

Rebuilding trust in electoral institutions

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Therese Pearce Laanela

School of Regulation and Global Governance (RegNet)

Australian National University

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Candidate's declaration

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Therese Pearce Laanela

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Abstract

The storming of the Capitolium in Washington and the collapse of the Afghan government are reminders that our democratic institutions are both precious and fragile. Less dramatic but equally concerning is a slow-burning undermining of institutions, whether through relentless political pressure, external threats, declining internal morale or rising defiance. Electoral management bodies (EMBs), the institutions designated to manage political change inclusively and peacefully, must be trusted for election results to be accepted. This trust can no longer be taken for granted.

For this reason, many EMBs are now seeking to incorporate trust-building practices and mechanisms into their operational structures. Thwarting these good intentions is the stark reality that political agitation and tensions run high precisely when operational demands are at peak, creating difficult or impossible situations for electoral authorities to navigate with their reputations intact.

This thesis extends institutional trust-building theory to encompass and be practically relevant to electoral authorities. Grounded in desk studies, participant-observation fieldwork in Tunisia and a dialogic survey with globally active field practitioners, the research focuses on the interplay between stakeholders' expectations, the handling of predicted events and crisis moments by authorities, and the consequences for institutional trust. Using social science insights to enable a richer, contextualised understanding of electoral trust dynamics, this thesis describes how stakeholder anger and feelings of injustice complicate transactions and information flow with electoral authorities and deplete the legitimacy capital that EMBs require to expedite democracy.

While the technical delivery imperatives of election administration are well understood, this thesis shows a wider range of stakeholder needs and expectations that

matter for trust-building. In addition to delivery-oriented transactional trust, an EMB trust-building model must also include values-oriented relational trust and the predictability that allows for security-based trust. By highlighting stakeholder perspectives, the thesis provides a social perspective to what has been seen as a technical and administrative problem and provides a broader range of pathways for EMB trust-building policy and practice.

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List of abbreviations

ACE	Administration and Cost of Elections project
AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
ARMM	Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
ANU	Australian National University
CAPEL	El Centro de Asesoría y Promoción Electoral
CSO	civil society organisation
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EAP	Elections Assistance Programme
EBA	Expert Group for Aid Studies (Expertgrupp för Biståndsanalys)
ECK	Election Commission of Kenya
ECP	Election Commission of Pakistan
EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
ELECT	Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow (UN program)
EMB	Electoral management bodies
IDEA	(International) Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IEBC	International Electoral and Boundaries Commission
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
INEC	Nigerian Independent Electoral Commission
IREC	Independent Review Commission
IRIE	Independent Regional Authorities for Elections (from French acronym)
ISIE	Independent High Authority for Elections (from French acronym)
JSCEM	Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
NAMFREL	National Citizens Movement for Free Elections
NCA	National Constituent Assembly

NDI	National Democratic Institute
OAS	Organization of American States
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RQs	research questions
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAFE	Secure and Fair Elections
TCC	The Carter Center
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States (of America)
WA	Western Australia

Chapter 1. The electoral trust problem

1.1. Why trust matters for EMBs

Democracies manage political change through elections. The political stability of nations relies on these regular events being run in a way that fulfils societal expectations. The responsibility for ensuring that electoral processes are run inclusively, fairly, peacefully and efficiently falls to electoral management bodies (EMBs) – the main protagonists and research objects of this thesis. EMBs are the state entities tasked with the administration of electoral processes, organisation of the electoral event, and delivery of an election result.

The consequences of a disorderly political transition are well documented in peace and conflict professional and scholarly literatures that link poor electoral integrity with social disharmony. If an electoral process breaks down or is rumoured to be corrupt or in some way discredited, the loss of citizen trust may be so great the results are rejected as illegitimate which can lead to instability or violence (Fischer 2002; UNDP 2009; UNDP 2011; Norris, Frank & Martínez i Coma 2015). Kenya, thought to be an oasis of stability in a volatile region, was brought to the brink of civil war in 2007 after a poorly managed vote count and to a constitutional crisis in 2017 when again election results were distrusted. The disproportionately high electoral assistance investments that flow to geo-strategically critical countries such as Solomon Islands, Libya and Haiti show that major donors such as Australia, the European Union and North America are acutely aware of the risks of failed elections leading to failed states (DFAT 2017; EBA 2021). Contentious elections in the form of opposition boycotts, post-election riots or protests and election violence including fatalities can undermine democratic transitions, accelerate instability in fragile states and jeopardise development and growth (Norris, Frank et al.

2015): while proliferation of false information, rumours and hate speech contributes to such contestation (Smidt 2020).

Ensuring that an electoral process stays on track is not easy. Despite many improvements in electoral management capacity and technologies, implementing well-run elections remains difficult, especially in countries with weak infrastructure, societal divides or corruption. Achieving accepted election results can be difficult also in countries where elections are traditionally well run (James 2020). Sweden, Austria and Australia have conducted expensive recounts or re-elections due to mistakes and mishaps.¹

Unexpected, delayed or close results can be a tinderbox in a high-stakes or agitated contest. The intentional undermining of EMB credibility can be a strategy that suits the interests of political spoilers. News of isolated voting aberrations, misinformation and rumour spread with the speed of a grassfire thanks to the ubiquity of smartphones and social media.

These are real and frightening contemporary problems for EMB officials. While EMBs may be increasingly able to handle the technical challenges of elections, the evidence in this thesis shows that they are less well equipped to handle the problems of reputation and credibility, simply put, of trust. In this thesis, I make the case that trust-building is particularly difficult for electoral institutions because, during the electoral cycle, political agitation and tensions run high precisely when operational demands are at

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/01/austrian-presidential-election-result-overturned-and-must-be-held-again-hofer-van-der-bellen>; http://www.val.se/tidigare_val/val2014/omval_10maj/index.html; <http://www.svd.se/omval-i-bastad>; for Australia see chapter 5.

peak, creating difficult, sometimes impossible, situations for electoral authorities to navigate with their reputation intact.

Trust in EMBs is important for many reasons. In elections, 100% transparency is unattainable in practice, necessitating assumptions of good faith.² More broadly, social capital and behavioural economics literatures describe trust as a social lubricant that facilitates transactions in public as well as private space. In regulatory scholarship, trust between citizens and their institutions is premised as foundational for compliance, cooperation and delivery of public goods such as tax collection, elderly care or Covid-19 vaccinations. But most importantly and specifically for EMBs, trust matters because the key deliverable for EMBs is an accepted result. The ‘raison d’etre’ for the whole electoral process – and for the institutions responsible – is to determine and convey legitimacy to the incoming government. While each stage in an electoral process is a building block to ensure inclusivity and fairness, it is, in the end, the election result that matters for political stakeholders, citizenry and international neighbours. The election result determines distribution of power, political transition and the direction of a nation.

As post-election turmoil shows us, delivering an official electoral result is not sufficient to ensure an orderly transition. An election result must also be accepted as accurate and legitimate for the losing parties and their supporters to concede defeat – keeping in mind that their natural inclination after a hard campaign will be to resist a loss, and that they may assess that contesting the result could be strategically advantageous. This is dangerous territory. As Toby James explains, if there is disagreement about the results, the “consequences can be pivotal. A protracted dispute may undermine

² Thanks to Michael Maley for emphasising this point in feedback.

confidence in the electoral process or lead a country down a path towards civil war, undermine the stability of government or undermine voter confidence” (James 2020 p. 33). Within the gap between these two scenarios – an official result (whether accurate or not) and an accepted result (whether dispute is warranted or not) – lies the particular significance of EMB trust-building.

Acceptance of these all-important results is bestowed – by the electorate, by the international community in the form of ‘recognition’, and most importantly, by the losing candidates and their supporters. There is nothing automatic or straightforward about this bestowal. In elections, perception of the electoral process can matter as much as reality. Electoral processes, especially in high-stakes environments, are publicly commentated by a cacophony of competing voices from politicians, media, observer groups, academics and ordinary citizens via social media. The perceptions expressed will be influenced by expectations of what ‘should’ have transpired, what they have experienced personally, what they have heard from sources that are influential to them, and their personal or group interests. An unexpected, delayed, or close result may trigger anger about an earlier stage of electoral process gone wrong – a voters’ list that excluded or included groupings of people, an election commissioner appointment process overly influenced by the incumbent regime, or a chaotic election day. Future elections can be haunted by the misgivings inherited from previous experiences of these aspects of the electoral process gone awry. Trust is situated in these messy, fraught dynamics. The next section of this chapter uses the complicated dynamics of the Guinea 2010 presidential elections to illustrate and delineate the concepts and scope of this research project.

1.1.1 Illustrating electoral trust concerns: The case of Guinea

The case of the Guinea elections in 2010 illustrates some of the key moments and conditions that provide the compelling narrative and drama of an electoral event,

including the interplay important for understanding trust. The Guinea case exemplifies particularly well the dangers of a gap between the historical significance of (and stakeholder expectations for) an electoral process on the one hand, and the ability of an EMB to deliver on the other. It also exemplifies the role of EMB leadership and relational capabilities to navigate that gap and avert the societal consequences of a failed election.

Guinea case:

An historic agreement signed in Ouagadougou in February 2010 provided a road map to elections and civilian rule for the West African nation of Guinea. Traumatized by a dramatic sequence of events including the shooting of a president and an open-air massacre of opposition personalities, a successful election promised an end to decades of isolation and poverty for Guinean citizens. For fragile neighbouring states such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, a calm electoral process was a prerequisite for much needed regional stability. While the political and historical context for the 2010 election was traumatic, the election itself initially proceeded with an orderly base of domestic political will, international support, and the establishment of electoral rules and structures (Arieff 2009; Arieff & McGovern 2013; The Carter Center 2010a).

In stark contrast to the hopes and expectations placed on the elections – and unbeknownst to many of those expectant stakeholders – the fledgling electoral authorities of Guinea had little capacity to organise an electoral event. No definitive electoral law, no clear procedures manuals for electoral workers, no correct voters' lists and voters' cards, and a lack of infrastructure compounded their inexperience. The first round of the presidential election was deeply flawed. The public disaffection and distrust

at the chaotic handling of the vote count threatened to sink any hope for a peaceful transition to civilian rule (Arieff & McGovern 2013; The Carter Center 2010a).

Guinea descended into electoral discontent where deep ethnic division, undisciplined security forces and disgruntled unemployed youth emerged as serious security risks to a peaceful electoral outcome. The sudden death of the election commission chairman, and the inability of the deeply partisan commission to choose a replacement, contributed to a public perception that the election authorities were incapable of producing a second election event (the run-off presidential elections) or an election result that could be believed and trusted (Arieff & McGovern 2013; The Carter Center 2010a).

External intervention and intense negotiation resulted in the political compromise appointment of a trusted outsider, the Malian General Siaka Toumani Sangaré, to assume the leadership of the elections. Sangaré's sound professional electoral competence and experience, his fierce commitment to the non-partisanship of the electoral authority, and his rapid and intense confidence building with the key stakeholders pulled the careening electoral process back on track. On 8 November 2010, the second round of the presidential elections was held, a president elected and a normalisation for Guinea was finally possible.

In the Guinea example, General Sangaré recognised that the election problems were on multiple levels: practical problems of distributing voter cards, a perception problem from voters and candidates deeply worried about fairness, and the transference to the election arena of societal grievances not directly connected to election preparations. Rather than focusing only on the electoral preparations, he worked diligently to regain the explicit confidence of the major stakeholders: citizens, parties and the international community.

To gain this confidence, Sangaré needed to draw on an additional layer of activities and behaviours – ones that signalled and demonstrated his (and by extension the EMB's) engagement and commitment to a fair election. It is this additional relational layer that is of primary interest in this thesis.

1.1.2 Electoral management as relational work

This thesis examines this space of relational interplay – between the expectations of stakeholders, the handling of predicted events and crisis moments by the electoral authorities, and the consequences for trust in electoral institutions.

A social–relational lens on electoral management work recognises a disconnect between how EMBs perform and how stakeholders perceive and interpret that performance. In the Guinea example, Sangaré's leadership qualities and explicit normative behaviour and attributes were critical for regaining party engagement and public trust in the electoral process. Signalling, attending to perceptions, and social relationships were electoral management tasks alongside insistence on operational integrity. The relational perspective brings together efficient and effective performance of the EMB along with perceptions that the process is competently orchestrated and fairly executed.

The EMB also includes professional staff who carry out the election work behind the scenes, as well as a large cadre of temporary officials who serve in a face-to-face capacity with the public as polling or registration officers. Senior officers are frequently under intense time pressures and resource constraints at best, and under political pressure or threat of violence at worst. Frontline officers can be under stress from any technical or planning failures that hinder their ability to provide expected services. Either type of pressure can affect how they deal with the public.

1.2 Thesis research questions

To date, the relational dimensions of EMB activities and behaviours are under-examined. Because trust resides in the messy space of interactions and interplay, trust research requires some delineation to be manageable. This thesis explores how stakeholder expectations and relationships are understood, managed and met by EMBs in their month-to-month work of ensuring that elections are well-prepared and executed (electoral administration). It will show that for EMBs, gaining the explicit confidence of these major stakeholders requires an additional layer of activities and behaviours beyond the operational tasks normally in focus. The activities and behaviour in this relational layer are educative (to better handle stakeholder expectations to the rules and reality of electoral processes), performative (by demonstrating engagement and commitment) and responsive (attending to stakeholder concerns whether genuine or malintended).

The chapter that follows reviews the emergence of electoral management as a field of study. It proposes EMBs as critical actors for democracy to function, public trust as a key factor for EMBs to succeed, and contemporary political dynamics as complicating that public trust. What is missing from the body of literature is how, on the granular working level, this electoral trust is to be achieved. That is, electoral trust is important, lack of trust is a contemporary problem, but... what do we do about it at the micro-level, and what policies and 'ways of thinking' underpin trust-building work?

This thesis aims to fill this literature gap by addressing three research questions:

- How are micro-interactions important for EMB trust-building? (RQ1)
- What behaviours, attitudes and strategies build and foster trust in electoral institutions? (RQ2)
- How can trust-building be incorporated into the electoral management process? (RQ3)

1.3 Thesis structure and logic

The following chapter describes how EMBs have come to prominence with a mandate to manage political change inclusively and peacefully. The literature described in chapter 2 shows how support for democratisation processes increased dramatically in the 1980s and '90s because policymakers and academics linked discredited elections with economic and regional instability. Support for transitional elections made the field of election administration visible, international, standardised, coherent and built a cohort of talent. Within this context, the concepts of integrity, trust and credibility have grown in importance.

Chapter 3 switches focus from the world of EMBs to the academic literature on pathways to institutional trust, with special focus on the intersection between micro-events, professional interactions and institutional trust-building. Regulatory scholarship in particular recognises the complexity and dynamics of institutions as they become embedded in different contexts while also recognising stakeholder motivations, fears and expectations that can impinge on institutional legitimacy. Concepts of legitimacy, trust and institutions are defined. The goal of chapter 3 is to identify a set of dimensions that have been associated with trust in the academic literature.

The remainder of the thesis uses an abductive methodology rather than a hypothetico-deductive methodology to build, through empirical research, a model of trust-building that suits the contexts and realities in which EMBs operate. As empirical data are pitted against the 'classic' trust dimensions from literature, some dimensions become less relevant, some change form, and some new dimensions emerge. This occurs in chapters 5 to 7.

In chapter 4 (Methodology), I justify my use of qualitative methods and grounded theory as the most appropriate for addressing the research questions and their focus on the dynamic processes by which EMBs build and sustain trust in electoral institutions. I

account for the three stages of data collection and analysis that support the step-by-step construction of an emergent trust-building model. First, desk studies of elections in crisis allowed me to identify broad patterns in stakeholder – EMB dynamics and the degree to which socio-relational factors were important for trust-building above and beyond transactional deliverables (chapter 5). Second, participant observation of seven district EMBs in Tunisia during an electoral period allowed a deeper understanding of the dynamics between officials and contestants (chapter 6). Third, accessing the collective wisdom of experienced practitioners through in-depth interviews (para-ethnography) allowed for integration of new learnings into EMB practice and reflective findings in chapter 7.

In chapter 5, the first of the data analysis chapters, I focus on six well-documented, practitioner-recommended case studies (Philippines, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Australia). These cases are analysed in terms of interplay (actors), incidents leading to crisis (as illustrative to identify dynamics), and fluctuating confidence in the EMB. The desk studies starkly display the twin pressures of logistics and stakes (complexity and intensity) that make trust-building and trust-retention difficult for EMBs.

The chapter concludes that logistics can never be perfected to the point of completely avoiding uncertainty. Furthermore, the very nature of elections – a competition between presumed equals – can never avoid the fact that stakes are high for candidates, supporters and other interested parties. Across the global and historical cases which included various stages of democratic and social stability, the chapter shows how institutional trust depended on a complex and fluid interplay between the socio-relational and transactional expectations of stakeholders and the handling of predicted events and crisis moments by authorities.

Chapter 6 switches focus from the documented accounts of elections to investigating how the challenges of logistics and stakes are handled in the field and how relational interactions can deplete the legitimacy capital that EMBs require to expedite democracy. I provide context on the Tunisian legislative elections and a detailed description of the Tunisian electoral process at the district level, with focus on EMB–stakeholder emerging relations. Although the Tunisian EMBs chose to take electoral trust-building seriously, there were difficulties of achieving trust-building goals against the challenge of logistics and stakes. The relationally responsive constant changing of procedures and rules that occurred led to stakeholder confusion, compounding the anger and feelings of injustice that are inherent to most elections because of the high stakes. These high emotions complicated transactions and information flow with the electoral authorities. The Tunisian case through its detailed account of micro-interactions uncovered hopes of trust-building and acts of trust breaking.

Based on this analysis, a trust-building model is proposed to specifically address the areas of agitation that confounded the otherwise highly competent and committed Tunisian electoral officials. The emergent model posits three dimensions of stakeholder expectations that need attending to: delivery-oriented transactional trust, values-oriented relational trust and security-oriented care to provide predictability and avoid harm.

In chapter 7, findings are presented from feedback on the model gleaned from interviews with experienced electoral management practitioners and their stories of losing, rebuilding and maintaining trust. The emergent trust-building model is adjusted accordingly with the three dimensions reframed for relevance to the practitioner community as ensuring delivery, and building shared purpose and shared understanding of the rules of the game.

The eighth chapter summarises that while the well-understood technical delivery imperatives of election administration remain foundational, the trust-building model

places an equivalent emphasis on relational dimensions of service and values-based communication and recognition of stakeholder needs for certainty and clear pathways for redress.

The final chapter discusses implications for the craft of electoral administration and for theories of trust in public institutions. The trust-building model of delivery, shared purpose and shared understanding can be applied to new and old EMBs through planning, relational work and a cautious approach to change. In so doing, a social perspective is introduced to what has been seen as a technical and administrative problem. EMBs are provided with a wider range of pathways for future trust-building policy and practice.

Chapter 2. The expanding role of electoral management bodies – from bureaucratic administration to relational management

To understand Sangaré's role from the Guinea example in chapter 1, and the expectations on chief electoral officers in his role, we need to understand better EMBs and why they matter. In the late 1980s, EMBs emerged from relative anonymity to become centre-stage actors in an acceleration towards democracy on all continents. Political scientists and international organisations drew attention to the link between poorly run elections, contested results and societal instability. In many of the new post-Cold War democracies, economic and political solvency hinged on credibly-run elections. The pressure to deliver these well-run and accepted elections fell to an assortment of, sometimes hastily assembled, election commissions and equivalent bodies collectively known by the generic acronym EMB.

EMBs and their officers were thrust into positions of prominence and importance, sometimes beyond what they had the capacity for, and beyond what they were prepared for. Peace agreements such as the 1995 Dayton Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina and 1992 Rome Accords for Mozambique generated new state institutions in as little as 12-18 months, putting the designated electoral institutions (EMBs) under immense political pressure and harsh scrutiny from national and international media (Alihodžić 2019). The gap between what was expected and what was possible with domestic capacity created a small boom industry of electoral assistance, knowledge and technology transfer and codification of practice. The legacy of those early elections in new democracies, with attendant resources, professional values, body of knowledge and expected standards, formed the beginnings of what is now a global and reasonably cohesive field of electoral administration practice.

The final quarter of the 20th century brought remarkable changes to the way elections would be organised and understood. With the demise of dictatorships in southern Europe (Spain, Greece, Portugal in the 1970s) and South America (Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay in the 1980s) came a democratic euphoria as well as thoughtfulness and protective fervour about the mechanics and institutions that could safeguard a fragile democracy. The deeply felt democratic aspirations of the countries in transition were palpable. Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán (2013), in the context of Latin American democratisation, describe an elite commitment to democracy that transcended temporary needs to win specific elections (see also Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan & Listhaug 2005).

Likewise, the end of apartheid in Namibia (1989) and South Africa (culminating in 1994 elections) brought similar fervour and renewed interest in the design of democratic institutions and political culture for southern Africa³ more generally (Horowitz 1991; Kadima & Booysen 2009; Matlosa 2003; Pottie 2001; Reynolds 1999; Sisk & Reynolds 1998).

The catalyst for the biggest wave of new democracies was the end of the Cold War, a time that Samuel Huntington (1991) describes as one of 'dried out' support for non-democratic regimes. A post-Cold War optimism and reordering of power prompted regional and global shifts both in how electoral democracy was valued and in how electoral democracy was expected to work (Carothers 1999; Diamond 1995; Harris &

³ South Africa displayed strong regional leadership in this space during the post-apartheid years. The negotiations leading up to the ratification (2004, revised 2015) of the SADC (Southern African Development Community) Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections started during the Nelson Mandela presidency, and was actively promoted by President Thabo Mbeki. This process (and document) brought the concept of 'democratic elections' to the top of the SADC agenda and provided a regional definition and standard for 'democratic elections'. These standards emphasise (as the Latin American countries did) the importance of the 'independence' of electoral bodies, which were perceived as too aligned to the incumbent regimes (SADC 2015).

Reilly 1998; Horowitz 1993; Huntington 1996; Siegle 2004). At the national level, poorly run elections were a liability to the democratic credibility of any country and for its international standing, which in turn had the potential to jeopardise diplomatic recognition and financial (development) support. For the international community, non-accepted elections flagged great risk, a potential trigger for the eruption of conflict that could threaten regional stability. Risks to these new elections – these elections that were critical for the public to put faith in new democratic arrangements – ranged from delivery failure, to inadequate provisions for a level playing field, to partisan capture.

To avoid these risks, an emerging consensus was that the work of running and safeguarding elections needed to be entrenched in an institution of the highest standing of fairness and impartiality. This deliberate thoughtfulness about public institutions and safeguarding democracy supported the rise of institutions with a ‘higher purpose’, i.e. with an electoral integrity mandate beyond bureaucratic efficiency. The institutional architecture of these EMBs varied from heavyweight ‘electoral commissions’ and ‘election tribunals’ with constitutional protection and high status⁴ in emerging or reconstituted democracies, to traditional and low-profile public servant institutional variants persisted in western Europe and the United States (IDEA 2006; López-Pintor 2000; OAS 2011).

⁴ An example of this deliberate values orientation is visible in this extract from an Organization of American States retrospective (OAS 2011): “The road to democracy was paved by a number of protagonists committed to democratic values and principles. Their efforts were underpinned by regional synergies captured in resolution 1080, adopted at the OAS General Assembly session held in Santiago, Chile, in 1991, and the Protocol of Washington of 1992. For the first time ever, the states of the Americas reached agreement on defending their democracies and responding jointly to any threats to their continuity. This regional commitment to democracy deepened over the years, culminating in the unanimous adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IADC) on September 11, 2001, at a special session of the OAS General Assembly, held in Lima, Peru.

Intrinsic to this attention to institutional safeguarding was the idea that the responsibility for elections was a precious cargo, at risk. Harris and Reilly describe how organising the 1994 first post-apartheid elections was a “difficult process with shortages of materials, logistical problems, sabotage of the counting process, and systems failures” that made the EMB “acutely aware that failure to deliver a free and fair election might lose South Africa’s democracy at the very moment of its delivery” (Harris & Reilly 1998, p. 57).

Research showing that democracy brought economic benefits (see Madsen et al. 2015), and security benefits (see Brown et al. 1996) has fed into an emerging consensus on the benefits of democracy support (Carothers 1999; Siegle 2004, 2006). Concurrently, particularly for the United States (US), the practice of ‘conditionality’ in overseas aid programs explicitly tied economic support to governance indicators.⁵ For recipient countries, this created incentives to show progress in democratisation. Holding elections and building election commissions was a tangible way to populate the democracy aid programs that were expected during this time.

For organisations ready to step into the technical assistance field, this ‘good governance’ imperative made electoral assistance funding readily available, and in turn prompted an inter-organisational collegial push to coordinate approaches that would ‘prove’ that good governance objectives were being met. ‘Elections held’ served as low-hanging-fruit – a tangible output and readily visible milestone with which to access

⁵ Early funding for the research and initiatives of the early scholarship on elections and their management came primarily from the aid sector. Likewise, mapping and datasets were largely compiled by organisations rather than universities. To this day many databases are kept by organisations rather than universities; such as the International IDEA databases on electoral justice, electoral systems, gender quotas, political financing, voter turnout and voting from abroad. The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, jointly run by multiple organisations, keeps comparative data on electoral management. IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) has a clearinghouse focusing on the electoral rights of people with disabilities. The Carter Center manages a database of public international law references.

electoral assistance funding (for organisations) and meet conditionality requirements (for recipient countries). As such, support to EMBs became intuitively simple to include in broader governance-oriented development funding proposals. For public policy scholars, these dynamics of good governance and conditionality both derived from and fed a subset of documentation and scholarly effort on expectations of a ‘free and fair’ (or later, ‘credible’) election by codifying international standards derived from public international law and praxis and producing checklist type resources for EMBs and those supporting or assessing elections (Elklit & Svensson 1997; Garber 1984; Goodwin-Gill 1994, 2006; IDEA 2006; Johais 2019; OSCE 2013; The Carter Center 2009). Anchored in early experiences in Uganda and Zimbabwe in the early 1980s, election observation as a small industry was born.

