

**Gerardo de Icaza, Director, Department of Electoral Cooperation & Observation
US Helsinki Commission Briefing
International Election Observation: Why It Matters**

Washington DC, USA, June 19, 2019

Salutations

Chairman Hastings

and members of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honored to represent the Organization of American States in this distinguished forum and to engage with you on international election observation and its role in building and consolidating democracy in the hemisphere.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your invitation.

The OAS and International Election Observation

The OAS has observed elections in its member states since the 1960s. Our first electoral observation mission (EOM) was a three-person technical mission to Costa Rica's presidential elections in February 1962. At that time, election observation was still an undefined and somewhat *ad hoc* concept, and Missions were primarily symbolic in nature – an expression of solidarity with the receiving member state.

While OAS missions still spring from this deeply rooted compact between the organization and its member states, and among member states themselves, they have evolved from the *ad hoc* approach of the 1960s to become highly structured

and professional exercises, which deploy subject-matter experts, along with technical tools and methodologies to collect and analyze key data on all aspects of a country's electoral process – from the pre-electoral period, through Election Day and in the post-electoral period – in order to measure the quality of an electoral process and determine whether it fulfills the criteria of a democratic election.

The information that we collect and analyze, allows DECO to offer solid, technically sound recommendations to our member states on adjustments that would enhance their electoral processes, build the capacity of their electoral institutions and authorities and strengthen democratic institutions and practices in the Americas.

Over the past 6 decades OAS has observed more than 260 electoral processes at all political levels in 28 of its Member States, including Presidential, Parliamentary, Legislative and Municipal elections; Referenda, Signature Collections and Voter Registration processes; elections for Constituent Assemblies and the Judiciary; and primary elections within political parties.

OAS Electoral Observation Missions are now a key instrument in the defense and promotion of democracy in the continent, supporting the integrity, impartiality, and accountability of electoral processes across the hemisphere.

OAS Observation in the Hemisphere

Since 2016, elections have been held in every single country in Latin America and the OAS has been present in all countries, except for Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Venezuela.

(Tables overleaf)

Elections in Latin America: 2016 – 2019*

Country	2016	2017	2018	2019
Argentina		Senate & Deputies (np)		
Bolivia	Referendum	Judiciary		
Brazil	Municipal (np)		General Election	
Chile		Presidential and Legislative Elections (np)		
Colombia	Referendum		Presidential & Legislative	
Costa Rica	Municipal		General Election	
Dom. Republic	General Election			
Ecuador		Presidential and Legislative	Popular Consultation & Referendum	Local Elections and elections to the Citizen Participation and Social Oversight Council (CPCCS)
El Salvador			Local and Legislative Elections	Presidential
Guatemala			Referendum (np)	General Election
Honduras		General Election		
Mexico	Local elections (some states) (np)	Local elections (some states) (np)	General Election	
Nicaragua	Presidential and Legislative (np)	Municipal		
Panama				Presidential
Paraguay			General Election	
Peru	General Election		Referendum	
Uruguay				
Venezuela		Local Elections (np)	Presidential (np)	

*OAS deployed an EOM to all elections listed, except for those marked 'np' – not present.

Electoral Calendars: 2019 - 2020

Electoral Calendar 2019		
COUNTRY	DATE OF ELECTION	TYPE OF ELECTION
Bolivia*	January 27	Primaries
El Salvador*	February 3	Presidential
Ecuador*	March 24	Sectional and Members of the Citizen Participation and Social Control Council
Panamá*	May 5	General
Belize	May 8	Referendum on the territorial dispute with Guatemala
México	June 9	Local
Guatemala*	June 16	General
Uruguay	June 30	Presidential primaries
Guatemala*	August 11	Presidential (second round)**
Bolivia*	October 20	General
Canada	October 21	Federal
Argentina	October 27	Presidential and Legislative
Colombia	October 27	Regional
Uruguay	October 27	Presidential and Legislative
Haiti	October	Legislative (partial)
Argentina	November 24	Presidential (second round)**
Uruguay	November 24	Presidential (second round)**
Bolivia*	December 15	Presidential (second round)**
Dominica	TBD	Parliamentary
Guyana	TBD	Parliamentary

* Invitation received by the GS/OAS from the host country to deploy an OAS/EOM

**If necessary

Electoral Calendar 2020		
COUNTRY	DATE OF ELECTION	TYPE OF ELECTION
Costa Rica*	February 2	Municipal
Dominican Republic	February 16	Municipal
Dominican Republic	May 17	Presidential and Legislative
Suriname	May 25	General
Mexico	June/July	Local in certain states
Brazil	October 4	Municipal
United States	November 3	Presidential and Legislative
Paraguay	November	Municipal
Belize	To be determined	General
Dominica	To be determined	General
Guyana	To be determined	General
Saint Kitts & Nevis	To be determined	General
Saint Vincent & the Grenadines	To be determined	General
Trinidad and Tobago	To be determined	Parliamentary
Venezuela	To be determined	Legislative

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OAS in the OSCE region

OAS does not have a mandate to deploy observation missions outside of the Americas, therefore we do not observe in OSCE member countries. We do however engage with OSCE states and institutions in other ways.

First, OAS enjoys a close relationship with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). OAS and ODIHR share a similar conviction and commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and we have

collaborated fruitfully over the years in bringing these commitments to bear in our work on democratic strengthening around the world. ODIHR reports are a valuable source of information for OAS, particularly as we seek to remain abreast of electoral developments in the OSCE regions.

Our respective memberships also provide opportunities for close engagement. As you know, OAS member countries include the thirty-four independent states of the Western Hemisphere and we have granted permanent observer status to 69 other states across the globe, as well as to the European Union (EU). Forty-six of our Permanent Observers are also members of the OSCE and two additional OAS member states (USA and Canada) are also members of the Helsinki Commission.

OSCE countries are also important contributors to OAS electoral observation missions and several EU states have provided steadfast support to DECO's work over the years. Just last year, DECO entered into a significant agreement with The Netherlands, which provides financing for OAS electoral activities, and includes an opportunity to observe electoral processes in the Dutch Caribbean and engage with their authorities on hemispheric best-practices in elections.

Trends I

- Use of social media in electoral campaigns.
- Fake news in the context of elections.
- Polarization.
- The use of credible data to counter electoral disinformation.

Trends II

- Mistrust and attacks on electoral institutions and journalists.
- Democracy is more than elections.
- The narrative of fraud in political discourse.
- Electoral violence.
- 'Judicialization' of politics.
- The importance of implementing recommendations.