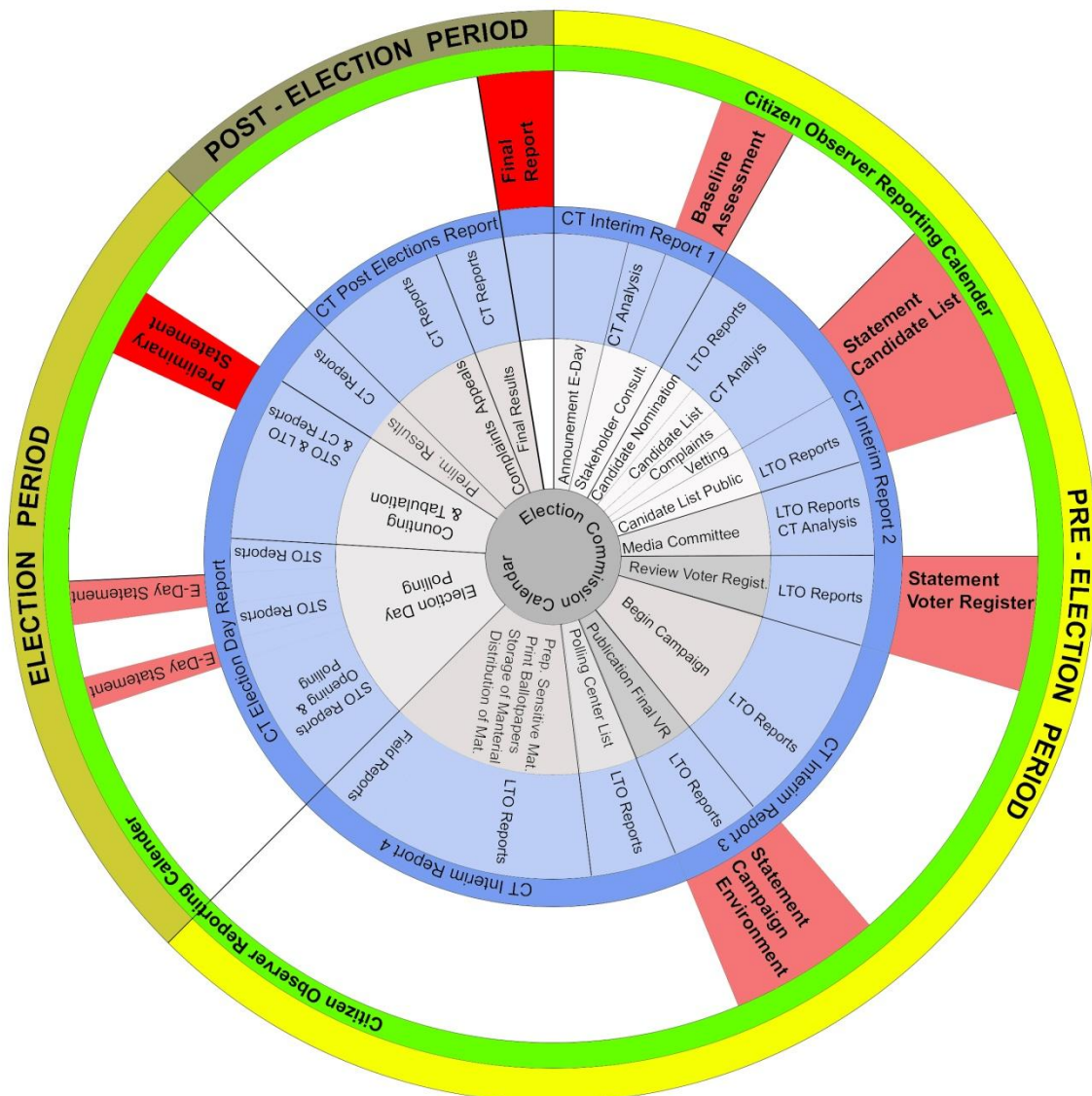
The definition of an electoral process as a linear timeline – or election period – works for most observer organisations. Particularly the ones with a more limited mandate, methodology and timeframe for their observation.

In the long-run elections should however be regarded as a cycle; covering all phases from one call of the elections to the next call. The underlying thinking is that elections are processes that expand beyond the call of elections, polling and announcement of results. The implementation of recommendations, development and changes of legal and regulatory frameworks, for example, are critical as they set the stage for future elections. Other aspects to consider beyond an election period could be campaign finances, use of state resources, media affiliation or changes in the delimitation of boundaries and districts.

Also, often several election cycles take place at the same time. Presidential elections might have a different interval and timing than parliamentary or provincial and local elections.

The concept of the election cycle was developed by International IDEA and the European Commission.² The purpose is to support sustainable commitment by all actors – institutions, government, civil society and others far beyond specific polls.

The visualisation and understanding of elections as a cycle promote the long-term evaluation of the qualitative progress of electoral processes and the impact of recommendations. This includes relevant legislation, the performance of the election administration, the media and every other element contributing to transparent and credible polls.



Source: own elaboration

The graphic above gives an example of how timelines, milestones and events scheduled by an election administration relate to internal and external reporting of an observer organisation.

² <https://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/electoral-assistance/electoral-cycle>

**Key Points:**

- Election reporting begins with the planning of structure and reporting lines of the mission. They are critical for systematic observation.
- The timeline of an observer organisation for reporting and statements should be based on the timeline of the election commission.
- To visualise elections as a complex cycle beyond the election period helps in the long-term evaluation of the qualitative progress of elections.

Internal and External Reporting

Methodology and objectives of internal and external reports differ substantially. Although both serve the same goal – to compile and present a comprehensive assessment of an electoral process – with their explicitly different audiences and purpose, they require distinctive strategies and formats.

The audience of internal reports is mainly the core team analysts and leadership. They will further assess findings and conclusions, which will be eventually reflected in the external reports.

The external reports are public and have to be written for the public: This includes all stakeholders of the electoral process – election administration, candidates, political parties, citizens, media, government, but also the international community.

The public only sees the external reports, mainly the preliminary statement and final report. And some only read the executive summary. Hence it's of utmost importance that those public reports are well structured, accurate, fact-based, comprehensive yet concise and easy to understand.

Internal Reporting

Election observation missions may follow different internal reporting strategies. Below are suggestions for good practices that allow an almost seamless integration into external reports such as a preliminary statement or final report. They are based on a systematic, modular approach with different types of reports, addressing different aspects of the electoral process. They are like pieces of a puzzle, resulting in a holistic, comprehensive assessment when putting together the final report at the end of the observation. Many of those internal reports can also be used as a basis for public statements and recommendations during an electoral process.

Baseline Assessment

The baseline assessment is essentially a needs assessment and is produced by the core team at the beginning of the election observation. Although not mandatory, this report is beneficial to determine the scope of the observation and critical issues that might arise during an election. It provides an overview of:

- electoral context (the type of elections, political environment)
- legal framework and changes since the last elections (amendment of constitution, electoral code, regulations) and whether laws provide for the minimum conditions for elections. It helps to find possible mayor legal gaps.
- election administration (structure, composition, etc.)
- status of recommendations issued after previous elections (indicating which ones were implemented, and which ones are pending or partly executed).

The baseline report may be used in the final external report and to some degree in the preliminary statement. Further, it serves as an excellent basis for a possible public statement at the opening of an election observation that can identify initial issues of the process and provide suggestions on how to rectify them.

