



Master of Electoral Policy and Administration

An Overview of the Model Curriculum





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March 2014



International IDEA Electoral Processes

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Graphic design by: Santángelo Diseño
Cover Design and illustration by: Santángelo Diseño
Printed by:

ISBN: 978-91-87729-45-4

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Introduction

The professional administration of elections relies on a cadre of knowledgeable and well-trained managers capable of rising to the challenges of such a large-scale operation. Unlike in other areas of public administration, however, there are relatively few opportunities for advanced professional education in electoral management—especially at the international level. Existing educational facilities tend to offer only short-term training courses on selected topics. At the same time, the global electoral community unequivocally advocates for greater professionalization of electoral management.

The Model Curriculum for the Master of Electoral Policy and Administration (MEPA) is intended to make a global contribution to such professionalization. The MEPA Model Curriculum offers a comprehensive one-year Master of Arts programme for election professionals. MEPA is designed to benefit not only current and aspiring election managers, but also policy makers and practitioners involved in elections—from observers to assistance providers. The Model Curriculum does not attempt to impose rigid requirements. Rather, it seeks to provide the basis for a rigorous and thought-through educational programme that covers all important aspects of the electoral process and equips its graduates with solid knowledge and the ability to handle the most complex professional challenges. MEPA is conceived as an international programme that aims to foster durable relationships between graduates from developing and stable democracies.

The Model Curriculum was developed by an international expert group convened by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) in early 2013 to discuss post-graduate studies in electoral processes. The inclusion of both academic and practice-oriented perspectives makes this resource valuable for all educators and students of elections. However, the primary target group of the Model Curriculum is academic curriculum designers and post-graduate course instructors. The authors of this resource recognize that the content of each course is ultimately shaped by the instructor's knowledge and experience, and seek to supply additional resources and sources of inspiration for academic instruction on the curriculum's topics.

The full edition of the MEPA Model Curriculum consists of 18 topics, corresponding to the same number of courses. Course information provided for each topic includes learning objectives for the course, suggested length, key issues to be covered and a detailed course outline with recommended resources.

This Overview omits course outlines and recommended resources to provide a brief summary of the Model Curriculum. The full publication is available upon request from International IDEA.

The Model Curriculum is intended to be a living resource. As a next step, International IDEA will support piloting of the MEPA Model Curriculum and promote its use in academic programmes, *inter alia* through the creation of an online academic network. International IDEA welcomes any questions or feedback on the content of the Model Curriculum.

Acknowledgements

At International IDEA, the curriculum development and MEPA partnership with Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna and UNITAR were supervised by Dr. Annette Monika Fath-Lihic, Senior Programme Manager, Electoral Processes.

IDEA's Electoral Processes team would like to express special gratitude to Jeff Fischer (Creative Associates) and Andrea de Guttry (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna), whose vision of a global Master's programme for election professionals inspired this Model Curriculum and whose tireless efforts helped International IDEA to advance this initiative. Special appreciation is also due to the drafters of the Model Curriculum: Sarah Birch, Linda Darkwa, Jeff Fischer, Michael Maley and Vasil Vashchanka. Several drafts of this document benefited from the expertise and thoughtful comments of many members of the expert group and colleagues at International IDEA. We are especially grateful to Andrea de Guttry, Jung Ae Jang, Carlos Navarro, Bhojraj Pokharel, Helena Bjuremalm, Brechtje Kemp and Lotta Westerberg for taking the time to peer review all or parts of the Model Curriculum. We also thank other members of the expert group who took part in the March 2013 meeting that propelled the development of the Model Curriculum: Mathieu Bile, Khaled El-Sahli, Zaid Eyadat, Bernard Owen and Ilona Tip. Additionally, special thanks go to Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna in Pisa, Italy, which graciously hosted the expert group meeting.

Course Information

Topic 1: Elections and Voting as Instruments of Governance

Learning objectives

To acquire a general background on elections and voting, including the context of democratic governance, the history and variety of electoral experiences, and the international instruments that guide and protect the right to vote and the act of voting.

