

25 Years of Election Observation at The Carter Center

A Retrospective

THE
CARTER CENTER



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One Copenhill
453 Freedom Parkway
Atlanta, GA 30307
(404) 420-5188
Fax (404) 420-5196
www.cartercenter.org

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Executive Summary

As The Carter Center marked its 100th election observation mission in 2015, the organization stands out as a leader in the field. A not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization (NGO), the Center has observed and reported on democratic and electoral processes around the world without inhibition or bias. The founder of The Carter Center, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, initiated this work based on a keen awareness of the critical importance of electoral issues—particularly of independent, impartial observation—as an integral component of the Center’s pursuit to advance democratic development, peace, and human rights across the globe.

A brief overview of the history of The Carter Center’s election observation work over the 25 years between 1989 and 2014 reveals a gradual evolution as the Center expanded its work around the world. Simultaneously, the role of election observation grew significantly within the Center itself, as did the role the Center plays in the field internationally.

When The Carter Center considers whether to observe an election, it assesses several key criteria. If a country extends an invitation to observe, the Center evaluates the feasibility and utility of deploying a mission. It weighs a potential mission against other possible missions, given limited resources.

Election observation at The Carter Center has gone through several distinct stages. Early missions often featured high-level political delegations, and many

were undertaken jointly with other organizations, most often the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. While they often included pre-election delegations, most focused attention on direct observation of polling days. Early mission reports also offered few, if any, recommendations.

In the mid- to late 1990s, election observation at The Carter Center entered a new stage. Increasingly, missions began assessing elections as broad political processes comprising several phases, of which polling is just one. The timeframe for observation expanded and missions began to include the deployment of medium- and long-term observers in the weeks and months leading up to the election-day deployment of short-term observers. They established field offices with staff members who arrived significantly ahead of the election and usually remained months after polling to observe postelectoral processes. The longer these missions became, the more depth their analysis



In March 2013, a voter casts his ballot on election day in Nairobi, Kenya. The Carter Center sent a 52-person delegation to observe polling.

reflected. New and richer understanding also led to a number of complementary projects that preceded or followed missions.

By the time these first 25 years of election observation came to a close, the Center had introduced diverse methods into its work, including the use of statistical sampling, electronic reporting, and technical experts. It had undertaken numerous types of limited or targeted missions. All the while, its collaborative efforts with other international organizations working in this field and with domestic partners around the world have continued to expand.

Most recently, through the Democratic Election Standards project launched in 2006, The Carter Center has worked to build international consensus

on a set of obligations against which elections should be assessed and to develop the methods through which to do so. The project has standardized the Center's reporting tools for practical application in the field, including an online database of election obligations and standards, an election assessment manual, and data collection and analysis software. At the same time, The Carter Center and its experts have worked at the forefront of the field, conducting research, publishing in journals, and convening a number of conferences and workshops. The Center stands as a leader in the field of democracy and elections and is committed to ensuring that elections serve to build strong democratic societies that respect and protect human rights.

Introduction

Founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, The Carter Center is guided by a fundamental commitment to human rights and the alleviation of suffering. To this end, the Center has sought to wage peace, advance freedom and democracy, and improve health worldwide. As part of these efforts, The Carter Center has enhanced the quality of democratic governance by conducting activities in several areas, including strengthening human rights institutions, combating political corruption, advancing transparent governance, and observing elections.

Over the past 25 years, election observation has become a cornerstone of the Carter Center's work. Through it, the organization has been able to encourage electoral processes that meet international standards and reflect the will of the electorate. Beginning with the 1989 elections in Panama, the Center had observed 100 elections in 38 countries

by the spring of 2015. These elections have occurred across four continents during various stages of democratization, including postconflict environments, periods of transition, party system transformation, and democratic backsliding. While the contexts have varied, the Center has consistently engaged in elections where the impact of failure would be debilitating, where the Center's involvement is welcome, and where the organization can play a constructive role.

Although the Center's observation methodology has evolved over time, it has employed an increasingly standardized approach, one that has allowed for flexibility when circumstances warrant while adhering to internationally recognized principles and standards. The Carter Center has worked alongside a handful of other organizations to build international consensus regarding best practices and standardized methodologies. The progress these institutions have made

together is noteworthy.

As the Center marks over 100 elections observed, it is poised to continue as a leader in this field and to advance the standardization of international observation for decades to come.

The Role of Elections in Democratic Governance

Broad, international consensus exists today that credible elections are a cornerstone of the democratic process. Genuine



Volunteers handle voter lists during Panama's 1989 election.

elections offer a means by which citizens can choose their leaders freely and through which they can hold these leaders accountable. As an expression of the will of the people, they are a manifestation of sovereignty. Elections invest leaders with the authority to govern according to the law. They also offer citizens the opportunity at regular intervals to assess this leadership and, if they desire, elect new leaders. In certain contexts, elections also offer an opportunity to consolidate peace after periods of unrest.

The fundamental human right to participate in genuine elections is enshrined in international law. Most explicitly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights—to which 168 nations are party—states, “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity... (a) to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors” (ICCPR, Article 25).

The quality of elections in a country often provides a glimpse into the quality of democracy in general. Where democratic elections occur, other

governing processes are likely to be more democratic and responsive. Conversely, where the integrity and freedom of the electoral process is at risk, other basic human rights often are in jeopardy. A wide spectrum of civil and political rights that are inherent to democratic elections are tied to the integrity of the electoral process as well. For these reasons, the electoral process is a linchpin in the overall protection and advancement of basic human rights and the safeguarding of democracy.

The Role of Election Observation in the Electoral Process

Given the vital role that elections play in democratic governance, the observation of elections by impartial parties offers an important means by which to assess and advance human rights and democracy. Regularly employed around the world today, election observation seeks to support the democratic process, facilitate peaceful and credible elections, strengthen relevant institutions, and offer recommendations for improvement. Observation missions commend electoral processes that are functioning well and criticize those that are not. Their commentary can bolster the legitimacy of successful electoral processes and

increase public confidence in them. The presence of observer missions can ease citizens’ fears of election-related intimidation and violence. On the other hand, observer reports can also attract attention to poorly conducted elections, sometimes deterring politically motivated misconduct or shaming countries into more transparent governance, while offering recommendations for improvement.

The act of fielding an observation mission also sends an important message to host countries that the international community cares what happens there. Providing recommendations to improve elections



Carter Center observers visit a polling place during Sierra Leone’s 2012 election.

often leads to effective partnerships and collaborative projects. Observer delegations and domestic organizations, institutions, and governments can share knowledge and lessons learned to enhance processes over time. Ultimately, the now-standard use of election observation is also a demonstration of a global movement in support of democratization and the need to protect and advance basic human rights around the world.

Regularly employed around the world today, election observation seeks to support the democratic process, facilitate peaceful and credible elections, strengthen relevant institutions, and offer recommendations for improvement.

Election Observation: Defined

The 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation defines election observation as “the systematic, comprehensive and accurate gathering of information concerning the laws, processes and institutions related to the conduct of elections and other factors concerning the overall electoral environment; the impartial and professional analysis of such information; and the drawing of conclusions about the character of electoral processes based on the highest standards for accuracy of information and impartiality of analysis.” Observation missions are expected to witness, comment on, and offer recommendations for the electoral process while not interfering with it. They are not concerned with specific results, but rather with the processes through which those results are achieved.

Election observation is, however, a two-way street.

Observation missions cannot bring about change except where host countries desire or at least allow it, and where governments are willing to implement recommendations to improve future processes. This is why organizations seek the invitation of a host country before establishing a mission.

In general, election observation is achieved through the deployment of observers who collect data on a range of key components of the electoral process, from the legal framework to electoral administration, to the polling process, to postelectoral dispute resolution. This collected information is used to inform public statements and recommendations. Various factors determine what aspects a mission will monitor, but the general objective is for observers to garner the most complete picture of the process possible given its resources and other constraints.

Today, The Carter Center and leading observation organizations have reached broad consensus that elections should be assessed on the basis of public international law. Such a framework offers a standard foundation for assessment while remaining flexible. Through this framework a country is assessed against the specific commitments to which it has agreed. Additionally, public international law by its very nature is evolving, as new agreements are undertaken and new laws are written. Therefore, it allows for growth and gradual advancement in assessment methodologies as well.

Despite this general trend toward standardizing election observation, leading organizations agree that assessments still must account for the unique political contexts in which elections take place. Even with standardized tools, assessment requires contextualized and subjective interpretation of information. Observers must take into account issues such as the frequency and severity of reported issues, as well as the intent behind them, to inform their overall assessment. No democracy is perfect; countries around the world embark upon elections from very different baselines. A country that has just emerged from a civil war, or one that is holding multiparty elections for the first time, may not meet the same benchmarks

that a long-standing, stable democracy can. The key question that observation seeks to answer is whether the reputed problems threaten the overall integrity of an electoral process: Have the issues been of sufficient importance and magnitude to alter the outcome?

