



# INAUGURAL MEETING REPORT

*What we know  
(and don't know)  
about election  
observation  
in 2021*

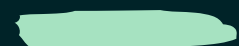


This brief summarises the main themes and discussion points of the inaugural ELECTOR meeting held on 25 November 2021 in Brussels and online. It was prepared by Dr Petra Alderman, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham's International Development Department.

The meeting saw the launch of the official ELECTOR website – **[www.elector.network](http://www.elector.network)** – along with several 'Research in Brief' papers that make cutting-edge academic research more accessible to practitioners and policy makers working on election observation. To continue to foster better relationships between academics and key international and domestic election stakeholders, ELECTOR will organise two meetings in 2022 to further conversations around specific themes.

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# HIGHLIGHTS



## On the role of observers during a crisis:

- The COVID-19 pandemic was used in some countries to undermine the quality of electoral processes, a trend that is likely to continue.
- The limited presence of international observers during the pandemic has put more pressure on domestic observer groups, but it has increased cooperation between the two.
- Observers are critical for the defence of democracy in the current global democratic recession, and their role includes making clear statements about malpractice.

## On new technologies:

- New methodologies are needed to monitor the digital and electronic technology landscape around election observations.
- International observer missions need a strong understanding of how digital and electronic technology works in practice and recognise the signs of digital manipulation.
- Public trust in digital technology and electronic processes is crucial for perceptions of electoral integrity.

## On disinformation and electoral violence:

- Our understanding of how disinformation affects voters remains limited.
- Preventing electoral violence requires context-specific knowledge and mechanisms.
- Coverage of electoral violence should recognize the distinctive threats facing specific groups, including women, young men, and poorer voters.

## On turning recommendations into action:

- Technical recommendations are more likely to be implemented than those aimed at campaign finance or the political representation of women.
- Observers should target their election recommendations to those who have the power to make change, and direct their recommendations to a named institution or implementer.



### COVER

An elderly man casts his vote in Tunisia, 2011

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### P.5

A 'no gun' sign is displayed at a polling station in Macedonia

© Congress Election Observation Mission to "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"

### P.9

A regional observer during the DRC's 2011 election

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## RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVE

Domestic and international observers face an increasingly complex electoral landscape characterised by the rise in digital and electronic technologies, disinformation, foreign interference and often violence. This changing landscape has also been shaped by a global COVID-19 pandemic that has upended even the most routine observation work. Given the challenges, election observation needs to be at the centre of our attention.

The aim of the inaugural ELECTOR meeting was to foster collaboration between academics, civil society organisations (CSOs), election experts, and international and domestic observers to identify best practices and priority areas for research that would benefit observers. While a number of people met in-person in Brussels, others joined online from elsewhere in Europe, the United States, and Africa. The discussions took place over a day, with agreement that further meetings would be beneficial. The day was divided into four panels – on new technologies, reducing violence and maintaining stability, turning recommendations into outcomes and the impact of COVID-19. This report follows the same structure, first explaining the rationale for the focus of each panel and then highlighting the key points raised by speakers and discussants.



Election observers need to focus increasingly on monitoring the digital and electronic technology landscape before, during and after elections.

## THEME 1: PLAYING CATCH-UP WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTRONIC PROCESSES

Digital technology and electronic processes play an ever-greater role in elections. On the one hand, they have great potential to make electoral processes more accountable and inclusive. On the other, they come with a unique set of challenges, including disinformation and the cyber security threats that are now part and parcel of elections in both emerging and established democracies.

### DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTRONIC PROCESSES

The international community is starting to develop new guidelines on the use of digital technology and electronic processes as well as new monitoring manuals for election observers. Observers themselves have also made great strides in this area by:

1. shifting their focus from election-day activities to monitoring the entire electoral cycle
2. recruiting digital and electronic technology experts
3. emphasising the importance of political context
4. examining the 'whys' and 'hows' of digital and electronic technology procurement.

Significant challenges remain, however, particularly in terms of funding, which tends to concentrate on election day. The use and misuse of digital technology and electronic processes can occur at any time during the electoral cycle, and observers need more stable funding to support their long-term engagement. Riccardo Chelleri (European External Action Service) noted that international donors have a special responsibility to observers as these donors often fund the adoption of digital and electronic technologies.