In sum, the post–Cold War world order, along with the internationally negotiated peace agreements, provided a window of optimism, a chance to ‘get things right’. Democracy and governance were spaces of hope. Elections – with the optics of queues of enthusiastic voters – have become the most tangible manifestations of that hope. A plethora of organisations appeared at this time, moving into this democracy and elections space. All of them faced the challenges of getting things right on a technical level and being seen as getting things right on a broader societal level. The legitimacy of elections was important for future stable governance, and at the heart of legitimacy was trust in the outcome and trust in the process.

2.1 Electoral management as a practice

The profusion of ‘first-time’ elections across Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia profoundly and irrevocably impacted how the field of election administration took shape. These critical elections were held under difficult conditions: poverty, post-war, post-revolution, post-dictatorship; the perceived viability of

democracy hinged on their success. The imperative to run a successful first (or second) election prompted a creativity and exploration of new methods in election management under difficult conditions, often with a fleet of international staff borrowed from established electoral commissions overseas or from the international organisations. The mix of cross pollination and necessary creativity in electoral management led to practices that spread and globalised as news of innovations and mistakes travelled and spread from one country to another through networks associated with the United Nations (UN) and other democracy-supporting organisations.

The issues to address and the range of contexts in which elections were held provided a wide canvas for developing electoral management practice. For countries emerging from administrative and economic chaos such as Cambodia, or countries with displaced populations and fluid borderlines such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, compiling a civil or voters' register remained (and remains) a perennial challenge. For countries emerging from war or national disaster, ensuring the necessary communication and transportation infrastructure for holding a national event was necessarily the top electoral priority. In Mozambique in 1994, for example, relentless bombing, land mines and a cyclone had destroyed the major roads, railways and buildings necessary for electoral materials transport and warehousing. Countries like Rwanda or Bosnia-Herzegovina faced the difficulties of choosing electoral systems that could address the challenges of deep ethnic cleavages; that could accommodate representation of different groups but still be viable for governing.

2.1.1 Electoral management and norms-building

Solving public policy problems normally lies within the domestic remit of sovereign countries⁶. The global changes of the 1980s and '90s turned this assumption on its head. Anger, violence or instability from poorly-run elections in these first (and subsequent elections) risked bleeding over national boundaries to neighbouring or related countries. International actors such as the UN, the US and certain globally-minded countries of Europe noted these risks to regional stability with concern.

This concern for stability prompted the growth and priority of 'election work' at the UN, and the creation of specialist electoral support organisations such as the Washington-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems, better known as IFES. The UN Electoral Assistance Division was created as a specialist focal point for the UN to coordinate the workload around the landmark elections and popular consultations of the 1990s, specifically Cambodia, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and East Timor where the international community was expected to play a role. Decolonization and peacebuilding programs led by the UN specified a key role for elections (Boutros-Ghali 1992, 1997) as one peacebuilding step. The centrality of independent and professional EMBs in the design of UN missions⁷ thus contributed to the 'normality' of including independent election commissions as a default solution in state-building enterprises (Lyons 2004). Election observation became part of the democratisation landscape. Established democracies in Europe and North America, and

⁶ Before the Cold War, elections often developed iteratively and independently, slowly changing in response to domestic developments and demands. These incremental and isolated iterations explain the range of systems and anachronistic practices in old democracies, for example that UK elections are held on a Thursday because it was market day (James 2020).

⁷ With the exception of the 'early' electoral missions in Namibia (1989) and Cambodia (1992-92).

regional organisations such as the OAS, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Southern African Development Community (SADC), supported or conducted election observation missions ostensibly to ensure better conduct by their very presence – to bear witness and to encourage acceptance of results.

The new generation of nation-builders looked for institutions and mechanisms not only to facilitate political choice, but also to accommodate efforts that promoted ethnic conciliation and national unity. This meant, for example, a renewed interest in the consequences of electoral systems (as divisive or conciliatory), and a strong emphasis on civic education and ‘democratising democracy’ by presenting legislation and complex debate in plain language and in widely distributed formats. The innovations introduced in the countries of the southern African region left a profound global legacy of design, outreach and social inclusion (see Harris & Reilly 1998) in the form of voter education and civic (democracy) education. Cooperation with civil society became a natural feature of electoral management.

The practices and understandings of ‘how elections are done’ follows the trajectory described in the literature on the spread of transnational legal orders and global norms (Braithwaite & Drahos 2000; Dezalay & Garth 2012; Halliday & Shaffer 2014), vernacularisation (Merry 2006; Simion 2018) and policy transfer (Widihartanto 2014). These scholars show how, in sectors from taxes to rule of law to economic policy, global norms spread through key ‘travelling’ individuals, professional international meetings and cookie-cutter laws, regulations and projects.

An intense period of cross-national initiatives and meetings marked the consolidation of a community of practice, strong on knowledge on how to run elections, equipped with codified, election-specific norms; a community that was ever strengthening its capacity and confidence to deliver elections. Rafael López-Pintor discusses the phenomenon from the early 1990s onwards, of chief electoral officers

meeting regularly under the auspices of the Commonwealth or other conveners. Each occasion moved them closer to each other, closer to a unified profession. He says: “beyond their networking function, these associations have played an important role in the diffusion and consolidation of standards of electoral practice worldwide, and therefore in the enhancement of EMBs as institutions of governance. The papers that have emerged from some of the workshops ... as well as some of the resolutions ... indicate the expansion of what might be considered a world ‘culture of election management’” (López-Pintor 2000). The EMBs of Canada and Australia, as well-functioning independent bodies in geopolitically-interested countries, arose as models that showed how this could be done (DFAT 2017).

While acting as funders and advocates of these remarkable changes in ‘other’ parts of the world, European countries and the US were slow adopters of these practices themselves. In much of western Europe, elections were (and still are) run as part of ordinary public administration. In the US, individual states carry wide-ranging responsibility for elections including voting types, voting systems and eligibility requirements with a multiplicity of different local approaches to electoral management.

2.2 Electoral management literature

This section reviews literature specifically relating to EMBs. It is a short section. As Toby James explains, the management of elections is “chronically under-researched”, adding that “given that elections have been conducted in many countries for centuries, this is an extraordinary oversight” (James 2020, p. 6). The research that has been done is largely in the political science domain, using methods and theory of a different stream than this endeavour. Where others go ‘big’ (with, for example, large scale datasets) this project – because of its focus on relations and interplay - goes small. Both perspectives are helpful; the micro-emphasis path is less travelled.

2.2.1 Establishing a field of study (first wave of enquiry)

We can divide the literature on election administration into roughly three waves of enquiry. A modest 1990s first wave considered the role of an EMB and basic taxonomies around what an EMB is and what it does. If the first wave of scholarship established the field by identifying EMBs as an area of interest, later waves of study addressed the complexities of actors and mechanisms (second) and deeper societal dynamics (third).

Universities were remarkably absent in this first wave of literature on election management and administration. Academic interest in elections was focused elsewhere, on the political implications of election system design, such as how votes turned into seats and who benefited from which arrangements (Grofman & Lijphart 1986; Horowitz 1993; Mackenzie 1958; Nohlen 1996; Taagepera & Shugart 1989), as exemplified by the types of articles published by the early journal in the field, 'Electoral Studies', founded in 1982.

A small subset of scholar-practitioners, however, began making a case for taking election management seriously as a subject of research (López-Pintor 2000; Maley 2000; Pastor 1999a; Pastor 1999b; Rose 2000), building on Mackenzie's (1958) early advocacy of impartial election administration as a prerequisite for free elections. The earliest literature identified election administration as an essential factor in democratic transition and peaceful power transfer.

Rather than universities, certain organisations produced the key documents that shaped understanding of election administration in this first wave. As described in the previous section, these organisations were newly set up to support democratisation and 'free and fair' elections but lacked guidelines or consensus on how to operationalise this ambitious mandate. These organisations published a body of 'grey' literature that served two functions. Firstly, to fill a knowledge gap on electoral structures; that is, what choices

are available and how these choices play out, comparatively. Secondly, this “grey” literature filled a more difficult normative gap: what are the standards we expect from elections and electoral authorities? Documentation relating to both functions took the form of handbooks, guidelines and online resources⁸. Key contributions were to lay down criteria for independence of electoral commissions, to establish codes of conduct for electoral management, and to make voter education a visible dimension of election work (www.aceproject.org, Harris & Reilly 2005; IDEA 1997, 2006, 2010; López-Pintor 2000; OSCE 2000, 2013; Reynolds et al. 2005; Vickery 2011).

Post-conflict elections⁹ have a particular place in this earlier literature of election administration. Foreign policy in the early 1990s posited calm and accepted electoral processes as a prerequisite for post-conflict national and regional stability. Post-conflict elections were a key milestone or exit strategy when the international community was involved in a transitional process – whether the Paris Peace Agreement for Cambodia, the Rome Peace Accords for Mozambique or the Dayton Agreement for Bosnia (Alihodžić 2019). Scholarly work informed these interventions but also studied them to explain ingredients for success or failure in democratic transitions. These works named election management as a crucial variable¹⁰ to mark and ensure a viable transition to democracy (Anglin 1998; Collin 2014; Elklit 1999; Harris & Reilly 1998; Lyons 2004; Pastor 1999b; Reilly 2002).

⁸ I was involved in developing some of these global knowledge products – see Appendix 1 on positionality.

⁹ Elections as integral to peace processes to end civil wars and implement peace agreements such as in Angola (1992), Cambodia (1993), Mozambique (1994), El Salvador (1994), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996), Liberia (1997), and Tajikistan (1999-2000) (described by Lyons 2004) contributed to the imperative of understanding the conditions for, and the pitfalls of, this new field.

¹⁰ Robert Pastor was early to argue that organising elections in poor countries is particularly volatile because of the intersection between political suspicion and technical incapacity whereby one party can interpret a technical irregularity as politically-inspired by its opponents rather than as administrative failures (Pastor 1999b). See also Lyons 2004.

2.2.2 Addressing complexity in electoral practice (second wave of enquiry)

Early focus on EMB and electoral systems paved the way for a second wave of practice and literature in the early 2000s in which the electoral process itself (not just the institution) came under scrutiny, along with the multiple actors involved. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International IDEA and the European Commission among other electoral assistance actors conceptualised, adopted, and then advocated an electoral cycle approach that eschewed an ‘event’ view of elections, instead favouring a holistic and circular ‘process’ perspective (Bargiacchi, Bakken, Guerin & Gomes 2011; IDEA 2006; Leterme 2017). The end of an election marked the beginning of a period of reflection, consultation and the beginning of planning for the next election. The electoral cycle approach was not just a philosophical shift but was rather intended as a way of correcting a destabilising problem of donors ‘throwing’ money to elections at the last minute.

With this shift to an electoral cycle approach, the initial conception of an EMB as functioning through a narrow set of documentation around tasks and instructions for delivery made way for a more complex discourse on the interplay of multiple actors with different capacities and various agendas. This new understanding of multiple phases and multiple stakeholders introduced to the literature concepts of importance to this thesis, namely dialogue, consultation, outreach, communication strategies, liaison, and dispute resolution (Ellis, Guerin & Ayoub 2006; IDEA 2006; guides produced by the EU, UNDP, IFES and EISA).

During this period of an expansive reimagining of electoral management, universities were still largely uninterested in engaging in this newly emerging field as a site for serious scholarship. Some individual professors adopted dual roles as consultants and researchers, straddling the line between the two worlds of practice and academia by

writing academic papers alongside ‘real-life’ electoral assistance assignments (Barkan 1993, 2013; Elklit 1999, 2012; López-Pintor 2000, 2011; Pastor 1999a; Pastor 1999b).

Recognition of electoral complexity led to a significant broadening of scope in two directions. Firstly, the emphasis and boundaries of an election event were stretched forwards and backwards to bring into focus pre- and post- election-day responsibilities such as voter registration, boundary delimitation, procurement, recruitment, political party campaigns and financing, and electoral disputes. Collectively, these multiple dimensions are known as electoral processes. Elklit and Reynolds (2005) began the process of developing a comprehensive framework that included each of these phases/elements to guide scholars looking at a full picture of election quality that would later culminate in the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Index¹¹. Meanwhile, observer groups adopted this extended temporal and topical approach by staying longer and involving more elements in their mission structure and final reports.

The second broadening of scope was the acknowledgement of the many actors implicated in an electoral event. Conference and practitioner meeting working papers instigated by the electoral assistance actors remained the most common pathway for emergence of these new ideas.¹² In the first instance, the introduction of ‘other actor’ roles and perspectives in electoral events referred to political contestants (parties), recognising that their ‘buy-in’ was an essential ingredient in electoral engineering (that electoral processes and structures cannot and should not be designed in a vacuum). But the notion of ‘multiple actors’ in the electoral space also took into consideration

¹¹ For more on the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Index, see www.electoralintegrity.org.

¹² These resources are largely buried by now, but can be found by looking up early 2000 papers on the major websites at UNDP, IDEA, EISA, CAPEL/IIDH, OSCE/ODIHR and IFES, for example.

observers, media, electoral reform advocates, minority group advocates, donors, financiers, auditors, vendors, judges, regulators, security forces, educators and civil society; all possible contributors to the enabling environment in which EMBs operate. Scholarly work venturing into the role of observers (e.g. Anglin 1998, later Kelley 2010, 2012) or donors (Carothers 1997, 1999) served to reinforce this point. The insights regarding the complex 'enabling environment' of elections led the electoral assistance community to purposefully create links between electoral support and deeper democratic participation. One example is IFES's work to include disabled communities in the design of electoral materials and procedures¹³, another is UNDP's shift in programming of electoral assistance to include analysis, consultation and inclusion of multiple actors (UNDP 2007, 2009, 2012) and a gender perspective (UN Women/UNDP 2015) during all parts of the electoral cycle.

This intense period of reflection and deliberation on election administration as complex, nuanced and contextual accompanied the global spread of this new professional knowledge. Predominantly this globalisation of practice occurred through professional conferences and training workshops through increasingly engaged regional organisations (such as EISA based in South Africa, the Association of European Election Officials based in Hungary, El Centro de Asesoría y Promoción Electoral [CAPEL] based in Costa Rica) and sponsored by the major organisations in the field such as UNDP, IFES, the EU and International IDEA. Concepts like the 'electoral cycle approach', the acceptance of the role of impartial election observers, and the

¹³ See www.ifes.org, search on the word 'access' for extensive resources.

independence of the electoral commission are evident in conference literature, proposals and election literature throughout mid-'90s and early 2000s.

Consortiums of international organisations made a concerted push to launch umbrella projects such as a comprehensive training package (www.bridge-project.org) and the expanded online resource ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (www.aceproject.org). These projects served as mechanisms for capacity building, information-sharing and professional networking. Conferences and workshops were ubiquitous at this time in all continents, as regional organisations and networks developed codes of ethics and conduct, and encouraged their members to participate in training programs, peer exchanges and electoral observation missions abroad. These activities, initiatives, and resources contributed to a sense of professional identity and membership for individual election administrators and to the homogenisation of the election administration field as a whole.

The first and second waves of literature marked movement in the centre of gravity towards deliberation and recognition of increasing complexity around electoral processes. Innovation and cutting-edge thinking belonged to newer democracies. Faced with navigating the challenges of 'first' elections, new democracies, such as those in post-dictatorship Latin American and post-apartheid southern African countries, crafted electoral management structures and processes deliberately and carefully in contrast to the haphazard or organic evolution in earlier established democracies (Birch 2008; Pottie 2001; UNDP 2012). These modern practices, innovated in transitional environments, fed back into established democracies. The thinking around independence and impartiality of independent election authorities is one such example. As late adopters, Sweden established an independent electoral agency (formed 2001) as did the United Kingdom (also formed 2001), both with clear and public identities, albeit with different functions and mandates. From the Bush–Gore 2004 elections to the 2020 Stop-the-Steal campaign,

the US experienced a resurgence of interest in election administration with major interest and investment in ballot design, registration and voting methods, but notably without turning to independent EMBs.

2.2.3 Attending to the ‘soft’ side of election work (third wave of enquiry)

Scholarship in the first wave of enquiry established that EMBs were important actors. The second wave found that the political, relational and operational conditions for EMB work were complex.

But another part of the puzzle remained. Namely, how reasonably-run, ‘by-the-book’ elections could so fundamentally lack public confidence and result in instability – this was counterintuitive to the initial assumptions that only poorly run elections were linked with instability. The ‘colour-revolutions’ in post-election Eastern Europe served as reminders that an election needed to deliver not only official results but also accepted results.

It is in this third wave of literature that universities and academic literature finally overtake “grey” literature in prominence and contribution. Election administration emerged as worthy of scholarship, alongside the election-related topics that had traditionally held more interest to political scientists such as electoral systems, voting patterns, voter behaviour, conflict, international relations and constitutional design. The persistence of academic pioneers such as Sarah Birch, Jørgen Elklit, Robert Pastor, Andrew Reynolds and Andreas Schedler that led the way signalling election administration as worthy of serious scholarly attention finally paid a dividend with an upsurge of interest from younger scholars (see the work of Clark 2014; Duforge 2019; Garnett 2019; James 2012, 2014; Johais 2019; Lara Otaola 2018; van Ham 2015).

A clear signal was when the American and international political science associations accepted election administration as a standalone topic for their annual

conferences. Universities in Montreal, Sydney, Pisa, Norwich and beyond hosted projects, courses and meetings on election administration-related topics. The dynamism and convening power of Harvard Professor Pippa Norris resulted in an ambitious multi-year Electoral Integrity Project that provided an umbrella for scholars to convene and establish common parameters of what electoral integrity is, and how it can be measured (Norris 2013; Norris, Frank et.al 2013; Norris 2014b; Norris, Elklit et al. 2014). The Electoral Regulation Research Network, established in 2012, convenes scholars and practitioners in Australia to deliberate, reflect and share research findings¹⁴.

These scholarly initiatives produced research on factors that influence how electoral processes are run and how they are perceived, including the political environment, international pressures, the legal framework, prevalence of corruption, competence, and the logistical realities of the running of the elections (Bland, Green & Moore 2013; Birch 2011; Elkit & Reynolds 2005; James 2012; Mozaffar & Schedler 2002). A running theme throughout the research is the importance of public confidence (see for example, Elklit & Reynolds 2002; Elklit 2012; Global Commission 2012; Norris 2012; 2013). A series of databases¹⁵ include a modicum of soft issues such as measurements for fairness and integrity; for example, the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems includes a question on the fairness of elections used in studies such as Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan and Listhaug (2005) and Birch (2008).

¹⁴ <https://law.unimelb.edu.au/centres/errn>

¹⁵ The databases and datasets include: (a) the expert survey-based Election Administration Systems Index (Bland, Green, Moore 2013); (b) NELDA (National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy) developed by Susan Hyde and Nikolay Marinov; (c) DIEM – Data on Election Monitoring – info from 592 reports from 19 EOM organisations (Kelley); (d) QED – Quality of Elections Data based on US State Department human rights reports, and the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity database (Elklit, Reynolds and Norris 2013, see www.electoralintegrity.org); and (e) the sixth wave of the World Survey.

The recognition, categorising and research focus on electoral processes (rather than electoral systems, voting patterns or electoral systems) brought the research and practitioner community closer – with scholars needing access and practitioners and policy makers grateful for insights on policy direction. While public confidence, as shown in surveys, is recognised as important – the characteristics of how that trust is formed and shaped has not been a subject of study.

2.2.4 Third-wave spotlight on integrity and public confidence

The group of scholars focusing on ‘electoral integrity’ are concerned with behaviours that address credibility, that improve the quality of elections, and that prevent electoral malpractice or maladministration (Birch 2011; Elklit 2012; Norris 2012). A subset of literature establishes the importance of confidence in the electoral process and confidence in authorities (Birch 2010; IDEA 2006, 2012; López-Pintor 2000; Pastor 1999a; Pastor 1999b; Rosas 2010). Scholars discuss a credibility problem whereby elections are not trusted by stakeholders due to deliberate malpractice, inadvertent maladministration, or distrust in the legitimacy of the institution or process (Alvarez, Hall & Hyde 2008; Birch 2011; Elklit 2012; Kerr & Lührmann 2017; Norris, Frank et al. 2014; Schedler 2002).¹⁶

The grey literature also flags concern over the dangers of waning public confidence in electoral processes and institutions. The Kofi Annan-led Global Commission report (Global Commission 2012) put electoral integrity front and centre in

¹⁶ For Birch (2011), electoral malpractice is the deliberate manipulation of the electoral legislative framework, manipulation of the vote choice (e.g. through vote buying or intimidation), or tampering with the administration of the elections. Maladministration or mispractice refers to the things that go wrong when poor organisation puts election administration in jeopardy.

a call to action for senior policymakers worldwide, defining an expectation that any election be “professional, impartial, and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle” (Global Commission 2012, p. 6), and warning of the trust loss when “corruption, intimidation and fraud go unchecked” (Global Commission 2012, p. 3). For the leading organisation working directly with EMBs, the Washington-based IFES, a practical way to address credibility was to tackle fraud. To that end, IFES released a series of papers and processes to support EMBs seeking to detect, mitigate, and prevent fraud (Darnolf 2011; López-Pintor 2011; Vickery & Shein 2012).

International IDEA, UNDP and the Electoral Integrity Project developed curricula to address electoral harms (IDEA, UNDP and EIP 2015).

The pivot from ‘hard’ logistical issues of electoral management to addressing the ‘softer’ issues of credibility led to renewed interest in norms-building and norms-reinforcing. The election observation community took the lead in highlighting and defining ‘credible’ elections as intrinsically linked to international obligations (Boda 2011; Davis-Roberts & Carroll 2010, 2014, 2017; Norris 2013). The Carter Center compiled and codified legal obligations, treaties and best practice guidelines to create a Database of Obligations (The Carter Center 2009) to enable election observation missions to assess observed breaches against specific international or regional norms. Signatories to the ‘Declaration of Principles on Election Observation’ such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Union, the OAS, the National Democratic Institute and the African Union convene annually to discuss and coordinate their messaging on the credibility of elections in light of ever more complex and challenging electoral environments, particularly cases (such as social media misinformation) where international and regional obligations have lagged.

As with previous literature waves, there is a geographic shift of gravity in the community of electoral practice and thinking with new processes, ideas, methods and

actors. The technical issues of running elections have settled in place; newer democracies are pivoting to address the challenges of trust and integrity. Bhutan explicitly adopts a values-based approach for its electoral institution; Bosnia-Herzegovina adopts a risk-management system to monitor public electoral trust and map vulnerable areas;¹⁷ Nigeria, Georgia, and Indonesia lead globally in having accredited facilitators for running election administration-related courses¹⁸; the Romanian EMB regularly publishes a journal to share electoral practice; Mongolia hosts international meetings to push forward the norms of impartiality and Korea plays a lead role in convening EMBs worldwide.¹⁹ Trust in elections is squarely on the agenda.

Electoral integrity scholars are embracing this trust problem with innovative quantitative approaches such as developing and honing datasets to better address and correlate ‘softer’ and more granular aspects of electoral management and stakeholder confidence. The Electoral Management Survey and ELECT surveys address human resource and organisational management²⁰; the regularly updated Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Index measures expert opinions on all aspects of the electoral cycle; and the World Values Survey introduces questions regarding attitudes to elections.

Scholars are then using these data to highlight particular parts of election architecture and practice that can affect trust. Bowler et al. establish a baseline linkage

¹⁷ Explanatory video for viewing at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmkOfXO8MQw>.

¹⁸ <http://www.bridge-project.org/about-bridge/statistics.html>.

¹⁹ Conference on challenges for young electoral democracies in Ulaanbaator October 2012 as part of Mongolia’s presidency of the Community of Democracies; Korea hosted the largest gathering to date of EMBs from 74 countries for the Association of World Election Bodies in Incheon in October 2013.

²⁰ James, Toby S, Holly Ann Garnett, Leontine Loeber and Carolien van Ham. 2019. Electoral Management Survey 1.0. www.electoralmanagement.com.

Norris, Pippa, Alessandro Nai and Jeffrey Karp. 2016. Electoral Learning and Capacity Building for Tomorrow (ELECT) Data. Harvard Dataverse. [Http://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/MQCI3U](http://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/MQCI3U).

between administrative performance of EMBs and perceptions of electoral integrity (Bowler, Brunell, Donovan & Gronke, 2015). Going one step more granular, James highlights the importance of human resources practices for integrity, showing that organisational culture, recruitment practices, job satisfaction and job stress can predict EMB performance which in turn has implications for integrity (James, 2019).

Institutional design aspects are also increasingly granular, for example by disaggregating de facto from de jure independence for better trust and integrity outcomes (van Ham & Garnett 2019).

Because of its decentralised and diversified approach to how elections are managed, the US is a particularly interesting ‘petri dish’ for scholars, for example using data from the American National Election Study that measures citizen opinions on the fairness of voting processes. Importantly, this American data gives early warning on the dangers of populist narratives that fuel a profound and lasting electoral distrust (Norris, Garnett & Grömping 2020). These warnings have implications also for other countries, even Australia where electoral trust is normally understood as high, but where pre- and post-election surveys show evidence of suspicion of fraud (Karp, Nai & Norris 2018). Bringing in a wider perspective including data from Africa, Kerr and Lührmann (2017) show citizen scepticism in a more positive light, arguing that low scepticism can be the result of tightly held narratives controlled by regimes with low levels of media freedom.

