Committee: OAS
Topic: Strengthening regional responses to disputed elections and electoral transparency.
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Overview of the Problem

One of the primary ways citizens exercise political power, select their representatives, and hold governments responsible is through democratic elections. Elections by themselves, however, do not provide democratic legitimacy. Electors must be able to freely participate, candidates must have an equal opportunity to compete, electoral authorities must manage procedures impartially, votes must be counted accurately, and results must be subject to transparent and legal verification in order for an electoral process to serve its democratic purpose. Elections can become causes of political instability rather than peaceful means of transferring power when such circumstances are called into questions. As a result, contested elections represent a threat to electoral administration, public trust, constitutional governance, human rights and long-term sustainability of democratic institutions.

Throughout the Americas, the organization of American States (OAS) is essential to the advancement of democracy, electoral transparency, and peaceful conflict settlement. The organization can assist member governments in identifying vulnerabilities.

This committee's primary goal is to create efficient regional solutions that uphold the independence of national institutions while safeguarding electoral integrity, promoting accountability, and preventing political conflicts from turning into instability.

Introduction

Voting is only one aspect of democracy; it also involves organizations that enable citizens to make genuine political decisions, to engage without apprehension, and to trust that elections operate under established regulations. Elections are intended to be a calm method for societies to resolve political rivalry. However, elections may also lead to uncertainty and conflict when electoral institutions appear biased, the outcomes are ambiguous, or complaints are handled unfairly. Thus, electoral legitimacy involves not

just the declared vote total but also the honesty and equity of the processes used to confirm and determine the outcomes.

To understand this problem, delegates need to distinguish between several concepts. Following to democratic laws and regulations throughout the entire electoral process is what is meant by electoral integrity. Electoral transparency refers to the availability of clear, timely and verifiable information on the conduct of elections. Disputed elections occur when the public or political leaders do not accept the conduct of an election or the result. Electoral observation is the independent assessment of an electoral process by accredited observers. Electoral Dispute Resolution (EDR) is the legal and administrative process for the adjudication of complaints and appeals.

The concepts are connected, yet they are distinct. Supervision can identify issues and suggest enhancements, whereas legal bodies address disputes according to applicable constitutional and electoral regulations.

There are a number of key instruments which provide the global framework for electoral participation. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right to take part in government and affirms that the authority of government should be based on the will of the people, expressed through periodic and genuine elections. (United Nations, 2017)

Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes the rights and opportunities of citizens to take part in the conduct of public affairs, to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections, to have access on a general basis of equality to public service. The regulations connect electoral integrity to the wider protection of political rights, freedom of expression, freedom of association and equality before the law (United Nations, 1948, 1966).

The most relevant regional framework in the inter-American system is the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Ratified by OAS member countries in 2001, it highlights the significance of representative democracy and acknowledges free and fair elections, political diversity, rule of law, human rights, and institutional autonomy as core

democratic values. The Charter allows for joint evaluation and diplomatic measures if there's a significant failure of democratic governance in a member nation.
These regulations show that electoral legitimacy is not just the counting of ballots, but rather part of a broader set of democratic institutions and political rights (Organization of American States, 2001).

The OAS seeks to guarantee that elections are conducted with integrity via its Electoral Observation Missions. This can be achieved via technical support, conversation, and legal frameworks. Observations may examine electoral laws, voter enrollment, candidate involvement, campaign conditions, media access, political funding, electoral technologies, voting methods, ballot counting, and complaint resolution.
From these observations any benefits and problems can be identified, with recommendations on how to improve for future changes. An observation mission does not have any power to declare an election invalid, replace a national electoral commission or declare an alternative candidate the winner. Disputes will usually be resolved through legal proceedings by the relevant national body(s) under the correct constitutional and electoral set up.