Interim Reports

Interim reports are often produced in close correlation to particular phases of the electoral process as defined in the election calendar and give regular updates on the electoral process as a whole. They are critical elements of a systematic observation as they help observers to assess the electoral process also against international standards, obligations and commitments a country has committed itself to and the national legislative framework.

Hence these interim reports shouldn't be considered as mere summaries. Ideally, they target specific elements of the electoral process such as voter registration, the participation of women, etc. (See below). They should be based on the findings by the long-term observers in the field and an in-depth analysis of the responsible core team analysts. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of all stages on time.

These interim reports serve then also as the basis for the respective chapters of the preliminary statement and final report. They can also be used for public statements, press releases or ad hoc reports during the electoral process with specific recommendations (e.g. on voter registration, verification of voter lists and their final publication.)

Considering the organisational capacity, here are some examples of events and topics interim reports can cover:

- performance and transparency of the election commission on all levels pertaining for example to
 - voter registration
 - candidate and party registration
 - operational aspects (e.g. printing of ballots, procurement of sensitive and non-sensitive material, logistical aspects such as the distribution of election material
 - regulations issued by the election commission
- amendment of the legal framework and other administrative regulations
- adjudication of pre-election disputes, such as appeals of rejected candidates
- the ability of women, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and people with disabilities to participate in all aspects of the elections
- campaign environment (e.g. violence, abuse of state resources, level playing field)
- role of other state actors, such as the military, police and other security forces
- performance of the media.

Similar to the baseline report, these interim reports are useful contributions to the preliminary statement and the final external report.

Regular Field reports by Long-Term Observers

Field reports by long-term observers serve two purposes: firstly, they provide periodic – usually weekly - updates on the electoral process in the respective geographic area of responsibility of the observers. As the long-term observers are usually deployed well in advance of the polling – sometimes several months – these reports cover everything from voter registration to campaigning, voting and tabulation of results to complaints and appeals.

Secondly, the format of field reports is also often used by a core team to request information on specific topics. Those topics are aligned with the content of the interim reports (see above) and critical quantitative and qualitative contributions to these internal reports.

Field reports might be based on a template, which is developed following the particularities of the electoral process. They are fact-based and subject for further analysis. Their structure is similar to checklists and forms used on election day. (See election day reports).

Ad Hoc Reports

Ad-hoc or spot reports are unscheduled, short and urgent reports produced by long-term observers focusing on developments that have to be reported to the headquarters without delay. Examples are major campaign activities or incidents that impact or sometimes even threaten the electoral process, such as violence or other disruptions.

Election Day Reports

Election day reports are mostly submitted by short-term observers during and at the end of the voting and counting process. These reports are usually based on templates, such as checklists and forms developed ahead of election day by the election analyst, data analyst and other core team members. They might cover specifically the opening of the polls, give regular information of the voting in general and cover closing and possibly counting in the respective polling station.

Forms should be designed in a way that limits mistakes and false information. This also applies to electronic forms which are increasingly used to gather information from short-term observers on election day. These forms are transmitted electronically to the headquarters through cell phones or computers. Immediate processing in a database allows for timely analysis of key aspects of the polls. Note: electronic forms must always have a back-up option in case cell phone networks are down or no internet is available. That allows for later electronic submission or manually, e.g. print outs.

When developing forms, it is helpful to keep the 5W in mind: what, where, when, who, why?

It is also helpful to ask yourself:

- Do you need to know this information?
- Will your questions provide the information?
- Can the question be misunderstood?
- What assumptions does it make?
- Is it time specific?
- Will respondents answer truthfully?
- Is the question relevant to the respondents/the objective of the observation?
- Does it contain unclear terminology?
- Will your questions collect data in a reliable and valid way?

Some fundamental principles are:

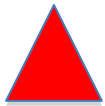
Clarity: Questions must be clear, concise and unambiguous. Eliminate the chance that the question will mean different things to different people. For example, if asking a question about frequency, rather than supplying choices that are open to interpretation such as: Very Often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never. It is better to quantify the choices, such as: Every Day or More, 2-6 Times a Week, About Once a Week, About Once a Month, Never. Example: Were any voters seen not allowed to vote? Yes, several, often, frequently. It's better to ask: Were voters rejected at the polling station? Not registered at the polling station, voted already according to voters list, documents not provided, other (explain).

Leading Questions: A leading question is one that forces or implies a certain type of answer. It is easy to make this mistake in the choice of answers. A closed question must supply answers that not only cover the whole range of responses, but that are also equally distributed throughout the range. For example these answer choices are weighted more towards a favourable response: superb, excellent, great, good, fair, not so great. A better way is to offer a more balanced set of responses e.g. Totally agree, partially agree, neither agree or disagree, partially disagree, totally disagree.

Phrasing: adjectives, verbs, and nouns have often either a positive or negative connotation. It is advisable to try to use words that have neither strong negative or positive overtones.

Hypothetical Questions: Avoid hypothetical questions because they ask for guessing.

Prestige Bias: Prestige bias is the tendency for respondents to answer in a way that make them feel better. There is little that can be done to prevent this.



Key Points:

- Internal reports will cover all aspects of the electoral process throughout the country.
- Content and timing is defined by the internal timeline of the observation organisation
- Internal reports have a different format and purpose from external reports.
- Each internal report should be drafted as a possible contribution to preliminary statement, final report and other public statements.
- It is critical to verify information and findings.
- Internal ad-hoc and incident reports, based on single field reports, do not reflect the situation in the entire country and should be used with caution.
- Forms and checklists are important tools for a systematic election observation. They should be based on the 5W: what, where, when, who, why?
- Questions in forms should be clear, concise and unambiguous.
- Internal reports should remain confidential.

External reporting

External reporting is a key aspect of election observation. These documents represent the official record by the observer organization of what has been monitored and analysed. They also serve as a reference for future observation.

As a general principle, all external reports are public. The audience ranges from voters, media, election administration, civil society, the diplomatic and international community as such, and everybody else who has an interest in the electoral process. Not all within these target groups have in-depth knowledge of the electoral process or the methodology used by the observing organisation. Hence external reports must be clear, concise, comprehensive and fact-based.

An organisation may delay the publication of some external reports. It is more important that information is fact-based and verifiable than to be the first organisation to publish a report. The credibility of an entire election observation depends on accurate reporting. This is, in particular, relevant for reports on incidents, which might be initially communicated to the election authorities to solve or mitigate the identified problem quickly.

The use of statistics and graphics can be effective to increase the credibility of the findings and conclusions. However, they should only be used if the underlying data are verified. It is also helpful to explain – particularly in the preliminary statement and final report – how these statistics were generated.

In general, there are four different types of external reports. They differ in their scope, analytical focus, level of detail of recommendations and channels of communication.

Interim Statement

An election observation might decide to publish interim statements, targeting major milestones in the electoral process such as the voter-registration, the conclusion of the selection and registration of candidates and parties, the beginning/end of the electoral campaign, etc. An additional opportunity for publishing an interim statement is the launch of the election observation mission - should the mission have already a complete baseline analysis available.

Although often covering the same event, milestone or stage in an electoral process, the interim statements are fundamentally different from internal reports of an observation mission. (See internal reporting). Their structure is to some extent similar to the preliminary statement and final report: An executive summary, verified facts and analysis of findings. Interim statements might also include specific recommendations for the respective stakeholders in the process. It is crucial that recommendations are realistic and feasible.

