

OAS: 50

YEARS
OBSERVING
ELECTIONS
IN THE
AMERICAS



Organization of
American States

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**OAS:
50 YEARS
OBSERVING
ELECTIONS
IN THE AMERICAS**



Organization of
American States

50 Years of Electoral Observation Missions



Since 1962, when the Organization of American States (OAS) sent its first Electoral Observation Mission to Costa Rica, the OAS has had a presence in electoral observation throughout the hemisphere, making it one of our best-known activities. The commemoration of this half-century mark is, therefore, an event that we celebrate with special pride.

Observation missions have accompanied the various political processes our region has experienced during this period but, more importantly, they have made essential contributions to the consolidation of democracy in the hemisphere. That is because one of the fundamental pillars of democracy is the legitimacy conferred to it by the genesis of these political processes: that is to say, by free, transparent, and inclusive elections.

When Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs) are sent, they carry with them a number of positive consequences for the promotion and defense of democracy in the Americas. First of all, these missions defend and promote the political rights of citizens—especially the right to universal suffrage, the right to a secret ballot, the right to freely elect, and the right to be elected—as expressions of a people's sovereignty. In that sense, the presence of an Electoral Observation Mission represents one of Pan-Americanism's greatest gestures of solidarity and support for the efforts undertaken by member states when they organize their elections.

In these five decades, as the region has gone through significant changes, OAS Electoral Observation Missions have also evolved. While the first years of work were focused on identifying election-day irregularities, today the

focus has been extended to issues of access, equity, gender perspectives, campaign financing, media coverage, transparency, and general support for the electoral institutions of each country.

That evolution was enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter of 2001, which dedicated an entire chapter to OAS electoral observations and pointed the way towards a new era for the EOMs. From that point on, the missions began to be formally framed in the long-term, focusing their attention not only on election-day events, but also on the development and modernization of electoral institutions as a whole.

With these new directives endorsed by the member states, we have been able to develop rigorous tools and methodologies for a more accurate and integrated process that yields an entire array of increasingly precise and nuanced observations. Our new methodologies provide us with a more in-depth view of the progress, deficiencies, and overall reach of our electoral processes.

As a result—and in response to Latin American and Caribbean political citizens' demand for the continuous strengthening of these processes—the reports that the General Secretariat sends to the Permanent Council about its observations include an increasing number of evidence-based recommendations. These reports are a treasure trove of information, of steps to be followed, of institutional strengthening, and of lessons in good practices. They are, in many ways, the footprints left by the evolution of this always perfectible process.

In this context, the Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) of the OAS Secretariat for Political Affairs is developing a database that is one of its kind. It will give us more information about how recommendations are being implemented and what kind of follow-up has been done, and it will make it possible to collaborate more efficiently with all of the electoral management bodies of the hemisphere.



This half-century of successful evolution is, without a doubt, just the beginning. Thanks to the ongoing efforts of the region's electoral authorities to improve and perfect their organizations, OAS electoral observation operates today in an environment of increasing democratic consolidation, which presents new and subtle challenges to the integrity of elections.

A past rich in experience and lessons learned and a vibrant present allow us to look with optimism towards the next fifty years of OAS electoral observation.

*—José Miguel Insulza
Secretary General
Organization of American States*

50 Years Observing Elections: The Evolution of Electoral Observation Missions



of reforms to the political system for which he requested the technical assistance of the OAS. These were the first precedents to what we know today as OAS Electoral Observation Missions (EOMs).

Between 1962 and 1989, observation missions were sent to witness 25 elections in eleven OAS member countries: Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Panama, El Salvador, Grenada, and Suriname. These missions—which today are called “first generation” missions—can be described as political and symbolic accompaniment involving the presence of international witnesses in election processes. It is important to note that the region was dominated by authoritarian systems during this period and that, for that reason, election observation could not be massively consolidated.

In November 2012, when the Organization of American States (OAS) sends its mission to observe municipal elections in Nicaragua, it will have sent a total of 200 Electoral Observation Missions throughout the hemisphere since its first mission in 1962.