Today, The Carter Center and leading observation organizations have reached broad consensus that elections should be assessed on the basis of public international law.

Purpose and Scope of This Report

This document offers a synopsis of the first 25 years of election observation at The Carter Center. It traces the history of the Center's observation work, in time and geographic scope, as well as the evolution of its election observation methodology, both internally

and internationally, given the Center's integral role in the field. It offers analysis of the learning process that has occurred in the field and the new methodologies that have evolved as a result, as well as insight into the future of election observation at the Center.

The Carter Center has gained immeasurable knowledge in these first 25 years. Yet, as much as it has learned, the jury is still out on just how effective observation has been in helping countries around the world consolidate democratic gains through elections. Many countries where The Carter Center has observed elections are still in the midst of democratization, a process that often takes place over multiple electoral cycles. The Center intends to move forward within this evolving learning environment, and its methodologies will continue to develop as the impact of election observation becomes clearer.

This report offers a condensed history of this evolution up to the end of 2014, and an opportunity for the Center to reflect on its involvement in the field. What follows considers the effect of Carter Center missions in domestic and international arenas, as well as their impact on current initiatives in democracy promotion.

Brief Overview of Election Observation at The Carter Center

25 Years: 1989–2014

In the spring of 1989 The Carter Center observed its first election, a politically charged contest in Panama that took place in the wake of significant unrest. Under the auspices of a joint mission with the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute, the team was led by former President Carter, former President Gerald Ford, former Prime Minister of Belize George Price, and shadow foreign minister of Australia John Spender. The delegation found the elections in Panama highly flawed and significantly corrupt. Following this critical initial mission, President Carter and The Carter Center went on to monitor 98 more elections in 38 countries during its first 25 years of election observation work, spanning most regions of the world. While the Center observed only one election in its first year of observation, by the end of this period the Center averaged three to five missions per year. Election observation evolved from a new but complementary endeavor for the institution to a cornerstone of the Center's work during those two and a half decades. Meanwhile, The Carter Center went from joining a new movement to becoming a key leader in the field.

Regions of Focus

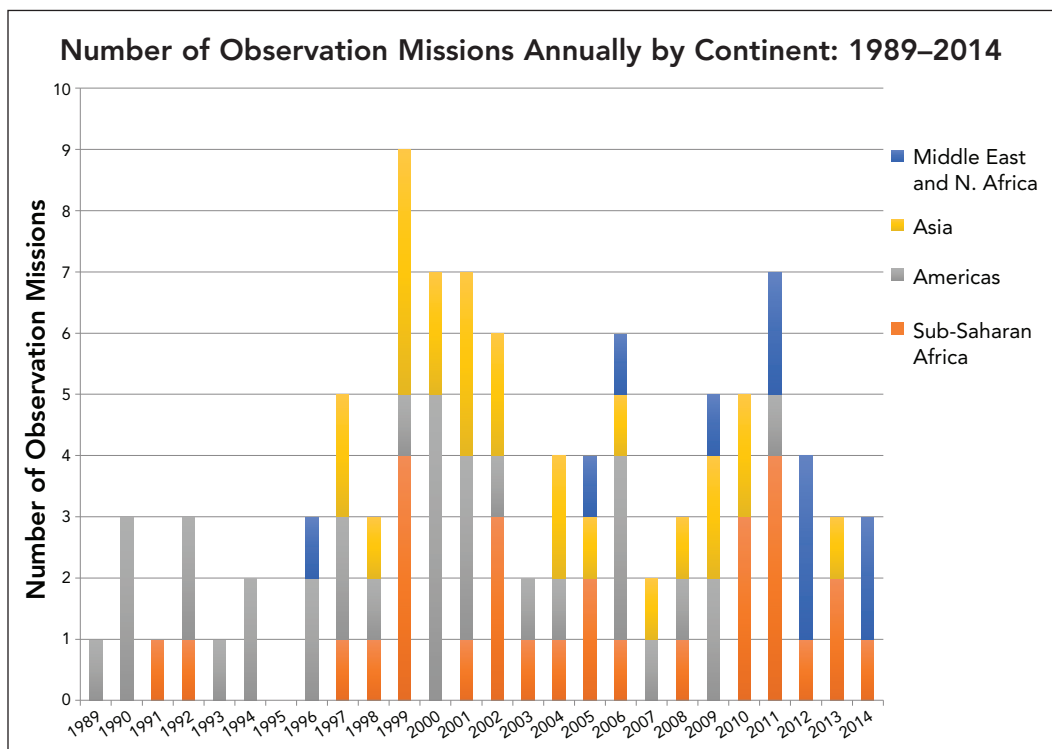
From Panama, The Carter Center went on to observe elections throughout the Americas during the 1990s and beyond, from the Dominican Republic to Nicaragua to Venezuela, among many others. The organization broadened the scope of its observation work to Africa with the Zambian elections of 1991, followed by a small mission in Ghana in 1992 and a comprehensive mission in Liberia in 1997. It has remained regularly engaged in African elections on an almost yearly basis ever since. In addition to its enduring involvement in Latin America and Africa,



The Carter Center observed the Cherokee Nation election in the United States in May 1999.

the Center observed elections in the United States for the first time in 1999 when it sent a delegation to the Cherokee Nation elections in Oklahoma. Observation in the Middle East commenced with elections in 1996 in Palestine, a region where President Carter has been closely involved over many decades. The Center also observed the 2009 elections in Lebanon and, following the 2010–11 “Arab Spring,” undertook several missions in the North African countries of Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia at a crucial moment in history. The Center

initiated its China Village Elections Project in 1997, while comprehensive election observation work in Asia began in 1999 with Indonesia, followed by East Timor, both countries to which the Center returned during several subsequent electoral cycles. In 2008 the Center commenced its long-standing and multifaceted project in Nepal. By 2014 The Carter Center regularly observed elections on four continents. Figure 1 illustrates the number of Carter Center missions by continent each year between 1989 and 2014.



The Role of Election Observation at The Carter Center

In 1986 The Carter Center established the Latin American and Caribbean Program with the objective of promoting democracy and improving inter-American relations. Initially the program worked closely with the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government, a group of then-current and former heads of government throughout the Americas founded in November 1986 that worked to reinforce

democracy, resolve conflict, and advance regional economic cooperation. Election observation soon emerged as a cornerstone of the Center’s work.

In 1997 an internal strategic review and planning process at The Carter Center led to several key organizational changes, narrowing the Center’s institutional focus and restructuring existing programs. Recognizing democracy as a mechanism for facilitating conflict resolution, guaranteeing human rights, and underpinning economic opportunity, the review identified three primary challenges within

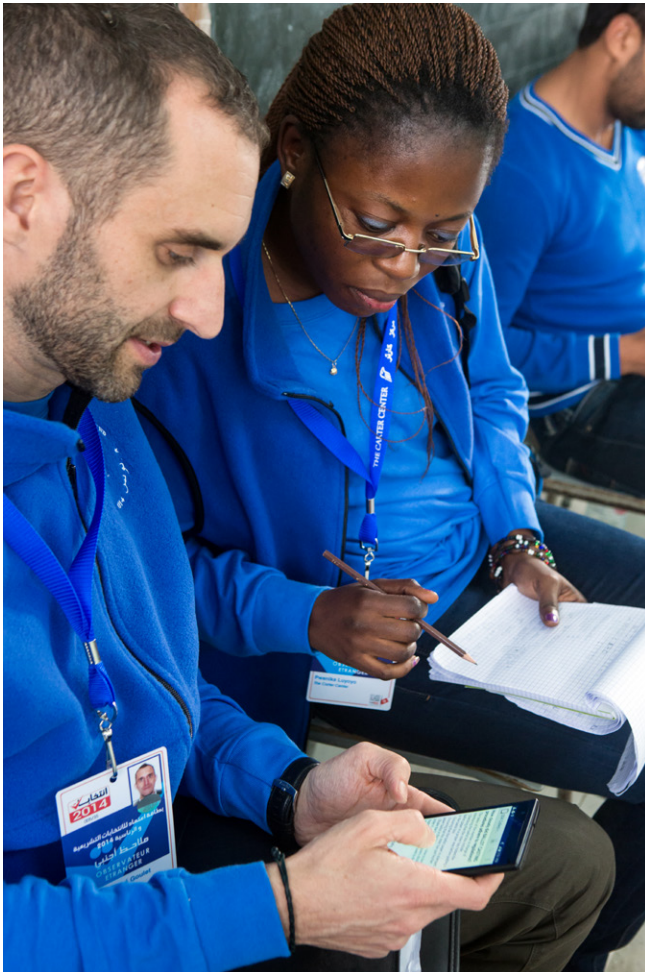
the international context at the time: consolidating recent democratic gains, fostering democratic transition in authoritarian regimes, and helping countries avoid democratic backsliding. The review also acknowledged that while elections play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges, they are not sufficient for a sustainable democracy. The strategic plan resulted in an organizational mission to advance peace through conflict

resolution, human rights, economic development, and democratic elections and governance. To fulfill this mission, the Center created the Democracy Program to provide an organizational home for activities devoted to democracy and elections.