Key subtopics

This course introduces the fundamentals of electoral process design, administration and evaluation; options available to policy makers and practitioners; and electoral stakeholders and their roles. Key subtopics for this course are:

- principles and theories of democratic governance;
- functions of voting and elections in democratic governance;
- introduction to concepts, terms and definitions;
- sources of legitimacy and credibility of electoral processes;
- state, non-state, and international electoral stakeholders and their roles;
- voting and election typologies—trends and regional patterns; and
- international electoral standards in electoral policy and practice.

Suggested length

20 academic hours, 2 credits

Topic 2: Electoral Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Learning objectives

To acquire knowledge of the elements that compose an electoral legal framework, understand the main legal instruments and principles that form the basis of international legal frameworks for elections, be aware of the processes by which legal frameworks are constituted and the main challenges of their administration, and improve students' ability to administer legal requirements and facilitate reforms to improve legal frameworks.

Key subtopics

This course provides an integrated analysis of the hierarchy of international law, constitutions, legislation and regulation that govern the features and conduct of electoral processes, and discusses the challenges associated with administering the requirements of these legal instruments. Key subtopics are:

- the concept of electoral legal and regulatory framework, its sources and elements;
- why regulatory frameworks matter;
- international legal framework: international treaties, customary law and soft law;
- overview of key international principles and requirements with regard to: electoral system design; electoral districts and boundaries; electoral management; voter registration; political contestants and electoral campaign; voting, counting and tabulation; and dispute resolution;
- mechanisms for securing compliance with international norms;
- sources of domestic legal and regulatory framework, including constitutions, statutes, regulations and case law;
- scope of electoral legal frameworks;
- electoral legal framework stakeholders including legislatures, governments, judiciary, electoral administration, political contestants and voters;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

30 academic hours, 3 credits

Topic 3: Electoral Management Bodies

Learning objectives

To learn about the models, mandates and organization of electoral management bodies (EMBs); survey government and non-governmental administrative partnership networks; and review the international, regional and topical associations of election professionals so that this knowledge can be applied in the design, management and monitoring of electoral administration.

Key subtopics

This course examines the spectrum of electoral administration mechanisms and how the options associated with different models can perform in different political environments. Key subtopics include:

- introduction to EMBs;
- why EMBs matter;
- principles and ethics in electoral administration—impartiality, professionalism and sustainability;
- credibility of EMBs and why it matters;
- EMB responsibilities and mandates;
- models of EMBs and regional comparisons;
- EMB secretariats;
- models of subnational electoral administration;
- recruitment and staff retention—challenges and solutions;
- networks of partners in electoral management: key players and relationships;
- EMBs with international outreach;
- electoral management associations (EMAs);
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities for EMBs.

Suggested length

30 academic hours, 3 credits

Topic 4: Electoral Systems and Managing Representation

Learning objectives

To understand the main types and features of electoral systems; different approaches to analysing them; and key policy issues surrounding (and the political dimensions of) electoral system choice. Students should be able to:

- identify electoral systems that could be appropriate for use in a given country context;
- analyse the likely practical, political and representational implications of adopting a particular system, in both the short and long terms; and
- provide well-reasoned and informed advice to the public and policy makers on the available options.

Key subtopics

This course provides an overview of electoral systems and their impact on participation and representation, but also addresses the administrative impact of different systems for electoral management bodies (EMBs) responsible for conducting elections under given systems. Key subtopics include:

- definition of electoral systems;
- why electoral systems and representation matter;
- governance typologies;
- key variables: ballot structure, electoral formula, district magnitude;
- electing a single person to an office;
- electing a representative body using single-member districts;
- electing a representative body using multimember districts;
- mixed systems;
- consequences of electoral systems for voting behaviour and party systems;
- consequences of electoral systems for representation;
- choice of electoral system in divided societies and post-conflict environments;
- practical consequences of the choice of electoral system on election processes, including costs;
- regional comparative review of electoral systems;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

30 academic hours, 3 credits

Topic 5: Understanding and Managing Boundary Delimitation

Learning objectives

To understand the concept of boundary delimitation, including the potential for political controversy and past abuses; analytical techniques that can detect, or measure the impact of, manipulation; and mechanisms that can enhance the credibility and legitimacy of delimitation and prevent potential abuse.