This can cause issues beyond political consequences. If citizens become distrustful they could become less involved in politics. It can cause issues with how credible institutions are seen. There can be more divisions in politics. This unpredictability in elections can cause issues with creating policies, cause issues with smoothly transferring power and can cause risks to journalists, candidates, observers, election officials and everyday citizens. However, when reacting to controversial elections you cannot assume every accusation is true. Democracies need to have the freedom to dispute results and organisations need to be able to fairly assess disputes.

Technology has also led to certain problems. Although digital media can aid authorities in providing accurate information quickly it can cause misinformation to be spread quickly. Electronic systems can make things efficient however they need to be secure, properly documented, independently tested and verified. A clear procedure must be

established to ensure relevant information is shared while safeguarding ballots, personal data, and the legitimate interests of political figures.

This background paper has been produced to provide delegates with knowledge to discuss practical solutions to electoral disputes. Delegates need to recognize that safeguarding elections demands a mix of prevention, transparency, independence, efficient legal remedies, and regional collaboration.
Overall the main principle of this committee is that electoral disputes should be resolved using verifiable evidence, fairness, impartiality and peaceful dialogue. Regional cooperation is most effective when there are uniform standards, building local capacity, protecting basic human rights and encouraging long term reform.

Historical Background

The idea of elections has evolved in parallel with representative governments. Throughout 1948 the Charter of the Organization of American States was created providing a regional framework for states within the Western Hemisphere to work together. During the same year the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations. This recognised political participation and real elections as a way to reflect the will of the people. In 1966, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ensured that voting, public participation and equal access to public service were protected in a binding treaty.

Various Latin American states have had military regimes, authoritarian government, political oppression and a lack of electoral competition throughout the twentieth century. Many states transitioned into democratic governance in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. However, issues such as corruption, fear, inequality in resources and lack of independent judiciary were not resolved just by having elections. This highlighted key principles of fair competition, civil liberties, independent administration, transparency and effective redress are required in democratic governance.

A significant regional development was the Inter-American Democratic Charter adopted by OAS member states on 11th September 2001. This outlined key principles of representative democracy (Article 3), including respecting human rights, free and fair regular elections, voting in secrecy, universal suffrage, political pluralism and separation of powers. Transparency within government (Article 4) and freedom of speech and the press were also included. If there was a serious impact on democratic order due to an unconstitutional change, collective evaluation and diplomatic efforts could be implemented (Article 20). This provides a foundation for regional involvement however does not allow full interference in internal disputes (Organization of American States, 2001).

Since 1962, the OAS has been involved in election monitoring. This has evolved from a mostly passive role to actively evaluating all parts of the electoral cycle. They monitor the legislation, voter registration, campaigning process, political financing, technology, voting, counting, tabulation and complaints. By 2026 they had completed 352 EOMs and had over 15,300 international observers and experts across 28 member states (Organization of American States, n.d.).

Other organisations have also created ways to support elections. The United Nations provide election support if requested or authorised by the country. The guidelines have been provided by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). Comparative research has been provided by International IDEA and independent election monitoring provided by the Carter Centre. This has led to high professional standards but will depend on how accessible the guidelines are, the availability of funding, ensuring they are unbiased and put into practice by national bodies.

The general election in Guatemala shows how issues can arise post-election. In 2023, Bernardo Arevalo and Movimiento Semilla reached the presidential run-off and Arevalo won on the 20th August 2023. However, legal challenges were raised against the party including attempts to remove their legal status. These issues highlight some problems

around the impartiality of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and ensuring that the people's votes were protected. This was supported by an OAS mission of 90 experts and observers from 20 different countries monitoring the elections. They encouraged respect for the voters' will and documented their concerns (Organization of American States , 2023a, 2023b, 2025a).

The presidential election in Venezuela on the 28th July 2024 shows how important verifiable results are. The National Electoral Council declared Nicolas Maduro the victory however did not release detailed results from the polling stations. On the 30th July, the Carter Centre announced that they were unable to validate the announced result meaning that the election was not conducted to an international standard (The Carter Center, 2024). The OAS General Secretariat had also asked for validation of the vote records (Organization of American States, 2024a). This suggests that there could be a number of risks that may occur, such as election tampering and lack of detailed records available to the public.