The establishment of the Democracy Program and the focusing of institutional and personnel resources on election assessment helped the Center to carry out an ambitious observation agenda each year and improved the efficiency with which it could plan and execute missions. The Center became better equipped

to assess elections more frequently with expanded geographic scope and to support longer, more robust missions in the field beyond the immediate polling period.

In 2006 the Center undertook another institutional step by launching the Democratic Election Standards (DES) project, with the dual objective of encouraging consensus regarding international standards for democratic elections based on public international law and further standardizing the Center's election observation work. While the Democracy Program continued to implement election observation missions, DES advanced the programmatic side through research, collaboration, the development of practical tools, and applied research and publications.



Past meets present as election observers use paper and an electronic device during Tunisia's general election in 2014.

The Role of The Carter Center in International Election Observation

As election observation's role grew within the Carter Center's mission of "Waging Peace, Fighting Disease, Building Hope," so did the role the Center plays within the field of election observation internationally. In the late 1980s only a handful of other international organizations were engaged in election observation, including the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and NDI. Today, The Carter Center is known as one of the leading international organizations observing elections worldwide. Its involvement in and assessments of electoral processes are highly regarded.

The Declaration established professional guidelines for election observation. It has offered a critical measuring stick for impartial analysis in a field that has grown significantly more popular in recent years

As the field of election observation grew, the Center was at the forefront of efforts to establish guiding principles for election observation, working closely with the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division and NDI. This effort culminated in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and a Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, which was endorsed by 22 organizations in 2005 and by more than 50 by 2015. The Declaration established professional guidelines for election observation. It has offered a critical measuring stick for impartial analysis in a field that

has grown significantly more popular in recent years, drawing new groups whose methodologies vary in quality. The accompanying Code of Conduct establishes the responsibilities of observers in maintaining the integrity of their work.

The Center's leadership on election observation methodology extends to long-term efforts to build consensus on assessment criteria for genuine elections grounded in states' obligations under public international law. In 2010 it launched its Database of Obligations for Democratic Elections, a resource providing source texts from public international law to election observers and others. It was redesigned in late 2014 as the Election Obligations and Standards (EOS) database and released together with a companion handbook, "Election Obligations and Standards: A Carter Center Assessment Manual." Additionally, the Democracy Program continues to produce specialized handbooks and templates for practical application, such as a handbook on electronic voting technologies and long-term observer reporting templates.

The Carter Center also has been at the forefront of improving the speed and quality of data collection and analysis. The Center's open-source data

collection and reporting system, ELMO, enables observers to submit real-time reports of data from the field via handheld technologies, facilitating the rapid analysis of country-wide information and release of public reports.

In all of these areas, the Center is known for its collaborative approach. In 2014, it became a managing partner of the ACE Electoral Network, an online community and knowledge-sharing resource on electoral processes for organizations, researchers, governments, civil society, and others. In addition, the Center solicited input from many organizations in developing the Declaration of Principles and the assessment framework reflected in the EOS database. Over the years, the institution has hosted and participated in dozens of meetings, conferences, and workshops to advance the field. In the majority of its missions the Center collaborates with international and domestic partners to enhance the effectiveness and impact of its work. The Carter Center has established itself as a recognized leader in election observation internationally during its first 25 years of observation work and is committed to continuing in this role for years to come.

Criteria for Involvement

While many aspects of the Carter Center's election observation methodology have evolved over the years, the parameters that guide the Center when fielding an observation mission—its criteria for involvement—have not. Above all, a host country must welcome observers. Cooperation with national authorities is central to the effectiveness of election observation work. Given the number of elections that take place worldwide each year, and therefore the array of possible missions, the Center uses its limited resources carefully and considers where they are most likely to have an impact. If the first hurdle, receiving an official invitation, is achieved, the Center then assesses its ability to field an effective mission. A number of factors come into play. First, the Center evaluates the likelihood that its presence will make a difference.

The opportunity cost of not observing another election inevitably plays a role, a consideration that is occasionally difficult to ascertain. In this context, the Center assesses whether its involvement is likely to have a positive and important effect and whether the election is occurring at an especially critical time for a given country. For example, the Center has observed crucial “transitional” elections in East Timor and Sudan following intense periods of conflict. The success of these elections was hugely important to the stability of those countries and to their efforts to consolidate democracy. For this reason the Center felt it was especially important to devote time, resources, and personnel to these elections.

At times, the Center has decided not to observe when it was clear from the outset that a host government had no intention of conducting legitimate elections. However, in certain instances an observer presence can still be beneficial, such as in countries where reporting by observers focuses attention on serious problems. If the Center intends to conduct a formal mission, it must ensure that there will be

no interference in its observers' access to stakeholders, release of reports, or freedom of movement. Furthermore, if there appears to be a risk that involvement could be construed as endorsement of an illegitimate process, the Center closely evaluates whether to go forward with a mission and makes public statements to address any questions as to the meaning of its presence.

Second, The Carter Center must secure funding for each observation mission, which sometimes involves soliciting support from multiple governments' agencies and other sources, and assess whether it has available personnel and other resources to conduct an observation mission. Third, the Center considers whether a mission is feasible in the country in question: Is it safe? Is there enough time to organize a mission?

There are, of course, times when the Center decides to conduct an observation but unanticipated events lead the Center to withdraw an intended mission. In its first 25 years of observation this occurred four times: in Togo (1993), Peru (2000), Bangladesh (2001), and Nigeria (2003). In 1993, President Carter was set to lead a 20-person observation mission to the elections in Togo when it became clear to both The Carter Center and its partner for the mission, NDI, that a credible opposition did not exist and preparations for the election were not sufficiently advanced. Despite 10 months of preparatory work, the two organizations decided that minimum conditions for a credible election were lacking and therefore observation would not serve a useful purpose. The mission recommended that all Togolese parties agree to delay so that conditions could be met, but when this did not occur the mission was withdrawn. Similarly, a joint NDI-Carter Center mission observed the first round of the 2000 elections in Peru but found that conditions did not exist for a credible runoff and therefore withdrew. A pre-election



Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter observes conditions at a polling station in Peru. After withdrawing the mission in 2000, NDI and The Carter Center returned to observe in 2001.

delegation to Nigeria in 2003 found that the absence of a firm electoral timetable and faltering confidence in the election commission warranted the withdrawal of the mission. And finally, security concerns related

to events of September 11, 2001, resulted in temporary suspension of Carter Center staff travel, which led to the need to end a planned observation mission to Bangladesh.

The Evolution of Election Observation Methodology at The Carter Center

The history of the 100 elections that the Center observed in its first 25 years in the field shows a process of methodological evolution that warrants review and analysis. This history not only sheds light on key changes to the approach the Center has developed over time, but it also offers glimpses of where this field may head in the future.

The Early Years of Observation

Election observation took hold at The Carter Center at a volatile time in global politics. During the late 1980s and early 1990s the end of the Cold War heralded a new era in which democratization was supported as a key goal around the world. Many early election observation missions involved transitions from authoritarian regimes to multiparty democracy, a difficult process often undertaken in fragile post-conflict settings. The early work of The Carter

Center and other organizations increased respect for the utility of observation at a time when restricting external access to domestic political processes was common. These early missions demonstrated how observation groups could assist countries in political transitions by bringing international scrutiny to states that were at risk for backsliding while catalyzing greater awareness of situations where the risk of relapsing into conflict was real.

Early Carter Center missions exhibited several differences from those today. Most were characterized by multiple brief, high-level pre-election visits and deployment of observer teams only for the election itself. Many were undertaken jointly with other organizations or under the auspices of the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government, with President Carter and other eminent persons at the helm. Given the tense political atmosphere in which most of these early missions took place, they often involved intervention or mediation by President Carter or others at key moments in the electoral process. The assessments were less likely to offer explicit recommendations, but rather sought only to comment on the processes they witnessed. The section below examines these elements briefly in turn.