Key subtopics

This course combines both a conceptual and practical approaches to identifying sound practices in boundary delimitation. Key subtopics include:

- concepts of representation;
- why boundary delimitation matters;
- main elements of boundary delimitation;
- apportionment;
- types of manipulation: malapportionment and gerrymandering;
- guiding principles for delimitation;
- neutral and independent delimitation;
- assessing and moderating the products of partisan delimitation;
- mechanics of delimitation;
- regional comparisons;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

25 academic hours, 2 credits

Topic 6: Political Parties, Campaigns, and Political Finance

Learning objectives

To acquire comparative knowledge of political party systems, party consultative mechanisms, political party codes of conduct and political finance systems in order to better understand the design, management and administration of political finance regulation systems.

Key subtopics

This course provides an overview of political party system features and options, but focuses on the impact of political party systems (and methods of financing them) on electoral campaigning and administration. Key subtopics include:

- definitions of political party systems;
- why political party systems and political finance matter;
- political party relations—candidate nominations, campaign rules, campaign advertising, media access and internal democracy;
- models of political party organization, leadership and membership;
- political party and candidate registration legal frameworks on eligibility, party name, party symbols and other requirements;
- party consultative mechanisms—councils, forums and codes of conduct;
- political party militias and other surrogates;
- codes of conduct for political parties and challenges to implementation;
- principles of political finance system administration;
- political finance systems—disclosure, detection, enforcement;
- political finance regulation—contribution and spending limitations and prohibitions;
- models of political finance regulators;
- public financing mechanisms;
- regional comparative review of political party and finance systems;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

30 academic hours, 3 credits

Topic 7: Electoral Planning and Budgeting

Learning objectives

To understand the major factors that influence and structure the process of planning and budgeting for (and financing of) elections. Students should be able to:

- develop, or contribute to the development of, strategic plans for an electoral management body (EMB);
- develop, or contribute to the development of, feasible operational plans for an EMB at various organizational levels;
- identify and cost activities to be undertaken within such plans; and
- modify plans in response to realistically identified risks and changed environmental constraints.

Key subtopics

This course explores integrated electoral planning and budgeting and presents methodologies to enhance the democratic quality and technical efficiency of electoral administration through effective planning initiatives. Key subtopics include:

- why electoral planning and budgeting matter;
- electoral cycle approach;
- electoral planning—strategic, operational, political and security considerations;
- metrics, milestones and performance indicators;
- electoral calendars—political, technical, peace building;
- models of electoral budgeting;
- principles of electoral procurement;
- accountability and transparency in financial management;
- electoral cost definitions—fixed, variable, diffuse, integrity;
- electoral cost performance ratios;
- coping with unexpected changes in planning assumptions (e.g., early or postponed elections, late legislative change, political-level decisions on processes);
- regional comparative review of electoral costs;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

40 academic hours, 4 credits

Topic 8: Voter Registration and Identification Systems

Learning objectives

To understand the main types and features of voter registration/identification systems, including their conceptual, legal and administrative aspects, and key policy issues surrounding (and political dimensions of) voter registration system choice. Students should be able to:

- identify voter registration systems that could be appropriate for use in a given country context;
- analyse the likely practical, political, representational and cost implications (and potential benefits and risks) of adopting a particular system;
- provide well-reasoned and informed advice to the public and policy makers on the available options; and
- design, implement, manage and monitor systems.