Interim statements are often issued in the form of press releases and through social media. Exceptional circumstances might warrant a press conference.

External Ad-hoc Reports

Like internal ad-hoc reports, these reports highlight urgent and problematic events. It is crucial to verify all information first, including with the election administration and other authorities if applicable. Depending on the severity of the event, an observer organisation might decide to use different communication channels from social media up to press conferences.

Preliminary statement

The preliminary statement is an initial assessment released before completion of the entire electoral process, usually shortly after election day.

It assesses the degree to which the process so far has met international obligations, commitments and standards relating to democratic, transparent and credible elections, and requirements contained in national legislation.

The preliminary statement is considered the report that gets the most public attention as it attracts high levels of political, diplomatic and media interest.

Target Audience

The preliminary statement targets a broad audience: election stakeholders, voters, candidates, political parties, electoral authorities, the government, journalists, international observer missions and everybody else around the globe who has an interest in these elections. Hence the writing of the preliminary statement should be well structured, clear, accurate, concise and free from jargon.

Publication

The preliminary statement is preferably published at a press conference after election day. Most international election observation missions issue this initial report within 48 hours after election day. This ensures that the preliminary statement of an observer group gets the best recognition and has a strong impact. Most international media that came for election day will still be present in the country. This approach requires however, diligent preparation of the internal statement reflecting the different stages of the electoral process and goals and objectives of the observation.

There are other pros and cons to this practice, and each organisation needs to decide about the best timing. The most decisive factor is the accuracy of findings and conclusions. To be the first, possibly even on election day, can severely backfire if findings and conclusions for the observed period - and particularly for polling - must be corrected later. It harms the credibility of the observing organisation. However, if the publication is delayed for too long, the electoral process might develop dramatic dynamics during counting and tabulation of results and the

adjudication of complaints and appeals which cannot be adequately reflected in the preliminary statement.

Preparation

The key to a good preliminary statement is a systematic observation, based on planning and preparation. This includes in particular high-quality internal reports which were compiled throughout the electoral process. These interim reports can provide entire sections of findings and analysis for the preliminary statement. Hence large portions of the preliminary statement can be composed well before election day. This includes political background, assessment of the legal framework, adherence to international commitments and standards, general assessment of the independence and performance of the election administration, the campaign environment, the media etc. What is left on election day is a more prescriptive section on the actual polling and possibly counting and first stages of tabulation where applicable.

Structure and Content

As the preliminary statement covers only the period up to its publication, it must be stressed that these are the initial findings. It does not include, for example, a full observation of the tallying procedures or any other remaining stages of the electoral process. It is worth highlighting at the beginning of the summary that the citizen observers will continue to observe the post-election period. The mission's overall and conclusive assessment is made only in its final report.

The preliminary statement should:

- Be usable as a stand-alone document. The preferred form is short paragraphs or bullet points.
- Address in the first paragraph the main conclusion.
- Summarise findings and conclusions in an executive summary, not exceeding one page.
- Bullets or paragraphs have to be backed sufficiently below in the main text of the preliminary statement.
- Provide a clear initial message on the assessment by the observer organisation.
- Establish an early indicator for political and diplomatic actors to determine the credibility of the electoral process.
- Emphasise that findings are preliminary.
- Give a comprehensive appraisal of preliminary findings on the three stages of the electoral process that have so far taken place: the pre-election period, election day, and initial stages of vote-counting and tabulation results (if applicable).
- Whenever applicable, clear references to the national and international framework/standards for elections should be provided. (Emphasise that the

country has committed itself to the implementation of these standards/human rights by ratifying the respective treaty or document and that they are not imposed by external actors such as the international community.)

- Use graphics, statistics or percentages were useful to illustrate otherwise difficult to understand or complex findings and conclusions. However, make sure that the underlying figures are verified. Mistakes that need correction later will undermine the credibility of the report and possibly the entire observation.
- Include a short characterisation of the observing organisation at the end of the executive summary. This paragraph should reflect the category of the observing organisation (Civil Society Organisation, umbrella organisations, etc.) and purpose of the observation, general methodology, the number of observers deployed, and geographic area observed. It is essential to emphasise the independence and impartiality as this adds credibility to this statement and the observation by your organisation in general. To specify the funding with names of donors is good practice as it adds to the transparency.

It is recommended to assign to each section of the report the analyst who was following the subject throughout the entire electoral process. (See concept of a Core Team, electoral cycle and internal reporting.)

Each analyst writes their respective section(s) and prepares one or two bullet points to be incorporated into the summary.

The head of the organisation or a specifically tasked member of the team combines and edits the contributions, and while doing so, consults individual analysts for purposes of editing and clarifying their contribution.

The draft preliminary statement - in its preliminary form not including election day observation, a title and some bullet points in the executive summary - should be shared for review by the entire core team.

The legal analyst should read the completed draft to verify the accuracy of all references to legislation, including international law.

The observer coordinator - including regional coordinators – who are tasked with receiving and processing reports from long-term observers should ensure that their findings are adequately reflected and referenced.

None of these drafts should be circulated beyond this inner circle!

Checklist for a Preliminary Statement

The list below is illustrative and should be adapted to the methodology, goals and objectives of the observing organisation.

Executive Summary

The executive summary is a comprehensive yet concise assessment of the areas observed up to the publication of the preliminary statement.

Example to be adjusted according to the respective organisation:

The “*name of the organisation*” is a Civil Society Organisation, headquartered in Kabul, with the purpose of observing elections and election related processes in Afghanistan. It observed all areas of the electoral process against international standards and commitments for democratic elections as well as the laws of Afghanistan. The “*name of the organisation*” deployed xx long-term observers and for election day xx short-term observers in xx provinces. The “*name of the organisation*” is independent and impartial and funded by (*names of donors*). It adheres to the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, signed at the United Nations in April 2012.

Preliminary Findings

Background

This section should provide a brief context under which these elections take place. For example, if elections were delayed or postponed, political forces boycotted the process, the elections follow a peace agreement, electoral reform or specific political development.

Legal Framework and Electoral System

- Short! Details to be left for the final report!
- Is the national legal framework for elections in line with international obligations and commitments?
- Identify the main challenges and positive developments.
- Mention if past recommendations have been implemented.
- Provide a short description/analysis of the electoral system and any issue on it.

Electoral Administration

- Assess the independence (statutory and functional), transparency, impartiality, accountability and professionalism of the Electoral Management Bodies.
- Analyse the reasons for problems – e.g. appointment procedures, the administrative and financial means at the disposal of the IEC/IECC, a possible dependence on governmental services, etc.
- Level of public confidence and trust?
- Were voter education and information effective and adequate?

Voter Registration

- If applicable: provide findings and conclusions of the observation of the voter registration process.
- Is there confidence in the voter register, when was the last update of the voter register organised or is there a process of constant updating?

Registration of Candidates and Political Parties

- Short info on how many parties/candidates are competing, how many candidates per seat, and whether this allowed for genuinely pluralistic elections.
- Brief reference to findings and conclusions on the registration process.
- Has there been any complaint about refusals? How have they been dealt with?