The Situation Today

The problem of electoral integrity has continued. Thirty-nine out of 173 were in decline in 2023 compared to 2018. Around 20% of elections between mid-2020 and mid-2024 had legal issues, 20% of those lost by either the presidential candidate or parliamentary party had the result openly disputed and 10% had opposition party boycotts. A report in 2025 found that 94 countries (54%) had deteriorated in at least one aspect of democratic performance in 2024 compared to five years ago. Not all disputed elections are rigged (International IDEA, 2024, 2025).

The first thing you should consider is making sure that you are being clear. Elections officials should provide up-to-date and accurate information to the public. They should also provide clear justifications for changes, keep documentation and have clear responses to complaints. If there is not enough documentation to back up the results or justifications then there will be more uncertainty. Having clear processes means it is

easy to identify genuine issues. People can therefore feel confident with their judgment on the elections.

Technology can help with the dissemination of information within elections. Electoral bodies and journalists can use social media and messaging apps. However, fake paperwork can be shared. Photos can be edited, false information provided about polling stations and unverified information about how votes are counted. Whilst it would be more efficient to have electronic voting registers and count systems, there should be some security in place. Clear procedures, audit trails, back up systems and where appropriate independent assessments should be in place. There is no assurance that technology will provide transparency so it is important processes are secure and can be verified (OSCE/ODIHR, 2023).

Guatemala continues to stress the need for post-election protection. The OAS General Secretariat emphasized in October 2025 the importance of safeguarding democratic institutions, constitutional principles, and respect for the will of the Guatemalan people as reflected in the Guatemalan elections of 2023. In Venezuela, there was a lack of results at polling station level, meaning there was no independent verification of the official results. The OAS General Secretariat requested verification of the voting registers on 2nd August 2024. A resolution was passed by consensus on 16th August, requesting the results to be published at polling station level and respecting the sovereignty of the electorate. (Organization of American States, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2025b, The Carter Center, 2024)

The OAS is continuing to send missions throughout the region. As of now there have been 352 missions sent to 28 countries since 1962. In 2025 there have been 12 missions sent, with 579 observers and experts. Over 400 recommendations have been made through preliminary reports. In September 2026, the OAS declared missions would be sent to Brazil, Paraguay and Peru to observe their electoral processes. This shows that there is still active observation happening. Missions are increasingly looking

at technology, electoral justice, political funding, violence, campaigning, media and digital communications. (Organization of American States, n.d., 2026).

An election can be confusing and unclear, and can lead to a lack of confidence in public institutions, greater division within society and slower decision making. It can also have an impact on investment and strategy.

Key Stakeholders and Their Positions

National Governments have responsibility for constitutional order, political rights and ensuring legal processes are performed within public institutions. Some governments may wish to improve transparency by introducing a monitoring system while others may be concerned about losing sovereignty and bias by introducing an external monitoring system. Each nation will look at the issue differently depending on their situation and political agenda. Nonetheless, at the Venezuela dialogue in 2024, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States highlighted the significance of verifying votes. A Consensus Resolution was made so they could be published for greater transparency. This demonstrates how while countries may have differing opinions on this issue, there are areas where they can come to a consensus. (Organization of American States, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c)

Electoral Management Bodies are responsible for overseeing the voter registration, candidate, ballot, polling stations, counting, tabulation and sharing of results. They should be well resourced with qualified personnel, utilize secure technology, and work on a legal foundation. It should also be impartial. In order to build public confidence, decisions should be made fairly and openly, there should be a record of decisions and clarity about any changes.

Political parties and candidates will want to ensure that there is a fair process. With equal legal protection and having equal opportunities to present their message to the voters and media. The opposition parties may be concerned that there will be restrictions on the number of candidates, intimidation and unequal media access. The governing parties will want to ensure that the electoral laws are being properly followed. All parties should ensure that they are using evidence and legal methods.