Monitoring the use and misuse of digital and electronic technologies requires a shift in methodology and a focus on new electoral actors. Recent election observation guidelines from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) stress the importance of monitoring the digital and electronic technology landscape, including providers and marketing trends. However, access to this information is often limited as the private sector dominates this landscape. Foreign ownership, which is common, is not necessarily a problem according to NDI. The problem is the general lack of transparency surrounding the ownership, procurement and the use of digital and electronic technologies. Speaking on behalf of the NDI, Richard Klein noted that the Institute would welcome more academic research in this area, given that allegations of electronic technology misuse – whether real or perceived – can seriously undermine the credibility of polls.

Offering a perspective from the European Union (EU), Holly Ruthrauff (Election Observation and Democracy Support) noted that while international observation missions require a strong knowledge of digital processes and how to identify the signs of digital manipulation, they do not necessarily need dedicated tech experts – a view also shared by Chelleri and Klein. It may be enough for international observers to have a good understanding of how digital and electronic technology works in practice without the need to grasp the internal workings of the different devices (including their software), as long as they have access to more

specialised expertise in the event of disputes. The main task of auditing the digital equipment and processes should be performed by electoral management bodies (EMBs) and domestic observers.

Another challenge related to the monitoring of digital and electronic technologies is that observers tend to focus on monitoring electronic voting systems as opposed to other types of digital and electronic technology. Yet, as Susan Dodsworth (University of Queensland) noted, the adoption of electronic voting systems varies across the world. Other types of digital and electronic technology are adopted more readily in certain regions than electronic voting systems. Understanding which technologies are adopted by a region and why matters, and requires closer academic scrutiny.

Drawing on experience of monitoring the use of an electronic voter registration system in Zimbabwe, Babra Bhebe-Dube (Electoral Resource Centre-Zimbabwe) offered some practical lessons for observers. She emphasised the need to monitor:

1. the development of digital and electronic technology requirements
2. the distribution and deployment of the new equipment
3. the structure of the electoral management body (EMB) including officer training
4. voter education.

She also noted that digital and electronic technologies can become a source of confusion among rural voters – and indeed some urban ones. This points to the broader importance of voter education campaigns to foster inclusion rather than exclusion of disadvantaged or otherwise marginalised voter groups.

Daniel Ioannisyan of the Union of Informed Citizens (UIC) added that the lack of public understanding of digital and electronic technologies can also lead to mistrust, as the UIC had observed in Armenia and Georgia. In these two contexts, the introduction of digital and electronic technologies might have resulted in less work for electoral officials and polling station staff, but it did not improve public trust in electoral processes.

Nic Cheeseman (University of Birmingham) suggested that it might be worth considering whether it makes sense to introduce expensive digital and electronic technologies in contexts characterised by low public trust. Using the example of electronic voter identification devices, he noted that in highly authoritarian contexts these devices may be seen as tools designed to strengthen government surveillance of the population, thereby fuelling public mistrust in electoral processes.

Echoing the importance of context, Koffi Sawyer (Commonwealth Secretariat) noted two fundamental questions that observers and academics need to ask.

1. Why is digital and electronic technology introduced in a particular context in the first place?
2. And what problems does it address?

He further emphasised the need to understand in-country variations and to treat new digital and electronic technologies not as solutions to electoral integrity problems but rather as complementary processes. In other words, these technologies cannot – on their own – increase public trust in the integrity of electoral processes.

## ELECTION-RELATED DISINFORMATION

Election-related disinformation, which comes in many shapes and forms including information operations, is not new, but the rise of digital technologies has accelerated its spread while making it harder for voters to distinguish facts from fiction. Yet, we still know very little about the impact of disinformation on voters, their behaviour, and rights, and how it affects the electoral playing field. Does it, for example, create an unfair electoral advantage? Similarly, we know little about who is responsible for disinformation, who generates it and who distributes it.

Having dealt with election-related disinformation, Bhebe-Dube offered the following practical insights.

1. Regional and continental standards should be developed on the use of digital technology and electronic processes.
2. Governments and the private sector should invest in the detection of disinformation and election-interfering activities.
3. EMBs and CSOs should work hard to provide reliable information to citizens.
4. Public awareness of disinformation should be raised and resilience increased.
5. Disinformation monitoring should be included in electoral analysis.
6. Cyber security laws should be strengthened.
7. Information environment should be analysed.

The international community can also play an important role in countering election-related disinformation. It can encourage governments to avoid media crackdowns, equip independent fact checkers, and push for more online accountability.