Key subtopics

This course combines both conceptual and practical aspects of the design and administration of voter identification and registration systems, and their impact on system administration. Key subtopics include:

- conceptual frameworks for voter registration;
- why voter registration and identification systems matter;
- geographic basis for voter registration;
- cross-cutting aspects of voter registration and identification;
- legal frameworks for voter registration;
- main elements of a voter registration system;
- mechanisms for ensuring the credibility, transparency and accuracy of the register;
- data protection;
- administrative frameworks for voter registration;
- choice of registration model: periodic, continuous or civil registry;
- regional comparative review of voter registration systems;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

30 academic hours, 3 credits

Topic 9: Electoral Operations

Learning objectives

To understand the tasks that need to be performed to implement the key practical elements of a successful election—the receipt of nominations, polling, counting of votes and results compilation—and how they relate to each other. Students should be able to:

- identify nomination, polling, counting and compilation processes that could be appropriate for use in a given country context;
- analyse the likely practical, political, representational and cost implications (and potential benefits and risks) of adopting particular processes, in both the short and long terms;
- provide well-reasoned and informed advice to the public and policy makers on the available options; and
- design, implement, manage, and monitor processes.

Key subtopics

This course systematically explores options for key activities that are required at election time, and approaches to undertaking these activities effectively. Key subtopics include:

- why electoral operations matter;
- assessing the environment when designing and implementing electoral operations;
- developing an electoral calendar;
- record keeping and accountability;
- strategies for ensuring the transparency and credibility of election operations;
- receipt of nomination/candidate lists, ballot design and ballot production;
- registration/polling location design and geographic basis for polling;
- the basic polling model: voting at a single designated polling station;
- extensions of the basic polling model: absentee voting, early voting, postal voting, provisional voting, mobile polling teams, out-of-country voting, Internet voting;
- multi-day voting and re-polling;
- options for balloting methods;
- single- and multi-round voting;
- the basic counting model: counting at each polling station;
- extensions of the basic counting model: counting centres, recounts, post-polling day counting;

Topic 9: Electoral Operations

Key subtopics

[cont.]

- election results management;
- post-election activities;
- operational plan implementation mechanisms;
- facilities management—headquarters, sub-national offices, warehouses, registration/polling locations;
- models of staffing—recruitment and training;
- public outreach mechanisms;
- procurement, transport, logistics, communications and asset retrieval;
- inventory of election commodities—non-consumables and consumables;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

40 academic hours, 4 credits

Topic 10: Marginalized Electorates and Special Voting Programmes

Learning objectives

To understand the methodologies and processes required to inform and enfranchise marginalized segments of the electorate and organize alternative voting modalities; be able to design, manage and monitor special voting programmes.

Key subtopics

This course identifies the sources and types of political marginalization that occur during elections and how to design and implement administrative and political mechanisms that can inform, enfranchise and empower these otherwise marginalized voters. Key subtopics include:

- definitions and sources of marginalization—political, social, physical, linguistic and geographical;
- why marginalized electorates and special voting programmes matter: inclusive electoral environment and representation;
- electoral marginalization stakeholders—state, non-state, international;
- gender and electoral participation;
- enfranchisement, informing and voting for youth and other socially disadvantaged groups;
- out-of-country voting—enfranchisement, informing and voting for diasporas, refugees and asylum seekers;
- enfranchisement, informing and voting for internally displaced persons (IDPs);
- enfranchisement, informing and voting for the visually impaired and people with physical and intellectual disabilities;
- enfranchisement, informing and voting for homebound and institutionalized voters;
- enfranchisement, informing and voting for military and other security forces;
- enfranchisement, informing and voting for detainees;
- early voting; and
- managing boycotts.

Suggested length

20 academic hours, 2 credits

Topic 11: Elections and Technology

Learning objectives

To acquire knowledge of conceptual frameworks to define election technologies, identify stakeholders and describe types of applications, and understand the criteria that guide the assessment, selection and implementation of election technologies. Students should be able to:

- identify technology that could be appropriate for use in a given country context;
- analyse the likely practical, political and cost implications (and potential benefits and risks) of adopting a particular technology, in both the short and long terms;
- provide well-reasoned and informed advice to the public and policy makers on the available options; and
- participate in the design, implementation, management and monitoring of systems.