What is clear across all of the scholarship and grey literature described in this section is that trust matters. The multiple entry points and areas of research are collectively building a picture that will inform choice points that democracies are facing. Table 2.1 presents a snapshot of these entry points. Academic electoral integrity research is currently increasing knowledge of how public trust in elections can be optimised through adopting particular institutional design and electoral architecture (column 1 in

Table 2.1). This body of research complements an active participatory ‘grey’ literature’ anchored in lessons learned from electoral assistance (column 2 in Table 2.1). This thesis contributes to the bigger canvas of how to rebuild trust in electoral institutions through a bottom-up approach that is more person-centred than institution-centred (column 3 in Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Illustrative table of approaches to electoral trust research

	Electoral integrity academic literature	Electoral support grey literature	Trust-building
Approach	Research that identifies optimal components for electoral design and democracy architecture	Lessons learned on ideal conditions and processes for delivering stable elections.	Investigation of the interactions where trust is built and the behaviours that build trust
Examples	Public financing Electoral systems EMBs models	Bio-technology in voter registration. Voting methods. Dispute resolution.	Mechanisms for addressing stakeholder concerns. Professional development and recruitment.
Reasoning	Institutional design choices matters for public trust.	Better elections build trust and acceptance of results.	Trust is built in interplay.
Whose trust is in focus?	General public.	Geo-political stability.	Political contestants and supporters.
Question	Does the existence of x affect public confidence	Does x work on the ground?’	How do stakeholders respond to this approach?’
Method	Datasets on structure measured against survey datasets on public confidence.	Topic-focused conferences and project evaluations.	Qualitative examination of EMB-stakeholder interplay.

The underlying assumption in column 3 is that what happens on the ground between people matters. This thesis uses data from the field – observations, stories and report – to validate this assumption, then proceeds to demonstrate that socio-relational factors account for why an election that objectively looks legitimate and credible can quickly dissolve into political chaos. Importantly, the argument presented contributes to finessing the institutional designs that enable electoral integrity by adding a new

dimension that reflects how people behave and relate to each other in the electoral context.

2.3 Trust-building: extending electoral integrity concepts

Institution-based trust is critical to building cooperation in most societies (LaFree 1998; Putnam 1994, 2000). In new democracies, there are reasons for thinking that the relationship between the public and the EMB might be particularly strong or particularly fragile. Inglehart (1977) argues that in materialist societies where people have known hardship and hunger or loss of family and possessions, people place hope in authorities to solve their problems of vulnerability and insecurity. In these contexts, an election authority that answers this hope is thus likely to attract trust. One that fails to answer this hope puts democracy in jeopardy, if people see other forms of authority as more attractive and stable.

The established wisdom is that in older democracies, at least at the national level, professionalised political parties exercise tight control over the communication of their candidates. The self-restraint of disappointed candidates and supporters has a calming effect on the dynamics of elections and their aftermath. A stable electoral system with its predictable sequence of elections can institutionalise hope for different political parties because it holds out the promise of future victories, which make current losses easier to swallow and less dramatic (Anderson et al. 2005).

This line of thinking reflects a tradition to segment between 'established and transitional' or 'developed and developing' countries and, understandably, to focus on transitional or developing countries where the need is greatest. Poverty and conflict may exacerbate and inflame agitation because so much more is at stake for groups who are looking to the election for a resolution of their grievance. Such an analysis is blinkered, however, by too great a focus on institutional stability and the security it offers. Mature

democracies may be better resourced to resist disruptions of this kind, but they are not immune to them. Institutions can falter in mature, well-practiced democracies as evidenced by the collapse of health care systems in Italy during the early months of the pandemic, the 2021 storming of the US Capitol, and the slow bureaucratic response to 2022 Australian floods.

The intense beginnings of transitional elections arguably shape the strengths and weaknesses of the election management field. The strengths can be seen in practitioner commitment and dedication to improve services for voters and candidates (Pearce Laanela, Alihodžić, Spinelli & Wolf 2021). The weaknesses are visible in the disconnect between societal expectations and the structural inability in most countries to deliver to those standards. EMBs are expected to handle not only large-scale logistics, changing technology and demands for faster and more accurate services but also to work under heightened vigilance in contentious areas relating to money, power and citizens' expectations. A broader, more critical and politicised audience of political actors and the general public follow electoral management processes alongside specialist international and domestic observer groups, pundits and traditional media.

2.3.1 Credibility, integrity and public confidence

At the policy level, the go-to concept when discussing elections is credibility. **Credibility** is the term applied when domestic or outside observers seek to 'objectively' judge whether the structures and implementation of any particular election were conducted in accordance with international obligations and domestic law. Credibility can be bestowed on an election by independent and trained election observers engaged in polling station observations, media monitoring, interviews and pre-election fieldwork to compile an evidence base to demonstrate that the election achieved its democratic objectives – or more specifically, lived up to the country's electoral law and codified

international standards on elections. In practice, this means that an election process is credible if it has met the standards of the EMB and the international community insofar as there is no evidence of corruption, intimidation, fraud or malpractice. If a formal observation mission has deemed an election credible, then accepted praxis is that there is no basis for reconsidering a re-run of the election or for criticising the EMB for failing in the exercise of its duties (Boda 2011; Davis-Roberts & Carroll 2017; EC/UNDP 2011; Goodwin-Gil 1994, 2006; Hyde 2011; OSCE 2000, 2013; Pearce Laanela 2017).

The semi-formal arrangement that underpins a credibility assessment constrains, but will not necessarily stop, individual stakeholders or pundits from criticising specific incidents or calling for reruns. Critics will be taken less seriously, however, once the credibility stamp is bestowed. Of course, angry stakeholders may then question the legitimacy, impartiality or competence of the observers themselves as has happened in specific elections such as Ghana in the early '90s, Ethiopia a decade later and Kenya more recently.

The important point about the term credibility is that it is formally codified in usage. The assessment methodology that leads to a credibility stamp is determined and agreed upon through a mechanism called the 'Declaration of Principles'. The declaration is a signed document, initiated by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and The Carter Center (TCC), held by the UN through their Electoral Assistance Division, and signed by all major observation organisations (including the Commonwealth Secretariat, OAS, the OSCE, the African Union and the European Union). The Declaration of Principles is also a forum for all signatories' yearly meetings to discuss and align methodology issues.

If credibility is the term used by the international community to discuss specific elections under scrutiny, then the term integrity provides another entry point to the same general normative ideal. **Integrity** has come to be the umbrella concept under which

scholars and practitioners alike have gathered to understand strategies that can counter the ‘ills’ of electoral maladministration, malpractice, distortion of results, violence, or intimidation (Alihodžić 2019; Birch 2020; Global Commission 2012; Norris et al. 2014). As discussed in chapter 1, this flourishing area of scholarship is a ‘broad church’ in terms of topics covered, including all aspects of electoral operations and electoral structures (e.g. electoral system design, types of EMBs). The aspirational ‘integrity’ objective (or vision) around which scholars align is one where elections are operationally sound, checks and balances are in place, and where electoral ills are absent or significantly and actively contained.

The definition of integrity from the Global Commission (2012) sits comfortably with the description of credibility provided above. Electoral Integrity was defined in the Global Commission Report (2012) as “any election that is based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as reflected in international standards and agreements and is professional, impartial, and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle” (p. 6). With this definition, integrity can be broken down into a set of performance indicators that can be assessed by experts and independent observers as the election progresses. But this is not to say that the citizens of a country will see things the same way.

A richer definition of integrity, designed for the context of public administration more broadly, is: “unity and soundness of purpose with processes in place to reflect on and evolve that purpose in response to community needs” (Braithwaite 2003, p. 270). Unity does not imply one-ness as much as coordination; that operations of one part of the organisation are not undermining the efforts of another part of the organisation. For example, suppose one part of the organisation keeps stakeholders briefed as standard operational procedure while another part of the organisation holds back information. In that case, integrity as coordination of operations is compromised. Soundness of purpose,

the second part of the definition, refers to the values and principles that give meaning and direction to the enterprise, which can be conceptualised at the broadest level of pursuing democratic ideals or at the local level of ensuring that each village has an opportunity to vote in a free and fair election. These aspects of the definition are in accord with the Global Commission definition above. The third part introduces a new element into the definition of integrity – “reflecting on and evolving that purpose in response to community needs”. These reflection and evolving purpose themes are important to remember as we move to the pragmatic recommendations towards the end of the thesis. The theme of ‘community needs’ is one that we explore in more depth already in this chapter: social psychology shows that needs and trust are deeply interwoven.

The topic of **public confidence**, sometimes also called public trust, is part of the electoral integrity literature. Most commonly, public confidence or public trust is measured in surveys designed to assess voter opinions, expectations and intentions (Birch 2010; McCallister & White 2011; Norris 2013). Public confidence data relate to electoral phenomena such as the timing of elections, quality of elections and the structure of EMBs (Birch 2008; Norris et al. 2013). These studies demonstrate that there are connections between how electoral structures and regulation are designed and the degree to which voters and candidates have confidence in the process. Birch (2008) uses survey responses to find links between formal autonomy of EMBs and popular confidence. Guillermo Rosas (2010) similarly uses Latin American surveys to understand whether the degree to which EMB administrators have independence from the political process affects attitudes (it does, he finds, especially among political elites).

The concepts explored in this section have in common an overt focus on how electoral institutions and their governance structures perform in relation to gold standards set by regional and international organisations and in relation to public

opinion. Yet, despite the best hopes of democracy practitioners, that there are no simple or linear pathways by which introduction of structure ‘a’ (design feature) leads to outcome ‘b’ (public confidence). Too many other factors intervene – not least the frontline behaviours of the electoral officers and the experiences of the election stakeholders in the relational realm of ‘micro-interactions’ (Kemper & Collins 1990; Lipsky 1978; Rice 2013).

2.3.2 What an electoral trust perspective adds

The previous section explained how concepts of credibility, integrity and public confidence are commonly used in narratives about elections. Each concept touches on two dimensions – on the one hand how an institution embodies its mandate and enacts its functions, and on the other, how individuals and the general public perceive the institution. It is in the gap between these dimensions of reality and perception that the trust perspective becomes so important.

As discussed in the previous section, practitioners and scholars seeking to understand (and address) the credibility gap around election administration have focused their attention on system choices and other structural aspects of the electoral architecture such as the design of EMBs or existence of public funding (Birch 2008, 2010; IDEA 2006). Handbooks and manuals developed by organisations such as International IDEA, IFES, and UNDP have provided structured guidance on the advantages and disadvantages of choices of many topics of concern, ranging from voter registration systems, electoral systems, to dispute resolution.

This structure and delivery-oriented way of seeing electoral processes influences practice. The imperative to find objectively plausible causal links between electoral

process choices and outcomes is one that faces electoral scholars,²¹ electoral assistance and election observation communities alike. For example, introducing biometric registration is predicated on the assumption that it can increase public trust by improving the accuracy of voters' lists and take the 'human' element out of voter registration. Similarly, the cost of highest-grade quality ballot papers to reduce risk of tampering in some parts of Africa is justified by the trust dividends of the security features such as watermarks (Kandawasvika-Nhundu, Mashumba, Matatu & Pearce Laanela 2018). These delivery – trust assumptions carry an undertone of 'objectivity' and fuel an ongoing discussion on how and with what criteria elections and their quality (integrity) can be measured, ranked and assessed as 'credible' elections, and 'legitimate' institutions (Davis-Roberts & Carroll 2010, 2014, 2017; Goodwin-Gill 2006; Norris et al.). In this long-running discourse, through both grey and academic literature, is the sense, sometimes overtly stated, that *if* the 'ills' can be 'fixed', or processes reformed, whether through better structures or institutions or processes, *then* results will more likely be accepted, violence diminished, public trust increased and so forth.

This thinking is often explicit in electoral assistance proposals and election observation reports: that with the right laws, structures and technology, then integrity, credibility and public confidence will be improved or achieved. The assumed relationships hold to a point. But there are instances where these intuitive linkages are thwarted. In other words, the same design features result in institutions or features that are trusted in one instance but distrusted in another. A technology that is seamlessly

²¹ Elklit and Reynolds outline these dilemmas well in their articles in the preparation of the methodology underpinning the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Index (2002).

introduced in one constituency causes suspicion and concern elsewhere. For example, electronic voting machines are the object of national pride in India, but in Botswana procurement of the same technology was fiercely contested. Domestically in the US and Brazil, voting technology choices have been weaponised to polarise views on the integrity of EMBs.

This thesis revisits these disparate outcomes through the lens of trust between EMBs and their stakeholders. The emphasis is on the meaning that stakeholders attach to what is regarded as EMB best practice with regard to laws, structures or technology and how decision-making processes played out in the electoral context. Who was excluded and who was included when EMB choices were made? Who do EMB choices affect, and how were those stakeholders informed? When decisions were implemented, how did officials behave in their interactions with questioning stakeholders? This relational dimension of the election administration portfolio has been under-studied and under-theorised in the context of electoral management. To visualise the relational dimension, we can think of frontline officers' preparedness to deal with citizens and political stakeholders in their day-to-day transactions. By extending the conceptual map to include a consideration of relationships of trust, how they are built and with whom, it may be possible to explain some of the less understood problems encountered by EMBs in their bid to establish credible elections.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how EMBs grew in importance, not only to organise elections but also as the carrier of hope for democracy. The chapter shows a shift in understanding of the pathways that lead to an accepted election result: from basic delivery of an event to understandings that recognise the influence of design choices,

electoral processes beyond the day, the role of a wider variety of stakeholder groups, and importantly, the context in which elections are held.

While actively pinpointing the importance of trust, academic literature has been slower to recognise the socio-relational dimensions of election management. Advocates from the community of practice have therefore lacked the 'proof' to demonstrate that deeper trust issues matter and that stakeholder-focused work is worthy of investment. The chapter therefore extends the current conceptual map in electoral studies to include a socio-relational interpretation of electoral trust. The purpose is to provide evidence for why (and how) managing the social and emotional demands of stakeholders in a manner that preserves an agreed standard of integrity is both desirable and practicable.

The next chapter provides a definition of trust that is useful for identifying the kinds of trust that are critical to an EMB fulfilling its mission, and reviews the literature to identify a set of dimensions of trust-building that can be tested for their applicability in different electoral management contexts, bearing in mind that there can be no compromising on agreed standards of electoral integrity.

Chapter 3. Pathways to trust

This chapter argues for an integrated conception of ‘trust’ that differs from that which has been the tradition in election-focused literature to date. Regulatory theory provides justification as well as a framework for this approach. Section 3.3 reviews the trust literature and identifies a set of ‘pathways’ relevant to building institutional trust. The pathways, that include socio-relational and transactional trust-building approaches, serve as a foundation for an electoral trust-building model to be built step by step via the empirical chapters that follow. Importantly, the relevance of micro-interactions for trust-building is established.

3.1 Approaching trust

Trust is a notoriously vulnerable good, easily wounded and not at all easily healed. / Trust is not always a good, to be preserved. There must be some worthwhile enterprise in which the trusting and trusted parties are involved, some good bread being kneaded, for trust to be a good thing. (Baier 1991, p. 110).

The social capital work of Coleman, Putnam and Fukuyama popularised understanding of how social bonds and social norms influence community, governance and economics (Coleman 1988; Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 1994). The importance and desirability of trust gained policy traction as the ‘soft variables’ in the policy and government literature. Sztompka explains this movement towards soft variables in many fields of social science as a legacy of Durkheim’s explanations of society and social behaviour in ever more complex and nuanced ways (Sztompka 1999). Sociologist Niklas Luhmann published his foundational ‘Vertrauen’ series of essays on trust already in the 1970s (Luhmann 1973, trans. John Wiley & Sons 1979), but the emergence of trust as area of focus across disciplines becomes more prominent from the late 1980s and accelerating in the mid-

1990s. Milestones in this acceleration were the volumes resulting from conferences convened by Diego Gambetta (1988), at Stanford School of Business in 1994 (Kramer & Tyler 1996), and a book series under the auspices of the Russel Sage Foundation Trust Project in the mid-1990s (see e.g. Braithwaite & Levi 1998; Cook 2001). The first wave to the third wave of election-specific scholarship described in chapter 2 can be seen along this same trajectory, with the softer variable concepts of integrity and credibility gaining importance.

But as many scholars (as well as laypersons) can attest, there is nothing easy, simple, smart, fair nor even inherently good about trust. Trust is bestowed – with trepidation. Trust is core to a decision to embark – or not to embark - on a presented opportunity, for example building a family or a business. The decision to go ahead – to ‘trust’ the people and pathway involved – means we risk something (e.g. an investment, our freedom) and are made vulnerable to those that we have trusted.

That risk and trust are inseparable is a matter of consensus across trust thinkers (Al-Ississ & Bohnet 2016; Baier 1991; Bohnet & Zeckhauser 2004; Job 2004; Jones 1996; Luhmann 1973 Luhmann 1973 trans. John Wiley & Sons 1979; Rousseau et al. 1998; Sztompka 1999). Trust involves risk, makes one vulnerable, and exposes one to betrayal (Al-Assiss & Bohnet 2016; Baier 1991; Rousseau et al. 1998).

Trust can be misplaced (Jones 1996), put vulnerable people at great risk (Jones 1996)²², and can perpetuate inequalities (Baier 1991). Trusting behaviours can enable

²² Recall Cambodian Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak’s letter to the American ambassador in 1975 as the Americans withdrew while the Khmer Rouge took over the country: “I never believed for a moment that you would have this sentiment of abandoning a people which has chosen liberty. You have refused us your protection and we can do nothing about it. You leave us and it is my wish that you and your country will find happiness under the sky ... I have only committed the mistake of believing in you, the Americans” (<https://afsa.org/sites/default/files/vietnamReflections009.pdf>).

corruption and in so doing, undermine integrity and legitimacy of process and outcome. Trust can perpetuate beliefs that are “abnormally resistant to evidence” (Jones 1996, p. 15) and trust can be a burden (Jones 1996). Jones writes: “when someone entrusts something to our care they expect us to respond to the fact that they are counting on us. Cases of objectionable trust or unwelcome entrusting, as when, for example, you burden me with your secrets” (Jones 1996, p. 90).

Iris Bohnet builds on the betrayal theme pointedly and specifically. She asserts that the difference between risk ‘in general’ and risk that relates to human interactions, is the aspect of betrayal when humans are involved (Al-Ississ & Bohnet 2016; Bohnet & Zeckhauser 2003). Hawthorn (1988) links trust, risk, betrayal and treachery. Our trust can be betrayed, this makes us vulnerable and betrayal is hardest on the most vulnerable.

Not only are there dangers to misplaced trust, but trust may not be necessary at all. In a backlash to the general consensus on the importance of trust, Cook questions conventional wisdom of the necessity of trust for cooperation by asserting that there are many other incentives and conditions under which perfectly functional cooperation occurs (Cook 2001, 2005). She provides a counter-narrative to the emphasis put on the importance of trust for the smooth functioning of transactions in social capital and contemporary management literature. Cook and colleagues explain that not only may trust not be needed, when other modalities are in place, but that, according to their case studies, in fact a lack of trust can motivate people to reduce risks and establish institutional mechanisms to secure cooperation (rather than faith in the trustworthiness of others). Their main point is that “the need for trust and trustworthiness as prerequisites to cooperation varies widely ... and posits the key role of scepticism, not necessarily trust, in a well-developed democratic society” (Cook, Yamagishi, Cheshire, Cooper, Masafumi & Mashima 2005).

John Braithwaite reconciles these conflicting perspectives on trust by advocating ‘institutionalising distrust’ to avoid the pitfalls of trust, and to create the safe space for simultaneously ‘enculturating trust’ to reap the social capital benefits that a trusting societal ‘culture’ brings (Braithwaite 1998).

So, if trust is not necessary or even necessarily good, then ‘why bother?’ The answer is that the risk/trust nexus must be navigated unavoidably for EMBs. The dynamics of trust described in the literature, relating to vulnerability, risk and betrayal, are potentially relevant to the field of election administration. Borrowing John Braithwaite’s distinctions (1998), if you have institutions that protect from treachery and exploitation, you are more able to trust individuals – this distinction between institutions and individuals is critically important. If your institutional structures and governance arrangements mean that risks are managed, then you are creating the safe space for people to trust each other and cooperate. Trusted electoral ‘frameworks’ or processes allow for the inherent vulnerability that candidature and likely electoral loss brings. A characteristic of a mature democracy is its well functioning institutional safeguards.

3.2 Towards a pragmatic trust definition

An interdisciplinary overview of the trust literature that takes the above debates about trust into account has been undertaken by Denise Rousseau and colleagues who offer the following definition of trust:

willingness to be vulnerable under conditions of risk and interdependence ... [Trust] is a psychological state that researchers in various disciplines interpret in terms of ‘perceived probabilities,’ ‘confidence,’ and positive expectations ... Trust is not a behavior (e.g. cooperation) or a choice (e.g. taking a risk), but an underlying psychological condition that can cause or result from such actions. Regardless of the discipline of the researcher, we share the root

assumption that trust is psychological and important to organizational life” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer 1998, p. 395).

This carefully constructed definition reconciles multiple attempts to understand and explain trust, some of which we will encounter in this chapter. Finding commonalities between the abstract conceptions of trust presented in this definition and the dynamics of EMB–stakeholder dynamics is a good start for thinking about how trust might be built in the EMB context. For example, the themes of vulnerability, risk, cooperation and interdependence noted in Rousseau et al.’s definition are relevant to understand and interpret how stakeholder interactions play out and how opinions about the EMB are formed. This thesis will show that the trust theme of ‘meeting expectations’ also resonates deeply.

The entity receiving trust, that is the entity that earns trustworthiness, can be an organisation as well as an individual. Being trusted means entities can be counted on to do what they should do (Baier 1991; Gambetta 1988; Luhmann 1973 trans. John Wiley & Sons 1979; Sztompka 1999).

The trust literature intersects with the institution-focused literature with recognisable common themes. As theorists explain, institutions are the social means of making life orderly and predictable; that which makes life orderly and predictable generates public trust. The norms and social constraints that institutions bring create the stable foundations so that people (individuals and groups) can get on with their lives and pursuits (Goodin 1996).

For transaction-oriented scholars who emphasise delivery of services as the basis of trust in public (or private) institutions, citizens trust systems and authorities to dependably and reliably ‘do what they are supposed to do’. Regulatory and procedural justice scholars, meanwhile, also emphasise the relational and value-oriented dimensions whereby systems and authorities ‘behave as one would expect and hope’ in accordance

with social values of decency and probity (Cooper 2020; Downie & Llewellyn 2011; Murphy 2016; Tyler 1990). Themes of competency, honesty, predictability and reliability as critical to institutional trustworthiness dominate the empirical trust literature (Borum 2010; O'Neill 2002; Rousseau et al. 1998; Sztompka 1999), noting that it is the risk of betrayal that puts predictability and reliability into the 'trust' category (Hawley 2014).

Predictability, delivery-competency, ethics and expectations are potentially relevant dimensions for EMBs establishing their trustworthiness. Citizens expect their EMBs to 'deliver' something or to 'behave' in certain ways. For the purpose of this thesis then, trust is a psychological state, held by one or shared with many, that expectations for a fair and well-run election will be met in accordance with both the EMB mandate as expressed in duly deliberated laws, charters and constitutions (on the one hand) and (on the other) in the people's hope for their country's democracy or the political actors hope for a 'fair go' in their pursuits within that democracy.

At this point, it is tempting to conclude that trust derived from reliability and meeting expectations is the critical kind of trust for EMBs to promulgate in the communities in which they operate. Under 'normal' circumstances, institutions are trusted when they predictably and consistently live up to expectations (Douglas 1986; Goodin 1996; Sztompka 1999). However, it is the societal and political aspects that show most starkly the 'not normal' nature of electoral trust-building compared to other public administration equivalents. These fall in the relational side of our trust-building exploration. The stream of relational trust research speaks of a long-term 'affective' predisposition towards people and groups; a "deep psychological bond, perhaps formed early in life, that provides individuals with a "reservoir of good will" towards the institutions that they are asked to evaluate and that renders these institutions legitimate" (Rosas 2010, p. 77).

From this perspective, trust is driven not so much by being able to predict that things will unfold in an orderly predefined fashion, but rather by a psychological assessment that the relationship between two parties is defined by good will – one will not intentionally harm the other and what is more, will take the other’s needs and position into account. The difference between the perspectives is the extent to which one party can count on the other²³. The first perspective defines trust as knowing the other will meet expectations that have been previously negotiated and articulated. It will be referred to as transactional trust. The second is believing the other will be considerate of one’s interests. It will be referred to as relational trust.

This thesis asserts that this second form of trust, relational trust, is essential to EMBs convincing stakeholders that procedures and outcomes are fair and should be accepted. And further, this stakeholder confidence can only happen when relational trust is embedded within the institutional architecture whereby rules and codes of conduct are clearly set out and explained to stakeholders. In other words, an EMB is trusted not only for delivery of services but also for considering the needs and interests of stakeholders and acting towards these stakeholders in ways that are responsive, reasonable and fair. An EMB is trusted to honour the electoral process rules and electoral management professional codes of behaviour. Communicating these value-oriented signals through these behaviours matters. Because the election phases of ‘campaign’ and ‘results’ are crackling with misbehaviour, misunderstandings and mistrust, a trusted authority needs

²³ Braithwaite and Levi summarise as follows: “Pettit points out that institutional constraints can go only so far to ensure freedom from the domination of others. Pettit argues that in addition to external constraints that institutionalize impersonal trust, a mechanism is required to reinvigorate trustworthiness as a civic virtue. The mechanism Pettit proposes is trust responsiveness, triggering trustworthiness by trusting. Communicating personal trust in another who desires to be thought trustworthy gives that person a powerful incentive to act in a trustworthy way” (Braithwaite and Levi 1998, p. 4).

to be seen as ‘above’ the political game-playing, as safeguarding the whole. The political stakes can foster and create an agitated, suspicious environment; unresolved or deep-seated societal grievances can infect and polarise perceptions of the electoral process. These effects are compounded by the natural or manipulated cadence of social media. These dynamics embedded in modern political contests explain why simply ‘organising elections’ as an administrative exercise does not suffice to prevent contested elections, stakeholder mistrust or unaccepted results.