## THEME 2: REDUCING VIOLENCE AND MAINTAINING STABILITY

Many elections around the world are affected by violence, but violence is not confined to election day only. It can happen at any time during the electoral cycle. As a result, one of the most pressing questions facing international election observers is how to evaluate elections critically while reducing the risk of conflict. Drawing on her own research on electoral violence and political parties in Nigeria and India, Ursula Daxecker (University of Amsterdam) pointed out that electoral violence threatens the quality of polls in two ways.

1. It reduces participation in elections.
2. It increases public polarisation as people are more likely to condone violence if it is carried out by the party they support.

Violence also has serious consequences for the quality of candidates: fewer women run in elections that are likely to turn violent, while the prospect of electoral violence tends to attract lower-quality candidates overall.

To better understand electoral violence and how to reduce it, we need to disaggregate it by looking at its actors, timings, locations, and targets. As Larry Garber (independent consultant and adjunct faculty) observed, different preventive mechanisms will work in different contexts and we need to consider this when making prevention-related recommendations. There are six key areas to focus on:

1. protecting election staff
2. mobilising grassroots
3. monitoring and regulating social media
4. promoting codes of conduct
5. educating voters about electoral process
6. undertaking scenario-planning exercises.

Sharing the experience of the African Union (AU), Robert Gerenge noted that its deployment of high-level political missions has helped to reduce electoral violence across the continent. Headed by people with high political gravitas, these missions are a form of preventive diplomacy that the AU combines with long-term observer missions and post-election follow ups to check and support the implementation of observer recommendations. However, the AU's activities also face some challenges when it comes to dealing with flawed elections. The AU has a clear stance that is opposed to unconstitutional changes of government, such as military coups, but it is harder to build cross-national consensus when it comes to flawed polls.

Election monitoring, whether through the use of digital and electronic technologies or through the physical presence of observers, is often seen as an effective mechanism to help deter violence at the polls. Daxecker, however, warned that its effects are not always clear cut. For example, the introduction of video cameras to some polling stations in Russia reduced electoral violence and fraud, but it also curtailed voter turnout. Meanwhile adjacent polling stations without cameras experienced an increase in both violence and fraud. Sharing his experience from Armenia, Daniel Ioannisyann noted that cameras have proved very useful in reducing electoral violence, but their introduction was accompanied by a broad political consensus on the importance of reducing such violence at polling stations.

Long-term support for electoral institutions is crucial to reducing electoral violence. Observers alone cannot prevent violence from happening, but they can help to strengthen electoral institutions through their observation reports and recommendations. Sometimes, however, these reports (especially preliminary statements) and recommendations can become triggers of violence themselves as they can contribute to popular contention. Sarah Birch (King's College London) recommended that election observation missions develop preventive strategies to avoid the risk of stoking violence. One such strategy might involve a closer cooperation between domestic



and international observers as the former have intimate knowledge of the electoral environment and potential triggers for violence. Another strategy relates to a more careful wording of interim and final election observation reports. Instead of implying that the 'wrong' candidate won the polls (a claim that cannot be backed by evidence yet can easily become a trigger), observation reports should focus on pointing out issues that limit voters' free choice.

Building on these comments, Daxecker suggested that observers should call out electoral fraud even in some cases where there is a risk that doing so could lead to violence. They need to defend democracy and democratic processes even if this means increasing

the risk of violence in the short-term. Yet, this is not always easily done in practice. As Thomas Molony (University of Edinburgh) pointed out, voters who are most concerned about electoral violence are usually its most likely victims and support the toning down of election reports by observer missions if these reports are likely to stoke violence.

Violence against women is also an important area where we need more academic research. However, Birch pointed out that they are not the only group that may suffer violence, and advocated for an approach that also recognises the fact that economically disadvantaged voters are more likely to suffer or be involved in election violence.

### THEME 3: TURNING RECOMMENDATIONS INTO OUTCOMES

Election recommendations constitute an important part of observer missions, and are critical to the ability of observers to effect long-term positive change. Despite this, however, and despite the fact that – as Jørgen Elklit (Aarhus University) noted – their content has not changed much since the 1990s, there has been relatively little research on when recommendations are implemented and how this implementation can be improved. This panel provided cutting-edge insights from complementary recent research programmes.

The discussion highlighted the fact that EMBs often find it difficult to admit to election-related mistakes and even if they do, they might not have enough political support among the main parties to act on recommended changes. In light of this, Vittoria Zanellati (European Partnership for Democracy) suggested that observers should tailor their support and recommendations to those who have the power to make changes, emphasising that these are rarely EMBs. She noted that around 33 per cent of election recommendations typically concern EMBs, but 50 per cent of these recommend changes in political system and 60 per cent require legal changes – changes that EMBs cannot implement.