During the “first generation” of missions, the main objective was to have a symbolic presence in the host countries. Today, electoral observations include specific methodologies that reflect the growing complexity of the hemisphere’s political and social processes over the last 50 years.

After a half-century of observing elections, the OAS continues to refine its methodologies with the steadfast goal of collaborating to strengthen the democratic processes of its member states.

First Generation Electoral Observation Missions: Presence

The first OAS electoral mission was sent to Costa Rica at the request of the Costa Rican government in February 1962. It was a technical assistance mission headed by Chilean Manuel Bianchi and it observed presidential elections in that Central American country. That same year, President Joaquín Balaguer of the Dominican Republic began to introduce a series

Second Generation: Transitions to Democracy

The OAS’s first large-scale, longer-term observation experience occurred with the 1990 elections in Nicaragua. The inauguration of a new structure of deployment and a change in focus from previous processes turned this effort into what would be the beginning of the “second generation” Electoral Observation Missions.

This new stage in observation is clearly and intimately connected to the political transformations the region was experiencing during those years. The end of the dictatorships ushered in a new boom in international election observation missions as the

“Electoral Observation Missions can be pivotal in bolstering public confidence in the democratic process and providing a secure environment in which voters can exercise their franchise without fear of intimidation or retribution. They have been, therefore, a fundamental tool for the strengthening of democratic governance, peace and stability in the hemisphere over the last three decades.”

—Albert R. Ramdin
Assistant Secretary General
Organization of American States



primary way to accompany democratic transitions in the hemisphere. The “second generation” missions began to take shape in terms of their structure, size, and leadership functions. They went from being exclusively missions of witness to being missions more focused on the quality of electoral processes.

In 1990, the OAS created the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD) with the goal of providing the member states with assistance and support to strengthen their institutions and democratic processes. The planning and organization of Electoral Observation Missions was established as one of its tasks.

A second big step towards institutionalizing the Electoral Observation Missions was the approval of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001. The Charter reflected the consensus in the region about the need to reach a higher level of social, political, and economic development by assigning a fundamental value to electoral democracy as the only valid political system for the region. In its Chapter V, the Democratic



After 50 years, OAS electoral observation is entering a new phase today. In order to respond to the needs expressed by the countries of the hemisphere, DECO will continue expanding its work, modernizing its vision, improving its tools, and helping to strengthen our citizens' ability to exercise their political rights. The future of observation is inextricably linked to the construction of democracies and the consolidation of democratic elections.

—Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian
Director, DECO

Charter establishes the states' responsibility to organize, implement, and guarantee free and fair election processes. It adds that—in the exercise of their sovereignty—states may solicit the deployment of an Electoral Observation Mission, which will be implemented according to the principles and norms of the OAS, safeguarding the principle of non-intervention.

Between 1990 and 2005, 100 “second generation” Electoral Observation Missions were carried out, in which the scope of observations included presidential, parliamentary, and municipal elections as well as referenda.

Third Generation: The Quality of Electoral Processes

In 2006, an executive order created the Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) as part of the Secretariat for Political Affairs, and the OAS undertook the drafting of a standardized methodology that would allow it to observe elections in a rigorous and systematic way. This important step forward allowed a formal structure to be established, made up of a Chief and Deputy Chief of Mission and a Core Group of specialists on various parts of the electoral process including: political context, legal affairs, technology, statistics, press, and logistics, among others. A structure with regional coordination and a group of election observers who receive rigorous training in each country where an observation mission is deployed was also created.

Did you know...