The central proposition of this thesis is that a dual-track understanding of trust-building is necessary in electoral administration. One track is delivery oriented and transactional, focused on the operational dimensions of trust-building; that is, an institution ‘doing what it is supposed to do’. The second track looks at interpersonal and societal dynamics, focusing on the relational dimensions of trust-building, particularly in atmospheres of stress, agitation and contestation. This is the realm also of micro-level behaviours, decisions and communication and their impact on citizen perceptions.

3.2.1 The role of institutions

An early step in the exploration of institutional trust-building is clarification of the function of institutions. ‘Institutions’ can be a synonym for organisations but is more formally used by theorists to describe patterns of social behaviour that have regularity and purpose; that give order to social life (Douglas 1986; Farkas 2019; Goodin 1996; Rice 2013; Yap 2019). Goodin explains that institutions are socially necessary constraints; that is, “organized patterns of socially constructed norms and roles, and socially prescribed behaviours expected of occupants of those roles, which are created and re-created over time” (Goodin 1996, p. 19).

Using this wider lens, public authorities are then not simply an organisation doing a job, but they are, more importantly, entrusted custodians of a valued social good.

Citizens, beneficiaries or stakeholders expect these public authorities to exercise their duties in such a way that they add public value, whether that be in relation to law and order, fair taxes, aged care or stable currency. Denise Rousseau speaks about the caretaking of the public good as a social contract between citizens and institutions. She explains that because “cognitively limited and emotion-driven human beings can respond to situational forces by truncating their plans for the future even in the face of their best intentions” (Rousseau 2012, p. 11), institutions can ensure that higher-order goals are met.

The field of behavioural economics builds on this premise– that societal mechanisms and default systems can benefit individuals in ways where individual choice falls short, such as in the case of pension planning or health insurance (Thaler 2015; Thaler & Sunstein 2009). The language of social contract used by Rousseau points to orderly society as upheld through the contract-like relationship whereby institutions safeguard a valued public good, and citizens comply with the rules that ensue (Rousseau 2012). UN Secretary-General Antonio Gutierrez emphasises the urgency and relevance of this approach: “now is the time to renew the social contract between Governments and their people and within societies, so as to rebuild trust ... People need to see results reflected in their daily lives ... It should also include updated governance arrangements to deliver better public goods and usher in a new era of universal social protection, health coverage, education, skills, decent work and housing” (Gutierrez 2021, p. 4). While Gutierrez frames the duty bearer in the social contract as government, it is institutions such as hospitals, schools, and housing commissions that deliver to citizens the public goods listed in the UN ‘Our Common Agenda’ as critical for human wellbeing.

The ways in which scarcity, vulnerability and uncertainty affect trust in institutions are recurring themes in institution-focused literature. A perceived or real inability to deliver or protect the entrusted public good can take on a deeper meaning,

akin to a betrayal. Because of the deep linkage with human wellbeing and safety, institutional failures, whether due to mismanagement, mistakes or misbehaviour, pose a threat to people. What is at stake is our ability to trust the system that has been put in place to benefit us, making us vulnerable and uncertain. The term precarity – “life without the promise of stability” (Tsing 2015, p. 2) or “unstable, uncertain, and vulnerable ways of being” (Brenman 2021, p. 22) – is used by scholars to describe how and why uncertainty is so destabilising for society and disturbing for individuals (Butler 2012; Millar 2017). Judith Butler gives the example of infrastructure that fails in disaster situations, leaving us without shelter, thereby vulnerable to hunger and disease (Butler 2009). For example, the World Health Organization was put under pressure for not providing definitive or timely accounts of the handling or mishandling of the Coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan.

Ability to deliver and protect public goods is deeply intertwined with institutional legitimacy, discussed in the following sections. Legitimacy gives institutions the moral and legal authority that underpins compliance and delivery – eroding legitimacy leaves a dangerous vacuum, as Tucker (2018) addresses compellingly in his examination of the disconnect between legitimacy, values, structure and behaviours of central banks. Similarly, Longstaff (2015) warns of the societal consequences of the erosion of legitimacy of parliaments.

With this big-picture framing in mind, electoral institutions are conceived in this thesis as the organisation, actors, events, norms and rituals that prescribe how elections are planned and run. EMBs are central to this concept, as the guardians and executors entrusted with the mechanics of a nation’s democracy, with the challenging task of either establishing or reinforcing practices of free and fair elections. EMBs form part of the bigger set of social arrangements that are referred to here as electoral institutions.

We can then conceive of electoral trust as a virtual spiral: trusting this election outcome (accepting this election result) confers trust on the systems and authority (EMB) that delivered this trustworthy event. This systemic trust, trust in the electoral authorities, will confer trust on future electoral results – which will be crucially important for acceptance of those results if social tensions are running high, if the results are close or unexpected, or if something like a pandemic requires preciously trusted systems or processes to be changed radically.

The valued public good is electoral democracy itself – a fair process that ensures the stable and periodic transfer of power to a government representing its people. Citizens trust their institutions to deliver order. Voters – unless disillusioned, mistrustful or cynical - expect elections to be fair. Implicitly the hopeful voters will trust authorities to make sure the rules are followed and trust that the outcomes are accurate and representative. Living up to these expectations is difficult; failure to do so can be calamitous.

3.2.2 Trust-related concepts and electoral management

An institution can have a better or worse reputation than it deserves based on factors both within and beyond its control. This is certainly the case in the pervasive ‘disconnect’ between documented events and activities in election administration and perception of events and activities discussed in chapters 1 and 2; that is, certain steps may have taken place and there may be evidence that they took place, but perception of the actioning of those steps can be different. The 2020 US election provided a very high-profile example of perceptions of what happened departing from the evidence and documentation of what happened. The distinction is an important one, as is the central proposition of this thesis that documented performance, while important in its own right, is not enough for elections to be accepted as fair. More is needed. In the early days

of conceptualising what was to become the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Index, Elklit and Reynolds asserted that the quality of an election could not be measured objectively, rather that the quality of an election depended on the “extent to which political actors see the entire electoral process as legitimate and binding” (2002, pp. 86-87). Toros and Birch (2020) point out that this perception-anchored understanding of electoral integrity can be problematic if weaponised by actors in bad faith. Unjustified allegations can be made which can take hold and undermine the legitimacy of objectively acceptable elections. That said, a perceived lack of electoral integrity cannot be defined away as irrelevant and needs to have a place alongside more objective indicators.

This also applies to the related concepts of legitimacy, credibility and public trust. These concepts have a particular role in reflecting the societal rather than administrative or operational role that elections play. For those in the frenzy of running elections, operations are the dominant concern. However, because intense contestations of political power and public policy are at play, in their regulatory and operational roles, EMBs perhaps more than other operationally-intensive institutions, need to navigate the more intangible and at times more challenging measures of success that link to perceived intent, competence, honesty or fairness.

Legitimacy is a concept more recently used to capture the subjective elements of deference to an authority, that is, accepting that the power that is being exercised institutionally is not only legal but also worth of compliance. Legitimacy is critical for public institutions to function effectively, achieve cooperation (compliance), and achieve the social outcomes for which they were created (Beetham 1991; Braithwaite 2003; Goodin 1996; Putnam 1994; Tyler 2006). Legitimacy is based on having a rightful, lawful place in the structure of society. The law specifies purpose and actions, validating the ‘right’ for a public institution (designated organisation, such as an EMB) to do what it does (its mandate). Simply put, an organisation is legitimate when it does what it is

designed to do, with the added caveat that this ‘doing’ should be done in such a way that aligns with that purpose (Longstaff 2015; Putnam 1994; Tucker 2018). For example, as citizens–stakeholders, we would expect an anti-corruption agency to have a meticulously clean financial statement or we would expect that an anti-discrimination board would include representatives of traditionally marginalised groups.

Along with the structure-law meaning of legitimacy is a social acceptance meaning. An institution that is legally established with a purpose and structure is imbued with meaning and value by those that it serves. There is considerable evidence in the organisational and institutional literature that trust shapes legitimacy. In other words, when people have trust in an institution, they imbue that institution with social standing (Pettit 1995) and social legitimacy that adds to that institution’s authority – above and beyond its legal mandate (Douglas 1986; Goodin 1996; Tucker 2018).

Gibson writes that legitimacy is the “substance that oils the machinery of democracy, reducing the friction that inevitably arises when people cannot get everything they want ... Legitimacy is loyalty; it is a reservoir of goodwill that allows the institutions of government to go against what people may want at the moment without suffering debilitating consequences” (Gibson, p.289 quoted in Tyler 2006). An institution can have that legitimacy even if unpopular; though unpopularity threatens to erode that legitimacy.²⁴

The concept of legitimacy spanning a structure-legal interpretation and a social acceptance interpretation paves the way for expanding the meaning of trust beyond a

²⁴ In elections, there is another, more commonly used usage of the concept, namely that elections bestow legitimacy on government (when elections are ‘credible’).

more transactional duty-focused definition. Trust involves acting in ways that create social bonds of loyalty when things go awry as we will demonstrate below. Such bonds may pose dangers as Toros and Birch (2020) point out, but the risks cannot be avoided, only managed, when the institutional infrastructure and safeguards have yet to be fully established.

3.2.3 Regulatory theory as a framework

The multiple and shifting dimensions and levels in citizen–institution interplay demand a framework that can accommodate complexity and ‘messiness’. Regulatory theory is helpful for this purpose. Regulatory theory asserts that people’s relations with their institutions are complicated, and that these relations can and should be examined through interdisciplinary tools and lenses; by shifting between laws, structures and technology and stakeholder experiences of inclusion and respect, by shifting between micro-macro social processes; and by accepting, and mapping, multiple sources of influence on these social processes (Drahoš 2017).

Regulatory theory follows the tradition in sociology whereby power, resistance and reaction are continuously in motion between multiple actors. Within this motion, the interplay among institutions, stakeholders and onlookers are jointly shaping both discourse and the movement of events (Foucault 1963; Valverde 2010). Applying a regulatory perspective to examine institution–stakeholder relations, demands, in the first instance, recognising the complexity of human agency and the influence of interplay between agencies and individuals on the course of events. The fluidity of agency and the importance of interplay mean that not only designated, ‘legitimate’ authorities exert power and agency. Stakeholders use their power and agency as well to further their agendas.

In turn, this recognition has implications for how we see EMBs in the trust-building dynamics; namely as part of a fluid and moving network of actors. To get something done in this regulatory space, an EMB will need to influence these networks in different ways – simple ‘command and control’ methods will not suffice. EMBs also must come to terms with the fact that they, in turn, will also be influenced by stakeholders, onlookers and events.

Concepts of networked and nodal governance (Burriss 2008; Burriss, Drahos & Shearing 2005; Holley & Shearing 2017; Maher 2017) and the concepts of webs of dialogue and webs of control (Braithwaite & Drahos 2000; Widihartanto 2014; Widihartanto & Braithwaite 2016) are examples of tools to analyse complex systems of individuals and institutions who ‘co-shape’ the regulatory environment. An illustrative example is the work of the Centre for Tax System Integrity between 1999 and 2005 on the topic of tax compliance. Through multimethod and long-term research projects in cooperation with the Australian tax authorities, Braithwaite and her colleagues mapped how trust relations play out at multiple levels in state institutions (Braithwaite 2003, 2009a; Murphy 2004).²⁵

Their research on institution–citizen interplay showed that trust was built (or lost) by officials at every level from headquarters to the frontline to third parties (Wurth & Braithwaite 2018). Senior and public-facing officials needed to negotiate the myriad transactions, misunderstandings and unmet expectations, and tax practitioners played a role in translating ‘official messaging’ into practice with varying degrees of compliance (Hobson 2004; Murphy 2004, 2008). The research findings also showed that different

²⁵ A full set of background papers available at the Centre for Tax System Integrity legacy website: www.csti.org.au.

strategies were effective for different non-compliant taxpayers depending on the motivations behind the non-compliance, eg whether negligent or deliberate (Braithwaite, Murphy & Reinhart 2007). Those taxpayers who were essentially ‘good citizens’ responded well to polite reminders from the tax authorities, while serial ‘gameplayers’ or disengaged taxpayers required more targeted strategies. These insights influenced the field of regulatory research in general, and specifically resulted in a shift in practice of how the Australian Tax Office communicated with taxpayers (Shover, Job & Carroll 2003; Job & Reinhart 2003).

Studies that are broader in scope, such as the Australian tax study, show that people trust differently (Braithwaite & Wenzel 2008), and for this reason there are no easy formulas for institutional trust-building, no checklist. In the following section we will see how scholars address this multidimensional trust story in various ways.

3.2.4 Trust as multidimensional, multilevelled and dynamic

Trust scholarship is often prefaced with words to the effect that ‘trust is important but also complex and elusive’. To unpack ‘complexity’ and to pin-down ‘elusiveness’, a breakdown as follows may be helpful: trust as multidimensional, dynamic and multilevelled.

Trust is multidimensional because people trust differently, with different starting points, motivations, predispositions, influences and emotional responses. For individuals who place trust, these different starting points or responses are linked varyingly in the literature with their distinctive individual personalities, expectations, upbringing, experiences, but also with the surrounding social discourse and societal norms (Job 2007; Stern 2008; Sztompka 1999; Tyler 1990). Job (2007) speaks of ripples of trust, whereby early experiences and personality shape an inherent disposition to trust (or not) reinforced or changed by socialisation, experiences or personality.

How do these different trust bases affect the way citizens see their institutions?

Tyler lists normative values as a key facet that influences people's trust in institutions (Tyler 1990). By normative values, Tyler means ethical views, personal morality and views about legal authority in general. Tyler also emphasises the importance of believing one is being treated with respect and in a procedurally reasonable and fair way (Tyler 1990, 2006). Similarly Stern points to local perceptions of officials' fairness and honesty as key to minimising opposition to change (Stern 2008). Braithwaite's trust norms theory divides citizen expectations into two larger categories – those that look to institutions for security and predictability and those that deliver care for the population and understand their needs (Braithwaite 2009b). Citizens expect their institutions to 'comply' with both to prove their trustworthiness.

Trust is unstable (or, framed positively, 'dynamic') because these multiple dimensions play out differently over time and depending on context. In her research on the cadence of trust needs and patterns over time, Sundaramurthy (2008) exemplifies this dynamism with her compelling depiction of deteriorating trust within family businesses as the businesses grow and develop. With her organisational science perspective, Sundaramurthy shows the necessity of adaptation of structures and processes to sustain the interpersonal trust that, in the case of her research, allows for business growth. She shows how early trust is inherent in the family structures, that is, the business can 'piggyback' on the trust that was borne of pre-existing family dynamics. As the business grows, trust-inducing systems, procedures and behaviours need to replace the initial family trust, demonstrating that trust's nature and the trust-building strategies needed are context, time, and 'relationship' specific. A meta-analysis of business trust literature illustrates the time dimension by highlighting the importance of repeated exchange and cooperative history which allow for trust, predictability and efficiency in business transactions (Meier, Lütkevitte, Mellewig & Decker 2016).

Similarly, scholars make the point that trust is multilevelled. Trust relationships arise when people put their trust in individuals, in institutions, in societal norms. Trust can also be aggregated up, to societal trust or various groupings within society's propensity to trust. Different stakeholders have different expectations on the same institution; shareholder trust in an airline will have different preconditions than passenger trust. Different research strands engage at different levels. Moral philosophy examines trust on the broad human level ('we as human beings', see Jones 2012; Stokes 2016); sociology, behavioural economics, political science and social psychology at the societal and human behaviour levels (Cialdini 2001; Merton 2018; Sztompka 1999; Thaler 2015; Tyler 1990, 2006); psychology and anthropology at the small group and individual level (Coleman 1988; Herman 1992). The regulatory, organisational and business literatures (Braithwaite 2003; Braithwaite 2009a; Kramer 2006; Murphy 2004; O'Connor; Tsafnat, Thomas, Glasziou, Gilbert & Hutton 2019; Rousseau 2012; Salancik & Pfeffer 1978) focus on the institutional/individual level (what makes institutions trustworthy, how trust works between companies and within companies).

These different viewing points into trust dynamics help us understand where to look for trust problems and trust-building opportunities in the electoral process. If trust is multilevelled, multidimensional and dynamic, this means that the first point of trust-building is the recognition that multiple dimensions of trust need to be attended to at all levels of work. While trust at one level may break down, trust at other levels may compensate until breaches of trust are put right. This imperative will guide the empirical work in this thesis.

The objective of this thesis is to identify pathways through which an EMB can build trust. Whether that trust is particularised or generalised – a distinction routinely made in the academic trust literature - does not matter for the purposes of identifying trust pathways that EMBs can use to build trust. Which type of trust appeals will depend

on individuals, their dispositions and their experience; which type of trust-building will be effective will be dependent on the context of the interplay in question. Any model for building trust needs to resonate with those who opt for particularised trust as well as those who opt for generalised trust.

Another common distinction made in the academic literature is between social trust, that is, the trust between community members, and political trust, that is, the trust in political institutions. Job argues that social trust flows into political trust (2005, 2007); Rothstein and Uslaner (2005) argue that political trust makes social trust possible (2005). Bargsted et al use a panel survey from Chile to show social and political trust having positive effects on each other (Bargsted, Ortiz, Cáceres & Somma 2023). Theoretically, social and political trust are expected to correlate, but empirical findings have been mixed, with some concluding that the relationship is at best low (Zmerli & Newton, 2008). Recently, Aassve and colleagues conducted a longitudinal study demonstrating that political and social trust can move in different directions in times of crisis. Their findings show how negative perceptions of Covid-19 management led to a decline in political trust and at the same time, an increase in social trust (Aassve et al 2024).

For an EMB, a trust-building model needs to be cognisant of both kinds of trust from day one, and seek to integrate, indeed braid, social and political trust together because both are necessary for eliciting cooperation and ultimately having election results accepted. At any time, a crisis can undermine trust in the political system or can ignite distrust among members of a social group. Building a trust pathway that has capacity to strengthen both is a prerequisite for EMBs working in the field.

Finally, a major cleavage in the trust literature has to do with conceptualising trust as about performance or morality (Connelly et al 2018). Does trust grow from being capable, reliable and a good performer or does trust grow from being an ethical and moral person? Both are important components of trust though their relative importance

will vary across contexts and across people. Again, for an EMB wanting to build trust, both need to be recognised as necessary characteristics of a trustworthy workplace.

These differences fragment the trust literature and make it difficult to easily translate academic analysis of trust to an EMB context where the goal may be to build trust in a relatively short period of time. This thesis first and foremost aims to integrate the theory and empirical findings across disparate studies to extract the ways in which an EMB might set about building trust across the diverse range of stakeholders taking part in an election.

3.3 Trust-building pathways

This section canvases a wide literature to identify thematic clusters that, given what is known of how EMBs function (chapter 2), offer a potentially useful set of pathways for institutional trust-building.²⁶ The pathways are deeply interconnected but each adds a new lens for examining the trust dynamics at play.

Figure 3.1 summarises the types of trust literature that were canvassed for this first state of identifying relevant thematic clusters. Literature on *why and when people trust* is foundational to the thesis quest to understand how to build trust and maintain it for EMBs. General trust theories contribute to understanding the kinds of challenges that EMBs are likely to face with stakeholders such as candidates, political parties, citizens and powerful interests. At the heart of this thesis is the assertion that EMBs need to understand people, which in turn means fully acknowledging variability and volatility in

²⁶ In this journey, some general trust theory will fall outside of scope, as some of the prevailing ideas on trust lose relevance when applied at the public institution level. For example, trust theory related to predisposition, family, and ethnicity is not included.

the trust that people – the electoral stakeholders – are likely to express. The goal of delineating pathways is to extract from theoretical and empirical work as many plausible routes to building trust, or ‘tools for the EMB trust-building toolbox’, as possible. Sometimes the empirical support for pathways is limited. Given the complexity of the task of EMBs proving themselves trustworthy in a variety of contexts with a variety of stakeholders, this review of pathways opts for inclusiveness. The empirical work undertaken and reported in subsequent chapters will tease out which pathways are most useful for EMBs and which are not particularly useful or relevant.

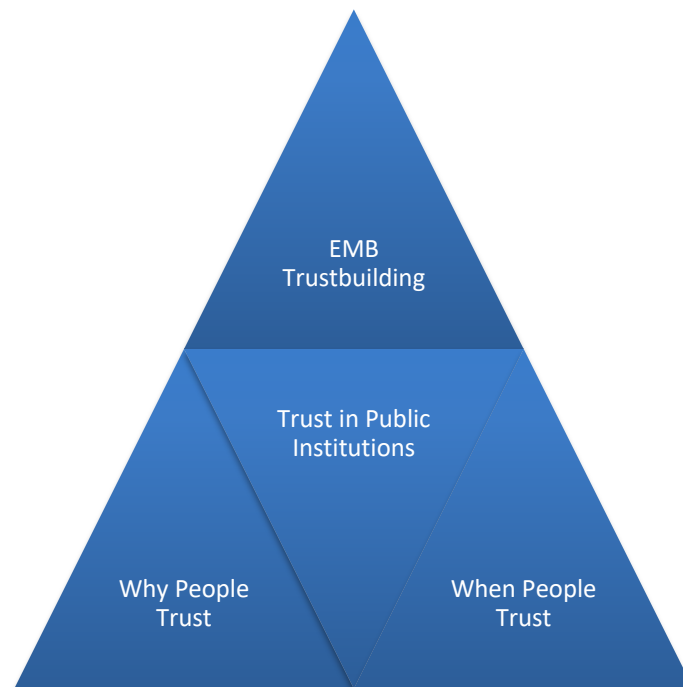


Figure 3.1: Types of literature on trust

Equally important in Figure 3.1 is the literature on when and why people trust public institutions (and lose trust in public institutions), a different question from when and why they trust each other. Kernels of valuable insights are sought across the spectrum in recognition that threats to EMB trust run across the full gamut of interactions with the public and with influencers of trust in the media and politics – from interpersonal exchanges at polling stations to operational decisions to developing high-

level policy on electoral systems, trust-building can be likened to the game of ‘Whack-a-mole’ where quick responsiveness may be needed on multiple fronts. Resting on a ‘people-oriented’ foundation are the structures and institutions robust enough to allow parties and voters to place their trust even when an election outcome does not favour them, and individuals may disappoint them.

The pathways for institutional trust discussed below are not even, equivalent or clear cut; they are as multidimensional, multileveled and dynamically interwoven as trust itself. The higher-level *meeting needs and expectations* pathway speaks to the fundamental and underlying purpose of institutions and warns of a dissonance when an institution performs to its formal mandate but misses the mark on what stakeholders need or expect. The next two pathways look more closely at the execution and operationalising of the institutional mandate, whether over time (*predictability and order*) or specific instances (*delivery and competence*). Recognising trust-building as relational, the next three pathways focus on what relationships need to achieve from the institutional perspective (*cooperation and compliance*) and from the stakeholder perspective (*fairness and do no harm*). The spectrum from big-picture mandate to frontline interplay finishes with a spotlight on *micro-interactions*. Each pathway brings a new lens for looking at the institution-stakeholder relations of relevance to EMB trust-building challenges.

3.3.1. Meeting needs and expectations

Outsize expectations are placed on EMBs. During the waves of democratisation and post-conflict transition, newly formed EMBs bore the weight of domestic and international hopes and expectations for smooth transitions from war to peace, from authoritarianism to pluralism, from chaos to stability (Alihodžić 2019; Leterme 2018; Lyons 2004; Pearce Laanela et al. 2021). The capacity to understand, address or live up to

these expectations matters for trust-building and has been recognised as important in regulatory practice.

Karen Jones explains that trust “must involve an expectation as well as an attitude” (1996, p. 10). With this phrase she makes explicit the theme of expectations, sometimes called hope, which runs through all trust literature, whether related to trust placed in individuals or in institutions. If expectations are met, that is, if an initial tentatively placed trust is met by satisfactory service or behaviour, a trust-building virtuous spiral is put into motion (Luhmann 1973 trans. John Wiley & Sons 1979, 1988; Jones 1996; 2012; Stern 2008; Sztompka 1999).

In transaction-oriented trust, expectations are explicit and obvious. If we nervously entrust our broken-heeled Milan-bought shoes to the unknown shoe repair shop, our fervent hope is that the shoes will be returned on time and in good shape to wear to the gala opening. Should this be the case, the likelihood of bringing further shoes to this shop increases, as does the likelihood that we will endorse the shop to friends. We expect the aged-care facility to care for our relatives, and that the tax authorities will assure that our money does not go astray. Disappointed expectations do not go unnoticed – the tentative trust bond is broken irrevocably or regained only through arduous effort.

So ... what do we expect of whom? Or, as Sztompka asks: Trustworthy for what? When there is a disconnect between expectations and delivery, even if the delivery is fully legal and appropriate to mandate, trust wavers or is lost. Scholars such as Sztompka (1999) and Braithwaite and Levi (1998) have tried to explain how and why our expectations of our public institutions and their officers, whether explicit or unspoken, can be so different –from institution to institution, depending on the context and from person to person.