Offering a practitioner perspective, Mawusi Dumenu acknowledged that the Coalition of Domestic Observers (CODEO) has seen some improvements in the transparency of electoral processes in Ghana, but that most of the implemented recommendations were of a technical nature and related directly to electoral processes. Other substantial issues that required reaching a consensus among a wider group of stakeholders and agencies were often left unaddressed. This was either because these issues were not on the Electoral Commission's priority list or there was a lack of commitment among the political elite to resolve these issues. He emphasised that as the Electoral Commission and political

parties engage in dialogue through the Inter Party Advisory Committee about how to improve elections and electoral processes, recommendations have to be practical, legal and cost-effective in order to be adopted for implementation.

CODEO's experience in Ghana closely mirrors findings of a small comparative Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) study mentioned by Tanja Hollstein (WFD) and authored by Susan Dodsworth, Eloïse Bertrand and Jamie Hitchen. Looking at implementation success stories in 5 case study countries (Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria and Uganda), Dodsworth et al. examined almost 1,300 election-related recommendations. Their findings showed that around 33 per cent of all recommendations were made to EMBs and 43 per cent of these were implemented. Countries with independent EMBs were more likely to implement observer recommendations, but the technical recommendations were the most likely to be implemented. Recommendations of a political nature, such as those related to campaign finance or the political representation of women, were least likely to be implemented. Forming coalitions with CSOs also increased the implementation rate of observer recommendations, offering a potential blueprint for observer missions both within and outside the five case study countries.

Offering a note of caution, however, Elklit pointed out that we should not pin all our hopes on independent EMBs. Referring to his recent study with Nic Cheeseman (University of Birmingham), he explained that most EMBs are independent in name only. What matters is their resources and relations with other political actors. Using the example of South Africa, a country with a truly independent EMB, Elklit noted that the quality of voter registration has been in decline despite repeated recommendations. Jean Costedoat-Miossec (European Commission and

United Nations Development Programme Joint Task Force on Election Assistance) further observed that all five case study countries in the Dodsworth et al. study were English-speaking African countries, where things work that may not work in French-speaking African countries. A one-size-fits-all approach is, therefore, not going to work in Africa, or indeed anywhere else. Costedoat-Miossec noted that there were other challenges to the implementation of observer recommendations besides the context.

1. The best time to implement electoral reforms and recommendations is well before the next election, but observers, donors and EMBs often face other pressing priorities.
2. The 'national sovereignty card' is often played to avoid making election-related changes, even if these changes do not infringe on sovereignty.
3. The day-to-day conduct of planned activities of the EU-contracted implementing partner, as well as its desire to preserve the quality of its relationship with the national authorities, often overtakes the broader need for advocacy on strategic election reform.

To increase the implementation rate of recommendations, Zanellati suggested that international organisations and assistance providers align and integrate their thematic support to democratic actors and processes across the electoral cycle. She also emphasised the importance of return and follow-up missions and a consistent dialogue with a large group of stakeholders. Echoing Zanellati, Costedoat-Miossec stressed the importance of election follow-up missions as they put election reform and democracy back on the agenda of the national government and the EU Delegation – as well as involving more CSOs outside of the specific election period (which the EU is increasingly already doing in parts of Africa). It is also important to support the diaspora and existing election observing networks. The EU has also been multiplying the number of domestic partners with which it works in a given democracy support programme to 1) generate a broader and stronger alliance for reforms, and 2) avoid the risk that the “sovereignty card” will be manipulated to delegitimise calls for reform. For example, the successful EU-funded ‘Supporting Democratic Governance in Nigeria’ programme has involved 10 different partners, but it comes with its own challenges as coordinating so many international, regional and domestic partners requires the relevant EU Delegation to have advanced capacities both in terms of time and resources, which has been the case in Nigeria.

Election recommendations should be part of broader recommendations to improve a country's governance. This ties in with some of the budget

support programmes carried out by the EU. Although often criticised, budget support programmes have proved relevant for the promotion of election-related recommendations, as policy support and political dialogue are at the heart of their support modality. Citing examples including the publication of polling station results in Togo, the political representation of women in the Gambia and election support in Armenia, Burkina Faso, Kyrgyzstan and Tunisia, Costedoat-Miossec called for more research on democracy support through budget support programmes. He also noted that the EU has developed a new approach to managing its budget support programmes that is based on mutual accountability, which is in line with the EU strategy for the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa. This means that the EU support programmes can increase the volume of financial transfers (excluding reimbursable grants) from the EU to the partner country in case of an intensifying democratic reform pace. At the same time, budget support programmes can be stalled, put on hold or even cancelled due to democratic considerations, reducing the likelihood that they will inadvertently aid autocratisation. Costedoat-Miossec gave 5 examples of countries in which this had happened.