High-Level Delegations and Pre-election Assessment

When The Carter Center began its decades-long commitment to international election observation in 1989, a hallmark of its early missions was the process of sending multiple high-level delegations to a country prior to election day. President Carter was almost always involved, representing the Center or the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government. These pre-election delegations were crucial to establishing relationships and developing trust with



Candidate fliers adorn the exterior of the city market in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2004. In years past, campaigning was one aspect of the election process observed during pre-election visits to a nation. Today, The Carter Center typically sends several long-term observers into a country for ongoing monitoring several months before election day.

key leaders. Delegation members met with a range of actors including electoral officials, political parties, civil society groups, military and security personnel, media, and private sector representatives. In order to lay the foundation for successful elections, delegations often sought the commitment of political leaders and electoral authorities to pursue credible elections and frequently brokered agreements between parties to ensure a peaceful electoral environment.

When necessary, high-level delegates intervened in tense political situations to defuse pre-electoral conflicts. For example, during the 1990 Nicaraguan elections, President Carter mediated an agreement to secure the participation of Miskito people and the delegation helped draft an accord to reduce campaign violence. Following the election, President Carter invited representatives from the Sandinista government and the newly elected team of Violeta Chamorro to meet at The Carter Center's field office to formulate a transition plan. That same year, during the Center's pre-election engagement in the Dominican Republic, President Carter mediated agreements through which parties and the electoral council would be able to verify election results. Similarly, pre-election visits to Guyana in 1990 and 1991 led to agreements to allow ballot counting at polling stations and revise the voter list. Prior to the 1996 elections in Palestine, when the Center expressed concern to Israeli officials regarding instances of intimidation and detention of Palestinians in Jerusalem, the Israeli officials implemented measures to mitigate these concerns. And in advance of the 1998 elections in Nigeria, President Carter intervened to foster the accreditation of domestic observers. President Carter has intervened in more recent elections, for example during the 2005 presidential elections in Palestine when he negotiated an agreement allowing voters registered in East Jerusalem to vote at any East Jerusalem polling site to ensure that discrepancies in the lists would not disenfranchise voters. However, in general, direct interventions were a more frequent characteristic of earlier missions.

Not all interventions were well received. When President Carter sent a letter to President Joaquín Balaguer during the 1996 Dominican elections regarding the detention of opposition supporters and the confiscation of their voter cards, many prominent Dominicans spoke out against what they deemed improper interference. Overall, however, these early high-level visits demonstrated the role that a non-partisan, independent organization like The Carter Center could play in defusing conflict, an especially important role given the volatile, uncertain contexts in which many of these early elections took place. The high profile of many of the delegates on these early trips—as former heads of state and other eminent persons—ensured that the missions wielded a certain moral authority and respect. Thus, their comments were usually well received. As a result, many of these early high-level delegations played an important role in preventing election-related conflict and facilitating a smoother process.

In these early missions, the Center undertook pre-election assessment trips both to gauge the electoral environment and to organize logistics for subsequent observer deployments on election day. In this sense, pre-election delegations were a precursor to the extended field office presence that is standard for Carter Center missions today. A series of pre-election delegations allowed the Center to build relationships and gather information for observation of the polling process. The visits offered delegates snapshots of the pre-electoral environment. For example, prior to the Center's first mission in 1989, it undertook two assessment trips to Panama. The following year, the Center made six pre-election trips to both Nicaragua and Haiti, and five to Guyana leading up to the 1992 elections. From then on such assessment trips—although not always in the form of high-level delegations—have generally been part of the Center's methodology.

Short-Term Observation

The work of pre-election delegations preceded the deployment of short-term observers who witnessed polling on election day. Early observation projects

heavily emphasized the immediate polling period, which included voting processes, ballot counting, and tabulation. There has been significant variation in the number of short-term observers deployed on missions over the last 25 years. In general, several factors determine the size of the delegation, including time, funding, country size, and logistical constraints, among others. It is useful to note that the specific number of delegates cited in reference to a “short-term delegation” often refers to the total number of short-, medium-, and long-term observers as well as experts and other staff who deploy on election day. Therefore, the numbers here are approximations. During its first 10 years of observation work The Carter Center deployed an average of 32 short-term observers on its missions, and the largest mission had 100. During the subsequent 10 years (2000-2009) the average did not change and the largest was 85. In the most recent five years (2010-2014), the average delegation size grew to 50 and the largest was 102. Delegations grew partly because of changes in the structure and types of missions.

All of these short-term observer delegations have had one thing in common: The Carter Center has consistently taken pains to field a diverse set of observers for its missions, hailing from many countries and with varied expertise. The diversity of nationalities is important in that it reflects the international character of the Center’s work.

While early missions focused on short-term observation, some offered glimpses of the extended timeframe that would become the norm. For example, the 1990 mission in Nicaragua covered pre- and postelectoral issues beyond polling, including voter registration and the aftermath of the election, while the 1990 project in Haiti commented on a wide range of issues such as the electoral framework, election law,



President Carter and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat speak to reporters during the 1996 Palestinian election.

voter registration, the campaign, the media, security, and an attempted postelection coup. Likewise a pre-election mission to Zambia in 1991 evaluated the campaign, the electoral framework, and the ability of parties to communicate and organize, while in Guyana in 1991 an advance team assessed the voter list. The majority of early missions, however, emphasized voting day processes.

Joint Missions

In the late 1980s The Carter Center was one of only a small number of organizations involved in election observation. Most early Carter Center missions were conducted in collaboration with other organizations, allowing a pooling of resources and expertise while ensuring nonduplication of efforts and more extensive in-country coverage. Collaboration also assisted with the logistical elements of planning a deployment.

The Carter Center jointly conducted six of its first 10 monitoring projects with other international observer organizations. NDI was the Center’s most consistent partner, especially during the first decade. The two organizations partnered for elections in Panama (1989), the Dominican Republic (1990),

Haiti (1990), Zambia (1991), Paraguay (1993), Mexico (1994), and Palestine (1996), in addition to others. IRI was a third partner for the missions in Panama and Mexico.

As time passed the Center continued to partner with other organizations where conditions were appropriate. This collaboration expanded and diversified as the geographic scope of the Center's work grew. New regional partnering organizations included the OAS in Venezuela (2004) and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) for elections in Liberia (2011), Madagascar (2013), and Mozambique (2014).

This environment of cooperation also extended from international and regional partners to domestic partners. Given the Carter Center's goal of improving election observation around the world, the participation of domestic institutions is critical to ensuring that this happens. In some ways, earlier joint and collaborative missions were a portent of the current leading role The Carter Center plays in the international community of election observation organizations.

Explicit Recommendations

While it is now standard, providing explicit recommendations was not always a core element of Carter Center missions. In the early years many missions simply commented on the electoral processes they witnessed rather than offering recommendations. When offered, recommendations were more likely to be broad or implicit in commentary on the process. For example, one can only glean recommendations from the election reports for Haiti (1990), Zambia (1991), Ghana (1992), and Paraguay (1993) from the overall analysis; they are not explicitly offered. The report from the 1990 Dominican elections offers a few very general recommendations, but Mexico (1994) is the first report in which such recommendations are explicitly outlined, followed by Nicaragua in 1996. After this time, recommendations became relatively standard.

The absence of explicit recommendations early on could be the result of efforts to clearly establish

that observation missions did not intend to interfere. Given the historical contexts in many countries where early election missions took place, often those that had experienced colonization and/or Cold War-era interference in domestic issues, governments were keenly resistant to outsiders' telling them what to do. With time, however, election observation became more widely recognized and accepted. Today, recommendations are a key facet of the process and are usually interpreted as assistance geared toward improving future electoral processes rather than as interference. Most missions today offer an explicit list of recommendations directed at key electoral actors. In addition, recommendations sometimes are offered during the process, often while there is still time to address issues.

The Advent of Long-Term Observation

As the field of election observation evolved, it became clear that monitoring the electoral process in its entirety, before and after polling, was increasingly important. Extended engagement offered a number of benefits. It allowed missions to develop stronger relationships with domestic actors and facilitated information sharing and assistance between them. Pre-election assessment also allowed observers to identify critical links in the process over time. For example, observing inadequate training of polling officials or mediocre voter education efforts can foretell delays in polling processes, which in turn can extend polling and counting later into the night, increasing opportunities for error or fraud and eroding public confidence in the process. Early pre-election observation allows a mission to identify these issues ahead of time and potentially recommend solutions to election management bodies that can implement corrective measures. Likewise, the resolution of electoral disputes after polling is often critical to preventing postelection violence and ensuring acceptance of the results. A review of the issues that surface through electoral dispute mechanisms can also suggest issues that election bodies should remedy prior to



The Carter Center has observed two elections in Nepal, including this one in 2013.

subsequent elections. Observation missions that cover these pre- and postelectoral processes can provide more useful assessments and recommendations.