The judiciary and electoral commissions will investigate any complaints concerning voter roll, candidates, campaigning, counting, tabulating and official results. They should be independent, impartial, properly structured, knowledgeable and efficient in order to be legitimate. Regional entities can provide training and comparative knowledge but can not substitute national judicial entities. Regional entities such as OAS and other international entities play supportive roles. The OAS is the main regional entity within the committee and supports democracy through monitoring elections, providing technical, dialogue and diplomatic support. The United Nations encourage human rights and may offer support with elections through training, logistics and technical advice. International IDEA provides comparative research, the OSCE/ODIHR provide monitoring techniques and support with disputes. The Carter Center gives an independent analysis which will be useful due to their expert knowledge.

Civil Society, National Observers and NGOs will provide information to voters, observe campaign techniques and funding and report on any issues. They will ensure political rights are respected. This group has local knowledge but can be limited due to a lack of resources, rigid legislation and may face intimidation/threats. The journalists and Media will make the public aware of the candidates, processes, resources and outcomes. They can draw attention to any anomalies but can have issues with censorship, intimidation, cyber bullying and unequal access to media. If there is any misinformation, do not respond in a way which prevents legitimate criticisms and independent reporting.

Technology Companies and Digital Platforms can affect the sharing of information. Whilst they can help authorities share information, they can cause more misinformation, identity theft, tampering and hidden political advertising. Ensuring that there is a good balance between being transparent and moderate while also protecting individuals' privacy, local legislation and freedom of speech. The most important stakeholder would be the citizens. Easily register to vote, feel safe to participate, receive accurate information and feel empowered to challenge any breach of their rights. People with disabilities, indigenous peoples, rural communities, linguistic minorities and those

overseas may face greater barriers. Businesses have a stake in ensuring that institutions are stable, however, this does not replace political rights.

Past Attempts and Existing Frameworks

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) sets out a global basis for political participation. Article 21, everyone has the right to take part in the government. The power comes from the will of the people expressed through free and fair elections. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) provides a legally binding treaty between states. Article 25 sets out that individuals should have the right to participate in public affairs, vote and stand for election in free and regular elections and access public service equally. While these are important set standards, there is no overarching governing body across the globe to oversee national elections and resolve issues (United Nations, 1948,1966).

The OAS Charter (1948) provides a legal basis for regional cooperation. It describes the fundamental principles of equality and non-intervention. The Inter-American Democratic Charter (2001), provides key elements of representative democracy and can be collectively assessed and interacted with. This allows for strong regional cooperation as all are committed to the democratic values in this document. However, it does not give any power to the OAS to invalidate elections or replace national electoral bodies automatically (Organization of American States, 1948, 2001). Electoral observation Missions by the OAS provide objective evaluations of the electoral process. These missions systematically evaluate legal factors, voter rolls, campaigning efforts, financial resources, media, technology, voter participation, casting votes, vote counting, aggregation, and grievances. Reports from these can help to highlight areas for improvement and drive reform. The effectiveness of this will depend on how accessible, how much time and money is available and how responsive national bodies are to the recommendations (Organization of American States, n.d.).

The United Nations provide support with technical advice, training, logistical support, educational activities for voters and sustainable electoral systems. The OSCE/ODIHR provide handbooks and techniques to observe the electoral management and conflict resolution processes. International IDEA provides comparative research, including Global State of Democracy reports. The Carter Centre have carried out independent observation and emphasised the importance of results at the polling station in Venezuela. This helps to increase knowledge and professionalism however findings will vary depending on how each organization collects their information (International IDEA, 2024, 2025). (OSCE/ODIHR, 2019, 2023). (The Carter Center, 2024).

There have been some successful developments to set important standards and provide good observation mechanisms. However recommendations may not be actioned, technical support may be limited due to lack of funds and cooperation from nations. Documentation may not be made public in a verifiable way. Disagreements can occur between governments. There can also be a lack of resources, training, accessibility and effective complaint mechanisms for electoral bodies relating to cyber security. Delegates should look to improve current mechanisms by providing volunteering action plans, standard transparency methods, training, coordination and realistic technical support rather than creating new institutions.

