

# IMPROVING ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT: THE ORGANISATIONAL DETERMINANTS OF ELECTORAL INTEGRITY – RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of elections that are held around the world has increased substantially with over 2,600 national contests taking place between 1945 and 2006 (Hyde and Marinov 2012). Conducting an election is a huge logistical challenge which involves the complex management of people, technology and resources. Electoral management boards (EMBs) are the state organisations that are tasked with the administration of elections. Yet EMBs come in many different organizational forms around the world. At the same time, there has been considerable variation in the quality of elections. Alongside many well-run elections, which often use technology, resources and personnel innovatively and efficiently, there are often concerns about administrative problems, technological failures, incomplete electoral registers and opportunities for fraud. This variation is found in both established and transitional democracies (Lehoucq 2003; Alvarez, Atkeson, and Hall 2012; Birch 2011; Norris 2014, 2015; James 2014).

This paper outlines a research project whose aim is therefore to increase our understanding of (a) the variation in institutional design of EMBs worldwide, particularly focusing on capacity, personnel, network structure and autonomy; (b) the consequences of EMB institutional design for EMB performance; (c) the impact of EMB institutional design for election integrity, credibility and legitimacy, as well as citizens' and political actors' perceptions of elections; and (d) make recommendations to EMBs about the practices that they can use to improve their performance.

The project's methods involve launching the first-ever cross-national survey of electoral administrators. The survey will capture the variations in capacity, personnel, network structure and independence among election management bodies across Europe. It is proposed that the project works closely with the Venice Commission and the Association of European Election Officials so that results can be fed back to practitioners for their mutual advantage. The project will also work in tandem with the Electoral Integrity Project who are conducting a survey in Africa and Asia with many identical questions to allow international comparisons.

## ABOUT US

We are a team of international researchers who are renowned for our research on electoral management.

**Dr. Toby S. James** is a Senior Lecturer at the University of East Anglia, UK. He holds a PhD from the University of York and has been a visiting scholar at Trinity College, Dublin and the John W. Kluge Center in the Library of Congress, Washington D.C. He has had articles published in international journals such as *Electoral Studies*, *Contemporary Politics*, *Election Law Journal*, *Policy Studies* and *Parliamentary Affairs* and is the author of *Elite Statecraft and Election Administration* (Palgrave, 2012) and is currently working on a book on *Comparative Electoral Management* (Routledge, forthcoming). Toby is currently an advisor to the UK Law Commission and Lead Fellow on Electoral Modernisation to the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Democratic Participation. Toby's research has been externally funded by the British Academy, Leverhulme Trust, AHRC, ESRC, Nuffield Foundation and the McDougall Trust. He has written commissioned policy report for national and international organisations.

**Leontine Loeber** studied law and has worked as a legislative lawyer at the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations of the Netherlands. In this capacity she was responsible for drafting changes in the Election Law. After this, she worked at the Dutch Electoral Council, where among other tasks, she was involved with organizing elections. During this period, the Netherlands switched from e-voting to paper ballot voting. Currently Leontine works at the Council of State as a legislative lawyer. She has obtained a master in Political Science at the University of Leiden and has published articles on e-voting in the Netherlands and voter trust. Currently, she is pursuing a PhD at the University of East Anglia on the topic of election fraud.

**Holly Ann Garnett** is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Political Science at McGill University and a student member of the Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship. Her research considers election management bodies and electoral integrity in comparative perspective, examining such topics as the online provision of information, communication with citizens, transparency, registration procedures and early voting opportunities. Holly was a visiting intern at the Electoral Integrity Project in Sydney, Australia in 2014 and has remained active in a number of the project's research activities. Holly holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in History and Political Science, with a minor in French from Nipissing University and a Master of Arts in Political Studies from Queen's University. She has received a Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship (SSHRC) at both the Master's and Doctoral Levels, and was a Killam Fellow at Cornell University in 2009.