Social psychologist Braithwaite explains, in her theory of trust norms, that we citizens imbue different expectations on the different institutions we deal with; that there are intrinsic values or sets of beliefs that citizens bring to their expectations of public institutions and to gauge trustworthiness. The broad categories of conceptions of trust (trust norms) can be linked to empirical counterparts within the belief systems of individuals, for example that people who broadly are drawn to security and order will trust institutions that provide security and order (Braithwaite & Levi 1998). She proffers a set of ‘security’ or ‘harmony’ aligned norms, whereby the trust-bestowing citizen has a deep-seated preference in expectations of behaviour, e.g. level of caring, from different public institutions: a security-oriented citizen has preferences for order while a harmony-oriented citizen places value on public goods such as the environment or social inclusion. Sztompka similarly describes that our trust in institutions is profoundly interlinked with our expectation of how that institution delivers, behaves and presents itself. Akin to Braithwaite’s harmony–security dimensions, Sztompka describes an axiological – instrumental continuum of expectations such as fairness from a judge or service provision from an agency. Precariously, an institution like an EMB may not know where it falls on these spectra (what stakeholders expect) until it disappoints and trust wanes. For example, “what people expect of a good president is efficiency, organisational talents, leadership abilities, that is mostly instrumental qualities. What they expect of a good supreme court judge is moral integrity, honesty, impartiality, that is, mostly axiological qualities” (Sztompka 1999, p. 84).

What complicates the trust picture further for the ‘trustee’ is that expectations can also reflect underlying and unspoken needs and expectations, not directly related to the mandate or transaction. Because people trust differently, different stakeholders may hold the EMB to different sets of expectations and fall differently on the security-harmony trust norms spectra. For example, we might expect a doctor to be not only

competent but also understanding. Despite receiving the appropriate prescription, we might feel a diffuse and lingering sense of dissatisfaction. We expect a grandparent to be welcoming and feel let down by a gruff and irritated welcome. We might expect a spouse to remember an anniversary (without any explicit agreement that this should be the case) and feel hurt when the day passes without recognition. In some of these cases, past history will mean it is not so important and we move on. But within the context of an election, this may not be the case. A busy and anxious EMB officer may be dismissive of a candidate's request without realising it. The candidate may recognise the busy context but feel poorly treated in an unresolved way. The fact that it is unresolved and sits there as an irritant is what makes it potentially dangerous. It predisposes to an adverse reaction later when there is a more rational reason for being betrayed²⁷. Trust has been compromised by doubt that this is a relationship where one has respect for the other. These dynamics have public institution equivalents in terms of both our explicit and our unspoken hopes, needs and expectations.

A premise of regulatory theory is that compliance, cooperation and institutional trust demand attentiveness to these stakeholder's expectations, even those that are unspoken. Valerie Braithwaite gives the example of a charity organisation that – for fiscally responsible purposes – shifts emphasis from grassroots work to a more efficient and results-focused model, with an ensuing indignant and angry outcry from members²⁸.

²⁷ Chapter 5 in this thesis gives several examples of this based on fieldwork observations, showing how excellent interactions can buffer future disappointments, and disappointing interactions can sow seeds that disrupt at a later moment in the electoral cycle. Whether a mistake is viewed as trivial or grave can depend on whether 'people like you'.

²⁸ A reader of a thesis draft provided the following equivalent anecdote from the electoral world. An electoral commission automated the payment system for polling station staff (direct deposits). The district electoral officers were angry with the efficiency measure, as the 'handing' out of cash payments had served as a precious relationship-building opportunity, a post-election meeting ritual for thanking polling stations officers for their contribution and encouraging commitment to future events.

She explains that their change in model failed to take into consideration the ‘expectations’ the members placed in the charity and thus: “they may be efficiently run and well-funded organization, but they may lose the confidence of the constituencies that they were originally designed to serve and that have traditionally supported them” (Braithwaite & Levi 1998, p. 67). This disconnect between institutional mandate and stakeholder expectation foreshadows events described in the Tunisia case (chapter 5) whereby relations deteriorated when political actors from independent and smaller parties expected behaviours and outcomes (access to media) which were neither within the mandate nor the capacity of the EMB.

This problematic discrepancy between mandate on the one hand and expectations in the form of unarticulated hopes has implications for electoral institutions. Stakeholders do not always have the language to explain why their expectations were not met, and in some cases, they may feel even embarrassed to do so, particularly if they come to realise that their hopes were unrealistic or fanciful.

Whatever the reason, the problem is that ‘we’ imbue into elections a collective hope that is bigger than the event. This means that EMBs need to understand expectations in a more personalised and contextualised way than institutional theorists would predict if trust is to be built.²⁹ It means that EMBs need to build trust actively through listening to expressions of expectations and then clearly and repeatedly articulate

²⁹ Research panel member Staffan Darnolf points out in correspondence that “the expectations can be low and therefore easy to meet, because EMBs and processes have a poor track record. So you might meet expectations, but still not contribute to the trust. Also, if the EMB has proven to be professional and impartial previously, it carries with it a certain trust reserve into the next election making it able to withstand a dent in its trust value without negatively impacting the legitimacy of the outcome even if the election itself took a hit.” (22 Oct 2013)

and appropriately respond to the expectations that can be met and those that cannot. And it means that multiple pathways to trust may be needed.

3.3.2. Predictability and order

At best, elections are familiar and welcome events, with recognisable and recurring attributes and cadence. Legal scholar Graeme Orr describes the electoral calendar, with its timetable of rules and rituals around nominations, campaigns, opening and closing, and declaration of results as creating a “familiar set of patterns by which we recognise the authenticity of the elections and through which we experience it” (Orr 2015, p. 52). This familiar set of patterns is a stabilising element. Destabilising elements come both in the function and the holding of the elections, because of frictions that manifest when societal fault lines run deeper than institutions can manage, and because fierce contests for power and resources intensify as elections approach. An exemplifying electoral cycle looks something like the following: after a flawed election, parties and the international community call for reforms. The implementation of reform brings unintended consequences, delays and mishaps, keeping a change carousel in perpetual motion. This carousel hinders the establishment of the calming and reassuring ‘rhythm and ritual’ of elections evoked by Orr. An under-resourced EMB will struggle to deliver predictability under shifting mandates, delayed legislation or financing or when morale or professional skillsets are weak.

This latter scenario is problematic for institutional trust. Fear of change can be linked to fear of harm for people in a vulnerable state or who have experienced trauma (Herman 1992; Maslow 1943). Where people have been through hardship, they will turn to authorities for security (Inglehart 1977). Themes of precarity (Butler 2012; Tsing 2015) and vulnerability appear in a burgeoning set of public response literature related to disaster management, climate change and risk and resilience work (Haines 2017; Hutter

2010). Chaotic change can undermine trust in authorities as does erratic and unpredictable behaviours by an individual or institution. But even necessary and orderly change or reform can feel and be disruptive, especially for those well versed in old practices and procedures. Ordinary investors and consumers are known to be averse to change, as Kahneman and Tversky's prospect theories and endowment theories explain, whereby people would prefer to avoid loss than to take a chance on possible gains. They explain that fear of loss and needs for certainty trump rational calculations of gain in uncertain situations (Kahneman & Tversky 1979). The work of Richard Thaler and his successors on behavioural economics also reinforces the findings of people as inherently risk and loss averse (Thaler 2015). Sociologist Black posits that change in any direction is destabilising to the individuals involved, and he attributes the root of violence and societal disruptions to changes in 'social geometry' whereby people have shifted in, for example, hierarchy or social distance (Black, 2011).

In a highly charged environment, such as a post-conflict environment, new institutions can be fragile if norms, roles and patterns of behaviour are not well established. These new institutions are set in place to safeguard or provide a public good that has suffered in conflict (such as peace, financial infrastructure or democracy), and in so doing need to constrain actions or send signals (e.g. demobilise soldiers or curtail inappropriate payments). This is no easy task even with best intentions, competence, resources or skills if these new practices are misunderstood or threaten entrenched interests. Al-Ississ and Bohnet explain that risk and betrayal patterns differ in cultures where institutions are predictable and can mitigate risk (as in 'The West') and places where people need to, as an alternative, put their trust in family or clan, and they advise that "when designing institutions, both social preferences as well as cultural factors should be taken into account" (Al-Asiss & Bohnet 2016, p. 93). Predictability and a meaningful order are relevant to how EMBs build trust, in that, as Birch (2020) warns,

citizens will turn to informal institutions when formal institutions fail. This is highly problematic for electoral democracy because informal institutions do not have incentives, mandates or accountability mechanisms to ensure a level playing field and franchise for all.

Predictability and order underpin social functioning (Finnis 2011; Fuller 1969; Murphy 2005) and are a prerequisite for trust (Braithwaite & Levi 1998; Suchman 1995; Sztompka 1999). Order begets trust. On the social contracts between citizens and institutions, Rousseau (2012) explains that: “Order provides the basis of trust between actors, including a balancing of power and infrastructures that provide information, supports and regulation of behaviour. It reduces threat and increases the array of possible decisions” (2012, pp. 11-12). And trust begets order. Luhmann (1973 trans. John Wiley & Sons 1979) explains: trust works to reduce complexity and anxiety, which, in turn, are the natural opposites to predictability and order. Predictability and order alleviate concerns that citizens have about change, about risk and about uncertain outcomes. This reciprocal relationship between trust and order is particularly important for EMBs as they introduce an electoral process that has to have legitimacy within a unique cultural context.

Achieving the ‘good’ of predictability, requires doing the ‘something’ that fulfils a mandate again and again, delivering consistently and reliably, in a way that is recognisably the same as last time (Sztompka 1999) thereby building up a trust bank and reservoir. In elections, this ‘repetitive doing’ is particularly difficult because of its intermittent nature; because elections are held only every few years, experience builds more slowly than in other fields. Jones (1996) emphasises how accumulated experience contributes to long-term robust trust as opposed to momentary trust from single transactions (Jones, 1996, p. 13). This consistency brings legitimacy, in that the internal alignment between mandate and action means that the institution/organisation ‘will do what they are supposed to do’

(Braithwaite 1998; Longstaff 2015; Tucker 2018). This is the institutional version of signalling “the degree to which people’s statements and their actions are consistent” which, according to Tyler and Kramer, is critical to trust (1996, p. 9).

The theme that a pattern of repeated cooperative behaviour can establish trust, as articulated by Kramer (1999) runs throughout the trust literature albeit with closely related terms such as stability (Suchman 1995), continuity (Suchman 1995), comprehensibility (Suchman 1995; Murphy 2005), constancy (Murphy 2005), consistency (Jones 1996), certainty, safety (Herman 1992, Goodin 1996), and reliability (or reliance) (Baier 1991; Jones 1996, 2005; Luhmann 1973 Luhmann 1973 trans. John Wiley & Sons 1979; Tyler & Kramer 1996).

The notion of consistent and repeated behaviours and messaging to institutionalise trust is difficult for EMBs to accomplish over an electoral cycle. The goal more realistically is to avoid inconsistencies and change that does not make sense to stakeholders. Pursuing trust through predictability and order demands that EMBs attend to detail in their logistics and communications, while being mindful of honouring other trust-building pathways. The pathway of predictability and order is associated most often with transactional trust. If it generates unfairness and non-responsiveness, however, this approach may harm the pathways of relational trust. The predictability-and-order pathways may also clash with the pathway for meeting expectations and needs.

3.3.3. Delivery and competence

‘Are they competent?’ asks O’Neill (2002) as one of her three simple questions for discerning institutional trustworthiness. Competence and ability to deliver on-time elections, a complete voter register and an accurate result is an obvious component of the EMB trust-building arsenal. Unfortunately, an unforgiving electoral calendar and

complex logistics make delivery of these outcomes anything but simple. EMB failures to deliver understandably lead to a loss of transactional trust.

Delivery and competence, like their corollaries 'predictability and order', figure prominently in trust literature. The difference is subtle. Predictability and order speak to the role and success of the institution vis à vis its mandate over time; delivery and competence speak more operationally to the task at hand, the service to be delivered. It is possible that incompetent delivery can occur predictably and in an orderly manner, as when protocol is followed diligently but results in more harm than benefit. This is a common problem in elections where public procurement rules and financing mechanisms move more slowly than the often-ruthless electoral deadlines. In the elections of Mozambique in 1994, for example, duly procured bicycles for civic education officers arrived the day before elections, wasting resources and disturbing important election-day transports.

The underpinning trust-delivery linkage is that an organisation that does not deliver, or does not have the competence to deliver, what it has been set up to do cannot be legitimate by any accountability mechanism (Tyler & Degoey 1996). Job speaks of 'poor performance' as a reason why trust is withheld (Job 2005, 2007); Jones adds ability to the mix: "the incompetent deserve our trust almost as little as the malicious ... Thus we say that trust is optimism about the goodwill and competence of the other" (Jones 1996, p. 6). We can also add 'simply unlucky' to the list, when things go wrong beyond the control of those delivering services.

Confidence that the 'other' has the ability to deliver the goods eases transaction costs and transaction times (Gambetta 1988; Granovetter 1985; Tyler & Degoey 1996). Confidence that the 'other' has the competence to make appropriate decisions and policies, eases acceptance of decisions, compliance, and cooperative behaviour (Drahor 2017; Putnam 1994; Ross 2009).

Delivery requires more than individual competence, however. It also requires effective organisational structures. Adequate resources, people who know what they are doing, a clear mandate, realistic timetables, a suitable legal framework and enabling environment are examples of other foundations for successful service delivery by public institutions. These prerequisites are not necessarily under the control of the public institution whose legitimacy will be in jeopardy if coordination for delivery fails or if the delivery promise has been 'set up to fail' by missing resources, legislative delay or other external factors.

In his research focusing on police in Ghana, Tankebe found that citizens are more likely to view authorities as legitimate and more likely to cooperate with them if they see authorities as effective in their job (Tankebe 2009). This intuitively satisfying finding is echoed throughout the wider trust literature – performance matters (Murphy 2009; Murphy & Barkworth 2014; Sargeant, Murphy and Cherney 2014; Sztompka 1999). Job uses the term political trust to describe a 'rational response' to government performance (2005); while Tyler speaks of 'consistent adequate performance' or 'reliability' of an authority (Tyler 1990, 2006). Vocabulary such as delivery, transactional trust, utilitarian trust, and performing to mandate (Tucker 2018) express similar points across disciplines. Valerie Braithwaite (2004) explains how for citizens who place a high value on 'security' norms, "trust should be offered only when a person knows of the authority's competence, commitments, track record and competing interests. In exchange for reassuring information about interests and likely outcomes, a person offers trust" (Braithwaite 2004, p. 140).

Once delivery is repeated, it ceases to be purely transactional. Cumulative transactions by their nature become relational; what begins with a barista who makes an excellent coffee everyday becomes someone who remembers your order, and then your name and seems to value your presence. Within the EMB context, delivering

competently is as much about relationship-building with operational partners and ‘clients’ as about ticking a box on the logistics schedule.

3.3.4. Cooperation and compliance

EMBs can build trust through cooperation but the trust literature more commonly discusses the opposite causal pathway of trust to cooperation. This is particularly so in the regulatory context where compliance with laws and rules is the desired end state. This is no less true for EMBs, but the institutional pathway is less well-developed. Building trust in the institutional pathway through relational work is the additional challenge facing EMBs. An institution that is accepted as legitimate and is trusted will “generate voluntary compliance with policies and laws even when people think that the specific measures are not sensible or doable” (Tucker 2018, p. 11).

Apart from having stakeholders as service receivers (e.g. voter cards received on time) or as rule followers (e.g. political rallies in compliance), a public institution like an EMB requires relationships with stakeholders that are essentially cooperative.

Cooperation is required because problems that are confronted in elections cannot always be resolved by recourse to a rule book alone.

Findings from research on mine accidents (Braithwaite 1985), water pollution (Hawkins 1984), and regulatory inspection generally (Bardach and Kagan 1982) showed that literal interpretation of regulation, that is, a prosecutorial and heavy-handed regulatory approach, did not consistently effect the changes that the regulation had envisioned. Rather, negotiation, persuasion, practitioner community norm sharing, storytelling (Braithwaite 2010; V Braithwaite 2003; Shearing & Ericson 1991) and many other ‘soft’, or ‘relational’ strategies seemed equally or more effective to encourage compliance and build trust. Subsequent empirical work in a variety of sectors such as global business regulation (Braithwaite & Drahos 2000), law and enforcement (Parker, Scott, Lacey &

Braithwaite 2005), environmental regulation (Gunningham & Holley 2010), national park maintenance (Stern 2008), coal safety (Braithwaite 1985), occupational health and safety (eds Bluff, Gunningham & Johnstone 2004), taxation (Braithwaite, Murphy et al.), energy regulation (ed. Coglianese 2017) and nursing home regulation (V. Braithwaite, J. Braithwaite, Gibson & Makkai 1994) provide additional empirical evidence on the value of cooperative approaches for building trust and compliance, while recognising the dangers of ‘capture’ when cooperative relations are too close.

With more recent concerns about the loss of trust in major institutions in mature democracies, attention has focused on actively building trust through broader campaigns of presenting to the public a human, helpful and fun-loving face. The Swedish Tax Authorities assign attentive focal persons and a dedicated phone number for small businesses to navigate their significant taxes. The thinking is that this positive personal relationship created by ‘speed-dial, ask-the-expert’ function removes at least some annoyances and may build good will. This relational ‘cooperation’ provides benefits both to the state (taxes paid) and the business (ease of compliance). The Australian Bureau of Statistics was an early adopter to use laugh-out-loud amusing statistics on their public Twitter account, creating a different kind of relationship with their ‘clients – one of sharing rather than just ‘extracting’ information at census time. The Australian Electoral Commission followed suit in their 2022 Twitter outreach.

Police in mature democracies such as Norway and the UK are a further example of an institution investing in relationships of sharing in order to build trust. Bradford lists:

four potential sources of, or influences on, opinions about the police: personal and vicarious experiences; the media in its broadest sense (not just news, but books, film and other fictional accounts); the actions and activities of the police themselves; and broader attitudinal orientations, such as those concerning perceptions of disorder and the breakdown in group values ... Of these, personal experience is by the

far the best represented ... and furthermore is known to have significant effects on people's views (Bradford 2011, p. 183).

Bradford alludes to the reciprocal nature of the trust-cooperation relationship "... centring personal rather than group experiences, [holds] out some promise that public confidence can be enhanced".

In cooperation-compliance dynamics, cooperation is the bigger concept, with the idea that the 'relational hard yards' to achieve cooperation can expand the citizen-institution contact surface from bare-bones rules-following. Trust is implicated in the process of building cooperative relationships as well as compliance. But it is also an outcome of having established a cooperative sharing relationship. When demands for compliance create friction, particularly in times of disruption and crisis, trust in the cooperative relationship can be the glue that facilitates following the rules, even if begrudgingly.

Cooperation is rendered complex because of the diverse standpoints, needs and expectations of stakeholders. If we imagine an outbreak of disease on a family farm where animals need to be slaughtered at scale, the local rural veterinarian is likely to be the more trusted source of information than a city-based inspector because of the prior relationship of caring and sharing. The idea that the relational must be attended to, and specifically named as 'relational work', is articulated in a pragmatic and clear way in a body of academic literature and policy work gaining traction in Canada particularly in the areas of health (Downie & Llewellyn 2008), criminal justice (Llewellyn 2011), peacebuilding (Llewellyn 2012) and human rights work (Human Rights Commission of Nova Scotia 2019). Relational theory "compels us to take the fact of relationship, or connectedness, as our starting assumption" (Llewellyn 2011, p. 90).

Relational and regulatory scholarship meet at the interface of compliance, cooperation and trust, sometimes referred to as 'responsive' regulation (Braithwaite 2011;

ed. Coglianesse 2017; Ford 2017; Levi-Faur ed. 2011). The relational and responsive approach to regulation has as its premise that context, actors and interplay matter to making regulation work, or rather, for achieving the aims that the regulation is meant to achieve, whether safer workplaces, cleaner air or, for our purposes, clean and well-run elections.

The reality of regulatory compliance as contingent on relationship building or the status of the relationship is not necessarily a positive thing. Or as Llewellyn puts it, looking at things relationally means “an understanding of the self as constituted in and through relationships with others. It does not glorify relationships as a ‘good’ in and of themselves but, rather, claims that relationship is an unavoidable fact about how we live, who we are and how we are formed, informed and reformed” (Llewellyn 2012, pp. 4-5). Attending to the relational can be erratic (people respond differently and unpredictably); time consuming; difficult to plan, budget or predict; and brings a risk of ‘regulatory capture’ (where accountability and separation of powers break down because of too close relations between agencies, or between agencies and inspectors, risking corruption) (Ayres & Braithwaite 1992; Baldwin, Cave & Lodge 2013; Levi-Faur 2011). Nonetheless – the relational dimension matters for cooperation and institutional trust.

EMBs’ capacity to exercise cooperation is far from institutionalised. Establishing relationships in a new context requires sharing, helping, even playing and developing interpersonal trust. The cooperative relationships that emerge are integral to getting the job of running elections done. When rules need to be followed in difficult circumstances, cooperative relationships help overcome obstacles and impediments. As the electoral process proceeds the sequence of facing difficulties and overcoming them builds institutional trust in the electoral process. As was the case with the predictability-and-order pathway, the cooperation-and-compliance pathway is iterative and reciprocal,

whereby trust builds cooperation and compliance, and cooperation and willing compliance builds trust.

3.3.5. Fairness

Electoral institutions are expected to deliver a fair process where rules are followed and where rules are designed to be fair. Axiological qualities such as fairness, integrity and honesty are important for public institutions and their leaders if they are to be seen as legitimate and trustworthy (Sztompka 1999).

Fairness figures regularly in the regulatory and relational literature as one requirement for the well-functioning and long-standing relationships on which trust can be built. In the court system, being treated fairly and with respect is important (Tyler 1999; Miller 2021). In parliament, being given a voice is at the heart of procedural fairness (Dunn 2015). Fairness can be conceptualised narrowly and broadly. Rupp summarises the organisational justice literature that examines a broader canvas of perceptions of fairness in the workplace. Rupp draws distinctions between process (was the process fair) and outcome (was the outcome fair), as well as other aspects such as how are others treated (third party), and how does 'my' organisation behave in society (what we know as corporate social responsibility) (Rupp 2011). It is widely accepted that all faces of fairness are worthy of study. Grievances and distrust in public institutions are often attributed to 'fairness' or lack thereof. Behavioural scientists point to a generalised visceral aversion to being 'worse off than others' explaining that "fairness considerations can be traced back to the brain" (Al-Isiss & Bohnet 2016, p. 84).

Focusing on the 'process' dimension of fairness, procedural justice scholar Tom Tyler explains that the "willingness of people to defer to the decisions of authorities and to the rules created by institutions is [linked to] the fairness of the procedures through which institutions and authorities exercise authority. This procedural justice effect on

legitimacy is found to be widespread and robust and occurs in legal, political, and managerial settings” (2006, p. 382). In his exploration of democratic decision making, philosopher Christiano echoes Tyler’s conviction that the procedural dimension is critical for decision making to be seen as ‘intrinsically fair’. He explains that “we evaluate the decisions from the point of view of how they are made or the quality of the procedure. We are concerned to make the decision in a way that includes everyone who by right ought to be included and that is fair to all the participants” (2004, p. 268).

As Martínez-Tur and Peiro explain, procedural justice has one core component, which is that the procedures in place are fair. But they point out a second equally essential component of procedural justice, relating to the encounter and the presence or otherwise of “interactional justice or interpersonal treatment (e.g. dignity) ...” (Martínez-Tur & Peiro quoted in Tyler 2006, p. 152). These are the micro-interactions discussed later in this section.

Tyler’s theory of procedural justice does not dismiss distributive justice (fair outcomes for all parties) but identifies procedural justice, particularly as perceived by stakeholders, as critical to building trust. Tyler and his colleagues have produced a tome of data demonstrating that the perception that an organisation is conducting its tasks in a procedurally fair way is just as important, if not more so, than the outcome. This fits with Suchman’s archetype of the procedurally legitimate institution. The use of procedural justice by authorities fosters compliance; people, as “moral actors” [are] motivated to obey authorities and laws because of an intrinsic obligation to do the right thing” (Murphy 2017, p. 43). This is highly relevant for EMBs whose every move is scrutinised in relation to highly politically sensitive tasks such as boundary delimitation or vote counting. Transparency is a prerequisite for others to assess an authority’s procedural fairness; for example, the publishing of a clear and logical statement of reasons to underpin official decisions.

A 'level playing field' is understood as one of the touchstones of a credible, 'free and fair' election according to international standards (IDEA 1997, 2006, 2014; Goodwin-Gil 1994, 2006; The Carter Center 2009). Political actors are hypervigilant to the impact of regulations, particularly as their implementation affects them vis-a-vis other actors, leading Pastor to write that "fair and effective administration of the rules is often as important as the rules themselves" (1999, pp. 5-6). Because money and power are implicated, and because regulatory infrastructure can seldom 'keep up' defences against unwanted extraneous influences, the level playing field is also where EMBs most often fall short (Leterme 2018).

3.3.6. Values-anchored ethical leadership (do no harm)

When elections – such as the Guinea example described in chapter 1 – are beset by crisis or political turmoil, international and domestic stakeholders have looked to the ability of senior EMB leadership to signal steadfastness on key values. The trust literature speaks not only to the trustee 'doing' fairness in the quiet, but also the importance of explicitly demonstrating these intentions. Sztompka gives the example of a Supreme Court judge whom people would expect to embody and display the axiological qualities of "moral integrity, honesty, impartiality" (as opposed to instrumental qualities of efficiency or effectiveness). Making the same point in reverse, Job (2004) lists scandals, lack of honesty and lack of ethics among reasons for lack of trust in government and in politicians.

The intense and intrinsic fragility of the trust exchange are at the heart of the interest in trust from ethical philosophers, political scientists, regulatory scholars and economists alike. The vulnerability and betrayal dimensions set trust apart from mere 'reliance' or expectation that someone or something (such as a car) will perform or deliver as expected (Baier 1986; Hawley 2014; Jones 1996; Pettit 1995). The difference is

that trust is emotionally laden: “our reactions to misplaced trust differ from our reactions to misplaced reliance ... I may feel betrayed and angry ... [rather than] disappointed” (Hawley 2014, p. 2). At the individual level, trust represents a person’s feeling of confidence that another will not inflict harm or adversity (Rousseau et al. 1998). Karen Jones speaks of trust being the optimism not only about the competence and ability to deliver as discussed above, but rather of an intentionally-placed optimism about the “goodwill” of the other (1996, p. 6) or the honesty of the other (O’Neill 2002).