For these reasons, starting in the late 1990s The Carter Center began to extend the timeframe of its election observation framework. It sought, where possible, to field missions capable of observing the broader electoral process, including pre-election components such as the legal framework for elections, boundary delimitation, election management, voter registration, voter education, campaigning, and the media. Many missions also remained after election day to observe the postelectoral environment including tabulation, the announcement of results, and electoral dispute resolution.

There were several elements to the extension of the observation timeframe, including regular use of field offices, increased deployment of long- and medium-term observers, and an increased incidence of postelection missions and extended stays. The expanded timeline also allowed Carter Center teams to develop a deeper understanding of the issues

affecting the electoral process in a given country.

Field Offices

Long-term field offices allowed a mission to establish itself in-country well before the election and provided a place for staff to meet with stakeholders as well as a home base from which to coordinate the logistics of a comprehensive observation mission. A field office team typically arrives months in advance of the election. Depending on the mission size and scope, the field office can include a field office director, observer coordinator, security manager, and other staff or experts in specific areas.

Among the many types of experts The Carter Center has sought

across the years have been legal and political analysts; electoral, media, and country experts; gender specialists; and statisticians.

While the 2003 targeted mission to Guatemala was an early example of the use of experts—in that case a human rights expert and a campaign finance expert—the use of specialists has become more common in recent years. Large-scale, complex missions like those in Egypt and Sudan engaged separate legal, political, media, and security experts.

Field office staff members meet with key actors, lay the groundwork for short-term observer deployment, and observe the pre- and postelectoral environment, but tend to remain close to the capital while observers travel out to other regions. Field office staff members remain in regular contact with Atlanta, reducing the need for multiple pre-election visits.

Over the last 25 years, The Carter Center established field offices on 76 of its missions in 33 countries. At times, these offices were shared with partnering organizations or with other Carter Center programs. For example, the offices in Palestine from

which the Center monitored the 2006 elections were subsequently transferred to the Center's Conflict Resolution Program for continued work. On several of the joint Carter Center-NDI missions, offices were shared between the two organizations; in some cases The Carter Center used an established NDI office, such as for the joint 2003 mission to Nigeria.

Field offices are open anywhere from a month to several years, depending on the length of the observation mission, the existence of follow-up projects, and sometimes the political context. For example, staff members in East Timor in 1999 rapidly evacuated their office (and the country) after a violent rampage that followed the public referendum on independence. The office was looted and burned. The Center returned and opened a new office less than two months later to continue its work.

The office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo opened in 2006 for the observation of elections. Over time, the focus of that office has shifted to include both human rights and election-related work. In Nepal the Center maintained an office from 2006 to 2014 due to the long and complicated nature of the observation mission there, which over time transformed into several unique observation phases that addressed topics including peace process implementation, political transition, constitution drafting, elections, political party youth wings, identity movements, and land issues. Offices in Juba (now South Sudan) and Khartoum, Sudan, opened in 2008 and continued their observation work for several years. In other countries, such as Mexico in 2000, the Center maintained offices only for a matter of weeks. On average, field offices were open for several months, enough time to monitor the key elements of the electoral process they were designed to observe.

Long-Term Observers

As election observation broadened to encompass the entire electoral cycle, The Carter Center began to send smaller teams of long-term observers (LTOs) (sometimes referred to as medium-term observers when deployed less than five to six weeks) to assess elements of the electoral process leading up to the

election. These advance missions complemented the work of short-term delegations on election day. Given that they remained in-country, LTOs offered a more comprehensive assessment of the pre-electoral environment than a series of pre-election assessment trips and high-level delegations could achieve.

LTOs typically travel in pairs throughout the country for an extended period leading up to election day and meet with key stakeholders, assess the electoral and political environment, and determine logistics for the arrival of short-term observers. They may report on voter and candidate registration, campaigning, media coverage, and preparations by the electoral management body. The information they gather is used in the publication of pre-election reports and guides the issuance of recommendations during the electoral process. It also offers an opportunity for observers to explain what election observation is and how it can be useful, thereby building relationships prior to the arrival of larger numbers of STOs from The Carter Center or other organizations.

The Carter Center first deployed LTOs in 1997 to Liberia. Two LTOs traveled throughout the country a month before the election to assess the registration process, campaign, presence of other international observers, and logistics for short-term observers. Ten LTOs deployed throughout Mozambique in 1999 to monitor the campaign period and electoral preparations. These observers received training in national electoral law prior to traveling to all 11 provinces, where they met with electoral authorities and political parties and took note of early issues such as delays in the disbursement of campaign funds, bias in media coverage, and several incidents of violence and intimidation. Not surprisingly, both Liberia and Mozambique are countries where The Carter Center went on to pursue long-lasting engagement that spanned multiple electoral cycles.

In 1999 the Center deployed eight LTOs to East Timor, where they monitored voter registration and the campaign prior to the public consultation process on independence. The findings of these LTOs were the subject of six weekly reports that supplied important information to the United Nations and other

policymakers regarding human rights issues. Given the unique nature of the consultation process and the fragile environment in which it was taking place, Carter Center LTOs received specialized training in human rights and information-gathering techniques prior to deployment and used specially designed forms for their reports that allowed them to focus on key issues, including the participation of internally displaced persons.

During the 2001 Zambian elections, five LTOs deployed to all nine provinces where they met with stakeholders and reported on issues such as the misuse of state resources, biased media coverage, deficient voter education, and logistical issues plaguing registration. The Center conveyed these findings and related recommendations to the election administration and others immediately in the hope that the issues could be resolved ahead of the election. In 2001 and 2002 The Carter Center again deployed LTOs to East Timor (now known as Timor-Leste).

Postelection Missions

Postelection assessment emerged with some regularity around 2000. In some cases, follow-up took the form of separate return trips during which delegates met with relevant actors to assess postelectoral developments. Often it was simply the extended presence of observers after election day, usually with a reduced team that remained in-country to observe dispute resolution or the implementation of recommendations. Nicaragua was the first country in which the Center remained involved, following both the 1990 and 1996 elections. In 1990 the mission remained after elections at the request of both presidential candidates to assist with the demobilization of the resistance and a smooth transition of power. In 1996 The Carter Center returned to observe the delayed announcement of results and assess concerns regarding postelection polarization. In Guyana a team of three undertook a trip in February 1993, about four months after elections, to determine whether



Postelection visits to Liberia led The Carter Center to become more broadly involved in the country. Above, Emmanuel Kwenah welcomes villagers in a rural area near Gbarnga to learn about the rule of law.

The Carter Center could offer any assistance as the country underwent the long process of democratization. In 1997 a team stayed one month in Jamaica following the election to assess the vote count and observe challenges brought before the courts. Other postelection trips took place in 1996 in Palestine, where a small team remained for two months to assess candidate complaints, and in 1999 in Mozambique, where 12 observers stayed to monitor the vote count and tabulation. In the case of Peru in 2000, despite withdrawing from observing the runoff, the Center returned to recommend democratic reforms following the failed elections.

At times, postelection involvement led to other types of projects and collaboration, explored in more depth in the next section. For example, in Liberia following the July 1997 special elections, a human rights-focused team traveled to the country to assess challenges regarding democratic consolidation and to assist domestic NGOs as they identified priorities. A month later, another assessment mission returned to Liberia to discuss future areas of cooperation, which ultimately led to the Center's broader involvement in the country.

In general, beginning in 2001 with the East Timor and Zambia missions, most follow-up was in the form of extended observation by a smaller group of personnel. Yet even this took place in fewer than one-half of missions. While there is general recognition that an extended presence is useful, the feasibility of implementation hinges upon such factors as funding, the political context, the timing of post-electoral events, and whether an extended presence is seen as useful.

At times, postelection involvement led to other types of projects and collaboration.

Elections as a Gateway to Postelection Support and Other Projects

Extended observation has led to a deeper understanding of the many issues related to elections and the broader process of democratization. As a result, missions have often discovered opportunities for potentially important postelection activities beyond observation. Among the many supplemental undertakings the Center has pursued as a result of an observation mission—or at times in preparation for one—are projects related to conflict resolution, human rights, political transition monitoring, peace process monitoring, citizen observation, access to information, access to justice, mining transparency, and mental health. The projects that have been implemented cover a diverse range of goals and activities in a variety of country and regional contexts. A few of the main projects are summarized briefly in the sections below.