**Dr. Carolien van Ham** is a Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the University of New South Wales, Australia; a senior research fellow at the Electoral Integrity Project at Sydney University and a research associate at the Varieties of Democracy Institute at Gothenburg University. Dr. van Ham is currently working on the Australian Research Council funded research project (2015-2017) "Getting elections right", investigating (a) why and under what conditions electoral reform in electoral democracies and electoral autocracies is successful; (b) how election integrity can be effectively strengthened; and (c) how election integrity affects democratization. Carolien's research focuses on democratization and authoritarianism, electoral integrity and electoral fraud, and political representation and legitimacy. She has published articles on election integrity, democratization and representation in the *European Journal of Political Science*, *Government and Opposition*, *Democratization*, *West European Politics* and *Electoral Studies*, a forthcoming edited volume on democratic legitimacy in advanced industrial democracies, a book on legitimacy in the Netherlands, and book chapters in various edited volumes.

## BACKGROUND

While many elections are conducted across the world to very high standards, there remains evidence of problems with poor election quality in both established and transitional democracies (Lehoucq 2003; Alvarez, Atkeson, and Hall 2012; Birch 2011; Norris 2014, 2015; James 2014). The design of electoral management boards, the organisations responsible for conducting elections, has become a pressing concern for policy makers. The professionalization of Electoral Management Boards (EMBs) has been defined as an important policy objective by Kofi Annan's *Global Commission on Elections* (2012). National and international organisations have invested significant sums of resources to improve electoral management. For example, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights spent approximately EUR€307 million on over 700 projects relating to democracy promotion between 2007-2010 (EIDHR 2011, 8), much of which was spent on electoral assistance.

In many countries, independent Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) have been championed as a key institutional reform measure to successfully strengthen election integrity, and as a result independent EMBs are now the most common institutional model for electoral management in the world (Catt et al. 2014; Wall et al. 2006; Lopez-Pinter 2000).

Yet, despite the intuitively appealing assumption that independent electoral management bodies will be better at their task of organizing and monitoring elections in an impartial manner, empirical evidence is mixed. While regional studies have found a positive impact of independent EMBs on election integrity in Latin America and Africa (Hartlyn, McCoy, and Mustillo 2008; Fall, Hounkpe, and Jinadu 2012; Hamberg and Erlich 2013), global comparative studies appear to show that EMB institutional design is either negatively, or only very weakly related to election integrity (Birch 2011; Norris 2015).

Moreover, the emerging evidence is that other aspects of EMBs practices can be important. Emerging scholarship demonstrates that the capacity of electoral management boards (Clark 2015, 2014), the personnel (James 2013b, 2013a), network structure (James 2015, forthcoming) and institutional design (van Ham and Lindberg 2015) of electoral management boards can be key factor shaping the quality of elections.

The ability of policy-makers to improve EMB design and practices is limited by the lack of cross-national data. The only global comparative data on election management bodies' institutional design is the classification by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2014; 2006), which distinguishes three broad types of electoral management: independent, mixed, and governmental. However, the organizational structure of election management bodies is vastly more complex than the three broad categories. In practice, many more differences in functions and accountability exist between countries (Lopez-Pinter 2000; Norris 2015; Elklit and Reynolds 2001).

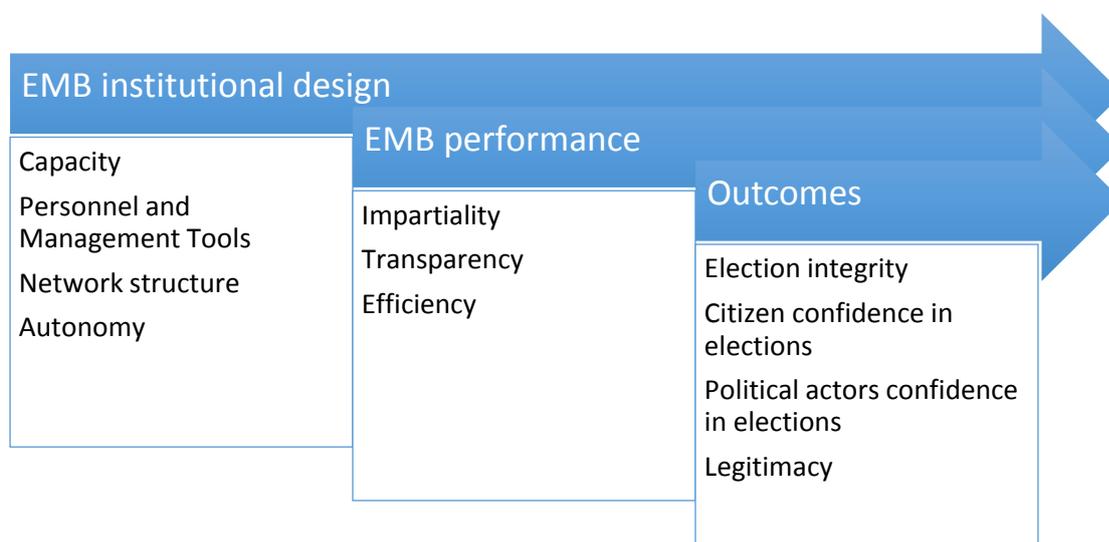
The aim of this research project is therefore to generate new high quality data on variation in the institutional design of election management bodies worldwide. This will increase our understanding of the consequences of institutional design on election management body performance, credibility and legitimacy, as well as electoral integrity more generally.