For her part, Hollstein identified two key considerations that could aid the implementation of election-related recommendations.

1. Observers need to look more closely at behavioural and contextual factors.
2. They need to provide actionable and achievable recommendations.

She noted that international observer missions need more space to test different approaches. The WFD Global Election Support Centre is, for example, trialling a thematic international observation mission on gender, inclusion and media freedom. The first trial mission of this kind, consisting of three experts, was deployed to the Gambia on 1 November 2021. The focus of this mission was to generate a more qualitative analysis on the ground, to include new topics typically left out of the broader international observer missions, and to generate an enhanced consideration of the broader country context. Hollstein recommended the division of recommendations into macro- and micro-level recommendations – a point welcomed by Dumenu, who also advocated for all recommendations from different missions to be pooled together and harmonised. He stated that this approach was adopted in Ghana's 2015 elections and should be followed elsewhere as it is often difficult for EMBs to make sense of the many different election observation reports and their recommendations.



## THEME 4: COVID-19 AND BUILDING BACK BETTER

More than 50 per cent of countries around the world have held polls during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite initial fears that elections could become COVID-19 super spreader events, many countries have held successful polls without overburdening their public health systems. However, given the likelihood of future pandemics and challenges posed by climate change, we can expect more disruptions to polls in future. It is imperative, therefore, that we learn lessons from the pandemic on the best ways to observe elections during crises and use it as an opportunity to build back better, especially in terms of the relationship between domestic and international observers.

As Koffi Sawyer (Commonwealth Secretariat) noted, the responses of international organisations to elections under COVID-19 conditions differed. Some have attempted to operate on a 'business as usual' basis, some have not deployed any observers, some have deployed lower numbers of observers, and some have supported domestic observer groups instead. Others, such as the EU, used their nationals who were already in the country to carry out the observations. There was also an inclination to engage younger observers because of their lower risk in relation to COVID-19. According to Sawyer, this initiative made sense, but the downside was a loss of experience. Overall, fewer international observation missions took place during the pandemic and their deployment often depended on the existence of and access to health facilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic was also used in some countries to undermine the quality of electoral processes. As Sawyer observed, weaker institutions made it easier for incumbents to use the pandemic to capture elections. In post-Soviet space, the suspension of civil and constitutional rights, including the rights to free speech and privacy – an ostensible pandemic measure – was used to quiet political opposition. Adam Busuleanu (European Exchange) noted the introduction of increased state surveillance in Russia, the use of weekend lockdowns to persecute opposition politicians in Azerbaijan, or the use of the pandemic to exclude international observer missions in Belarus. In Armenia, people who were in quarantine on election day were unable to vote, highlighting a common issue faced by many countries that lack alternative voting methods. He also pointed out that limited election observation, especially by international observers, added to the pressure on domestic observer groups and called for more long-term support for domestic observers.

Ellen Kandororo-Dingani (Zimbabwe Election Network) shared a similar experience from Zimbabwe, where the government suspended the country's by-elections in areas that are opposition strongholds, using the pandemic as a pretext. The Zimbabwe Election Network sent three members to observe elections in Zambia under COVID-19 conditions in order to pressure the government of Zimbabwe, but the by-elections are yet to happen. Kandororo-Dingani noted that life in Zimbabwe was almost back to normal, but the government was still reluctant to call the by-elections. She noted that no elections had taken place in Zimbabwe since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and that the country's CSOs tried to use this time to push for electoral reforms. They issued 115 recommendations but only 5 have been implemented so far.

The pandemic also had some positive effects on election observation by increasing the cooperation between domestic and international observers. Sawyer suggested that more integration was needed between these observer groups and that they should also involve more citizens in their election observation missions. Thomas Molony further suggested that, in preparation for future pandemics and other emergencies, we need to adopt protocols for election-day voting, voter registration, referendums, by-elections, voter education, and observer missions. He recommended:

1. the establishment of a ringfenced emergency budget support fund that countries could tap into during health crises;
2. more efforts to listen to local observers and citizens to better tailor future election support;
3. the introduction of measures to reduce the number of voters who travel long distances to vote; and,
4. arrangements to ensure election observation can still occur even in a time of crisis.