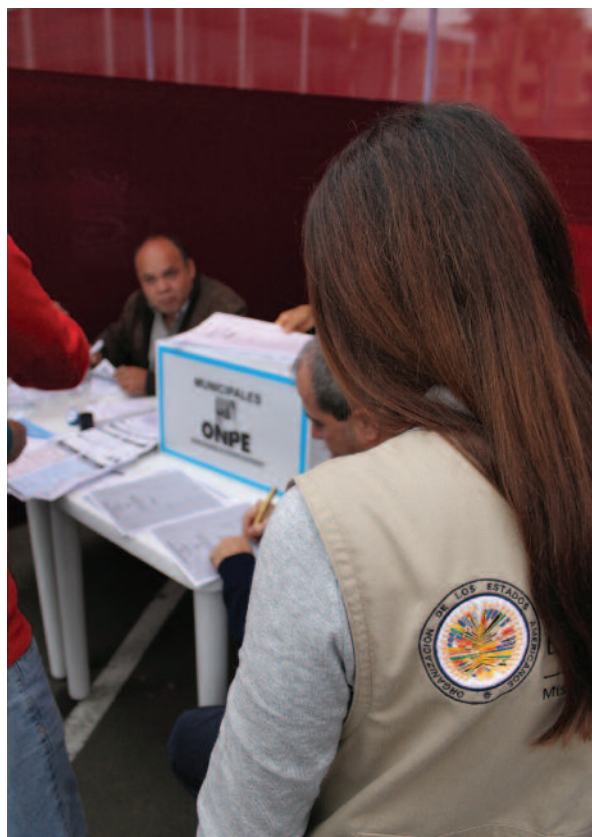
The OAS has observed elections in 26 of its 34 member states

Democracy works when political parties and citizens trust that the electoral structure is fair, meticulous, and impartial and that it is delivering reliable data that will meet with general acceptance. The Missions provide advice, offer clarity and confidence, review procedures, listen to the contenders, and make recommendations without getting involved in the internal matters of each country. They provide security, peace, and trust. The impartiality of the OAS is collateral against abuse, arbitrary decisions, and fraud. This has enormous value for democracy. When election processes are clean, peace prevails and democracy functions. This is what the OAS contributes with its Missions.

—Horacio Serpa
Chief of Mission
Bolivia, 2009

Realizing that it needed to professionalize its work even further and to explore aspects related to inequity in electoral contests, the OAS added three more specific methodologies in recent years in order to observe specific aspects of the electoral process related to: gender, financing, and media.

Between 2006 and November 2012, DECO sent 75 Electoral Observation Missions to various places throughout the hemisphere.



50 Years and the Future of Electoral Observation Missions

The celebration of a half-century of electoral observation is a perfect time to reflect on the future of Electoral Observation Missions. While member states recognize these missions as one of the OAS's most important tasks, significant challenges remain for the coming years.

In terms of observation methodologies, DECO plans to produce, in the medium term, a tool to evaluate equity in voting and/or candidacies from sectors of the population that have been historically underrepresented, such as indigenous, Afro-descendent, and displaced populations, and other vulnerable groups. It is also necessary to work on transferring the knowledge that has been acquired through all of the observation methodologies developed.





One of the most concrete results of the observation missions are the recommendations which—as expressed in the various reports—seek to contribute to the strengthening of electoral processes in the long term. One pending task is to develop mechanisms to follow up on the recommendations in order to accompany election agencies during the various stages of the electoral cycle.

Future missions will need to take a deeper more comprehensive look into the entirety of electoral processes beyond election-day observation. One step that can be taken is to strengthen the early presence of specialists who will begin to gather information from the country as soon as an invitation to send an Electoral Observation Mission is received. This will help monitor aspects related to equity, integrity, and inclusion in electoral processes.

Beyond the challenges, the OAS will continue to mobilize its efforts to strengthen electoral processes in the hemisphere, protecting and expanding citizen participation and guaranteeing the ability of all men and women to exercise their political rights freely and fairly.

No road has been longer, or full of more sacrifices and hopes, than the road our people have travelled to recover and reclaim democracy. This still incomplete democracy is the only way we have to ensure equality in an environment of freedom. In the recent history of efforts to consolidate the democratic consensus, OAS Electoral Observation Missions have been, for the men and women of our country, a tangible manifestation of inter-American solidarity for the protection of our most sacred accomplishment: fair, competitive, and transparent elections.

—Pablo Gutierrez
 Director, DECO
 2007 – 2011

Did you know...