Conflict resolution has been a pillar of The Carter Center's peace programs since the organization's inception, so it makes sense that election observation missions have led to conflict resolution projects and

vice versa. President Carter's personal involvement as a mediator in such places as Palestine, Egypt, Liberia, and Sudan has led to the institution's observation of crucial elections in those countries. For example, President Carter became involved in Liberia in 1991 when he and Center staff members worked toward an agreement to end the civil war there. This involvement led to the Center's monitoring of the 1997 elections, as well as subsequent elections in 2005 and 2011, and an array of other projects. Likewise, The Carter Center's 25-year involvement in Sudan, through both its Conflict Resolution Program and its health programs, led to an invitation to monitor the presidential elections in 2010 and the South Sudanese referendum in 2011. As early as 1989 President Carter mediated talks between the Southern People's Liberation Movement/Army and the Sudanese government. In 1995 President Carter negotiated a cease-fire between Sudan's North and South to advance the Center's Guinea Worm Eradication Program and several other health initiatives, which had been unable to reach volatile areas of the country. He also helped to advance the peace process that culminated in the 2005 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which called for elections. And following the observation of the two critical elections in 2010 and 2011, the Center launched the 2013 Sudan-South Sudan Dialogue Initiative, which brought together leaders from the North and South in hopes of making progress on contentious issues across their joint border.

While conflict resolution projects often led to election monitoring projects, observation frequently led to projects related to human rights and rule of law. The Center's work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is perhaps the best example of this. After monitoring the 2006 presidential and legislative elections, one of the Center's most complicated missions, the Center remained engaged in the DRC through several projects. The first initiative was the launching of the Human Rights House to serve as a support center for civil society and offer assistance across a broad spectrum of issues to strengthen

democracy and the organizations that advance it. The second was a collaborative project with Columbia Law School's Human Rights Clinic in which the two organizations reviewed 60 mining contracts for the government in 2007, highlighting concerns and offering recommendations. A second phase of the project in 2011 sought to increase transparency in mining negotiations and offered impact assessment training for NGOs to use in mining communities.

Perhaps most emblematic of the shift to a long-term monitoring horizon has been the addition of several political transition monitoring projects, most specifically those in Nepal (2008) and Tunisia (2011). In the wake of major political upheaval, both nations had to draft new constitutions. The Center maintained teams to monitor these processes, to release public statements in much the same fashion as they are released during and after elections, and to offer recommendations.

A huge part of assisting countries with successful elections is empowering people to participate in the

The Carter Center has collaborated on many projects with national organizations. One of the primary avenues for this has been through citizen observer training.

process and understand their rights. To this end, as a complement to election observation missions, The Carter Center has collaborated on many projects with national organizations. One of the primary avenues for this has been through citizen observer training. Mozambique offers a good example. In 2004, the Center's mission to Mozambique trained a national organization in long-term observation, organized a public seminar with domestic observers on assessing voter registration, and assisted with parallel vote tabulation. Similar partnerships have taken place

on a number of other missions and have proved extremely useful in expanding standardized observation methods at the national level.

Overall, the growth and development of long-term observation is one of the most significant advances Carter Center election observation experienced in its first 25 years. The extension of the observation timeline is a manifestation of the Center's recognition that electoral processes extend far beyond election day.



Women wait to vote in 2010 in Juba, which would become the capital of the new nation of South Sudan.

Mission Models, Specialized Observation, and New Methods

After 25 years, The Carter Center has established a strong, standardized but flexible methodology. It has laid out in detail the various mission models it implements, depending on political context and resources available, as well as on how specific components are included such as the use of experts, statistical sampling, electronic reporting, and specialized observation.

Mission Models at 25 Years

As a part of the process of standardization, in 2013 the Democracy Program reviewed the differences between the types of election observation missions the Center undertakes. This process enabled the Center to further define the rationale for each type of mission and to outline their strengths and weaknesses. The program has defined four types of missions: high-level political delegations, election experts missions, limited election observation missions, and comprehensive election observation missions. The first two are not considered “official” election observation missions and are not included in the total count of observed elections because they do not involve the deployment of observers assessing and reporting on the process from around the country. An “official election observation mission” must be one pursued institutionally by The Carter Center, either alone or in partnership with other organizations, that consists of a minimum number of observers deployed for a substantial period around the country and that issues public statements and/or a final report on one or more aspects of the election. A quick review of the

four types of mission models highlights these nuances.

“High-level political delegations” consist of one or more visits by Carter Center staff and eminent persons at key moments in the electoral cycle. The Carter Center’s Americas Program, which conducts election observation and other projects in Latin America, has most frequently used this model. Often these delegations work in partnership with the Friends of the Democratic Charter, a group of former distinguished leaders from the Western Hemisphere who advise the OAS on the application of the charter. The delegations usually meet with key actors and tend to focus on one or more key concerns. For example their involvement can demonstrate international interest in the election; encourage a peaceful election process; or aid communication between parties as a means of conflict resolution. Although high-level political delegations may produce public statements, they focus on behind-the-scenes work, frequently offering private recommendations to improve the process or to defuse tense political situations, rather than the public assessment that is a core feature of comprehensive election observation. Such



An Indonesian poll worker shows the ballot for the 2004 elections.

missions are not considered “observation” missions because they neither deploy observers nor attempt to assess the electoral process thoroughly. Some of the Center’s early activities in Latin America fall into this category; the 2013 elections in Honduras and 2014 elections in Panama offer more recent examples.

An “election experts mission” consists of a small team of technical, electoral, or political experts who conduct in-depth analysis of specific elements of the electoral process. The teams conduct their activities in accordance with the Declaration of Principles and a standard methodology. While an invitation from and accreditation by the host country are not requirements for their work, experts missions seek them because they can facilitate access and goodwill. Usually, teams are in the host country for three to six weeks or longer. They may issue public reports, or they may determine that private exchanges are more beneficial. In any public reports or statements, these teams make clear that their work is not intended to offer a comprehensive assessment of the electoral process. Some recent examples include missions to Nicaragua in 2011, Algeria and Palestine in 2012, and Jordan and Venezuela in 2013.

As discussed above, The Carter Center has also pursued many “limited election observation missions” (sometimes referred to as “specialized” or “targeted” missions). Like experts missions, these limited missions observe only one or more specific aspects of the electoral process, or occasionally a specific geographic region. Unlike experts missions, however, these teams include short- and/or long-term observers. In addition to the deployment of observers, a limited mission usually includes a field office director, an observer coordinator, a legal analyst, and a security manager, with other personnel incorporated as necessary. They deploy observers to assess specific processes and usually include the release of public statements. Each statement notes the limited nature of the mission’s scope. Like comprehensive missions, limited missions use standardized assessment criteria and methodologies in their work and adhere to election observation principles. An invitation from the host country and accreditation are required. Some



A Nicaraguan woman looks for her name on the voter list in 2006.

examples of limited missions include those focused on e-voting in Venezuela in 2006 and in the Philippines in 2010; a 2009 mission to Indonesia focused on campaign finance, dispute resolution, and the Aceh province; and a 2012 mission to Libya, which had limited geographic coverage because of security concerns.

Finally, a “comprehensive election observation mission” is election observation in its most complete form. These missions strive to assess the entire electoral process, ideally through the deployment of long-term observers for three months or more in advance of the election and short-term observers for the election itself, with core staff and long-term observers remaining through tabulation and the announcement of results. The core team consists of a field office director, observer coordinator, legal analyst, and security manager, and others where necessary. The observer teams comprise 16 or more observers.¹ These missions secure an invitation and accreditation from the host country and adhere to standardized assessment methods consistent with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. As this is the most typical form of mission undertaken by the Center, there are many examples, including

¹ The number of observers deployed is based on the size of the host country, the size and diversity of the population, and other factors.

most recently Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2011, Sierra Leone and Egypt in 2012, Kenya and Nepal in 2013, Mozambique and Tunisia in 2014, and Guyana in 2015, among others.

Limited Missions

There are times when it is not possible or advisable to pursue a comprehensive election observation mission. Sometimes a late invitation by the host country prevents the Center from mobilizing a comprehensive mission, as was the case for several elections during the 1990s in Mexico. In other cases, a limited mission might be deployed because of limited funding or because the presence of other observer groups makes a full mission less important. In Venezuela and Guyana in 2006, for example, other international organizations had already decided to send comprehensive missions, reducing the need for the Center to send another comprehensive mission. The overall political context, including the likely competitiveness and quality of elections, can also lead to the decision to send a limited mission. In each of these scenarios, The Carter Center determines whether a limited-scope mission could add value.

Over the years the Center has pursued a number of different types of targeted or specialized missions. The specific context in a country determines the type of mission, but among the varieties have been missions related to local elections, campaign finance, voter registration, human rights analysis, and e-voting techniques.

A few observation missions have focused specifically on the critical process of voter registration, which is integral to ensuring equitable access to voting on polling day. For example, between monitoring the 2003 municipal elections in Mozambique and the 2004 presidential and legislative elections, the Center deployed a small team of observers to 150 voter registration centers in nine provinces there. These observers assessed the functioning of the registration process, the presence of national observers and party agents, and citizens' evaluations of the process. Their findings led to an interim public report offering recommendations.