Campaign Environment

- Critical issues of the campaign environment. Include violent incidents and aggressive rhetoric, arrests or detentions?
- Did candidates/parties enjoy equal rights to freedom of assembly, expression and movement during the campaign period?
- Size and tone of the campaign? Use of social media? Fake news?
- Campaign rules (main features) and their implementation.
- Were party/campaign financing regulations implemented and enforced? And if regulations were enforced: were they enforced fairly? Are those regulations on campaign financing adequate for genuinely competitive elections? Was there state financing of parties/campaign, subsidies for media coverage, was this an issue in the campaign?
- Were state resources used/abused for campaigning by the ruling party/incumbent, to what degree?

Media

- Overall assessment of the state of media freedom in the country.
- Was election reporting of media regulated in any way? Were those regulations implemented and enforced (sanctions, criminal legal proceedings, campaign silence?)
- Were the most important media/social media monitored? By whom? Based on what methodology?
- Performance of the most influential media, did they provide equitable coverage to the parties/candidates, e.g. state/private national media (balance, quality of coverage, e.g. were there special programmes, voter education, debates, fair and equitable access for all parties/candidates) – a particular emphasis on the state-owned or public service media.
- Online news media – were they significant? (If not, then leave them out.)
- Violent incidents towards journalists/media?

Participation of Women

- Access to candidacy
- Legal regulations and limits to women's participation in all aspects of the elections.
- Conclusions on the possibilities of effective exercise of the right to participation.

Participation of Persons with Disabilities (PWD)

- Access to candidacy
- Legal regulations and limits to PWD's participation in all aspects of the elections.
- Conclusions on the possibilities of effective exercise of the right to participation.

Participation of National Minorities, Ethnic Communities, Religious Communities, IDPs or Refugees

- Access to candidacy
- Legal regulations and limits to participation in all aspects of the elections, does equal access translate into equal participation?
- Implementation of quotas?
- Out-of-country voting? (If applicable)

Civil Society and Citizen Observation

- General access to the process,
- Freedom of movement,
- Ability to observe effectively,
- Freedom of expression,
- Accreditation issues.

Note: Party agent monitoring is usually for the section Polling and Counting, or if there was a problem with the regulation or the implementation of the law (late registration of party monitors etc.) then it could be in Election Administration.

Possible civil society role in voter education should be mentioned here if relevant, verified and available.

Polling and Counting

- Mention the geographic/quantitative coverage of polling stations observed by the observing organisation. The broad sample of polling stations is one of the substantial advantages Civil Society Organisations have over international observation missions. It is however still recommended to qualify findings as 'in the polling station observed'.
- Opening/closing – on time/delayed?
- How was voting carried out – calm, disruptions, where?
- Polling procedures carried out well?

- Secrecy of the vote?
- Security of the environment surrounding polling stations?
- Professional level of polling station staff?
- Was the counting/tabulation carried out transparently, competently, following procedures, did the procedures work?
- If there were problems, what is your assessment of why they occurred? Was the integrity of the vote affected?

The report may be concluded with few lines concerning the plans of the observer group to follow the development of the process and reporting.

Final report

The final report provides a comprehensive assessment of the entire electoral process. It contains main findings with analysis and subsequent conclusions and recommendations for possible improvements of future elections. The final report is largely built on all previous reporting, in particular, the internal reports, preliminary statement and the post-election observations and assessments.

Target Audience

The final report has a similar target audience as the preliminary statement. However, as it is usually published months after the main elements of the electoral process are already concluded, final results announced and the winners of the elections often already in office, it doesn't get the same broad attention. This doesn't diminish its importance. The final report is critical for the overall assessment of the entire process and contributes fundamentally to the further development of all areas of the electoral cycle.

Hence the final report should be well structured, clear, accurate, concise and free from jargon.

Publication

The final report is preferably published at a press conference and should be accessible on the website and social media platforms. Live stream on social media might be considered if feasible.

Preparation

The preparation of the final report is similar to the preliminary statement. The first drafts can be already developed well before the electoral process is concluded. This includes also a first table of draft recommendations.

Structure and Content

Suggested areas to cover in the final report are:

- Introduction
- Political background Executive summary with priority recommendations
- Implementation of previous recommendations

- Legal framework
- Electoral administration
- Voter registration
- The right to vote
- Registration of candidates and political parties
- Campaign environment
- Campaign finance
- Media
- Participation of women
- Participation of persons with disabilities
- Participation of national minorities
- Out of country voting/voting for IDP's (if applicable)
- Civil Society observation
- Polling, counting and tabulation of results
- Electoral disputes
- Results and post-Election environment
- Recommendations
- Abbreviations
- Annex

A best practice is that the final report doesn't exceed some 40 pages, to ensure a good reading experience. It also encourages the writers to be focused and to the point.

Use of Graphics, Statistics or Percentages

Graphics, statistics or percentages can substantially support findings and conclusions. However, it is critical that they are fact-based and verified. Corrections at a later stage will undermine the credibility not only of the respective report but possibly the observation as such.

Charts, statistics and percentages have to be meaningful. The turnout of female voters per observed province in comparison to the total turnout province helps to illustrate a complex element of the observation in a clear and easy to understand manner.

Checklist for the Final Report

Table of Contents³

Executive Summary with Priority Recommendations

The executive summary is a comprehensive but concise assessment of the areas observed during the entire electoral process. Structure and content are based on the executive summary of the preliminary statement, complemented by additional findings, conclusions and recommendations.

- It must be usable as a stand-alone document.
- The preferred form is short paragraphs or bullet points.
- Paragraphs must reflect the essential findings and conclusions for all areas observed.
- The first paragraphs have to address the main conclusions of the observation.
- Paragraphs have to be backed sufficiently in the main text of the final report.
- The executive summary should list 5-6 “Priority Recommendations.”
- The executive summary should not exceed 4-5 pages.
- A short characterisation of the observing organisation is at the end of the executive summary. It should reflect the category (Civil Society Organisation, umbrella organisations, etc.) and purpose of the organisation, the general methodology, the number of observers deployed, and geographic area observed.
- It is important to emphasise the independence and impartiality as this adds credibility to this statement and the observation by your organisation in general. To specify the funding with names of donors is good practice as it adds to the transparency.
- The final report should be coherent all previous external reports, in particular preliminary statement.
- Whenever necessary/useful the final report should provide a clear reference to the national and international framework/standards for elections

(Example to be adjusted according to the respective organisation:

“The name of the organisation” is a Civil Society Organisation, headquartered in Kabul, with the purpose of observing elections and election-related processes in Afghanistan. It observed all areas of the electoral process against international standards and commitments for democratic elections as well as the laws of Afghanistan. *“The name of the organisation”* deployed in total xx long-term observers and for election day xx short-term observers in xx provinces. The name of the organisation presented on *“date”* its preliminary findings. Observers continued to

³ The order of the chapters is not compulsory. Although it’s recommended to lay out first political context and “frameworks” and recommendation shall be the final chapter.

follow the electoral process until its conclusion, including the complaints and appeals process. *(if applicable)*

“*The name of the organisation*” is independent and impartial and funded by *(names of donors)*. It adheres to the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, signed at the United Nations in April 2012.

Introduction

Background of the Civil Society Organisation and its observation. This includes but is not limited to the scope of observation, methodology, funding, deployment plans for the pre-election period, election day, post-election period, dates of deployment, reports published, etc.