The OAS is one of the organizations that signed the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation (2005)



50 YEARS OF ELECTORAL OBSERVATIONS

OEA enviará 65 observadores para verificar el

Para ello, firmó con las autoridades la Convención

◆ 1948 XI Pan-American Conference – OAS Charter Established

◆ 1962 First EOM in Costa Rica

◆ 1962 First EOM in the Dominican Republic

◆ 1963 First EOM in Honduras

◆ 1963 First EOM in Nicaragua

◆ 1966 First EOM in Bolivia

◆ 1967 Protocol of Buenos Aires – First Amendment to the OAS Charter

◆ 1968 First EOM in Ecuador

◆ 1970 First EOM in Guatemala



Manuel Bianchi
First OAS/EOM Chief

◆ 1978 First EOM in Panama

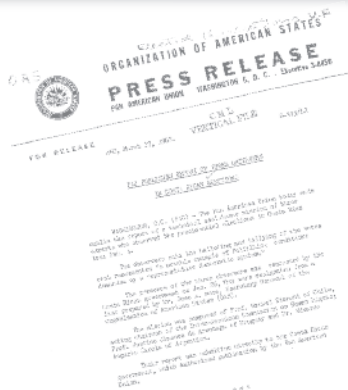


1960

1970

1980

1990



◆ 1982 First EOM in El Salvador

◆ 1984 First EOM in Grenada

◆ 1985 Protocol of Cartagena de Indias – Second Amendment to the OAS Charter

◆ 1987 First EOM in Suriname

◆ 1989 Resolution on Human Rights, D

◆ 1990 First EOM in Haiti

◆ 1990 First Democratically

◆ 1990 Creation of the Unit

◆ 1991 First EOM in

◆ 1991 Santiago Co

◆ 1991 Adoption of

◆ 1992 First

◆ 1992 First

◆ 1992 Prot





◆ 2000 EOM/OAS withdraws from Peru

◆ 2001 First EOM in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

◆ 2001 First Female Chief of an OAS/EOM: Elizabeth Spehar

◆ 2001 Adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter

◆ 2005 Signing of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation

◆ 2006 First EOM in Saint Lucia

◆ 2006 Creation of the Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation

◆ 2007 First EOM in Jamaica

◆ 2008 Publication of *A Manual for OAS Electoral Observation Missions*

◆ 2008 DECO Collaborates with the African Union. Legislative Elections in Angola

◆ 2008 Publication of *Criteria for Electoral Observations*

◆ 2009 First EOM in Antigua and Barbuda

◆ 2009 First EOM in Mexico

◆ 2009 First EOM in Dominica

◆ 2009 First Pilot Methodology for Media Observation in an OAS Electoral Observation Mission



Elizabeth Spehar
First Female OAS/EOM Chief



2000

2010



the OAS Charter



Democracy, and Electoral Observation AG/RES 991 (XIX-0/89)

lected Female President of the Region: Violeta Chamorro

for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD)

Paraguay

Commitment to Democracy and the Renewal of the Inter-American System

Resolution 1080 Regarding Representative Democracy

st EOM in Peru

st EOM in Venezuela

Protocol of Washington – Third Amendment to the OAS Charter

◆ 1994 First EOM in Colombia

◆ 1997 First EOM in Guyana

◆ 2010 Publication of *Observing the Use of Electoral Technologies*

◆ 2010 First EOM in St. Kitts and Nevis

◆ 2010 First Joint EOM between OAS and CARICOM. Haití

◆ 2010 First Pilot Methodology Incorporating a Gender Perspective in an OAS Electoral Observation Mission – EOM Paraguay

◆ 2011 Publication of *Methodology for Media Observation During Elections: A Manual for OAS Electoral Observation Missions*

◆ 2011 First Pilot Methodology to Observe Political and Electoral Financing in an OAS Electoral Observation Mission – EOM Guatemala

◆ 2012 First EOM in the Bahamas

◆ 2012 First EOM in Belize

◆ 2012 Publication of *Gender Methodology*



Methodologies for Electoral Observation: More Inclusive and Competitive Elections



Did you know...

The Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation was created in 2006

Originally proposed as a way of having systematic and objective tools for OAS election observation tasks, a number of methodologies have now been designed that facilitate a detailed analysis of conditions affecting equity in electoral contests. These methodologies have become one of the most

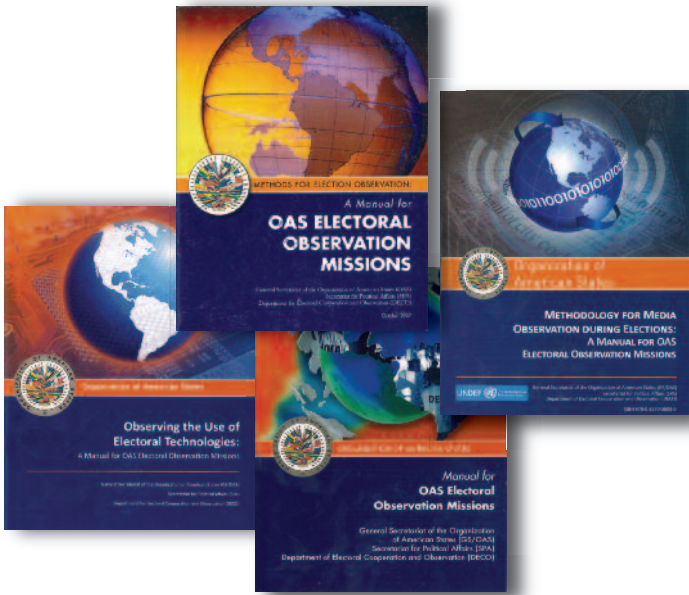
significant achievements of the 50 year history of OAS Electoral Observation Missions.

Since 2007, the OAS Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) has been progressively developing various methodologies that seek to improve OAS professional and technical capacities in electoral matters. The documents called *A Manual for OAS Electoral Observation Missions* and *Criteria for Electoral Observation* were the first OAS instruments to establish



Whenever I led an OAS Electoral Observation Mission in a Member State, the part of the experience which struck me the most was the welcoming attitude of citizens to our presence and our role in their country. No matter how contentious the situation, most people understood that the OAS was there for them, by contributing to the holding of an open, fair electoral process.

—Elizabeth Spehar
Executive Coordinator, UPD
1995 – 2004



concrete performance guidelines for its observation work in the Americas.

After this first stage, as electoral democracy was consolidated in the hemisphere and the likelihood of election-day fraud became more and more remote, DECO identified the need to make a qualitative leap in the area of observation and proposed the creation of methodological instruments that would permit the OAS General Secretariat to observe not only election-day procedures and technical aspects, but also elements related to the conditions affecting equity in competition during the various stages of the electoral process. Methodologies on media observation, electoral technology, gender, and financing are the concrete results of these efforts.

Media Observation

The Methodology for Media Observation during Elections establishes the parameters for tracking the work of various media outlets and helps analyze



With rigorous adherence to its own role and responsibility, respect for sovereignty, and commitment not to interfere in the internal affairs of the countries requesting assistance; OAS Electoral Observation Missions are a factor of intermediation and coordination in particularly delicate political circumstances. Because democracies—even democracies with strong foundations—are not free of tensions, and when electoral processes are authentic, they are serious competitions between different proposals for the kind of government and projects a country should have. These electoral missions are neither infallible nor miraculous, but they are necessary, as is the commitment to democracy that undergirds and drives them.

—Dr. Tabaré Vázquez
Chief of Mission
Dominican Republic 2012





LUKIN NENA

Did you know...

An EOM is deployed in response to an invitation from a member state

electoral conditions in terms of equity in competition. Political parties' and candidates' access to the media, informational coverage, compliance with laws governing the media, and coverage of issues important for voter education are areas particularly emphasized in the methodology.

Observation of Electoral Technology

The Methodology to Monitor the Integration of New Technologies in the Electoral Process contains tools for observing the registration of candidates, voter registration, electoral mapping, electronic voting, and the reporting of results, as well as other aspects of electoral administration and organization in countries where highly technical processes are used. It also describes in detail the functions of the information technology expert who is part of the Core Group.