China Village Elections

Early targeted missions included those organized through the China Village Elections Project, which observed its first election in 1997 and went on to observe 13 more. In partnership with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the project sought to promote fair, competitive elections at the village level and to enhance the governance skills of elected local leaders. These missions consisted of small teams that observed village elections and conducted local interviews, and also met with officials in Beijing to discuss the standardization of village elections at a broader level. The project jointly organized several conferences and connected scholars in the United States and China. More recently, in March 2010 the Center sent its largest mission to China to assess villager committee elections in Yunnan Province.



A Chinese woman votes for local officials in 2010.

Similarly, one of two missions to Bolivia in 2009 was a fairly robust but targeted mission conducting long-term observation of voter registration in particular. The mission undertook direct observation of the new biometric registration process as well as legal and technical analysis through a field office in La Paz over the course of four months. It employed six long-term observers and several experts who worked together to assess practical and legal aspects of the biometric registration process. As a complement to this project, the Center also deployed a delegation of short-term observers to watch the elections with a specific focus on the use of the new biometric registry at polling stations.

In 2009 the Center re-engaged in Indonesia, where it had previously conducted two comprehensive observation missions for the 1999 and 2004 elections. This time, the Center deployed a limited mission focused on three elements of the electoral process that were of specific concern: (1) electoral administration; (2) campaign-finance reporting; and (3) postelectoral dispute resolution mechanisms. In addition, the mission deployed observers to the Aceh region in light of concerns about election-related violence there.

Several limited missions over the years have concentrated on human rights. In 2003 a limited mission consisting of four observers and three experts traveled to Guatemala, where their human rights-based observation work sought to draw attention to issues such as voter access to the polls, media, and public resources; intimidation of voters; and discrimination against indigenous groups. As a subsidiary issue, the mission also examined campaign finance. Both issues were assessed in relation to the elections, but also within the broader context of Guatemala's quest for peace and national reconciliation. The work of this mission complemented comprehensive observation missions deployed by the European Union (EU) and the Organization of American States (OAS) to Guatemala.

In recent years the trend toward electronic voting has led the Center to conduct several limited missions specifically to observe the e-voting process. For

example, the Center sent a small technical team to the presidential elections in Venezuela in 2006 to assess e-voting processes. This mission aimed both to support democratic elections in Venezuela and to assist the Center as it developed methods for observing and evaluating e-voting processes. The mission assessed issues such as the cultural and social factors at play in the usability of the voting machines, the performance of the machines, and the election commission's administration of the process. The Carter Center sent a similar, targeted mission to the 2010 elections in the Philippines that assessed the impact of automated voting technologies on the electoral process by observing the systems in use in three selected areas of the country. Likewise, this mission contributed to the Center's efforts to develop standardized methods for observing e-voting technologies. The Philippines election gave the Center an opportunity to test its methodology, which was summarized in a handbook on e-voting published the following year.

Several comprehensive election observation missions have led to subsidiary projects that focus on the difficult process of democratic consolidation following and between elections. A handful of missions—referred to at the time as political accompaniment missions—targeted this issue specifically. For Ecuador's 2007 Constituent Assembly elections, the Center deployed a limited observation of the process of constitutional reform. In this case, the mission expressly focused on the success of Ecuador's political transition. The delegation conducted several private meetings with officials to offer recommendations in preparation for the upcoming elections. The mission complemented the Center's conflict resolution work in Ecuador, which began in 2007. The Center then observed the 2008 Constitutional Referendum in Ecuador by deploying a limited mission of political and electoral experts who assessed and offered recommendations on the process of voting on a draft constitution. Additionally, a small political mission traveled to Bolivia in January 2009 to observe the constitutional referendum and assess how well the electoral process adhered to the country's electoral code.

Transition Monitoring—Nepal

A handful of the observation missions during these 25 years have been truly revolutionary. The Carter Center's work in Nepal is among them. The Center's involvement in Nepal began in 2004 with efforts to bring an end to the ongoing civil conflict. This engagement led to the Center's monitoring of Constituent Assembly elections in 2008, followed by a long-term project in which the Center monitored the consolidation of peace and democratization in the country. The scope and design of the project during the post-2008 period was unique. Designed as a political transition monitoring project, the mission focused on two key processes: the consolidation of peace and the drafting of the constitution. In doing so it covered a large range of associated issues, including identity movements, security issues, political party youth wings, land issues, the peace committees, voter registration, election observation, and local governance.

The distinctive project sought to address the political disconnect between Kathmandu and the rest of the country by focusing observation on the local level and reporting back to the capital, fostering better communication in Nepal's quest for peace and its efforts to draft a new constitution.

To this end, long-term observer teams deployed in 2009 throughout the country's five development regions and continued deployment off and on through 2014. In contrast to the Carter Center's usual practice of deploying only noncitizens on international observation missions, each observer team included one Nepalese observer who could better facilitate the collection and interpretation of information given major linguistic and cultural barriers. Observer teams collected both qualitative information, through open-ended questions, and quantitative information. The field office staff used these data, gathered from local communities throughout Nepal's 75 districts, to analyze developments and trends. The mission regularly published reports and consulted with key stakeholders at the national level to share pertinent information. Also noteworthy was the project's slow but steady effort to shift from international to local ownership. After about six years, the project closed in early 2014. In September of that year, the Center handed over the significant contents of its database of observer reports, local interviews, and other collected data to a national NGO to be available to the Nepalese people in the future.

The Democratic Election Standards Project

The collaborative development of the 2005 Declaration of Principles and Observer Code of Conduct led to the strengthening of the field of election observation, but also highlighted the need for more consistent analysis of observation work as it evolves and for continued collaborative efforts in the field. In response, the Center developed a project within the Democracy Program specifically dedicated to such work and in 2006 inaugurated the Democratic Election Standards (DES) Project. The project began with three main goals: to ascertain and build upon consensus regarding standards for democratic elections based on public international law; to address challenges confronting election observation work internationally; and to further standardize the Center's election observation work.

Under the auspices of DES the Center has pursued a number of activities. These include the standardization of reporting across missions; the development of a database of election observation obligations; several handbooks offering practical tools for application in

the field; the advancement of electronic tools such as ELMO (discussed below); ongoing conferences and workshops with other leading election observation organizations and experts to advance research, develop practical tools, and facilitate the convergence of standards among practitioners; and the publication of academic work. In undertaking these projects, the Center has become known for its collaborative efforts. A community of organizations devoted to advancing election observation now exists, and this community has made major strides. A review of the work of DES illustrates the role it has played and can continue to play in the future.

The Standardization of Observer Reporting

Following the successful signing of the 2005 Declaration of Principles, the Democratic Election Standards Project went on to pursue further standardization of observer methodology at The Carter Center. In 2008 the Democracy Program formalized a series of reporting templates to improve the consistency of information gathered on missions and the output of information from each mission. These forms included templates for LTO and LTO coordinator weekly reports; pre-election public statements; campaign rally reports; complaint, violation, and irregularity reports; LTO incident reports; daily deployment check-in reports; and a suite of checklist templates for STOs on poll opening, polling, poll closing, and counting. These forms were first utilized for the 2008 elections in Ghana and then for elections in Indonesia and Lebanon in 2009. They are now a standard part of all Carter Center missions.



The 2008 election in Ghana was among the first in which Carter Center observers used standardized reporting templates.

Election Obligations and Standards Database and Other Tools

Created in 2010 as the Database of Obligations for Democratic Elections and redesigned in 2014, the Election Obligations and Standards (EOS) database is an online compendium of public international law related to elections, collected from nearly 200 sources. The information it contains is organized within a matrix reflecting 21 obligations for genuine elections and 10 basic components of the electoral process.² The database indicates the treaties and customary law sources which countries have adopted through ratification, as well as other nonbinding instruments, handbooks, and sources indicative of good state practice.

The database is a comprehensive resource for election observers, researchers, host governments, civil society organizations, and others. Users can evaluate elections in a country according to the international obligations that the nation has freely undertaken, a so-called public international law-based framework or an “obligations-based approach.” The 2013-14 redesign made the database easier to use and update with new content, vital to its success given that international law is constantly evolving.

As a complement to the database, the Carter Center developed a comprehensive handbook for election observers, published in 2014. The handbook, “Election Obligations and Standards: A Carter Center Assessment Manual,” is a summary version of the database that is more practical for use on missions. It includes assessment criteria and examples of questions for data collection that can assist in using a public international law-based assessment framework. Launched at the United Nations in 2014, this handbook is recognized as an important contribution to the field.