When people are agitated, feel threatened, have been through trauma or have deep-seated grievances, deeper human needs come into play; specifically, needs to feel respected (listened to), and needs to feel secure (Herman 1992, Maslow 1943; Lago & Thompson 1996). This has implications for trust-building because the emotional self of the citizen or political actor can be more influential in guiding behaviour than the rational self.

Institutions meet the needs of the emotional self by listening and consulting, and by explaining and laying out clear pathways and due process anchored in values and respect (Braithwaite 2002; Kramer 2006; V. Braithwaite 2003). The social contract between citizen and state extends to ‘do no harm’ unwritten agreements, for example to protect social goods such as public health from potentially more nefarious “corporate power [that] can induce laws or contracts that in effect, give away the rights of society’s members to be protected from otherwise preventable harm” (Rousseau 2012, p. 11; Thaler & Sunstein 2009). In the election context, the social contract would be the justified expectation that an EMB protects the electoral ‘good’ of a level playing field against the electoral ‘harm’ of incumbent advantage and undue influence of money-politics.

There is an implicit and explicit dimension of the foundational ‘do no harm’ principle. Implicit means trusting that an institution will not harm without fanfare: a

church will not turn away a visitor, a hospital visit will not worsen a health situation. However, in turbulent times, explicit ‘do no harm’ trust-building can demand demonstrative embodying and defending core values in the face of threats. An EMB official who actively demonstrates protection of the electoral process will gain a reputation for having a moral compass and fortitude to withstand partisan interference. Gabriel Sterling, election official in the state of Georgia, took a firm and public stand against relentless pressure to overturn the US results (Daily 2020). His emotional display at a press conference was neither predictable nor orderly but showed a different face of trust-building through honouring and embodying shared ethical norms. Akin to the wizard Gandalf’s powerful exhortation ‘you cannot pass’ in Tolkien’s *The fellowship of the ring* (1991), this election official signalled a line that was not to be crossed; that he and his colleagues would protect the public good of elections from harm at all cost. In the public eye, institutional trust can be given a boost through the leadership of a senior official who embodies and publicly acts on the ethical values of the organisation; in day-to-day transactions, the same applies to frontline officers who visibly display, and act in accordance with, such values.

3.4. Micro-interactions in trust-building

The review of pathways reinforce the idea of trust building as multi-dimensional, multi-levelled and dynamic. While the electoral integrity literature described in chapter 2 focusses on ‘public trust’ writ large and its linkage with specific design issues, this thesis highlights neglected aspects of the trust picture, namely the socio-relational and micro-interaction parts of electoral trust-building.

To illustrate the value of examining micro-interactions, there is a body of public administration research that examines the interplay between officers representing

institutions and their 'clients'. This micro-interaction literature shifts focus to the frontlines where critical trust-building incidents occur. In his classic work on 'street-level bureaucrats', Lipsky argues that the outsized impact of a brief interaction for a blanket judgement of authorities means that the quality and behaviour of frontline professional officers is a critical area for investment (Lipsky 1980). In elections, the frontlines can be the registration of polling stations for voters, candidate registration or political financing compliance for political actors, budget or election results transactions for other government agencies – basically anywhere that is 'outwards-facing' for the EMB.

When Putnam applies social capital theory to public governance, he describes the powerful, recursive, positive (societal and economic) link between a strong culture of trust and an effective public administration (1994). He draws on rich comparative accounts of the lived experience of citizens interacting directly with their local service providers, showing how smooth transactions eased flow and increased prosperity. Meanwhile, corrupt, incompetent or slow transactions led to citizens finding alternative pathways to having their needs met – cumulatively a suboptimal solution for societal wellbeing.

The incidents that motivated the Black Lives Matter movement underscore the societal impact of fraught citizen–officer interactions. Using longitudinal data from the UK, Bradford explains that, of all the sources of influence on opinions on the police, “personal experience is by the far the best represented ..., and ... significant” and further, that those who have had recent unsatisfactory contact experienced lower levels of trust and confidence in the police” (Bradford 2011, p. 183).

Scholarship from various professions adds depth and detail to these insights. Evidence linking micro-interactions with trust is found in Stern’s examination of compliance of national park regulation (2008). Stern looked at a range of factors, including the interplay between the behaviour of park rangers and the reactions of the

national park neighbours who potentially were in breach of the rules. He found that stakeholder trust in park rangers was the single most crucial factor for regulatory compliance, and for that reason, made the point that the relational dimension (trust-building and trustworthy behaviour) is critical to effective national park management. Jones (1996, p. 10) makes a similar point about the trust placed in physicians. The expectations of patients exceed considerations of competence and also include the integrity of the persons, and whether the physician cares about the interest of her patients. A range of studies from the professions, business and regulation emphasise the importance of overall positive micro-interactions to trust-building (Downie & Llewellyn 2008, 2011; Job 2007; Losoncz 2019).

In the context of election administration, “street-level bureaucracy is primarily the registration station, the nomination office and the polling station personnel” (Elklit & Reynolds 2002). Elklit and Reynolds (2002) concur that the direct contact by citizens with their electoral processes are intrinsically linked with the legitimacy of an election. They explain that citizen experiences of voting have bearing on their sense of political efficacy, which in turn underpins a principled commitment to democracy. There are implications of this finding on voting modalities such as postal voting and internet voting where human interaction is absent. There are also implications of this finding on efficiencies in workforce size: more polling station officers means more interactions – both in the sense that polling station officers are themselves ordinary citizens who have more ‘buy-in’ from the experience of working with elections, and from the larger pools of interactions with ordinary voters with better staffed polling stations.

In his book *Ritual and Rhythm in Electoral Systems* (2015), Orr explains that citizens place meanings and value on their polling station experiences beyond their particular vote’s transactional value. Emotions linked to citizenship and community are also on the table when they arrive at the local polling station. The regularity (rhythm) of the event

(every few years) and the community embeddedness of the event (e.g. at the local school) can give a feeling of connectedness with society, filling a ritual and symbolic function. Building on this tableau of the polling station as an ethnographic site, the atmosphere (e.g. crackling with tension; celebratory and relaxed, or mundane and subdued) can give insights into the health of the electoral democracy (Pearce Laanela 2017). Orr points out that the ubiquitous local charity-arranged 'sausage sizzle' (barbeque) and cake stalls outside polling stations throughout Australia are now, for Australian voters, part and parcel of the voting experience, thereby demonstrating the point that the experience is more than transactional. It is both relational and affirming at the level of micro-interactions, making trust-building highly dynamic.

While the inevitable advance of early, postal and online voting will shift the experience away from community-anchored traditional polling, nonetheless, for our purposes here, the mental picture of Orr's citizen at the polling station can give us a platform with which to visualise micro-interactions in the electoral context. In a study of the quality of American elections, Alvarez and colleagues point out that the quality of the voter's experience in the polling station has implications for how they trust the process overall (Alvarez, Hall & Llewellyn 2008).

The attitudes and behaviours of the EMB officials interact with the expectations, needs or interests of the stakeholders. From this interaction, some kind of imprint will result. Positive and neutral imprints can be mundane and filed, under the radar, to build a cumulative picture foundational to a general, passive, trusting stance. Negative imprints may also be discarded but there is risk that they will follow a different trajectory. Electoral frontline officers, like the police, commonly deal with irate, agitated or vulnerable citizens. Whereas positive or neutral experiences, impressions or stances will likely not be communicated beyond the individual involved, negative transactions at salient moments can serve as emotional tipping points. If amplified in media, social

media or in-group communication, this interaction leaves an outsized imprint and legacy on generalised trust and overall reputation.

3.5 Foundations of an electoral trust-building model

3.5.1 Summary of applicable trust pathways

The pathways to trust described in the previous section are distilled from research from many disciplines, chosen as particularly relevant for the dynamics in stakeholder–EMB interplay that build or undermine trust in the electoral process. The thematic clusters drawn from literature as potentially useful for trust-building pathways were: a) meeting needs and expectation; b) predictability and order; c) delivery and competence; d) cooperation and compliance; e) fairness; and f) displaying key values. These thematic clusters may reinforce each other or conflict. A trust-building pathway that meets needs and expectations may demand departure from predictability and order. Delivery and competence may in unexpected circumstances undermine cooperation and compliance. Delivering fairness for all may clash with meeting expectations of a few. For reasons of this kind, EMB trust-building must be conceptualised as multi-dimensional with intertwined pathways; multi-levelled, meaning that macro- and micro-interactions have implications for trust-building; and dynamic, implying that trust-building is relational work that ebbs and flows in interplay between the trustor and trustee.

The literature that supports the importance of these pathways spans regulatory theories, public governance theories, institutional theories, procedural justice theories and trauma theories. Empirical evidence to support their veracity comes from educational, organisational, workplace and public administration contexts. The empirical chapters that follow seek to provide evidence necessary to evaluate their applicability to election management.

Before testing for applicability, however, a consideration of these pathways suggests that for EMBs wishing to build trust, a multidimensional mental schema is vital at all times. The attitudes and actions required to build transactional trust, once the baseline tasks of EMBs, differ from the attitudes and actions required to build relational trust. The theoretical bases for transactional and relational trust are different. Yet both are highly likely to be important.

3.5.2 Building a model

The broad spectrum of pathways indicates the difficulty of the task of creating a checklist or one-size-fits-all approach to EMB trust-building. No individual can possibly master all the skillsets, and no strategic plan can meet all expectations. An EMB trust-building model can nonetheless serve a vital purpose.

An EMB trust-building model can spotlight EMB–stakeholder interactions and provide a lens to understand those interactions. An EMB trust-building model can familiarise electoral leadership with a summary of available understandings of trust to inform a more nuanced design of professional development, communication and other design elements that impact EMB–stakeholder interactions.

Table (3.1) provides a provisional overview of the trust pathways emerging in the literature potentially relevant to EMBs. While the contours and boundaries between the identified pathways are amorphous and porous, the pathways discussed in section 3.3 serve as a starting point, or touchstone, for building a trust-building model. The relevance of the broad-brush view of trust to stages of the electoral process is represented at the macro level of the EMB as a legitimate state institution of governance and at the granular or micro level of EMB officials' behaviour or impact on particular stakeholders such as political candidates or individual voters.

Table 3.1. Trust-building pathways – expected areas of relevance for EMBs

Levels of EMB Work	Trust in Institution (macro, generalised trust)	Trust in Officials (micro, individualised trust interplay)
<i>System-level (legislative framework, structural independence, voting system design)</i>	Meeting expectations Predictability and order Fairness	Meeting expectations Values-anchored, no harm Fairness
<i>Operational level (infrastructure, logistics, recruitment)</i>	Meeting expectations Delivery and competence Cooperation	Respectful micro-interactions Delivery and competence Cooperation
<i>Community-level (candidate and voter registration, polling)</i>	Meeting expectations Predictability and order Delivery and competence	Values-anchored, no harm Cooperation Respectful micro-interactions

Delivery and competence speak to the refreshingly tangible, operationally feasible trust-building set of pathways. This stream encompasses the operational and transactional trust gained through proof of delivery; that is, meeting the expectations of what the EMB should do and how it should be done. EMBs are expected to deliver electoral events smoothly, enable an inclusive franchise and deliver an accepted result that leads to a legitimate incoming authority. This will appeal to those looking for tangible evidence of an EMB ‘doing what it is supposed to do’.

Other pathways to trust-building are more abstruse, particularly those relating to trust gained by demonstrating normative values and intentions of goodwill, or those relating to understanding the articulated expectations or more deeply buried needs of stakeholders. The high standards of independence, fairness and impartiality expected of EMBs are the ‘axiological’ qualities that theorists consider important for trust (O’Neill 2002; Sztompka 1999). While little research takes a broad-brush view of trust in the running of elections, there is substantial and sophisticated work done on how to conduct an election to maximise legitimacy. Trust in the form of fulfilling one’s mandate in accordance with known best practice is part of this legitimacy. The chapter argues, however, that this is not enough to shore up the trust legitimacy pathway, particularly when the focus is on the dimension of legitimacy that involves acceptance of election

results. EMBs need to expand their horizon to consider relational trust, that is, the cooperation is safe and beneficial, that no one is subject to unfair treatment, and that harm is not delivered to actors who are acting with good will. Relational trust homes in on what is happening between people, how they interpret what is happening, and how this interaction and interpretation impacts acceptance of the electoral process.

The lines in the table above are dotted at best; the purpose of the pathways is to create a starting point for the empirical journey, with the full recognition that the pathways are artificially delimited. Also, the macro/micro distinction in the table is helpful only as a lens to view the empirical evidence in following chapters. As discussed in this chapter, generalised (macro) and individualised (micro) trust will bleed into and feed each other, as will trust loss. Excellent personal experiences with an authority will buffer a disparaging newspaper article; generalised high trust of an authority will buffer a single experience. Similarly, lost trust in one 'box' in the table above, will, according to the literature, tarnish trust in others. One individual's experience at the micro level (if gone viral or used by activists as a compelling example) may lead to questioning of systems more broadly: broad system reform done poorly or hurriedly may influence operational delivery, and so forth (endlessly). While micro and macro trust-building at various stages of EMB work may need different strategies, all need attention in electoral work.

3.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to review the trust literature to find possible pathways for building and maintaining trust in an EMB as it does its work. The chapter explains why no 'one' narrow conceptualisation of trust is sufficient. EMBs oversee and are embroiled in many moving parts from the macro to the micro levels of engagement. A series of pathways were extracted from the trust literature drawing on

theoretical and empirical research from business, psychology, sociology, philosophy in general, and political and economic philosophy in particular.

The chapter establishes lack of trust as costly, inefficient and threatening to institutional legitimacy. For EMBs, trust has a particular value as a buffer to ‘get through hard times’ and as a relational lubricant critical to successfully navigating complex situations and bringing stakeholders back into the electoral process. Yet, trust has to be tempered by legitimacy and integrity. In setting up a new electoral institution or invigorating an existing one, the purpose is one of building the trust of stakeholders and simultaneously the trustworthiness of the electoral institution by placing equal importance on the related concepts of legitimacy and integrity.

The chapter presents a case for the inclusion of the social-relational dimensions of EMB trust-building. In contrast to *legitimacy*, which is the more stable concept, dependent on structure, mandate and reputation over time, mercurial *trust* is dependent on a dynamic interplay between behaviours and perceptions in interactions with stakeholders and the delivery of services. Trust thereby adds to our understanding of electoral integrity by taking the next step into subjective and micro-processes; trust is built and lost in a complex web of interactions at multiple levels.

Following consideration of related concepts and definitions, this chapter provides a wide-sweeping review of trust-related literature to identify the characteristics of trust and the pathways, both transactional and social-relational proposed as necessary for institutional trust-building. Rather than focusing on ‘which structural choices can we link with public trust’, the thesis focuses on ‘which behaviours, attitudes, and strategies build and foster trust in the electoral context, and which undermine trust?’

The multiple trust pathways described in section 3.3 explain why ‘delivery of services’ is insufficient for EMB trust-building. Literature themes of needs, protection, demonstrating values, addressing fairness, and micro-interactions provided peepholes

into the many complex ways we as citizens and flawed, irrational and needy humans interact with our institutions. A transactional or delivery-focused approach is particularly insufficient as a sole basis for institutional trust-building – particularly when people are agitated, feel threatened, have been through trauma or have deep-seated grievances. In these cases, the emotional self, concerned with fairness and fear of harm, can trump the rational self in assessing the institution in question. These issues have compelling salience in the context of the work of EMBs.

The theory-driven trust pathways identified in section 3.3 form a foundation for guiding and interpreting the empirical work on EMB trust-building that will follow in this thesis. Characteristics of trust-building that are hypothesized initially as particularly important for citizen–public institution interplay include meeting needs and expectations, predictability and order, delivery and professional competence, cooperation and compliance, fairness, embodying and displaying ethical values and attending to micro-interactions respectfully. Seen as a package, these pathways have both transactional and relational dimensions that an EMB trust-building model will need to accommodate.

The EMB trust-building model that is built step by step in this thesis will put forward a third ‘predictability-oriented’ dimension alongside the transactional and relational dimensions of trust-building. This additional dimension provides pathways to certainty, stability and fairness that citizens expect from new institutions, particularly during a crisis or after trauma. The third dimension will speak to the need to invest in rituals, pathways, regulations and routines that emulate or provide a proxy for reliability, predictability and security. But this is to come as the case is made in the three empirical chapters that follow through documented case studies, participant observation of a Tunisian election and reflective dialogue with expert practitioners.

Before further interrogating the usefulness of these pathways empirically through looking at current EMB field practices and experiences, the next chapter provides the

methodological underpinnings of the study. Institutional trust problems are dynamic and occur on multiple levels and with multiple entry points. The following chapter will need to demonstrate how the methods used in the research for this thesis examine EMB trust at the macro (institutional, societal) and micro (interpersonal) levels, and in altercations between different constellations of stakeholders for different reasons at different times in the electoral cycle.

Chapter 4. Methodology

As discussed in chapter 2, current research on electoral integrity has supported the construction of an increasingly sophisticated range of datasets. These datasets enable political scientists to use quantitative techniques – mainly varieties of regression analysis – to explore patterns and causal relationships across large numbers of elections. Important databases relating to electoral integrity include the V-DEM database and Wave 6 of the World Values Survey (see Birch 2020 for a thorough description of available databases, and Norris 2013 for rationale). A subset of this research addresses public confidence in electoral institutions. Broadly, the methods employed use survey methodologies to correlate public confidence measures with various electoral phenomena such as electoral systems, voter turnout, referendums, independence of EMBs, effectiveness of websites and public funding of parties.

The methods in this project are different because the purpose is different. The argument is that an EMB could implement the best knowledge from this body of public confidence research, and still not achieve an accepted election result because of a myriad other reasons. A paraphrase for trust-building could be ‘recognising and attending to the myriad and messy other reasons why you or the process may be mistrusted’. The stark reality facing democracies today is risk of electoral processes failing because trust fails. The knowledge gap lies here – the ways and means to mitigate the risks of contested elections that fall outside of the ‘improve-the-process’ or ‘change-the-electoral system’ or ‘regulate’ solutions.

To fill this trust-building knowledge gap, this thesis provides an account of the contextual interactions among stakeholders and the accompanying sense-making of the electoral process. In order to do this, data used in this thesis are predominantly qualitative and stakeholder centred. They place importance on the meaning and

experience of stakeholders engaging with the electoral process and the responsiveness of the EMB to what they are observing among stakeholders as preparations for the election unfold. The argument of this thesis is that this is where insights into the drivers and breakers of trust can be found, in the complex webs of relationships that play out in any electoral process and that unavoidably enmesh the EMB. This thesis rests on the proposition that a set of qualitative ‘boutique’ studies exploring both relational and transactional approaches to trust-building will aid in developing a conceptual framework to complement and extend earlier work on electoral integrity.

4.1 Methodology

Qualitative methods allow nuanced analysis of behaviour and interactions and the development of thick descriptions to generate conceptual frameworks for the processes of trust-building, that is, holistic accounts that allow a complex picture of the issue to emerge (Creswell 2013; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña 2014), or what Flyvbjerg, quoting Nietzsche, advocates as allowing for ‘rich ambiguity’ (Flyvbjerg 2011, p. 311). Qualitative studies accept non-linear social processes and contextual insights, that in turn can lead to novel conceptualisations of the phenomenon of interest (Creswell 2013; Charmaz 2006). As Losoncz points out, “quantitative approaches are well suited for describing the macrosocial changes of a given regulatory context, while qualitative approaches are ideal to uncover regulatory cultures and individual and community-level responses and social actions” (2017, p. 87). It is precisely these cultures, responses and actions which are of interest to this study and its attempt to understand trust and trust-building.

To address the underlying issues that are important for understanding trust, and in line with other regulatory studies, the area of research interest is the *people* rather than *structures* per se, although how people engage with structures is also important (J. Braithwaite & Drahos 2000; V. Braithwaite 2003; ed. Coglianesi 2017; Drahos 2017;

Ford 2017; Morgan & Yeung 2007). Or, to go one step further, the relationship between people – as individuals and as groups – to the structures and to each other.³⁰ It is people who place trust. In the context of electoral trust, they may do so through their roles as candidates, journalists, observers or voters, but nonetheless, the trust dynamics – ‘why/when do people place trust?’ – apply. The electoral trust-builders can be parliamentary committees or government legal advisers whose informed decisions, integrity and ability to cooperate effectively enable fit-for-purpose legal frameworks; judges or polling station chairpersons whose procedural rigour and careful considered judgements determine whether disputes are resolved fairly and calmly; voter education campaign designers whose decisions shape the image and understanding of the electoral institutions and events at hand; or frontline registration and polling stations officials behaving with respect.

These trusting and trust-building people individually and cumulatively contribute to an atmosphere that is conducive to trust-building or not. The dynamics of trusting and trust-building happen in relationship to each other, in interplay. It is this that – in the methodology of the research – explains the focus on the ‘relational’ dimension of the object of inquiry. Trust relationships occur among people and groups (‘who trusts who and why?’) and between stakeholders (for example, do candidates trust each other to abide by rules); trust abides in people’s acceptance of the decisions that are made, and in the discourse among the trust-builders. The ‘structures’ are part of this trust maze – they originate from these trust dynamics; they modulate these dynamics, and they exacerbate

³⁰ Autesserre (2014) provides a model for this approach. Her book ‘Peaceland’ takes everyday interactions seriously, linking everyday habits and behaviours to peacekeeping outcomes.

these dynamics. It is these *relational* dynamics that explain why a *structural* decision that can seem 'logical and obvious' in one place, such as the well accepted use of voting machines in India, can be toxic and divisive in another, as seen in the debate of introducing voting machines to Botswana. Understanding electoral trust requires understanding the dynamics and interplay between the actors in the electoral space: the EMB and its stakeholders.

4.1.1 A methodological approach to capture trust interplay

The methodology of this thesis follows Henne: "Regulatory scholarship retains a critical focus on how different actors, ideas, objects and events inform governance structures, institutions and practices. The regulatory theories and concepts ... reflect the importance of understanding systems, webs and networks in making sense of regulatory and governance practice" (Henne 2017, p. 98). Methodologically, per a 'realist' sociology approach, unpacking these webs, systems and networks demands drawing on all available parts of the toolkit when trying to understand complex policy interventions for the purpose of advising policymakers on what works under what conditions (Pawson, Greenhalgh, Harvey & Walsh 2005). Pawson, Greenhalgh, Harvey and Walsh (2005) advocate moving nimbly between theory and multiple data sets, such as quantitative data, qualitative interviews and professional literature, iteratively and with curiosity. James (2020) convincingly argues that this realistic sociological approach is an excellent match for understanding the electoral management field – that no single dataset can give a full understanding of the issues at play.

Case studies, interviews and participatory observation have been chosen as the primary empirical methods to understand the relational interplay that underpins electoral trust. This relational interplay is wholly uncodified and resides in the space between electoral practitioners and their stakeholders. Accessing this uncodified space and the

stories and situations required access to practitioners, an empathic and knowledgeable understanding of their situation to establish credibility, and access. This access, and pre-understanding, was possible thanks to decades of professional service in the field and strong networks to draw on. Referred to as ‘para-ethnography’ by anthropologists, the approach recognises a research value of in-depth professional knowledge and experience and proposes a collaborative and co-generated approach to meaning-making (Holmes & Marcus 2005, 2008; Islam 2015; Roberts & St John 2021).

The motivation to use these alternative and primarily qualitative methods to dig deeper into electoral trust stems from the professional insights and experiences of the researcher as described in Appendix A. As a practitioner, alongside colleagues, I have seen how rules, structures and formalities put in place to secure electoral delivery and integrity can crumble and fail when stakeholder relationships are weakened. As head of a global team, I have seen how these para-ethnographic micro-insights resonate internationally and across electoral system types.

4.2 Methods

Table 4.1 provides a summary of the relationship between the RQs, methods, and research steps:

Table 4.1 Research questions and research steps

Research question	Method/research step
RQ1: How are micro-interactions important for EMB trust-building? (when, between who, using which trust pathways - what are the special characteristics of electoral trust-building)	Scan of six cases of active EMB trust-building for broad patterns. In depth participant observation of micro-processes in one election. Validation of findings. Chapters 5-7.
RQ2: What behaviours, attitudes and strategies build and foster trust in the electoral institution and its processes?	Participant observation of EMB/stakeholder interplay in one electoral process: monitoring and recording of EMB behaviour, attitudes, strategies and stakeholder reactions. Chapter 6.

RQ3: How can trust-building be incorporated into the electoral administration process?	Para-ethnography: semi-structured interviews with senior practitioners (community of practice). Chapter 7.
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The electoral cycle, from election planning to evaluation, is 3-5 years, and the stakeholder interactions are many: is there a cadence of trust-building and breakdown? Do electoral trust dynamics match the institutional trust pathways foreshadowed in the literature? Chapter 5 provides broad patterns and initial insights by re-examining six well-documented cases with a socio-relational lens to home in on challenges to and features of electoral trust-building.

The source documentation for the desk-study cases, such as electoral observation reports, does not use the language or framing of trust. The accounts, however, paint a rich picture of the complex political and infrastructural contexts in which EMBs work and the flash points of stakeholder ire where trust breaks down. Four decades, three continents and vastly different social-political circumstances separate the six purposefully sampled trust-rebuilt cases; the commonalities help foreground what is uniquely challenging for EMB trust-builders compared to other public institutions.