OAS Electoral Observation Missions are made up of a careful blending of political leaders, who represent the specific experiences of their countries' democracy and electoral systems; permanent technical teams, who bring experience and context to each mission; and volunteer observers who participate with great capacity and commitment. The considerable political, regional, cultural, professional, and gender diversity of these missions have helped them to make essential contributions towards the improvement, consolidation, and defense of democracy in the Americas.

—José Octavio Bordon
Chief of Missions
Guatemala, 2008 – 2011
Panama, 2009





If there is anything that distinguishes the OAS—that has defined it from its roots from the time of its creation—it is the promotion of democracy. Electoral observation is the perfect mechanism for working towards this objective. I have led several observation missions and I have been a witness to the high level of organization, professionalism, and commitment among observers; and to their respect for electoral authorities and for the peoples of the Americas. But the Missions are more than this; they are an opportunity to provide international cooperation for electoral management bodies, and to receive and implement recommendations aimed at ongoing improvement of electoral systems.

—María Emma Mejía
Chief of Mission
Costa Rica, 2010

Incorporating a Gender Perspective into Electoral Observation

A tool known as the Gender Methodology makes it possible to systematically analyze the equality of participation of men and women in electoral processes at all levels: as voters, candidates, leaders in government institutions, within electoral agencies, and within political party structures. Since beginning to use this methodology, OAS Electoral Observation Missions have been gathering important information on diverse factors that directly or indirectly influence the opportunities and obstacles that men and women face in terms of their ability to participate in elections with equitable conditions.

Methodology to Observe Political and Electoral Financing

This methodology—created recently—provides concepts, procedures, and tools for OAS observation missions to evaluate political financing systems in an exhaustive, reliable way and with a gender focus. It also includes an in-depth analysis of the legal aspects of electoral financing, with a concentration on evaluating the extent to which financing systems bolster equity and transparency in electoral processes, in both pre and post-electoral phases.

Thanks to the development of these methodologies, the OAS today has tools for rigorous and professional analysis, and this has had a direct impact on the quality of recommendations coming from the Electoral Observation Missions. As it celebrates this 50th anniversary, the high quality of its observation work has brought the OAS recognition as an international leader in electoral observation.



Technical Cooperation on Electoral Matters: Strengthening the Electoral Cycle



The Joint Electoral Observation Mission in Haiti did not limit itself to passive observation of the voting process and making recommendations once the process had come to an end. As a long term mission deployed in a polarized political environment where trust and confidence in the impartiality and integrity of the electoral commission were in short supply, the mission undertook the observation by pointing out shortcomings, irregularities, non-respect of the electoral law and regulatory procedures; making recommendations for improvement of the electoral process, balloting, counting of votes and conflict resolution. In this way election observation served as a valuable technical assistance contribution as well as safeguarded the integrity of the electoral process.

—Colin Granderson
Chief, Joint Electoral Observation Mission
Haiti, 2010 – 2011

need to establish an election oversight agency that would be autonomous from all the other branches of government and that would provide greater guarantees to the electoral process that was to take place the following year. While missions today differ in terms of their political context, makeup, deployment, and purpose, the “technical assistance” provided that year became an important precedent for the first OAS Electoral Observation Missions. It also established a key precedent in terms of the objectives of electoral cooperation: to collaborate in strengthening the entire election cycle at the request of the member states.

Since the hemisphere’s return to democracy in the 1980s and early 1990s, the OAS has provided technical accompaniment to a number of member states as they

The implementation of cooperation projects with election oversight agencies in the region has become one of the main pillars of DECO’s efforts to strengthen the electoral management bodies and contribute to the continuing consolidation of democratic processes in member states.

The creation of specialized electoral management bodies charged with administering electoral justice and/or organizing elections is a relatively recent process for many of the countries of the region. But OAS technical accompaniment of election matters goes back a long way.

On October 19, 1961, the OAS published its Report of the Technical Assistance Mission to the Dominican Republic on Electoral Matters. At that time, the OAS Mission made important recommendations about the





Did you know...
 In total, more than 5,000 international observers have been deployed in the Americas

have established their electoral management bodies and developed a number of related processes like the formation of voter registration lists and the civic education of citizens. Most of these electoral “assistance” projects were conceived of as long-term processes, and they contributed in significant ways to establishing functioning electoral institutions in the region.