DES has also developed two handbooks for electronic voting, the first in 2007 based on pilot tests conducted during the 2006 Venezuelan elections and the second in 2012, incorporating lessons learned since then. Given the difficulties of directly observing electronic voting, these handbooks offer

observers a baseline survey for observing e-voting and discuss international obligations relevant to assessing e-voting.

Through its research on public international law as it relates to elections, DES also has revised existing observer reporting templates and checklists, discussed above, to better reflect the public international law-based framework. This has assisted the Center in collecting similar data across missions, which is helpful for future quick reference of reports and for comparisons across missions.

Electronic Observer Reporting: Introducing ELMO

In an electoral environment, the public’s ability to access information rapidly is crucial. Citizens are awaiting election results and analysis, often in tense environments. In 2011 The Carter Center for the first time deployed observers using an electronic reporting mechanism. The Democracy Program’s Democratic Standards Elections Project developed this tool in collaboration with the Georgia Institute of Technology in order to allow observers to report in real time the data they collect in the field. The system and its database have been dubbed ELMO, short for “election monitoring.” Through the use of tablets, smartphones, and internet browsers, ELMO allows users to directly upload data collected on checklists during observation to a database, so that staff and analysts can more quickly collate and synthesize the information from the field to produce public reports more promptly.

Ideally, ELMO obviates the need to fill out paper observer checklists that are carried in person back to headquarters or reported tediously over phone or email, delaying the information and ensuring that a lot of work has to be done to process the data for analysis. Data reported through ELMO is uploaded directly to a database from where it can easily be

² This framework was introduced in a 2013 article in *Election Law Journal* by Democracy Program Director David Carroll and Associate Director Avery Davis Roberts: “The Carter Center and Election Observation: An Obligations-Based Approach for Assessing Elections,” *Election Law Journal* 12, no. 1 (2013): 93, doi: 10.1089/elj.2013.1215.

accessed for analysis. Another advantage to the ELMO system is its ability to send messages directly to observers through “broadcasts” on the devices they are using. This can be useful simply to get information to observers about a change in polling stations or schedule, and it can be used in the event of an emergency.

The Center first used ELMO during the Cherokee Nation elections in 2011, followed by the Liberian elections that same year. ELMO was subsequently used for elections in Egypt and Kenya in 2012 and Nepal in 2013. It is now regularly used on most elections and has greatly increased the speed with which the Center can collect and process observer information and therefore produce public reports. There are of course several concerns connected with the transition to electronic reporting. Observers often have to explain to polling staff what the devices are for and why they are being used. Depending on the country context, taking notes on paper can be perceived as less threatening than typing information into a device. But, given the huge increase in cellphone use globally, this is less and less of a concern. Although technology is becoming cheaper, it is also consistently evolving, so there is a cost associated with maintaining up-to-date electronic systems.

These challenges notwithstanding, the development of ELMO offers an avenue for fostering collaboration in election observation. As an open-source technology, ELMO gives interested parties the ability to use the program freely and, if desired, to tailor it to their needs. In 2014 the Center actively began seeking partners to contribute to ELMO’s evolution, through such activities as customizing the program to fit various types of observation or country



ELMO takes advantage of current technology to speed the delivery of information, as here in Egypt in 2012.

contexts, making it available in more languages, improving its interface and functionality on various devices, and improving its mapping capabilities. The Center sees ELMO as another way to build a cooperative community.

Research, Collaboration, and Publication

The Carter Center’s recognized role as an effective collaborator has been achieved in part by hosting and participating in a number of meetings, workshops, and conferences on election observation and democratic standards. For example, DES brought together roughly 10 organizations to contribute to the process of developing its Election Obligations and Standards database over several years. In 2008 and 2009 DES hosted a number of meetings in response to the identification of major gaps in public international law, with a specific focus on observing campaign finance, the media environment, and electoral dispute resolution processes. A 2010 conference addressed the intersection between technology and election observation,

particularly how information and communication technologies can best be utilized in elections. Two regionally focused workshops took place in 2010 on applying public international law to assess elections in Africa and Southeast Asia, respectively, and a 2012 conference in Atlanta addressed the “Challenges of Legal Identity, Citizenship, and Voting Rights.” These conferences and workshops have often led to further research and publications. Democracy Program staff members have written several publications, including academic articles, on the Center’s approach to observation.³

The Democratic Election Standards Project continues to encourage the standardization of election observation approaches and to elevate the use of public international law as central to assessing and advancing the integrity of election observation. Since its establishment in 2006, DES has been

at the forefront of a collaborative community of organizations with similar goals. Together they have developed a common approach, which has informed their efforts in the field, as well as trainings and partnerships with domestic observer groups and civil society organizations. One of the key roles of DES is to clarify what election observation can do and what it does not do. Clarifying these objectives to all concerned parties is crucial to the success of election observation, so that expectations can be met and goals achieved.

DES will continue in its role as a vehicle for advancing election observation methodology. The process of consensus-building that The Carter Center has embarked upon with peer organizations involves the ongoing application of methodologies, reflection on their effectiveness, review of applicable international law and best practice, and adaptation.

³ See electionstandards.cartercenter.org for more information.

Conclusions and the Future

The Carter Center marked its 25th anniversary of election observation with the publication of “Election Obligations and Standards: A Carter Center Assessment Manual”; the launch of the updated EOS database and a new website devoted specifically to Democratic Election Standards; and the deployment of observation missions to Tunisia and Mozambique and targeted missions to Libya, Panama, and Egypt.

In the 25 years since its first election observation mission to Panama in 1989, the Carter Center’s election observation work has come a long way. The Center now recognizes the need for long-term engagement to build stronger relationships, which in turn bolster confidence and foster greater cooperation and information sharing. The Carter Center has been involved in some countries for multiple electoral cycles, including Venezuela, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Guyana, Timor-Leste, Mozambique, China, Liberia, and Nepal. Through election observation and other

complementary projects, the Center has supported the long-term democratization of these countries. Yet The Carter Center, like many others, is still trying to discern the impact of election observation on specific elections as well as on countries’ long-term trajectories. Only by reflecting on past engagement can observers evaluate the long-term impact of their involvement.

There is little doubt that the task of creating a comprehensive framework of standards for assessing elections is extremely difficult, not only because the international laws on which this framework is based are evolving, but also because of the unique political and historical contexts in which this framework must be applied. While The Carter Center has come a long way in 25 years of election observation, there is much more to do in order to “get it right.” Twenty-five years is just the beginning.

Acknowledgements

This retrospective was researched and written by Amelia Cook, building on research previously conducted by Cynthia Michota. Chloe Bordewich and Jennie Lincoln provided comments on drafts of the report, for which we are grateful. Avery Davis-Roberts and David Carroll edited the text and provided oversight and guidance on the process. Chris Olson Becker of the Carter Center’s communications department oversaw the publication of this report, and Jim Kavanagh copyedited it.

The Carter Center is grateful for the financial support of the following donors, who made this review of 25 years of election observation at The Carter Center possible:

- Mr. and Mrs. Shawn M. Aebi
- Mr. and Mrs. Gaby Ajram/Ajram Family Foundation
- Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development—Canada
- Dr. Peter B. Danzig and Ms. Lava Thomas
- Mr. Carroll J. Haas, Sr./Carroll J. Haas Foundation
- John C. and Karyl Kay Hughes Foundation
- Government of Ireland/Irish Aid
- Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Koenig and family
- Mr. and Mrs. Lembhard G. Howell
- Mr. Michael Nelson and Ms. Louise Durocher
- Mr. Steven E. Nothern
- Ms. Cherida C. Smith
- Mr. and Mrs. James N. Stanard
- The Willow Springs Foundation

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Terms and Abbreviations

COFEHG	Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government
DES	Democratic Election Standards
EOM	Election observation mission
EOS	Election Obligations and Standards
EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
ELMO	Open-source ELECTION MONITORING software developed by The Carter Center
EU	European Union
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IRI	International Republican Institute
LTO	Long-term observer
MTO	Medium-term observer
NDI	National Democratic Institute
OAS	Organization of American States
STO	Short-term observer

The Carter Center at a Glance

The Carter Center was founded in 1982 by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, in partnership with Emory University, to advance peace and health worldwide. A not-for-profit, nongovernmental organization, the Center has helped to improve life for

people in more than 80 countries by resolving conflicts; advancing democracy, human rights, and economic opportunity; preventing diseases; and improving mental health care. Please visit www.cartercenter.org to learn more about The Carter Center.



Martin Frank

THE
CARTER CENTER



One Copenhill
453 Freedom Parkway
Atlanta, GA 30307
(404) 420-5100 • Fax (404) 420-5145

www.cartercenter.org