## THE FOCUS: CAPACITY, HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES AND AUTONOMY

This project addresses the concrete challenge of running high-quality elections, faced by election management bodies around the globe. To do so, this project will be the first study to collect comparative data on the legal, institutional and administrative framework through which election management bodies function. It focuses on three major areas that are of the utmost concern to practitioners and policy-makers:

1. **Capacity.** What resources do EMBs have? Where are the resources spent (e.g. new technology, personnel development, local offices)?
2. **Personnel and management.** How long have staff been in their post? What qualifications and training do they have? What policies are in place to monitor and improve employee performance? What is the level of job satisfaction among employees?
3. **Autonomy.** To what extent are EMBs formally independent of government? What is the scope of tasks of EMBs? What appointment procedures and tenure rules are used for EMB boards? What formal accountability structures are in place? How does de jure independence vary from de facto independence?

Drawing on these questions, this project will provide policy recommendations on: patterns of spending and resourcing by INGOs and national EMBs on elections; the recruitment, training and management of staff; the involvement of civil society in the electoral process, and the reform of the formal legal structure of existing EMBs.



## METHODOLOGY

We propose undertaking a survey of the personnel in electoral management bodies in Europe to gather information on their capacity, human resource practices and autonomy. We propose sending the survey to EMBs in the European states with a population over 300,000.

The project will be run in collaboration with the Electoral Integrity Project who will be conducting a similar survey in Asia and Africa.

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### THE STRUCTURAL SURVEY

There will be two surveys. The first survey (Appendix A) will require only **one senior official to complete** from each EMB. A fillable pdf and/or Word document will be sent to the official to complete. This 'structural' survey will ask information about the EMB and conduct of elections in the country including:

- The organisational design of the EMB
- The volume of staff
- The tasks and responsibilities of the EMB
- The decision making process within the EMB
- The budget and resources of the EMB
- The EMBs involvement with the international community

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### THE PERSONNEL SURVEY

It is proposed that the second survey (Appendix B) is sent to **all personnel within the European EMBs** to complete. This will be an online survey and a link to the survey will be provided for distribution within each EMB. The survey covers questions about the individual's:

- Role within the EMB
- Perceptions of the quality of elections in their own country
- Perceptions of the human resource practices and their workplace
- Training and professional development
- Demographic information

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### THE HELP NEEDED FROM EMBs

We kindly request that each EMB:

- **Nominates a survey facilitator within their organisation.** This person will be the central point of contact for us with any questions. This will *not* be an onerous task. The survey facilitator will be provided an email to disseminate to employees.
- **Nominates one senior individual to complete the structural survey.**
- **Survey translation.** The survey will be translated into the official language of each country. If the EMB is able to assist with the translation, this would be appreciated.

## OUTCOMES

- A policy report will be co-authored by the team with recommendations for 'best practice'. Stakeholder EMBs, INGOs and governments will be provided with an electronic copy. The team will offer to present findings at the next European Conference of Electoral Management Boards.
- Bespoke, confidential advice will be offered to partner EMBs on request.
- Academic conference papers, journal articles/book chapters will be written to advance the scholarship on electoral management.
- The scholars will then seek to apply for a further grant to develop a global survey. A longitudinal survey could include several waves so that the impact of reforms could be traced over time.

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