Political Background

Provide a short overview under which these elections took place: the context of the election, identify all political issues relevant to the election as well as other democratic issues. Describe the background to the key political actors in the election process. This section is particularly important if elections were delayed or postponed, political forces boycotted the process, the elections follow a peace agreement, electoral reform or a specific political development.

Implementation of Previous Recommendations

Describe which of the main recommendations from past elections were implemented, and if not for what reasons; the table with the assessment of recommendations should be added as an annex.

Legal Framework

- Provide clear analytical findings on the legislative framework for the elections. A possible structure is:
 - International Principles and Commitments
 - Constitutional Human Rights
 - Electoral Legislation
 - Election System and Constituency Delimitation

In particular, there should be a key conclusion on whether the election laws provide for the conduct of elections in accordance with international standards, especially on the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms related to democratic elections.

The analysis of the election laws should highlight problematic areas where the legal framework needs improvement.

Possible references to a legislative provision should be quoted as a footnote.

Electoral Administration

- Assess the independence (statutory and functional), transparency, impartiality, accountability and professionalism of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC).
- Analyse the reasons for problems – e.g. appointment procedures, the administrative and financial means at the disposal of the IEC/IECC, a possible dependence on governmental services, etc.
- How confident was the public in the election administration Level, its compliance with legal requirements and the level of openness shown to electoral actors, including citizen observers?
- Was the voter education sufficient?

Voter Registration

- Assessment of the quality of the voter register and whether there is public confidence in its accuracy and reliability.
- It should also cover the voter registration system and procedures.

The Right To Vote

Description of the legal requirements for citizens to vote and analysis on whether there is a universal non-discriminatory franchise.

Provide data on the number of registered voters etc. if possible.

Registration of Candidates and Political Parties

Description of the requirements for registration to contest the elections. Identify whether procedural improvements are required. This section should also provide key data on the names/numbers of the main candidates/political parties.

Campaign Environment

- Provide a comprehensive overview of the conduct of the election campaign. In particular, the degree of freedom of political parties/candidates to campaign, organise, assemble etc. must be addressed.
- Assess the peacefulness of the campaign; whether overtly aggressive rhetoric was used, etc.
- Reference the legal framework for campaigning and whether it political parties complied with it.

Campaign Finance

- Were party/campaign financing regulations implemented and enforced?
- If regulations were enforced: were they enforced fairly?
- Are regulations on campaign financing adequate for genuinely competitive elections?
- Was there state financing of parties/campaign, subsidies for media coverage, was this an issue in the campaign?

- Detail the use of and fair access to state resources for campaigning. (Where relevant).

Media

- Overall assessment of the state of media freedom in the country.
- Overview of the media landscape, including online media.
- Violent incidents towards journalists/media?
- Was election reporting of media regulated in any way? Were those regulations implemented and enforced (sanctions, criminal legal proceedings, campaign silence?)
- Were the most important media/social media monitored? By whom? Based on what methodology? Reference findings/data if applicable.
- Performance of the most important media, did they provide equitable coverage to the parties/candidates e.g. state/private national media (balance, quality of coverage e.g. were there special programmes, voter education, debates, fair and equitable access for all parties/candidates) – a particular emphasis on the state-owned or public service media.
- Were fake news/hate speech observed? If so, what was their impact?

Participation of Women

- Access to candidacy, legal regulations and limits to women's participation in all aspects of the elections, the final report should provide conclusions on the possibilities of effective exercise of the right to participation.
- Implementation of quotas? (If applicable).

Participation of Persons with Disabilities

- Access to candidacy
- legal regulations and limits to Persons with Disabilities participation in all aspects of the elections.

The final report should provide conclusions on the possibilities of effective exercise of the right to participation.

Participation of National Minorities

- Access to candidacy
- Legal regulations and limits to participation in all aspects of the elections
- Does equal access translate into equal participation?
- Implementation of quotas?

Out of Country Voting/Voting for IDP's (If applicable)

- Assessment of out-of-country voting/voting for IDPs including legislative framework
- Challenges and limitations.

(If not applicable, this might be the section to assess possible disenfranchisement of voters.)

Civil Society Observation

- General access to the process
- Freedom of movement
- Ability to observe effectively
- Freedom of expression
- Accreditation issues

Note: Party agent monitoring is usually for the section Polling and Counting or if there was a problem with the regulation or the implementation of the law (late registration of party monitors etc.) then it could be in Election Administration.

Possible civil society role in voter education should be mentioned here if relevant.

Polling, Counting and Tabulation of Results

- Mention the geographic/quantitative coverage of polling stations observed by the observing organisation. The broad sample is one of the substantial advantages Civil Society Organisations have over international observation missions. Nevertheless, it is recommended to qualify findings as ‘in the polling station observed’.
- How was voting carried out – calm, disruptions, where?
- Opening/closing – on time/delayed?
- Polling procedures carried out well?
- Secrecy of the vote?
- Security of the environment surrounding polling stations?
- Professional level of polling station staff?
- Was the counting/tabulation carried out transparently, competently, following procedures, did the procedures work? (e.g. whether results were posted and candidates were provided with copies of results.)
- If there were problems, what is your assessment of why they occurred? Was the integrity of the vote affected?

Electoral Disputes

This section should provide detailed reporting on the complaints made in relation to election day or election results and how they were resolved. If the resolution of the cases is not completed by the time the report is finalised, this should be mentioned.

Results and Post-Election Environment

Publication of Results: Where there were problems with the publication, etc.)

What was the impact of the election results and any significant political consequences that occurred in their aftermath?

Provide details and an assessment of any complaints related to election day and the results and how they were resolved.

Possibly add a table of the results as an annex.

Recommendations

It is considered a good practice to present the recommendations in a table (see separate template). The structure is aligned with the structure of findings in the final report. It is suggested to reference the page in the final report, the context, responsible institution for possible implementation and the international commitment.

All recommendations have to be based on findings and must refer to issues identified in the narrative of the respective section of the final report. If there was no problem, there can't be a recommendation.

Recommendations should also be feasible. It is not helpful to request, for example, immediate changes in the legal framework for implementation within a short time-frame to be applicable for a second round of elections if they require amendments of the constitution. These recommendations have to be clearly earmarked as long-term amendments.

The examples below are taken from a report by a European Union Election Observation Mission. They are supposed to illustrate the structure and concept that could be used for recommendations. The format should be adjusted to the needs, goals and objectives of the observing organisation.⁴

⁴ More examples for recommendations and external reports can be found here:
<http://www.eods.eu/eom-reports>