Challenges and Complications

Balancing between international and regional issues can be challenging, Governments often argue that domestic electoral management falls strictly within internal jurisdiction. Other states may argue that members have committed themselves to shared democratic values and severe issues could require regional involvement. With the OAS charter promoting “the sovereignty equality of states” and “non-intervention”, the Inter-American Democratic Charter allows collective evaluation in certain situations. The actions taken must consider both. The democratic commitment should not be seen as a way to disregard a set agreement. Whereas, a democratic commitment should not allow unlimited interference. (Organization of American States, 1948, 2001)

The polarisation of politics can cause issues. Parties may not have trust in the institutions due to the being run by opposing parties. Candidates may not agree with any outcomes. Regional organisations may be seen as not having fairness. The OAS can ensure their credibility by ensuring their methods are consistent, clear explanations of their conclusions are given and there is a distinction between factual evidence and allegations. Issues should be considered using consistent criteria, however, each country has different laws. Independence is key. There may be issues regarding political bias within election organisations and courts. This could be due to political appointments, budget manipulation and arbitrary removals. This could cause a lack of confidence even if there is no evidence of fraud. Steps can be put in place to ensure independence such as transparent appointments, conflict of interest policies, training and independent audits. Independence should be considered based on the legal protections and actual actions.

Resource and technological issues can cause issues. The authorities will need resources to employ staff, register votes, create ballots, set up polling stations, transport, communication, cyber security and dispute resolution. If there is a lack of resources this can cause outdated voter registration, limited training, delays to the publication, limited accessibility and poor record keeping. Whilst this does not necessarily make the election illegitimate it can cause increased errors and issues with looking into claims. However, regional collaboration can help by providing training, expertise and voluntary support.

Technological issues can cause problems. Issues may occur with hacking, tempering, disruption to services and leaking of personal data. Steps can be put in place to ensure security such as clear processes, access controls, audit trails, back-ups and if appropriate independent technical evaluation.

The authorities should provide clarity on how the results have been processed and how incidents have been locked into. Technology should not be disregarded but should be used securely. Misinformation can be challenging. Untrue claims can cause confusion for voters. However, if there are strict rules around political communication that can prevent valid criticism and independent reporting, steps can be put in place to ensure

quick publication of confirmed information about the process, transparency around correcting mistakes, increasing media literacy, transparency around political ads and ways to report manipulated content. Any rules should be clearly defined legally, proportionate and not politically enforced.

Campaign finance can cause unfair competition. If there is no transparency around donations, spending or using public resources this can cause unfair funding. This can affect how the campaign is advertised, organised and reported in the media. Steps can be put in place to ensure timely publication of donations and spending, consistent auditing, clear guidelines around public funding and equal enforcement for the ruling party and opposition. Safety issues can cause problems for voters, candidates, election staff, journalists and observers. Safety measures may be required, however the safety agencies should work legally and proportionally. Dispute resolution can cause issues. Cases should be resolved in a timely manner, however should not be refused. They should have clear timelines, easy complaints, independent decision makers, clear criteria and logical decisions.

The Committee's Role and Powers

The OAS focuses on providing a regional platform in which countries can work together on democracy, human rights, security and development. Delegates should think about how they can improve electoral integrity through observation, support, technical co-operation, transparency and peaceful conflict resolution. However, it is important to remember that while the OAS has its own authority, the authority of the MUN committee is dependent on the rules set out by the conference.