After the initial stage of creating these electoral management bodies was completed, just a little over five years ago, the new agencies began to take the lead in

Whenever political crises have occurred in the context of electoral processes in the Dominican Republic, the OAS has played a stellar, high-level role. With OAS mediation, the various political and social actors of the country have been able to find viable solutions to the particular problems they were facing. The fact that the Dominican Republic has such a strong and mature electoral system today, and the fact that it has made such great technical progress in elections, is due in no small part to the ongoing contributions of the OAS.

—Roberto Rosario
 President, Central Electoral Board
 Dominican Republic

initiatives aimed at promoting their own growth, improving their internal capacities, increasing their efficiency, and increasing the quality of the services they provide to citizens. Reflecting a significant change in paradigm, “Electoral Technical Cooperation” replaced the “assistance” through the implementation of much more tailored programs and projects that are totally separate from the observations and have a separate mission that involves having an impact on institutions.

Since 2007, in response to requests from various election authorities, DECO has implemented a total of 17 technical cooperation programs in areas including the auditing of voter registration lists,

electronic voting, electoral maps, training, biometric voter registration, quality management, and others. Through the implementation of concrete, tailored, and professional projects, Electoral Technical Cooperation is today aimed at strengthening the formal mechanisms of the democratic process that are not completely contained within the actual electoral event. In this sense, DECO plays an important role by implementing projects that contribute to the long-term, institutional strengthening of electoral bodies.

One of the most concrete examples of the OAS’s ongoing commitment to strengthening the electoral





CAITLIN KELLY

When I was in Paraguay, I was able to appreciate the importance and impact of OAS Electoral Observation Missions. People from the most diverse social and ideological backgrounds—from the president of the country, to the leaders of most of the political factions, to social leaders and human rights activists—told me that the presence of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission had been a decisive factor in ensuring respect for the results of the election, and thus in the consolidation of the democratic process in that country.

—Enrique Ayala Mora
Chief of Mission
Paraguay, 2010

cycle is the accompaniment of processes for certifying the quality of the different electoral management bodies of the region. In fact, thanks to the level of prestige it has earned, the Department for Electoral Cooperation and Observation is situated today as a world leader in the creation of international standards for quality certification in the electoral arena, known as ISO 17582. DECO's leadership today has put the OAS on the cutting edge of election issues, expanding its prestige beyond our own hemisphere to the entire world.

In the coming years, electoral cooperation will face important challenges. Increasing requests for cooperation in the context of severe budgetary restrictions in donor countries forces us to redouble our efforts to be more efficient and effective in the deployment of missions with a single common objective: to be reliable partners of member states as we continue down the path of perfecting the mechanisms of democratic participation.





FRANCIS GAGNON



HUGO PASARELLO



Because of their efficiency, neutrality, and transparency, OAS Electoral Observation Missions have earned the trust of the people of the Americas and contributed to good governance and to the democratic strengthening of the countries of the region. Governmental, political, and civil society organizations all see the presence of an OAS Electoral Observation Mission as the guarantee of valid witness to the transparency and legality of the process in which authorities are elected. OAS reports contribute to the good governance of a country and, therefore, to the strengthening of its democratic institutions.

—Magdalena Chu
National Chief

National Office of Electoral Processes, Peru

Electoral Observation Missions build capacity of the region to strengthen governance frameworks and enhance and sustain democratic societies. This includes the full participation of all citizens regardless of class, race, ethnicity or sex and their capacity to monitor progress. EOMs also serve to deepen the culture of democracy and strengthen local capacity for participation and monitoring. The result is a region in which the leadership fully represents the diversity of its population and citizens actively participate and have full confidence in the democratic governance of their nations.

—Rosina Wiltshire
Chief of Mission
Saint Lucia, 2011



JORGE CHRISTIAN CHAVEZ RAMIREZ



VITO ROBBIANI



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