Context (including reference to the relevant page of the FR)	Recommendation	Suggested Change in Legal Framework	Responsible Institution	Relevant International – Regional Principle – Commitment – National Legislation
<p>International treaties must be passed into law to have full legal effect before national courts. Only some aspects of the ICCPR have been incorporated and, at times, applied arbitrarily. UNCAC, for example, is also yet to be fully implemented, as foreseen in the Constitution, leaving gaps in the law and implementation mechanisms for adequate protection of international treaty commitments domestically. (page12)</p>	<p>Enhance and harmonise the protection of fundamental rights pertinent to elections by enacting comprehensive legalisation to give domestic legal effect to the relevant international legal obligations, including ICCPR, UNCAC, CPRD and CEDAW.</p>	<p>Legislative Enactment</p>	<p>Parliament HRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs National Committee on Women (Ministry of Women and Child Affairs)</p>	<p>International Commitments ICCPR, Article 2: “[...] each State Party [...] undertakes to take the necessary steps, in accordance with its constitutional processes and with the provisions of the present Covenant, to adopt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized in the present Covenant” UNCAC, Article 7(2): “Each State Party shall also consider adopting appropriate legislative and administrative measures, consistent with the objectives of this Convention [...]”</p>
<p>Around 30 per cent of polling stations countrywide were located at religious sites. Locations often lacked adequate facilities for the deployment of female EC staff. In some cases, voters had to walk long distances under difficult conditions to reach their assigned polling station. Some polling stations were not accessible to voters with reduced mobility. (page 18)</p>	<p>Review of polling station locations to ensure that polling stations are not located in religious sites, offer adequate facilities for women, are accessible for people with disabilities and are closer to a voter’s residence.</p>	<p>EC Guidelines, procedures Internal regulations</p>	<p>EC</p>	<p>Right to vote ICCPR, Article 25. ICCPR, HRC GC 25, para. 20: “[...] voters should be protected from [...] any unlawful or arbitrary interference with the voting process.” CRPD, Article 29 “States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others</p>

Annex

Data, charts and tables regarding, i.e., election results, boundary delimitations, etc.



Key Points:

- External reports – particularly preliminary statement and final report – are critical key indicators whether elections are considered credible and transparent.
- External reports have to be drafted with specific consideration of an audience that has, to a large extent, limited knowledge of the complexity of election observation and the electoral process as a whole.
- External reports must be fact-based, concise and accurate in the presentation of findings and analysis.
- It should be emphasised that the preliminary statement reflects only the observation up to the day of publication, ideally on time after election day and that the observation is still ongoing.
- The final report is a comprehensive analysis of the entire electoral process. It should also include clear recommendations on how to improve future electoral processes.
- Recommendations have to reflect issues and problems identified in the narrative of the report.
- Statistics, graphics and percentages can enforce findings and conclusions and help to illustrate complex contexts. However, the underlying data must be verified and factual. Mistakes can undermine the overall credibility of the observing organisation and its reports.

Communication Strategy

Professional communication with the public and the media, in particular, is as essential as a preliminary statement or the final report. Press releases, interviews, social media posts and other media events are important vehicles to strengthen messages, findings, conclusions and recommendations.

All information distributed to external audiences should reflect the overall goal of the citizen observation organisation. Hence communication needs to be guided by the same principles as the observation as such: thorough planning, clear objectives, awareness of the audience and crucial: it has to be accurate and fact-based.

Ideally, a communication plan should be based on the observation calendar of the observer organisation and follow the calendar of the election administration.

Sometimes overlooked: the importance to brief observers in the field properly on how to interact with media. One misleading or false comment by an observer to a journalist can distort the entire assessment of the observation and harm the credibility of the organisation substantially.

As part of the broader communications plan for the domestic election observation, an observer organisation needs to decide how to distribute information through reports and how to use the content of these reports to ensure that findings and recommendations have an impact in the post-election period.

Communication objectives and targets

Each election observation mission should have a designated contact for journalists. This can be either a spokesperson with explicit authority to speak on behalf of the organisation or a press officer who facilitates interviews with the leadership and provides other information as needed.

This designated person or team should be responsible for identifying communication needs and priorities and has to design a strategy to address them.

Depending on its overall methodology and mandate, an organisation might focus only on distributing information, or it might take a rather active role in a critical public discourse on the electoral process.

The vehicles selected for communicating specific objectives vary according to the message to be delivered, and the targeted audience. The organisation, might use traditional media (print, broadcasting), call a press conference, issue a press release, give interviews to specific media (e.g. local radio in a specific region), or use the broad offers of social media. The latter might also include live-streaming of key events to give the public immediate and unfiltered access to the key messages and information.

It is equally critical to be aware of the different audiences. The “Public” consists of much more than the average voter or “the media”. Election administration, political parties and candidates, civil society organisations, local and international media, the diplomatic community and other international organisations and officials involved in elections, have different priorities and require different types of messages. Accordingly, the impact of specific statements will be much stronger if the messages are tailored to the needs of individual target groups. An observation organisation might also consider specific briefings for specific groups such as diplomats or international media.

The press officer needs to study in advance the priorities of each group, select the information that is most relevant for them and the best vehicle to get this information to them.

The communication approach might look different when discussing election observation findings and recommendations with election-administration bodies compared with a discussion on reforms within the civil society.

Be aware: in general, there is no such thing like off-the-record background briefing. Organisations should always consider everything they say as public domain.

Although not necessarily part of an external communication strategy in the conventional sense, it might also be important to maintain regular communication with the election administration. Some missions do these through the respective core-team analyst. However, when it comes to communication of messages and discussion of findings, the task might better rest with the leadership of the observation organisation.

Depending on the task, it would be the task of the press officer to draft key messages and also defence lines. Those defence lines are essential and help to tackle challenging situations.

Basic Design of a Communication Strategy

A basic design of a communication strategy could consist of:

- Selection of a dedicated contact for media. In large geographic and complex elections, additional regional press officers might be an option. However: Adherence to hierarchy and reporting lines is imperative. This ensures that an organisation speaks with one voice only.
- A specific timeline for media events and the publication of press releases. This timeline should be integrated into the observation mission calendar. Press conferences for key events such as mission launch, presentation of the Preliminary statement and the Final report should be planned well in advance.
- Key messages and defence lines – to be changed according to the stage of the electoral process.
- An online presence consisting of a website and social media. The website functions these days mainly as a repository for reports and documents. It also gives an overview of the methodology and mandate. Social media are mainly used to get information out fast, reiterate key messages and serve as a proprietary news channel to address, for example, fake news fast and effectively.
- Comprehensive analysis of actors/audiences relevant to the observer organisation.
- Contact list with all local and international media and journalists concerned with elections.

- Contact list with all the other relevant stakeholders of the electoral process, including election officials, the international community, diplomats, officials, political parties and candidates, etc.
- Key reports and documents in local languages and high-quality translation in English. Social media postings should also be in all relevant languages, if feasible.
- Public outreach material such as fact sheets informing the public, officials and media, for example about mandate and methodology.
- Depending on resources: a media centre.



Key Points

- Communication with the general public and the media is as important as the observation as such.
- Strategic communication is critical to communicate findings, conclusions and recommendations to the public.
- Thorough planning also reflected in a specific timeline of media and other events, as part of the election calendar is critical.
- All communication, such as press releases, interviews, social media posts and other media events must be fact-based.
- Know your audience: different groups like media, diplomats, candidates, election administration, have different information needs and priorities.
- The use of the different instruments to communicate with the public has to be tailored to ensure maximum impact.
- No observer should comment on personal findings in his area of responsibility to the media.
- All observers should be advised to provide only basic information such as size of the mission, mandate etc. to the media. Their individual findings do not represent the situation in the entire country.

Annex

Template Preliminary Statement
Template Final Report
Template Recommendations

Headline: Short – Key Conclusion – Balanced

Location, Date

This preliminary statement by name of the organisation reflects the initial findings of its election observation up to now. It is published while critical parts are still being observed and before the electoral process is completed. Name of the organisation will present a final report at a later stage with a full analysis and recommendations for electoral reform.