Nic Cheeseman advocated for building up domestic observer capacity, while Molony added that a more balanced cooperation between international and domestic observers was needed. He noted that international observation missions often learn a lot from domestic observers, but they do not necessarily give much back. Kandororo-Dingani suggested that domestic and international observers should engage in a continuous conversation and develop protocols to protect observers during times of crises.





## IMPLICATIONS FOR OBSERVERS

The research findings presented at the inaugural ELECTOR meeting, and the subsequent discussion between researchers, observers, and policy makers, have several important implications for election observers.

First, election observers need to focus increasingly on monitoring the digital and electronic technology landscape before, during and after elections. This includes paying attention not only to the technology itself and how it is used (and misused), but also to why it is implemented in the first place, who it is implemented by and how, and who benefits from it. Such an approach can help observers build a context-specific political economy analysis of the electoral landscape. This, in turn, will inform their recommendations and other election-related activities, such as voter education campaigns. This is particularly important in authoritarian and post-authoritarian contexts, where public understanding of (and trust in) digital technology and electronic processes might be relatively low.

Second, disinformation monitoring should become part of any electoral analysis. Similar to the monitoring of the digital and electronic technology landscape, disinformation monitoring should focus on who produces disinformation, who spreads it and how, and who benefits from it. Adopting this comprehensive approach can help to empower observers to understand the individual country information landscape. This is vital for all country

contexts, be they authoritarian, transitional or democratic, as election-related disinformation is now a universal problem. Election observers can also play an important role in countering disinformation by encouraging governments to avoid media crackdowns, pushing for more online accountability, and equipping independent fact checkers before, during and after the election.

Third, international observer missions should develop preventive strategies to avoid the risk of stoking electoral violence so that they do not feel the need to avoid making strong and clear statements about manipulation. Closer cooperation with domestic observers can help international observers better understand the context-specific triggers of violence, while highlighting problems rather than implying which candidate 'really won' – something that is typically impossible to prove – can avoid the inadvertent validation of public contentions that cannot be backed by evidence. This does not, however, mean that international observers should tone down their election reports and ignore election-related fraud or malpractice. Observers should also devote greater time and effort to identifying the possible victims of electoral violence. Instead of relying on the gender dimensions alone, economic disadvantage should also be considered a factor that can put voters at risk of violence. This will help observers to better tailor their prevention recommendations.



To increase the implementation rate of election-related recommendations, observers need to align their support and recommendations to the electoral cycle and target those who have the power to make change.

Fourth, to increase the implementation rate of election-related recommendations, observers need to align their support and recommendations to the electoral cycle and target those who have the power to make change. This is particularly important in authoritarian contexts, where EMBs are often independent in name only and have little real power or interest in improving the quality of polls. Return and follow-up observer missions might be helpful here and in other contexts, as they engage CSOs outside of regular election time and can put election reform back on the government's agenda. Targeting recommendations at specific institutions/bodies is also important, as it creates the potential for those organisations to be held accountable for the lack of progress. International and domestic observer missions should also focus on pooling together and harmonising their election recommendations to make implementation easier. Dividing recommendations into macro- and micro-level might also help, providing EMBs and other electoral stakeholders with a blueprint for action.

Fifth, there should be more cooperation between international and domestic observers to better prepare for the future disruptions of elections as a result of health and other national and global crises. This should entail the development of new protocols for observer missions, long-term support for and capacity building of domestic observers and the involvement of citizens in election observation missions. Such activities will help to ensure that a level of election monitoring continues even at times of major disruptions, while providing sufficient support and protection to domestic and international observers.

Finally, participants agreed that collaborations and discussions between observers, policy makers and researchers was extremely fruitful and that it would be useful to have further conversations around questions such as: how the public perceive election observers and how their legitimacy can be further enhanced; and how to foster stronger ties between domestic and international groups. To that end, it was agreed that two further ELECTOR meetings would be held in 2022.



ELECTOR is the Election Observation Research Network, based at the University of Birmingham. ELECTOR aims to foster a constructive and mutually supportive relationship between civil society groups, election experts, and international and domestic observers, enabling those working at the coal face of election observation to shape the direction of new academic research. ELECTOR is funded by the Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI). More information about ELECTOR is available on the website: [www.elector.network](http://www.elector.network)



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