The desk study method was foundational and essential to delimit scope in a potentially boundless and amorphous study area. The purposive (or ‘diversity’) sampling used is appropriate for exploratory, abductive research that aims to build theory (Seawright and Gerring 2008). Chapter 5’s review of case studies illuminates key challenges for electoral trust-building (‘logistics’ and ‘stakes’), interactions of importance (EMB officials and political contestants in the pre-election phase), and the potential relevance of the earlier identified institutional trust pathways (relational and transactional streams). This delimitation was critical for subsequent steps; it determined the relevant micro-interactions for further examination by answering the methodologically important question of ‘which behaviours to look at, between who, when?’. Close observation, in

this case participant observation, was an effective method for spotlighting and understanding the more narrowly defined subsection of EMB-stakeholder interplay micro-interactions, that is, ‘EMB official’s behaviour towards candidates in the pre-election phase’.

The participant-observer methods employed in the field research (chapter 6 – Tunisia Case) allowed for fine-grained analysis of the trust dynamics at play. As a researcher, I was embedded in an electoral observation team to experience and observe EMB trust-building micro-interactions during critical pre-election moments of the electoral cycle. Through interviews and full observation access to offices, warehouses and polling sites, I followed local-level EMB officials and the political contestants in their work and interactions.

The participant observation study provided the opportunity to test further the trust pathways outlined in chapter 3 and evaluate their relevance to the EMB context. This evaluation, however, could not speak definitively to the practical utility of the findings. Can this knowledge help EMBs on the ground? To answer this question, the preliminary findings were tested, validated and adjusted with experienced practitioners (chapter 7). Beyond triangulation, the in-depth practitioner interviews provided a deeper exploration of the characteristics and conditions needed to convince stakeholders that an electoral process is worth trusting.

4.3 Data collection and analysis

The cases and data sources used for this thesis are largely contemporary and display the unfolding of relationships and events. The thesis datasets – from the cases to the interviews to the frequent use of ‘grey’ literature – are anchored in the knowledge of practitioners, in expert knowledge. The datasets represented concrete experience manifested in reports, transcripts and notes.

This project has different forms of data resulting from the three distinct research phases. The first set are the desk-study documents: observation reports, academic articles, media articles and project evaluations . The second set are the documents (interviews transcripts, electoral documents, and research journal) emanating from the fieldwork, which anchor chapter 6. The third set are interview transcripts, which display trust dynamics at the individual level. Complementing each are reflective memos and analytical notes about the cases, interviews and observations to reflect and cluster emerging patterns.

Data gathering and processing (analysis and theory-building) were concurrent, iterative, recursive, ratcheting between the theoretical and empirical literature on trust and thesis data reflecting experiences of electoral management similarly informed the analysis of the data in the form of reports, transcripts and notes generated by the three empirical studies (Bird 2015, Timmermans & Tavory 2012, Snyder 2019). For example, coding candidate reactions to an EMB decision was conceptually matched to procedural justice theory. Then, checking whether procedural justice also seemed relevant in another example of political party reaction, ‘common purpose of elites’ was judged to be more apt.

Analysis thus required a tiered process over multiple work sessions including describing the data piece; organising pieces of the data into multiple views on the same event, and into themes, ideas or coverage of similar phases of the election; connecting these themes across elections and countries; corroborating with experts or other accounts when questionable; and continually looking to trust theories to reorganise, interpret and reinterpret emerging themes. The multi-method threads – purposive sampling informed by search, advice and snowball; non-linear, iterative and only semi-structured analysis process; and the hermeneutic and grounded assembling of clusters and emerging themes – were held together by the research questions.

The cases, fieldwork and interlocutors were selected purposefully as appropriate to address the research questions and enable more complex and holistic findings (Luciani, Ausili, Campbell, Tschirhart & Jack 2019). In practical terms, purposeful sampling means identifying and selecting “information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood 2015, p. 533).

4.3.1 Collecting and coding desk-study case data

Because interplay is the focus of the research questions, the case selection process required choosing cases that provide a detailed account of events leading up to an election, the issues that arose during that time period, and the actors involved. The specific criteria for final case selection are specified in chapter 5, but an overview of the issues considered in case selection is provided below.

The initial selection criteria for desk-study countries were intended to be: one election that was highly problematic and popularly seen as lacking legitimacy, followed by another election considered successful and legitimate. This hoped-for symmetry and cleanliness of comparability did not match the reality. Some aspect of the conduct of all elections – however well-run and well-intended – will be disputed, and residual distrust from previous experiences has a tendency to linger. Rather, the set of six countries (Philippines, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Australia) each have a trust-crisis occurring in relation to an election and each one responds with measures to strengthen confidence for subsequent elections. How these trust dynamics play out is the focus.

The ‘units’ of study are the election commissions or equivalent (EMBs), their relationships with stakeholders and two electoral cycles. The case countries that were considered for trust dynamic analysis were recommended by operational directors from two of the major organisations in the electoral assistance field, IFES and International

IDEA.³¹ Sampling and descriptions The case studies are not comparative – rather, they are carefully chosen to help identify some key characteristics of electoral commissions that affect public trust (to ‘illuminate theory’). They are neither too big (unwieldy) nor too small countries (too small and they become too personalised, everyone knows everyone), neither too young nor too old democracies (they’re not jaded and ancient, nor are they so new that they don’t have an identity). They are neither models of excellence nor hopeless ‘basket cases’. The focus is on what the EMB did, the ‘spark’, to rebuild trust.

Within the documentation for each election, a narrow focus on specific crisis points and the interplay of specific actors allowed me to identify patterns while also attending to distinct contextual conditions and complexities of each case. The documentation consisted of case primary documents such as EMB generated documents for planning or communication, election assistance project plans and secondary accounts such as observer, media and academic reports. The most robust and comprehensive descriptions of the events that unfolded during the elections under scrutiny were the external, professional, observer organisations, confirming the para-ethnographic research value of professional ‘grey’ literature (Holmes & Marcus 2005, 2008)

The document types reflected several stakeholder/watcher perspectives. Largely unavailable are insider accounts of betrayed trust and anger (for example from candidates), which means inferring lack of trust from events or transactions that are described. Election observation or evaluation reports sometimes address trust in passing, usually in the sense of overall confidence in the institutions or their legitimacy, without

³¹ See www.ifes.org and www.idea.int.

specifying causal pathways. I gathered each category of document type (international academia, international observer, domestic observer, aid documents, EMB documents, and more) systematically and comprehensively according to what is publicly available on the internet or through request via contacts. Appendix C exemplifies document types.

4.3.2 Analysing desk-study cases

For each ‘cluster’ of documents (document type category/country) I did a brief discourse analysis (what is the ‘tone’ used, what is the general consensus of this grouping regarding the EMB) as well as content analysis (what issues are of concern). The desk-study coding and analysis was informed by multiple readings and iterative insights. This modus of spiral-like cyclical engagement with datasets is encouraged in the regulatory studies field; ensuring time for familiarisation with data; time for reflection; time for reordering of data; time for extraction of key concepts; time for active experimentation and looking for patterns, and a recursive ‘going back’ to initial sources to test for fit (Charmaz 2006; Erlingsson & Brysowicz 2017; Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick & Mukherjee 2018).

The analysis of ostensibly objective, professional reports of events unfolding, without insider accounts of the same events, had limitations. What was possible, and helpful for delimiting interplay relevant for trust loss, was noting where things got heated, turned confrontational or went wrong in EMB–stakeholder interplay, and looking at the spaces/times in the cycle where relationship building took place.

Table 4.2 shows the initial coding categories based on informed assumptions of where trust dynamics could lie – anything from structural (e.g. leadership appointed in a transparent and non-partisan way), operational (delivering complete registers, well-run election events, and accurate results), and normative (displaying commitment to electoral values such as non-partisanship, independence and political participation).

I used NVivo for the desk-study phase; a software tailor-made to manage qualitative research, particularly suited for interpretive text study. The utility of NVivo for this research step was twofold: as a repository for data, and as a tool for coding and making conceptual linkages. As a repository, various 'layers' contained: the raw texts about the elections themselves (primary and secondary publicly available); descriptive captions about the texts; descriptions about the elections; categories and themes expressed as nodes (Salmona & Kaczynski 2016).

As is usually the case with qualitative content analysis, I worked upwards and downwards – or perhaps more aptly in the hermeneutic spiral described by Erlingsson and Brysowicz (2017) – between highlighted text, coding, categorising and preliminary theme identification. This process was informed by Charmaz (2006) who advocates a grounded method to arrive at new insights, from initial unlimited codes, through to focused clusters of recurring themes and ideas connecting initial codes (similarly described also by Erlingsson & Bryseiewisc 2017 and Nyumba et al. 2018). For example, I coded any pieces of text that referred to meeting spaces – such as counting centres, inter-party liaison committees, consultative committees and election commissioner press conference – and coded/categorised them in multiple ways such as type of meeting, purpose of meeting, quality of meeting. In the cacophony of codes – not knowing in advance what would emerge, I coded for stakeholder attitudes to the EMB (negative/positive), for crisis points in the elections, and also for externalities such as political environment, international pressures, the elections process itself and for anything that described the electoral concerns expressed by the various stakeholder groups.

Coding is not just about labelling, it is about linking (Miles et al. 2014); “analysis is a flexible reflective process of working and re-working your data that reveals connections and relationships” (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz 2017). As the clusters of coding

and linking developed, I created larger clusters – or categories – that showed how the EMBs coped with the myriad moving parts of electoral process, how they managed large-scale decentralisation and what precipitated the series of mishaps and missteps in each case. I ‘coded’ the irritants that particularly triggered stakeholder discontent (appointments, procurement, count); and the trust-building mechanisms that calmed agitations (public admission of mistakes, mechanisms for solving problems and keeping parties informed outside the public arena, the deliberate selection of individuals seen as highly credible to lead reconstruction after crisis). The trust-related themes emerging were ‘balms’ and ‘irritants’ – types of meetings or situations that seemed to make relations worse or better.

I segmented and coded initially based on combination of emerging (generated from documents) and pre-determined (from trust-norms theory) using reiterative (Creswell 2003) or focused coding (Charmaz 2006). Reiterative coding means continually revisiting the coding as patterns emerge. Similarly, focused coding is “using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data” (Charmaz 2006, p. 57). In larger academic articles/media not specifically about the elections, I searched words and terms likely to highlight relevant text that would give: an election commission; name of commission; acronym of commission; election administration; election commissioner; election commissioners’ names; and key words from the electoral scandals particular to that country.

Table 4.2 Initial coding categories for desk study cases

External environment	Structure	Delivery and competence	Normative - confidence building and outreach
Context and purpose of elections. Acceptance of results.	Legal/regulatory Framework for Elections. The structure of the EMB.	Implementation capacity. Planning processes. Follow-up processes	Formal communication strategy of the EMB. Outreach, voter education, and public image campaigns by the EMB.

<p>Political environment. Levels of low-level violence or tension.</p> <p>General attitudes and level of trust in society (social/historical context).</p>	<p>Mechanisms for formal independence.</p> <p>The functions of the EMB.</p> <p>Formal links between EMB and key stakeholders.</p> <p>Financing of EMB.</p> <p>Penetration of EMB throughout the country.</p> <p>Permanence of electoral structure.</p>	<p>Experience and training levels of EMB officials.</p> <p>Crisis management strategies and behaviours.</p> <p>Perception of EMB professionalism.</p>	<p>The formal and informal relations between the EMB and key stakeholders.</p> <p>Importance of trust to the EMB.</p> <p>Perception of EMB as non-partisan, as ‘well-intended’.</p> <p>Professional confidence, inclusive practices, transparency.</p> <p>Approach to crisis situations.</p>
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4.3.3 Summary of desk-study cases

The cumulative picture resulted in both country specific understandings on how and why relationships and attitudes changed between the two electoral events, and tentative findings on the trust pathways identified in chapter 3. While case findings informed subsequent research stages, subsequent stages also informed revisions of the desk-case chapter, as I was able to test the country specific findings on the relevance of the trust pathways on country experts and people who were involved in the electoral events during interviews.

4.3.4 Fieldwork and data collection

Research question 2 on the ‘behaviours, attitudes, and strategies to build and foster trust in the electoral context, and which undermine trust?’ required a more intimate look at trust-building than could be provided by document analysis. Immersive fieldwork was critical for this stage, to reach the “significant insights and understandings that carry a more universal and general import.” (Griggs & Howarth 2012, p. 170). In contrast to the documents reviewed in the desk studies, the reality of an election is very

different: intense, confusing and often chaotic, with competing perceptions and interpretations of unfolding events.

The fieldwork mapped stakeholder–EMB interplay during an intense electoral event in Tunisia in 2014, using relationships, behaviour and reaction to behaviour as focal points for understanding trust-building. The ‘dataset’ for analysis consisted of interviews, field notes, living documentation, observation notes relating to seven electoral districts, seven Independent Regional Authorities for Elections (IRIEs, from French acronym) responsible for those districts, their stakeholders (the ballot ‘list’ candidates) and their watchdogs (civil society organisations [CSOs] and media.)

Fieldwork provided an invaluable ‘outside-in’ opportunity to observe relationships and behaviours during an electoral process under way, and closely follow the actions as they evolved. Sequentially, this empirical step fell after the desk-study cases, so as to see how the patterns of relational and transactional trust-building identified in the desk-study phase played out in practice. This sequencing allowed for deeper microlevel understandings, but also provided an opportunity to confirm or deepen, or alternatively disconfirm, findings.

Observation of the 2014 Tunisian legislative elections was the most interesting opportunity available during the timing and scope limitations of the PhD. Logistically, I was fortunate to arrange to serve as a long-term observer for The Carter Center Electoral Observation Mission in Tunisia (see www.cartercenter.org). Thanks to a special agreement with The Carter Center (TCC), I was allowed independence of research action, but through my association with the mission I achieved benefits such as cost-sharing, logistical support, a full-time interpreter/assistant, fuller access to respondents (with weight of a recognised institution behind me), and access to the data of the mission.

Tunisia is a country in transition³². Countries in transition need to do much, and even differently, to build trust among people still wounded by trauma, and in institutions discredited by years of authoritarian state capture. In 2014, Tunisia embraced this challenge wholeheartedly as evidenced by its leadership role in the Arab Spring, a Nobel Peace Prize and great pride in revived democratic institutions. It was also a country that faced challenges to these democratic ambitions with tensions between Islamist and secular visions; with economic have and have-not dynamics, and with a host of geopolitical influences, threats and fear. All formal political forces and the international diplomatic and business communities were committed to a successful election. Anti-democratic forces, however, such as underground radical Islamist activist in Tunisia with access to weapons and support from forces in neighbouring Libya, and remnants of the fallen authoritarian Ben Ali regime, were understood as threats. There was also the risk of ‘spoilers,’ that is, political contenders that undermine elections in the face of impending electoral loss.

These internal and external pressures notwithstanding, the EMB had a job to do to the best of its ability, and this was the object of my enquiry. The fieldwork enabled me to observe first-hand the difficulties for a newly created institution to navigate the delivery of credible elections during a period of national and regional instability. Fortunately, the Tunisian EMB, known as ISIE (Instance Supérieure Indépendente pour les Élections³³) did not have a legitimacy problem; the thorough negotiations of the Nobel Prize winning nation-rebuilding process ensured that there was ‘buy-in’ for each

³² Now backsliding, but that is a story for another time.

³³ In English, the Independent High Authority for Elections.

democratisation step. The ISIE was properly mandated, and elections were held as outlined in a widely consulted and accepted democratic plan. This meant that any emerging problems would be directly linked to issues arising from things that happened – problems would be from the dynamic and not from the structural. This inherent legitimacy, and acceptance, was optimal for observing relations – because it meant that reactions would be to what the EMB did (rather than to what it was). To clarify, if an institution is widely seen to be corrupt or partisan, very little that it says or does will matter – a systemic reactive devaluation will occur among watchers. This was not the case for the Tunisian ISIE; the relations with stakeholders could more easily be observed for exactly what was happening.

Meeting places, where trust between EMBs and stakeholders is shaped, happen at multiple levels in a country. The hierarchy of electoral contacts begins in the capital with party leaders, media editors, ambassadors, civil society leaders, election commissioner and government ministers shaping the trajectory of the narrative on the national scale. At the provincial and district-level meetings of parties and EMBs can run smoothly or go awry. At polling and registration centres we find the bulk of the lived experiences that shape the public attitude to the electoral process; citizens remember their experiences of voting and consider the experience meaningful (Orr 2015), or not, as the case may be.

The work in the seven districts covered the period of commencement of candidate registration until the announcement of the result of the vote count. The district level was optimal: lower tier would have given too short a time period (as polling officials are hired only for a few days) and a higher tier would have produced too few interactions and that would also be too difficult to access because of the high profile of the candidates. My fieldwork comprised both interviews and direct observations of certain key events in which candidates and ISIE (district-level EMB) officers meet. The interviews were with candidates from across the political spectrum about their

experiences dealing with the ISIE, and with ISIE officials about their interactions with candidates. In interviews and participant observation I looked for examples of approval or disaffection with the procedures or the officers as a proxy for, and indicator of, trust.

Using participant-observation methods risks interfering with the observed transactions (Angrosino & Rosenberg 2011). The historical intensity of the elections helped to mitigate the intrusive nature of observation; those present had too much at stake to pay much notice to observers. Similarly, in the interviews it is likely that many interlocutors were presenting their best face and a constructed narrative for an outsider such as myself. Nonetheless, the interviewee's 'choice' to speak ill or well of the EMB was an important indicator of underlying trust. Also, while the words may have been carefully chosen, the emotional reactions such as anger and deep respect that arose during the interviews were conveyed unfiltered and genuinely. Newcomers to politics, of which there were many in these elections, also tended to be more direct and honest in their responses, without the 'messaging' of experienced politicians.

The fieldwork in Tunisia is a case study chosen to serve as an example of a larger phenomenon (Evans, Gruba & Zobel 2011). Tunisia as a case incorporates many elements typical of countries where trust is of importance: dynamic movement in country's political trajectory with much at stake for political actors, and an EMB under intense scrutiny to deliver a fair process. There was a residual anxiety in Tunisia – latent and overt – from dictatorship and regional turmoil. These remnants of traumas placed extra responsibility for sensitivity and duty of care when arranging and conducting interviews, through convenience and snowball sampling. Asking 'who should I speak to for more info about ...' raised issues of appropriateness where there may have been fear or mistrust (Cohen & Arieli 2011) for interviewees, and care was always needed to pursue lines of questioning respectfully and to do notetaking discretely.

4.3.5 Analysing fieldnotes

The fieldwork component of the research allowed, through observation and interview, a sense of the messy and dynamic nature of the interplay between our actors, answering the question ‘how do these meetings play out in real time?’ For example, in the interviews where I spoke to the IRIE president/members, four parties (Islam/centre/left/random other), and one-to-two CSO monitoring agencies, I asked the parties how they perceived that the IRIE did their job; I asked the IRIE to describe the process.

My daily research journal served as the repository of the bulk of the dataset. Within this journal I captured not only primary observations and transcripts but also reflective practice: the epiphanies and linkages emerging because of the deep immersion into the electoral process. The combination of descriptive and analytical notetaking helped to build theoretical insights. Specifically, the research journal has the following elements:

- a) interview excerpts directly related to the topic (candidates’ comments on their experiences of the EMB/EMB comments on their interactions)
- b) my observations of the various events I was watching (lottery draw for slots on ballot papers, campaign events, training sessions, press conferences, electoral preparations)
- c) notes from discussions with other observers/participants from other parts of the country or involved in other aspects of the electoral process that I did not have direct access to
- d) formal weekly reports on political and electoral developments in my seven districts
- e) my own reflections on what I was seeing
- f) the reflections of the many people I spoke to about what I was seeing/finding.

This process of moving from raw data to theory building follows the processes common to sociology, ethnography and anthropology, where thematic data analysis is tailored to the type and purpose of the data collection. The key word is 'iterative', where the researcher "collects data from the field by interviews or observations, reflects upon it and notes emerging themes that are used to inform future forays into the field. Diary records facilitate development of the researcher's subjective views and parallel analysis of diary field data may occur" (Grbich 2014). For analysis, I read my research journal (included the interplay relevant interview excerpts) cover to cover, critically, highlighted anything directly related to interplay such as any subtleties of the meetings that result in feelings of anger/enthusiasm or compliance/defiance, and any insights about elections. I put these into raw categories, and then distilled into themes, classifications, propositions, concepts, informed by previous thesis stages such as breach of expectations, annoyance or emotional response to poor delivery, did they respond to good delivery, cooperation, feeling things were orderly, had faith in the leadership, felt things were fair and if they respected.

While interviews provided one set of insights, the behaviours and attitudes displayed in stakeholder meetings were also helpful to understand trust pathways at play, for example whether EMB–stakeholder interplay was cordial and professional or confrontative and defensive, information-rich or not, genuine or formalistic in tone, whether values or sanctions and penalties were emphasised, and the tone of discourse in response to stressful situations.

For example: I walked into the fieldwork with two dimensions of trust-building to explore in more detail: transactional trust and relational trust – how did these play out on the ground just before an election? Embarking on the data analysis, I marked and clustered quotes and observations along the primary pathways to trust: delivery/operational dimensions and relational dimensions. For example: '[the IRIE

commissioner] answered my questions even at 10 o'clock at night' classified as a data point that spoke to multiple relationally-oriented trust streams such as cooperation and micro-interactions and served as evidence for a positive trust-building behaviour (open door, direct communication), while an observation that the packing lists for the results had a serious mistake fit the 'delivery' coding.

I then wrote the same story in multiple ways. I checked back with key informants, trusted colleagues more familiar with the Tunisian context, or who were there with me in the meetings, such as my interpreter. I reflected on what surprised me, and in which ways the trust pathways as written were adequate to describe the dynamics under way. The unexpected emergence of vulnerability, fragility and agitation, described in chapter 5, substantially changed the trajectory of the trust-building model and introduced a new dimension to understanding trust-building in the electoral context.

My accreditation as an international observer allowed me unique and extraordinary access to all of the electoral centres of activity. The disadvantages of the dual obligations to the PhD research and to reporting for The Carter Center were time, exhaustion and competing deliverables. I had a geographically wide span of districts, traffic was heavy, and it was hot – three meetings in a day could mean coming home late, tired and dirty. 'Bone-tired' is an oft-appearing word in the journal. I wrote every evening and focused on what I had learned and heard about interplay.

4.3.6 Practitioner interviews and data collection

The third and final empirical data collection phase was designed to test the universality of the findings against the collective memory and reflections of the epistemic community. Using snowball sampling methods, I sought interviewees with many decades of active electoral service across multiple countries. The interview locations of Stockholm, Canberra, Los Angeles, Washington, New York and Atlanta are hubs with

clusters of expertise attached to the offices of key organisations in the field such as the UN and TCC. These sites were reachable within the financial and temporal limitations of the PhD. Criteria for the interviewees were: self-identifying with community of practice, extensive and/or deep experience of elections, active engagement in elections (as administrator, observer, donor, technical adviser), and active reflection on those experiences (whether in the academic or public policy space).

I interviewed mainly senior practitioners, targeting those individuals who have a deep knowledge of their own country or those with extensive comparative experience from multiple countries. I included selected younger practitioners for gender balance and to add specialist competence on inclusion. The interview protocols were structured to see if the trust-oriented findings to that point resonated with their own experiences. What happened when there were delivery failures? How did they explain? How did they introduce reform? How did they deal with stakeholder disappointment? (see chapter 7 and appendix D).

The rationale for taking findings back to expert practitioners is premised on the value of practice-based knowledge. There is a body of knowledge on what makes elections work well, and this knowledge rests largely in the cumulative know-how of experienced practitioners. Tapping experienced practitioners as a knowledge base is now endorsed by many policy and practice-oriented disciplines such as criminology, nursing and business – and encouraged in regulatory studies. Electoral administration is akin to nursing in that “innovations and experiences from the everyday world often outpace research” (Weber, Belsky, Lack & Cheng 2014, p. 1075); practitioner knowledge can “challenge the way academics think about the world, the way we produce and share knowledge, and what the world counts as ‘legitimate’ knowledge (Wenger 1998). Because the knowledge of election practitioners is not yet well systematised and theorised, electoral management scholar James “encourages further research using the local

knowledge of street-level bureaucrats” especially to inform policy and avoid unintended consequences from electoral reforms.

By the same token, practitioners, even experienced ones, can be timid about adopting new models of practice. In part, this can be explained by professional caution against doing harm. In part it is explained by power structures with a market interest in the status quo. In part it is due to traditional and routinised ways of doing things that bring efficiencies and shared understandings across the field, which can reinforce trust. For these reasons, academia has a role to play in broaching new ways of doing things. The value of such a contribution, however, lies in the sense it makes to experienced practitioners.

For the field and key informant meetings, I conducted semi-structured interviews for which the interlocutors were pre-prepared with core questions for them to think through in advance (Mikecz 2012). These interviews were conducted using one or a combination of three alternative means of recording: Firstly, an auto-recorder for later transcribing; secondly, a note book for scratchpad notations; thirdly, direct input of answers into a laptop. The method was chosen on a case-by-case basis for cultural and situation appropriateness as well as ease. Regardless of the means of direct data entry, both the interview notes and observation reflections were inputted into field notes the same evening to enhance accuracy.

For additional details on participants and choices, see chapter 7.

The semi-structured interview protocol included the following questions:

- In your work, and in your own mind, how do you use/understand concepts like trust, legitimacy, credibility and confidence?
 - **Purpose:** ensuring we are talking about the same things, possible additional insight for definitions/explanation of how concepts are used in the electoral context.