Key subtopics

This course combines both a conceptual and practical approaches to understanding election technology applications and the impact and challenges of managing these technologies in different political environments. Key subtopics for this course are:

- why technology matters;
- descriptive definitions of election technologies—determinant, influential, administration;
- functional definitions of election technologies—education, identification, registration, balloting and tabulation, dissemination, delimitation;
- understanding the technological development life cycle, including ongoing support requirements;
- election technology legal framework;
- election technology stakeholders—state, commercial, public;
- new technology assessment methodology—objectives, appropriateness, transparency, cost-benefit, acceptability;
- approaches to outsourcing and contracting—benefits and risks;
- vendor relations;
- overview of voter identification/registration technologies;
- overview of electronic voting technologies;
- overview of Internet voting;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

30 academic hours, 3 credits

Topic 12: Civic and Voter Education

Learning objectives

To understand the differences between civic and voter education, including the relevant actors and the development and dissemination of related information.

Key subtopics

This course provides opportunities to review and analyse voter and civic education programmes and their impact on the quality and quantity of electoral participation. Key subtopics include:

- definitions of voter, electoral and civic education;
- the role of the mass media and traditional and non-conventional outlets in civic and voter education;
- stakeholders in civic and voter education;
- designing civic and voter education strategies;
- message development (public outreach, focus groups, opinion surveys, mock polling);
- general and special audiences;
- message dissemination (avenues, coverage, timings and actors) and challenges in coordination;
- measures of education programme effectiveness;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

20 academic hours, 2 credits

Topic 13: Media and Elections

Learning objectives

To understand the development and management of media regulations, media relations and rumour control in order to gain the skills to design, manage and monitor such programmes.

Key subtopics

This course provides opportunities to review media-engagement strategies for such educational initiatives. Key subtopics include:

- media relationships and communications techniques;
- why the media matters;
- traditional and new media, and their role at all stages of the electoral cycle;
- concepts of balance and fairness in media coverage and different ways to achieve it;
- cross-national variations in media regulation during electoral campaigns;
- media monitoring mechanisms;
- rumour, misinformation and disinformation management;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges, and opportunities.

Suggested length

20 academic hours, 2 credits

Topic 14: Electoral Integrity and Malpractice

Learning objectives

To understand the typologies of electoral malpractice, the tactics used by perpetrators and investigation techniques by enforcement stakeholders in order to be able to prevent (or reveal and halt) electoral malpractice.

Key subtopics

This course combines a conceptual and practical approach to identifying the vulnerabilities and types of electoral malpractice and mispractice, and introduces investigative and administration techniques and mechanisms that can prevent or manage such practices. Key subtopics include:

- definitions of electoral malpractice;
- electoral mispractice and substandard practice;
- why electoral malpractice matters;
- electoral malpractice stakeholders—state, non-state, international, voter (victim or perpetrator);
- malpractice tactics—deception, coercion, damage or destruction, denials of service or failures to act;
- malpractice tactics by electoral cycle activity—voter identification, voter registration, political campaigning, balloting and ballot tabulation;
- electoral malpractice investigation techniques;
- measures of electoral integrity;
- assessing the impact of electoral malpractice on an election outcome;
- regional comparative review of electoral malpractice;
- procedural accountability controls and other malpractice prevention techniques;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

30 academic hours, 3 credits

Topic 15: Electoral Security and Conflict Prevention

Learning objectives

To be able to predict and profile electoral conflict in order to help develop measures to prevent, manage or mediate such conflict.

Key subtopics

This course explores the causes and manifestations of electoral conflict and the mechanisms that can be employed by state and non-state stakeholders to stem such conflict. Key subtopics include:

- why electoral security and conflict prevention matter;
- definitions of electoral conflict and violence;
- electoral conflict profiles, vulnerabilities and early warning signs;
- stakeholders—state, non-state, international;
- electoral security administration strategies;
- good practices in electoral conflict prevention and management, and their effectiveness;
- regional electoral conflict comparisons;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

20 academic hours, 2 credits

Topic 16: Electoral Justice Systems

Learning objectives

To understand the models of electoral justice systems, alternative electoral dispute resolution mechanisms and adjudication procedures in order to be able to design, manage and monitor these systems.