OAS Electoral Observer Missions can provide observations and recommendations. The General Secretariat can bring attention to issues, provide encouragement for dialogue and offer technical co-operation. The Permanent Council can look into regional issues and take diplomatic steps. Article 23-25 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter focuses on how electoral observation and support can be provided. Member states are responsible for ensuring free and fair elections occur, but can seek support from the

OAS. Member states agree to the terms and conditions that the observer mission will work under. Observer missions will make recommendations based on their findings. If free and fair elections cannot occur, recommendations can be made to the Permanent Council. (Organization of American States, 2001)

The OAS will not have unlimited authority over national elections. They will not be able to automatically take over electoral commissions, declare elections invalid and decide who has legally won every contested election. Generally, decisions such as these will fall to the competent electoral authorities and courts within the country. Resolutions should include recommendations that are in line with the OAS mandate.

Recommendations could include better training and technical knowledge for EOMs. You could research how post-election conflicts are settled and make sure recommendations are clear. Encourage states to provide results in a timely manner. Make a note of any changes. Ensure that ballots remain secret and personal information is safeguarded. Create clear complaint mechanisms. Voluntary action plans can be created to outline what recommendations have been made, by whom, when and how they can be measured.

The OAS can encourage collaboration between electoral authorities, cyber security experts, civil society and digital platforms to improve technical security. Work with other organisations such as the United Nations, International IDEA, Carter Centre, universities and other experts to gain more knowledge. All responses should start with the evidence available. This could include official records, observations, complaints and court rulings. Recommendations could include encouraging dialogue, technical support or diplomacy.

During committee sessions, delegates will negotiate and draft comprehensive resolutions. The preambular clauses will provide context and acknowledge relevant documents. Operative clauses will include recommendations. A good resolution should clearly state the issue, realistic recommendations, consider funding, be in line with

mandates and include methods of measuring progress. Instead of asking states to be transparent, you could recommend that they create a voluntary regional framework that includes publishing verifiable results, transparent changes, easy complaint mechanisms and follow-up reports on the recommendations made by the observer mission. Ensure recommendations are backed up with facts. Use formal language and have respectful debate. Follow the parliamentary procedures within the conference.

Guiding Questions for Debate

1. How can the OAS strengthen its response to disputed elections while respecting national sovereignty and avoiding political interference?
2. What minimum transparency standards should electoral authorities follow when publishing results, and how can they accommodate different national systems?
3. Should EOMs have stronger follow-up mechanisms for their recommendations? How could these operate within the OAS mandate?
4. How can regional organizations distinguish legitimate legal challenges, unsupported allegations, and credible evidence of serious irregularities?
5. What cooperation is appropriate when an electoral authority does not publish detailed results that allow independent verification?
6. How can the OAS support independent electoral bodies and courts without replacing national constitutional arrangements?
7. How can governments and digital platforms address election misinformation without restricting legitimate criticism or freedom of expression?
8. What safeguards should apply to cybersecurity, electronic tabulation, digital political advertising, and election-related personal data?
9. How can voters, opposition candidates, journalists, domestic observers, and election workers be protected from intimidation?
10. When regional consensus is difficult, what diplomatic or technical measures can still encourage transparency and peaceful dispute resolution?

Conclusion and Call to Action

It cannot be overstated how important it is that elections are conducted fairly. In order to do this there must be fair rules, participation, accurate results and impartial resolution of any disputes. If there are not proper measures in place to protect the election there can be disputes which could cause larger issues surrounding public confidence, credibility and political stability. International human rights and Inter-American democracy demonstrate that there is a connection between ensuring election rights and upholding the rule of law, political pluralism, freedom of expression and independent institutions.

Guatemala shows the importance of protecting election results and ensuring a smooth transition of power. Venezuela shows the importance of having detailed documentation to ensure results can be verified by officials. In both countries having reliable evidence, transparency, independent institutions and legal solutions is key. The OAS have mechanisms in place to ensure an effective response can be made. This includes preventative measures, monitoring, technical support, dialogue and diplomatic solutions all within legal boundaries.

There are opportunities for delegates to provide practical solutions to increase confidence in elections while respecting national sovereignty. This will ensure political disputes can be resolved peacefully, transparently and legally ensuring all citizens have their political rights respected.

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