Executive Summary

- The executive summary is a comprehensive but concise assessment of the areas observed up to publication of the preliminary statement.
- It must be usable as a stand-alone document.
- Preferred form is bullet points or short paragraphs
- Bullets or paragraphs must reflect the key findings for all areas observed.
- The first bullet or paragraph has to address the main conclusion.
- Bullets or paragraphs have to be backed sufficiently below in the main text of the preliminary statement.
- The executive summary should not exceed one page.
- A short characterization of the observing organisation is at the end of the executive summary. It should reflect the category (Civil Society Organisation, umbrella organisation, etc.) and purpose of the organisation, the general methodology, the number of observers deployed and geographic area observed. It is important to emphasise the independence and impartiality as this adds credibility to this statement and the observation by your organisation in general. To specify the funding with names of donors is good practice as it adds to the transparency.)

(Example to be adjusted according to the respective organisation:

The name of the organisation is a Civil Society Organisation, headquartered in Kabul, with the purpose of observing elections and election related processes in Afghanistan. It observed all areas of the electoral process against international standards and commitments for democratic elections as well as the laws of Afghanistan. The name of the organisation deployed xx long-term observers and for election day xx short-term observers in all 34 provinces. The name of the organisation is independent and impartial and funded by (names of donors). It adheres to the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election

Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, signed at the United Nations in April 2012.)

Preliminary Findings

Background

This section provides a short context under which these elections take place. Particularly important if elections were delayed or postponed, political forces boycotted the process, the elections follow a peace agreement, electoral reform or specific political development.

Legal Framework and Electoral System

Short! Details to be left for the final report

- Does the national legal framework provide a sufficient/adequate/sound... basis for elections in line with international obligations and commitments?
- Identify key problems and positive developments.
- Mention if past recommendations have been implemented.
- Provide a short description/analysis of the electoral system and any issue pertaining to it.

Electoral Administration

- Assess the independence (statutory and functional), transparency, impartiality, accountability and professionalism of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and Election Complaints Commission (ECC).
- Analyse the reasons for problems – e.g. appointment procedures, the administrative and financial means at the disposal of the IEC, a possible dependence on governmental services, etc.
- Level of public confidence and trust?
- Was the voter education/information sufficient/efficient?

Voter Registration

- If applicable: provide findings and conclusions of the observation of the voter registration process.
- Is there confidence in the voter register, when was the last update of the voter register organised or is there a process of constant updating?

Registration of Candidates and Political Parties

- Short info on how many parties/candidates are competing, how many candidates per seat and whether this allowed for genuinely pluralistic elections.
- Brief reference to findings and conclusions on the registration process.
- Has there been any complaint about refusals? How have they been dealt with?

Campaign Environment

- Key issues of the campaign environment. Include violent incidents and aggressive rhetoric, arrests or detentions?
- Did candidates/parties enjoy equal rights to freedom of assembly, expression and movement during the campaign period?
- Size and tone of the campaign? Use of social media? Fake news?
- Campaign rules (main features) and their implementation.
- Were party/campaign financing regulations implemented and enforced? And if regulations were enforced: were they enforced fairly? Are those regulations on campaign financing adequate for genuinely competitive elections? Was there state financing of parties/campaign, subsidies for media coverage, was this an issue in the campaign?
- Were state resources used/abused for campaigning by the ruling party/incumbent, to what degree?

Media

- Overall assessment of the state of media freedom in the country.
- Was election reporting of media regulated in any way? Were those regulations implemented and enforced (sanctions, criminal legal proceedings, campaign silence?)
- Were the most important media/social media monitored? By whom? Based on what methodology?
- Performance of the most important media, did they provide equitable coverage to the parties/candidates e.g. state/private national media (balance, quality of coverage e.g. were there special programmes, voter education, debates, fair and equitable access for all parties/candidates) – a particular emphasis on the state-owned or public service media.
- Online news media – were they significant? (If not then leave them out.)
- Violent incidents towards journalists/media?

Participation of Women

Access to candidacy, legal regulations and limits to women's participation in all aspects of the elections, the preliminary statement should provide conclusions on the possibilities of effective exercise of the right to participation.

Participation of Persons with Disabilities (PWD)

Access to candidacy, legal regulations and limits to PWD's participation in all aspects of the elections, the preliminary statement should provide conclusions on the possibilities of effective exercise of the right to participation.

Participation of National Minorities / Ethnic Communities / Religious Communities / IDPs or Refugees

Access to candidacy, legal regulations and limits to participation in all aspects of the elections, does equal access translate into equal participation? Implementation of quotas? Out-of-country voting? (If applicable. (If not applicable, this might be the section to assess possible disenfranchisement of voters.)

Civil Society and Citizen Observation

General access to the process, freedom of movement, ability to observe effectively, freedom of expression etc. Accreditation issues.

Note: Party agent monitoring is usually for the section Polling and Counting or if there was a problem with regulation or the implementation of the law (late registration of party monitors etc) then it could be in Election Administration.

Possible civil society role in voter education should be mentioned here if relevant.

Polling and Counting

Mention the geographic/quantitative coverage of polling stations observed by your organisation. The broad sample is one of the substantial advantages Civil Society Organisations have over international observation missions. It is however still recommended to qualify findings as 'in the polling station observed'.

- How was voting carried out – calm, disruptions, where?
- Polling procedures carried out well?
- Secrecy of the vote?
- Security of the environment surrounding polling stations?
- Professional level of polling station staff?
- Was the counting/tabulation carried out transparently, competently, following procedures, did the procedures work?
- If there were problems, what is your assessment of why they occurred? Was the integrity of the vote affected?

An electronic version of this preliminary statement is available on the name of the organisation website www.website.org

For further information, please contact:

Name, phone number, email

Address of organisation

Final Report

(type) Elections (year)

Location, Date

This final report contains the findings of name of the organization on the xx elections

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1. Executive Summary with Priority Recommendations

The executive summary is a comprehensive but concise assessment of the areas observed during the entire electoral process. Structure and content are based on the executive summary of the preliminary statement, complemented by additional findings, conclusions and recommendations.

- It must be usable as a stand-alone document.
- Preferred form is bullet points or short paragraphs
- Bullets or paragraphs must reflect the key findings and conclusions for all areas observed.
- The first bullets or paragraphs have to address the main conclusions of the observation.
- Bullets or paragraphs have to be backed sufficiently in the main text of the final report.
- The executive summary should list 5-6 “Priority Recommendations”
- The executive summary should not exceed 5 pages.
- A short characterization of the observing organisation is at the end of the executive summary. It should reflect the category (Civil Society Organisation, umbrella organisation, etc.) and purpose of the organisation, the general methodology, the number of observers deployed and geographic area observed. It is important to emphasise the independence and impartiality as this adds credibility to this statement and the observation by your organisation in general. To specify the funding with names of donors is good practice as it adds to the transparency.)

(Example to be adjusted according to the respective organisation:

The name of the organisation is a Civil Society Organisation, headquartered in Kabul, with the purpose of observing elections and election related processes in Afghanistan. It observed all areas of the electoral process against international standards and commitments for democratic elections as well as the laws of Afghanistan. The name of the organisation deployed in total xx long-term observers and for election day xx short-term observers in all 34 provinces. The name of the organisation presented on (date) its preliminary findings. Observers continued to follow the electoral process until its conclusion, including the complaints and appeals process. (if applicable)

The name of the organisation is independent and impartial and funded by (names of donors). It adheres to the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-Partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, signed at the United Nations in April 2012.)