Key subtopics

This course provides an overview of the types of formal and alternative electoral justice mechanisms, but also assesses the issue from a practitioner's perspective by examining the administrative challenges associated with adjudicating such cases. Key subtopics include:

- the importance and role of electoral justice;
- definition of electoral justice and related concepts;
- prevention of electoral disputes;
- electoral dispute resolution (EDR) mechanisms;
- classifications of EDR systems;
- key principles and guarantees of EDR systems;
- elements of EDR systems: types of challenges and actions, deadlines, evidentiary issues and remedies;
- alternative EDR mechanisms;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

20 academic hours, 2 credits

Topic 17: Electoral Observation, Evaluation and Validation

Learning objectives

To understand the history of electoral observation, observation techniques and evaluation criteria to be able to render informed judgments on the quality of the conduct of an election.

Key subtopics

This course provides an overview of the types of electoral monitoring and observation, the administrative challenges associated with conducting such initiatives, and the criteria for evaluating the elections and options for reform. Key subtopics include:

- why electoral observation, evaluation and validation matter;
- definitions and objectives of electoral observation and monitoring;
- electoral observation/monitoring stakeholders—international, domestic non-partisan, political party;
- history of electoral observation and monitoring;
- organizational models for electoral observation and monitoring;
- role of non-partisan election monitors;
- role of political party agents;
- codes of conduct for electoral observers and monitors;
- parallel vote tabulation, quick counts and exit polls;
- electoral forensics;
- ‘niche’ monitoring—election technology, electoral conflict, delimitation, political finance, media;
- electoral evaluation standards and judgment criteria;
- electoral observation and electoral reform;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

25 academic hours, 2 credits

Topic 18: Policy Advice and Electoral Reform

Learning objectives

To understand how, in a typically highly political environment, appropriate, neutral policy advice can be given (and electoral reform options pursued) that best serves the voters and the democratic process.

Key subtopics

This course provides the knowledge to develop strategies and tactics to diagnose issues for reform, organize multi-institutional reform processes and manage the impact of these reforms. Key subtopics include:

- why policy advice and electoral reform matter;
- conceptual frameworks for electoral reform;
- electoral reform agendas and political impacts: assessing the interests of different stakeholders;
- identifying opportunities for electoral reform;
- institutional change agents and electoral management bodies (EMBs);
- incremental and radical reform: advantages and disadvantages;
- drawing on skills from outside the electoral world;
- mechanisms for explaining proposed reforms and building political and public consensus;
- change management and implementation, including within an EMB;
- assessing the impact of electoral reforms;
- managing opposition to electoral reform;
- main areas in which things can go wrong and lessons learned; and
- future challenges and opportunities.

Suggested length

20 academic hours, 2 credits

About International IDEA

What is International IDEA?

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. International IDEA's mission is to support sustainable democratic change by providing comparative knowledge, assisting in democratic reform, and influencing policies and politics.

What does International IDEA do?

In the field of elections, constitution building, political parties, gender in democracy and women's political empowerment, democracy self-assessments, and democracy and development, we undertake our work through three activity areas:

- providing comparative knowledge derived from practical experience on democracy building processes from diverse contexts around the world;
- assisting political actors in reforming democratic institutions and processes, and engaging in political processes when invited to do so; and
- influencing democracy building policies through the provision of our comparative knowledge resources and assistance to political actors.

Where does International IDEA work?

International IDEA works worldwide. Based in Stockholm, Sweden, it has offices in Africa, Asia and Latin America.



The Model Curriculum for the Master of Arts in Electoral Policy and Administration (MEPA) offers a comprehensive internationally-minded training route for election professionals in the form of one-year Master of Arts programme.

Designed for current and aspiring election managers, policy makers and practitioners involved in elections, it reflects the flexibility required to effectively cater for different regions. MEPA was developed by an international expert group convened by International IDEA in early 2013 to discuss post-graduate studies in electoral processes.



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ISBN: 978-91-87729-45-4