2. Introduction

Background of the Civil Society Organisation and its observation. This includes but is not limited to: scope of observation, methodology, funding, deployment plans for pre-election period, election day, post-election period, dates of deployment, reports published, etc.

3. Political Background

Provide a short overview under which these elections took place: the context of the election, identify all political issues relevant to the election as well as other democratic issues. Describe the background to the key political actors in the election process. This section is particularly important if elections were delayed or postponed, political forces boycotted the process, the elections follow a peace agreement, electoral reform or a specific political development.

4. Implementation of Previous Recommendations

Describe which of the main recommendations from past elections were implemented, and if not for what reasons; the table with the assessment of recommendations should be added as an annex.

5. Legal Framework

- Provide clear analytical findings on the legislative framework for the elections. A possible structure is:
 - a) International Principles and Commitments
 - b) Constitutional Human Rights
 - c) Electoral Legislation
 - d) Election System and Constituency Delimitation
- In particular, there should be a key conclusion on whether the election laws provide for the conduct of elections in accordance with international standards, especially on the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms related to democratic elections.
- The analysis of the election laws should highlight problematic areas where the legal framework needs improvement.
- Possible references to a legislative provision should be quoted as a footnote.

6. Electoral Administration

- Assess the independence (statutory and functional), transparency, impartiality, accountability and professionalism of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC).
- Analyse the reasons for problems – e.g. appointment procedures, the administrative and financial means at the disposal of the IEC/IECC, a possible dependence on governmental services, etc.

- How confident was the public in the election administration Level, its compliance with legal requirements and the level of openness shown to electoral actors, including citizen observers?
- Was the voter education and information sufficient?

7. Voter Registration

Assessment of the quality of the voter register and whether there is public confidence in its accuracy and reliability. It should also cover voter registration system and procedures.

8. The Right to Vote

Description of the legal requirements for citizens to vote and analysis on whether there is a universal non-discriminatory franchise. Data on the number of registered voters etc. should be provided.

9. Registration of Candidates and Political Parties

Description of the requirements for registration to contest the elections. Identify whether procedural improvements are required. This section should also provide key data on the names/numbers of the main candidates/political parties.

10. Campaign Environment

- Provide a comprehensive overview on the conduct of the election campaign. In particular, the degree of freedom of political parties/candidates to campaign, organise, assemble etc. must be addressed.
- Assess the peacefulness of the campaign; whether overtly aggressive rhetoric was used etc.
- Reference the legal framework for campaigning and whether it was complied with;

11. Campaign Finance

- Were party/campaign financing regulations implemented and enforced?
- If regulations were enforced: were they enforced fairly?
- Are regulations on campaign financing adequate for genuinely competitive elections? Was there state financing of parties/campaign, subsidies for media coverage, was this an issue in the campaign?
- Where relevant, detail the use of and fair access to state resources for campaigning.

12. Media

- Overall assessment of the state of media freedom in the country.
- Overview of the media landscape, including online media
- Violent incidents towards journalists/media?
- Was election reporting of media regulated in any way? Were those regulations implemented and enforced (sanctions, criminal legal proceedings, campaign silence?)

- Were the most important media/social media monitored? By whom? Based on what methodology? Reference findings if applicable.
- Performance of the most important media, did they provide equitable coverage to the parties/candidates e.g. state/private national media (balance, quality of coverage e.g. were there special programmes, voter education, debates, fair and equitable access for all parties/candidates) – a particular emphasis on the state-owned or public service media.
- Were fake news/hate speech observed? If so, what was their impact?

13. Participation of Women

- Access to candidacy, legal regulations and limits to women's participation in all aspects of the elections. The final report should provide conclusions on the possibilities of effective exercise of the right to participation.
- Implementation of quotas? (If applicable).
- Assessment of international standards

14. Participation of Persons with Disabilities

Access to candidacy, legal regulations and limits to persons with disabilities in the participation in all aspects of the elections The final report should provide conclusions on the possibilities of effective exercise of the right to participation.

15. Participation of National Minorities

- Access to candidacy, legal regulations and limits to participation in all aspects of the elections, does equal access translate into equal participation?
- Implementation of quotas?

16. Out of Country Voting/Voting for IDP's (if applicable)

Assessment of Out-of-country voting/voting for IDPs (if applicable)

Including legislative framework, challenges and Limitations. (If not applicable, this might be the section to assess possible disenfranchisement of voters.)

17. Civil Society Observation

General access to the process, freedom of movement, ability to observe effectively, freedom of expression etc. Accreditation issues.

Note: Party agent monitoring is usually for the section Polling and Counting, or if there was a problem with the regulation or the implementation of the law (late registration of party monitors etc.) then it could be in Election Administration.

Possible civil society role in voter education should be mentioned here if relevant.

18. Electoral Disputes

This section should provide detailed reporting on the complaints made in relation to election day or election results and the manner in which they were resolved. If the resolution of the cases is not completed by the time the report is finalised, this should be mentioned.

19. Polling, Counting and Tabulation of Results

Mention the geographic/quantitative coverage of polling stations observed by your organisation. The broad sample is one of the substantial advantages Civil Society Organisations have over international observation missions. It is however still recommended to qualify findings as 'in the polling station observed'.

- How was voting carried out – calm, disruptions, where?
- Polling procedures carried out well?
- Secrecy of the vote?
- Security of the environment surrounding polling stations?
- Professional level of polling station staff?
- Was the counting/tabulation carried out transparently, competently, following procedures, did the procedures work? (e.g. whether results were posted and candidates were provided with copies of results.)
- If there were problems, what is your assessment of why they occurred? Was the integrity of the vote affected?

20. Results and Post-Election Environment

- Publication of Results: Were there problems with the publication, etc.)
- What was the impact of the election results and any significant political consequences that occurred in their aftermath?
- Provide details and an assessment of any complaints related to election day and the results and how they were resolved.

Possibly add a table of the results as an annex.

21. Recommendations

Good practice is to present the recommendations in a table (see separate template). The structure is aligned with the structure of findings in the final report. It is suggested to reference the page in the final report, the context, responsible institution for possible implementation and the international commitment.

Note: To be considered: the practical implications for implementing recommendations that require legislative change. Especially if they require amendment to the Constitution. The language used in this section should be understandable for all readers.

22. Abbreviations

23. Annex

Data, charts and tables regarding, i.e., election results, boundary delimitations, etc.

Template Recommendations

Recommendations⁵

No.	Page # 6	Context	Recommendation	Suggested change in the legal framework	Responsible Institution	Respective International Commitment
Legal Framework						
1						
2						
Electoral Administration						
3						
4						
Voter Registration						
5						
6						

⁵ This template may be customized according to observations, findings and conclusions. The number of overall recommendations and sections is indicative and not binding

⁶ The column "Page #" refers to the relevant page in the final report for the respective section

No.	Page # 6	Context	Recommendation	Suggested change in the legal framework	Responsible Institution	Respective International Commitment
Candidates and political party registration						
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Campaign Environment						
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Campaign Finance						
11						
Media						
12						
13						
Participation of women						
14						
Participation of Persons with Disabilities						

No.	Page # 6	Context	Recommendation	Suggested change in the legal framework	Responsible Institution	Respective International Commitment
15						
Participation of National Minorities						
15						
Electoral complain and appeals process						
15						
16						
Polling, counting and tabulation						
17						

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