- Can you speak about elections that you have been involved in where things went wrong and trust/public confidence was lost?
 - **Purpose:** triangulating pre-identified irritants, triangulating pre-identified dynamics, preparing for detailed section on losing trust.
 - **Follow-up questions:** how much agency did the EMB have (vs external factors) in this crisis, how prepared/structured were they to handle. How did stakeholders understand / manipulate the situation for own ends / respond publicly. What seemed to have the biggest effect on public opinion (e.g. what stakeholders version took hold?)

- Can you tell me about elections you have been involved in where confidence-building strategies were introduced – or even where unintentional acts boosted confidence?
 - **Purpose:** triangulating pre-identified taxonomy of confidence-building measures, triangulating pre-identified taxonomy of dynamics (attitudes, behaviours, strategies), preparing for detailed section on rebuilding trust.
 - **Follow-up questions:** who identified and prompted these measures? How effective were they? Why? Can you give examples of how parties / voters reacted? Did the interplay seem genuine, forced, ritualistic? Knowing what you know, what would be your best advice for EMB handling of a crisis (e.g. a vote count gone wrong?)

- If we look away from crisis, at the normal running of elections. What would be your best advice for maintaining trust and legitimacy? Please use the electoral cycle as a prompt for your thinking.

- **Purpose:** preparation for a section on maintaining trust.
- As part of my PhD, I'm working on a model of trust-building. Would you mind taking a look at it and seeing if you think it holds, if it resonates with your understandings and your experience? Please number each of the dimensions 1-5 in terms of importance to EMB trust-building (1=not important, 5=critical).
 - **Purpose:** testing and improving trust-building model through qualitative and quantitative responses.

4.3.7 Analysing practitioner interviews

Holmes and Marcus (2008) recommend a collaborative dialogue-based approach to maximise the knowledge gained from encounters with practitioners, while Kelly and Cordeira (2020) emphasise the importance of practice-based, useful and actionable research agendas to be anchored in respondent experiences. For the practitioner interview triangulation research phase, I sought experience-based insights on what does and does not work to build stakeholder electoral trust.

I conducted 31 long-form interviews. In many cases, interlocutors had not necessarily reflected on their experiences in terms of 'trust', but when prompted had strong views on how atmospheres of trust and distrust played out in their work. This finding in and of itself validated my motivation for undertaking this research. Trust resonated with practitioners when I raised the issue but was not foremost in their minds when reflecting on their experience in managing elections. To allow for maximum reflection and to tease out the critical moments, specific behaviours or relationship-building exercises over time that shaped their understandings of trust-building, I variously used additional techniques in the interviews such as a set of questions to think about before the interview, visual props and rating of the trust-building dimensions to

add specificity. During these interview-dialogue sessions, I presented my findings-to-date to the interlocutors for their reactions.

In the follow-up analysis and reflection of the interviews, I clustered the responses under: background in elections; what concepts of trust, credibility and legitimacy mean to them in their practice; and their stories. I clustered examples of: when things went awry for an EMB; examples of reputational repercussions; examples of how stakeholders served as ‘multipliers’ of trust-affecting messages about the EMB and their motivations (Justified? Misunderstanding? Manipulative?); and their expectations. Further, I clustered for: evidence of trust-building and damage control; and stories of mechanisms or electoral leadership that impressed, that created a sense of common purpose, served as a buffer through difficult times, or smoothed the path. I also asked participants, based on their general reflections and experience, what advice they would give an EMB regarding trust-building.

Bent Flyvbjerg explains the value of practice-based expertise by explaining that common to all experts is that: “they operate on the basis of intimate knowledge of several thousand concrete cases in their areas of expertise. Context-dependent knowledge and expertise are at the heart of expert activity” (Flyvbjerg 2011, p. 303). The practitioner-centred approach in this study of EMBs allowed for recursively identifying linkages between the initial academically grounded trust pathways described in chapter 3 and those identified from direct experience or lost and built without theoretical underpinnings.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter described the set of methods employed: analysis of case studies (desk and field), participant observation, interviews with key stakeholders (in one case) and key informant interviews with members of the broader electoral practitioner

community. Step-by-step, using abductive (iteratively toggling between theory and practice) methods, the thesis chapters look at potential applicable theory, beginning with a set of pathways derived from theory and practice insights from proximate fields where trust-building between citizens matters such as policing, aged care and courts (summarised in chapter 3). The theoretical pathways to building trust are interrogated against narratives of six desk-study cases, observations and interviews with an EMB in action in Tunisia, and against the cumulated experience of expert practitioners.

All EMBs may not have had the same crises described in various stories throughout the empirical chapters. The crisis, however, is not the focus. Rather the objective of the methodology is to observe EMB trust dynamics across different contexts using different data analytic approaches to evaluate the relevance of trust-building pathways. Through a series of empirical steps, these broad potential pathways, while all relevant, are distilled to a less unwieldy tri-dimensional model: more targeted to the particularities of electoral processes (as broadly described in chapters 1, 2 and 8), and as tested at the institutional and individual levels in chapters 5 and 6 and to serve as a more useful and intuitive 'package' to a practitioner community, as tested, revised and validated in chapter 7.

Chapter 5. Trust dynamics in six desk-study cases

This first of three empirical chapter studies crisis incidents through documentary evidence in six cases. Tracking trust dynamics means looking at what actually transpired. Because quotidian transactions rarely play out in the public space for scrutiny, the day-to-day waxing and waning of trust is opaque and hidden. However, during particular moments a spotlight shines on incidents, scandals or controversies that lead to the crisis moments. These public crisis moments are the subject of this chapter. Crises are invariably associated with a dramatic loss of trust and are thus compelling to understand electoral trust-building.

The chapter shows the relevance of the trust pathways described in literature, but shows that trust-building is never complete or entirely successful. Certainly, it is an ongoing active responsibility for EMBs to prove themselves trustworthy, but the cases exemplify how this responsibility is exercised against history, culture and events that are beyond EMB control. Further, the cases show that EMBs are uniquely beset by twin trust-building challenges: the inevitability of logistical failure, and the inevitability of relational tensions because the political stakes are high. Institutions that safeguard trustworthiness are to be valued, but they cannot prevent crises that become trust-breaking events. Logistical failures, often related to the time-bound, temporary and decentralised nature of electoral operations, expose a reality that elections are not a bedrock, a reality that amplifies the agitation of candidates and supporters with visceral and personal investment in the outcome. At best, the leadership of an EMB is responsive, relationally attentive and intuitively employs trust-building pathways to calm or restore a careening situation – a form of adaptive strategising.

Electoral crises proved a useful analytical lens to sketch trust dynamics at a big-picture level. An arc of trust loss and rebuilding has an intuitive trajectory: grievances

(justified or not) arise and play out; authorities react more or less skilfully; confidence is fully or partially restored (or not at all). An electoral crisis brings a starkness and visibility to this arc. The clarity allowed by this public-playing-out-of-events contrasts with the opaque quality of 'everyday' public service where even tension-infused interplay naturally plays out quietly, with a slower pace, behind bureaucratic doors and bureaucratic language. In short, a crisis lens allows for an efficient approach to identify areas where socio-relational micro-interactions may be particularly visible for examination.

Crises may reveal serious flaws in management, and put leadership on display, in particular the ability to cooperate, delegate, and communicate (Mishra 1996). A crisis has been defined as a convergence of events and interests in the public space, a 'historic choice point' (Streeck & Thelen 2005, p. 7); Foucault (1963) describes a crisis as the juncture in a fever that leads to death or recovery. A crisis precipitates a focus of attention, and at best, analysis, mobilisation of those concerned, considered response and appropriate change. Crisis, shock, or geopolitical shifts can undermine the prevailing way of seeing things and launch a reappraisal or reframing (Halliday & Shaffer 2014).

Interpreted through a public administration lens, a crisis situation marks the fork in the road in which resolute action is demanded, but for which institutions and their officials are often unprepared. This 'lack of blueprint', this 'winging it in the public eye', is what makes crisis points so compelling for understanding trust in a public institution, and so terrifying for election administrators. In this sense, the story of readiness and of reaction becomes more telling than the crisis itself.

In summary, crises are big enough to attract a great deal of attention and are documented by many players. Bias towards the bigger players, the more visible actions and the dominant historical narrative is acknowledged. The next chapter redresses this bias by shifting the spotlight to micro-trust dynamics in real time through participant observation in an election.

This chapter proceeds in four main parts. The first introduces an anatomy of trust dynamics and explain the selection of cases. Secondly, six cases are presented in which an electoral crisis is followed by active trust-building. Thirdly, I present findings in the form of broad patterns across the cases. The fourth section is a discussion that links these findings with the trust-building pathways put forward as potentially relevant to EMBs. A final section summarises and concludes.

This chapter shows that trust dynamics are particularly relevant in the electoral context when stakes are high. The high stakes exacerbate levels of political agitation and expose political stakeholder vulnerabilities as manifested through both genuine anger over perceived injustice but also propensity to shift blame or try to affect the narrative of the elections for political purposes. The imperative to respond to these strong emotions and political drivers in an electoral crisis puts EMB leadership capability into the spotlight. At this juncture in the thesis journey, it is posited that relational skillsets and methods become particularly important for EMBs.

5.1 Understanding trust dynamics at play

The theoretical insights from chapter 3 showed a set of pathways for trust-building relevant for public institutions. Two ways of thinking dominate these pathways; trust as *transactional* – whereby the institution builds trust through careful planning and the well-executed delivery of services (as represented primarily by meeting expectations, competent delivery, order and predictability); and trust as *relational* whereby the values-messaging, norms and behaviour of the institution builds stakeholder confidence (as represented primarily by cooperation, fairness, ethical leadership and respectful micro-interactions).

5.1.1 Interplay

Interplay is affected by political and historical context. In the case of electoral trust, the interplay is between the EMB and its stakeholders. While a small-scale loss of electoral trust, such as an altercation between a voter and a polling station official, may sour relationships between those two individuals – it will not have repercussions on public trust beyond the incident. Loss of electoral trust becomes a societal problem only upon a series of escalations beyond the incident itself, and well beyond the emotional responses of particular individuals involved. This is when an incident can turn into a crisis and becomes a possible case for analysis in this chapter.

The stakeholders (actors) of note in this analysis are those who are engaged in the escalation of incident or circumstances underpinning EMB crises; those whose influence is such that their views of EMB credibility – their ‘trust’ – will affect and influence the reputation of the EMB beyond those directly implicated by the particular incident in question. These influencers, or multipliers, are an electoral elite expected to have insight into the electoral process, and their opinions are bestowed weight and validity. Typical examples of such trust-influencing categories of stakeholders are special committees on electoral matters, influential analysts in academia or the media, trending #hashtag creators, civil society observer groups and the international community in the form of diaspora, diplomats or international observers (see e.g. Leterme 2017). Individuals in these categories may not have directly experienced the incidents in question; nonetheless their interpretation of how events play out will be conclusive to how history – or the general public – judges the course of events.

Election contestants – the party officials and candidates standing for office – are a particularly important category of trust-influencing stakeholders. In the case of this stakeholder group, they may include the person (candidate) directly ‘aggrieved’ by the particular incident or decision in question. Their ability to tell the story of their

grievances – and convince impartial observers such as independent journalists of their version of events – can be the cause of an incident escalating in importance and public visibility. Civil society advocacy organisations may fall into this category as well, for example those that represent aggrieved societal groups of voters unfairly affected by an electoral policy. Today, social media, especially its virality, provides a new medium to spread the ‘story’ of whether an electoral process is deemed trustworthy. Bloggers or influencers can damage trust through commentary that may or may not be fully informed.

The confidence of another category of stakeholders, namely government agencies and individual ministers, can also be critical to ensuring that essential resources such as budget, appropriate legislation and talent are made available to the EMB. Without these enabling resources, an EMB is ‘set up to fail’, whether inadvertently or deliberately. The political appointees in the responsible ministries can both be susceptible to wider opinion and also complicit in shaping opinion in the enabling corridors of power, rather than in the public arena.

Trust interplay is affected by the electoral environment that mirrors the civic culture and historical context. A voter who doesn’t find their name on the voters’ list in the Netherlands might assume an administrative oversight, while the same experience in a fraught mid- or post-conflict context might generate an angry assumption of deliberate disenfranchisement. Attending to pre-existing tensions in the electoral environment, including the roles and interests of stakeholder categories, is a key component to understanding electoral trust dynamics and why incidents can escalate to electoral crises.

5.1.1.1 Crisis incidents

Incidents that become crises are likely to be most suited to analysis in this chapter because the reports will be unable to avoid reflection on trust interplay, even if the word

is not used. In crises, trust losses tend to be so significant that they cannot be ignored.

Anger and outrage, opposition and dismissal are terms that, depending on context, reflect perceived breaches of trust.

Not only are crises helpful as an opportunity to examine trust, but crises also illustrate the instrumental value of existing trust. A distrusted authority will navigate a crisis with extreme difficulty: every move will be viewed with suspicion, which in turn makes 'every necessary move' difficult to enact. Conversely, a healthy trust repository serves as a buffer for an institution to get through hard times (crisis). As the literature in chapter 3 illustrated, trust serves as a relational lubricant that allows for smoother navigation of complex situations because trust eases and enables cooperation.

Looking at particular historical elections through this lens means focusing on interplay (actors), incidents leading to crisis (as illustrative to identify dynamics), and patterns of fluctuating confidence in EMBs. A central idea in this analytical framework is that an electoral crisis occurs in the nexus of (mal)administration and stakeholder reaction. Whether the catalysing event is a severe breach of electoral practice or not, the most important aspects of an electoral crisis (from a trust perspective) are the reactions from affected stakeholders and their public expressions of dismay, outrage or other negative interpretation of events. These reactions matter because, whether justified or not, they set back public confidence in the electoral process. These dynamics are the 'interplay' that is understood as important in the analytical framework. These moments of reframing are important for noticing shifts in electoral trust; an electoral crisis brings into relief the interplay that shifts trust up or down.

Incidents that become crises can occur within any electoral phases – appointment of commissioners, voter registration, boundary delimitation, voting operations, voting results or regulating financing of political parties. In each instance this breach is brought to public attention in a negative light and through investigation which triggers response

and change processes. Technical or administrative mishaps are a regular occurrence in most electoral processes, and while these can be highly problematic from an election administration viewpoint, they can be contained and resolved ‘under the radar’. These incidents become a crisis (rather than an incident) in the interplay with stakeholders only if they escalate into the public domain because some stakeholders have chosen to make them public or amplify their importance.

It is of note that an electoral crisis may have already been brewing in the background waiting for a perfect storm to bring tensions to a head. An electoral crisis can relate to long-term mismanagement, corruption or impartiality rather than one specific incident. In these cases, the crisis is a slow burn, related to the build-up of stakeholder anger over the institution’s perceived inability to take care of the public good to which it has been entrusted.

In a trust crisis, stakeholders become divided and the cooperation necessary to ensure an orderly election and political transition is threatened or collapses. The trust crises examined in this chapter are different from externally driven emergencies, such as environmental, health or terrorist threats. External threats pose a different trust dynamic. External crises can temporarily ‘unite’ stakeholders to achieve a common purpose as occurred with the threat of terrorist attack in the 2014 Tunisian elections discussed in the next chapter.

5.1.2 Case selection

This chapter illustrates the building and breaching of institutional trust in electoral spaces by examining the interplay between EMBs and stakeholders in six cases. The cases (Philippines, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and Australia,) are geographically as well as chronologically diverse with two decades separating the earliest

incident from the latest. The cases were recommended by senior experts as examples of compelling stories around public confidence in the EMB.

The criteria for the selection of cases were that:

- a) In each case the source of the crisis and its resolution had to lie within the domain of the EMB – a cumulative build-up or isolated incident of maladministration which undermined trust. In other words, not a natural disaster or terrorist attack in which case other agencies' actions would dominate.
- b) For insights on interplay, each case would have to include stakeholder reactions to events which amplified the crisis.
- c) For insights into the variety and effectiveness of trust-building mechanisms, each case needed to include attempts by the EMB to rebuild trust after the incident with some success. Identifying what worked was prioritised over what did not work which was less systematically documented.

To ensure a correct rendering of the trust dynamics at play, there had to exist sufficient documentation on this interplay, whether by academics or practitioners. Using grounded theory methods of coding and clustering, I examined the documents for actors, incidents and discourse (public statements) that signalled loss, retention or gain of trust using the guiding questions described in chapter 4. Ideally, participants in the events were available for corroboration. Events had to be sufficiently documented in the academic or grey literature, in order to qualify for inclusion in the final six.

5.2 Electoral crisis and EMB trust-building – six cases

This section presents the chosen cases where trust in electoral systems and authorities was put to the test. Each vignette describes how events played out, how stakeholders reacted, how EMB authorities responded and whether confidence was restored. Each case was purposefully sampled for a trust story worth telling: that is, that

the case included an active trust-building behaviour to illuminate at least one aspect of the institutional trust story. The cases each demonstrate a ‘spark’ – such as ingenuity, leadership or a mechanism to resolve thorny electoral issues. In each case the source of the crisis and its resolution lies within the domain of the EMB, undermines trust and leads to stakeholder reactions that in turn amplify the crisis.

5.2.1 Philippines – pioneers of electoral vigilance³⁴

The Philippines’ 1986 and 1987 elections were turbulent and transformative domestically and beyond. The inspirational Filipino ‘People Power’ movement profoundly shifted how elections were watched and contested for decades to come. Specifically, these dramatic years for the Philippines widened the definition of electoral stakeholders beyond any EMB – political party binary view.

The crisis of the 1986 elections had both acute and slow-burning characteristics. Slow-burning because of persistent and localised thuggish money-power political culture. Acute because of the drama of the particular historical point in time where these pervasive political habits – and the weakness of institutions to contain them – were put on sharp display. The 1983 assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino both marked and intensified domestic unrest. In that context, with an aim to secure his political dynasty, President Marcos in 1986 called and held a snap election.

In contrast to the pervasive culture of dirty politics emerged a stark countermovement. It is at this time that the civil society movement that came to be known as NAMFREL (National Citizens Movement for Free Elections) finds its feet, its

³⁴ In addition to in-text citations, this section was built on a cumulative picture derived from reports and additional desk-study case sources listed in Appendix C and interviews listed in Appendix D.

voice and its stable base. With significant Catholic Church support that provided legitimacy to the effort, as well as business groups, the coalition of civil society groups from across the country worked both at the grassroots level and in the capital. On their agenda was the promotion of peaceful means to support democracy which meant encouraging active participation in elections, encouraging opposition not to boycott the elections, promoting electoral reform and – importantly – teaching themselves how to organise effective domestic monitoring capacity to be able to ascertain the fairness of elections.

By the time of the Marcos snap election in 1986, NAMFREL had both the capacity and the clout – backed by the church and with the active participation of half a million people – to declare the elections fraudulent and have that declaration accepted. They pioneered a quick parallel count method to assess the accuracy of results, a method that has since been replicated and standardised globally. Manila exploded into a popular uprising, with the support of the military. These dynamics culminated with a dramatic storming of the presidential Malacañang palace and the flight of President Marcos.

In behaviour, in aspiration and in composition, the civil society countermovement held higher trust than official institutions. Electoral authorities were in disarray with internal morale at a nadir. Courageous election officials walked off the job during the 1986 count.

A rapid rebuilding of electoral trust in time for the May 1987 legislative elections was possible for three reasons. Firstly, the political goodwill that accompanied the rise of Corazon Aquino and the exodus of the Marcos regime buoyed sentiment towards the elections; secondly, significant changes were introduced, in particular to the contentious area of how election officials were appointed; and thirdly, the active engagement of NAMFREL with its people power and Roman Catholic Church backing to affirm the legitimacy of the process.

All was not smooth sailing. The 1987 elections were violent and contested as had become almost a 'habit' or culture of Filipino elections. Nonetheless, "most Filipinos have accepted the post-Marcos election results as reflecting the collective choices of the populace and appear convinced that the electoral process has improved dramatically under the Aquino government" (NDI 1991, p. 1). A new constitution, an elected legislature, local officials elected and the reform of the EMB the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), all signalled a return to democracy for the Philippines. This time, there was an organised 'people power' movement to protect these reforms from backsliding.

The pioneering work of NAMFREL demonstrated the power of civil society as a force for ensuring fairness and a level playing field. As such, the 1986–87 innovations established a catalyst and a playbook for global domestic observation movements. The two Philippine elections covered in this case vignette were both caught up in the maelstrom and democratic tailwind in which they took place. While the electoral infrastructure and legal platform for elections mattered for electoral trust, these 'objective' success factors paled in comparison to the importance of the perceptions, concerns and behaviours of the political contestants, electors, NGOs and EMB and their capacity to hold each other accountable.

The trust pathways identified in the literature (3.3) are partially helpful for understanding the remarkable transition in the Philippines. Lack of ethical leadership depleted EMB staff morale, which in turn led to the 'walk-outs' which impacted delivery (counter-directional to the normal pathway whereby poor delivery negatively impacts trust). The absence of trust can be directly linked with the meeting of needs and expectations, pathways of fairness, of embodying ethical values – or rather, the generalised understanding that these institutional characteristics were completely lacking during the end of the Marcos period. Rebuilding trust in the EMB would necessarily be

exceptionally long term and relationally oriented work towards sceptical stakeholders bruised by past experience. But for the short term, NAMFREL served as a ‘third-party’ proxy, as a trusted third party that could vouch for the electoral process, where justified to do so. In this sense, EMB cooperation with civil society forces proved invaluable for trust in the electoral process, if not in the electoral institution.

5.2.2 Ghana – shining example from troubled beginnings³⁵

For several decades, Ghana has enjoyed a highly established reputation in the electoral community. Seen as a pioneer and a model, the Ghana Election Commission’s reputation is based less on its technical (transactional) qualities, but rather on its pioneering (relational) work in outreach and consultation. The practice of establishing political liaison committees pioneered in Ghana is now widespread. These practices grew out of necessity and deep distrust in institutions. The transformation of the Ghanaian EMB from a young and untested low-profile agency to the ‘institution of governance’ model that it became known for took place in the 1990s during a particularly fraught historical period of Ghanaian politics.

While a National Commission for Democracy had already been established in 1982, it took almost a decade to realise meaningful reforms to secure Ghana’s transition to multiparty democracy after authoritarian rule. In 1991, the Interim National Electoral Commission was created alongside a new constitution (1992), an end to bans on political activity, and mechanisms to ensure freedom of the press.

³⁵ In addition to in-text citations, this section was built on a cumulative picture derived from reports and additional desk-study case sources listed in Appendix C and interviews listed in Appendix D.

For the international community, these were positive signs. (Asante and Bossman 2017) Comparatively, the 1992 elections were flawed in the way that many newly democratic elections were flawed. For this reason, international observers were benevolently and uniformly positive about the elections. The Carter Center and the Commonwealth Observation Missions deemed the 1992 election results valid: “despite the occurrence of serious irregularities in the election process, what we have observed does not lead us to question the validity of the results” (The Carter Center 1992, p. 1).

For domestic opposition stakeholders, however, seething residual grievances and fears that incumbent strongman Jerry John Rawlings was using ‘democratic’ means to assure his authoritarian power affected their views and expectations of the very same elections. With this backdrop, the 1992 elections were conducted in a cloud of political turmoil: boycotts by the four major opposition parties and low turnout by their supporters. The parliamentary elections were contested by only three parties, all aligned to the Rawlings government, giving his National Democratic Congress party a formidable win.

The opposition parties expressed deep distrust of the election commission and made accusations that the outcome of the presidential election was rigged by the government, demonstrating a “deep-seated lack of trust ... in the impartiality of those responsible for managing the electoral process and profound suspicion that those in power would not hesitate to use whatever means were required to stay in power” (ComSec 1997, p. 4). They also expressed anger with international elections observers (ComSec 1997). A 1993 report submitted by the New Patriotic Party called ‘The Stolen Verdict’ indicted in particular a deeply flawed voters’ register as one of the reasons for not accepting the results of 1992 as valid (ComSec 1997).

Five years later, reflecting back on their own initial observations from 1992, the Commonwealth Secretariat described the subsequent dynamics as follows:

Underlying the complaints, however, was a more fundamental issue: a deep-seated lack of trust on the part of the opposition parties in the impartiality of those responsible for managing the electoral process and profound suspicion that those in power would not hesitate to use whatever means were required to stay in power... (ComSec 1997, p. 4).

To redress the 1992 crisis of confidence, a new electoral commission was introduced. This commission introduced a series of measures to address the 1992 (and earlier) electoral weaknesses. These measures included new registration arrangements, the introduction of computerised scanners and the introduction of identity cards. Introducing practical measures to fix the ostensible problems were not, however, enough to convince opposition parties of the EMB's impartiality. Commonwealth observers reported that the parties were 'deeply suspicious' of the EMB's efforts; "this reflected their belief that the Electoral Commission's predecessor, the Interim National Electoral Commission (which had been responsible for managing the 1992 elections) had been biased in favour of the governing party and that the new commission would prove equally untrustworthy. The suspicion diminished over time, and the parties later accepted the new technology and the arrangements for registration and voter identity cards ..."

(ComSec 1997, p. 4).

The trust-building and 'diminishing' of suspicion was not solely the result of technical improvements such as the improved voters' register. Rather, acceptance of the new technology to improve the register was a by-product of acceptance of the new EMB arrangements (Gyimah-Boadi 2007). The suite of confidence-building measures – the new Constitution that outlined the conditions for elections, the re-formed electoral commission, a provision for elections to be held concurrently - had the value of signalling renewed commitment to a level playing field.

According to observers of that period, it was the new behaviours and competencies of the EMB that marked the biggest change between the crisis elections of

1992 and the trust-building elections of 1996 (Bratton 1999). The methods and mechanisms that Commissioner Afari-Gyan and his officers used were novel: consultation, dialogue and responsiveness with political parties. Through dialogue, the EMB pre-empted potential spoilers, ensuring that contestation or questioning about the electoral process happened inside the electoral ‘tent’, rather than in the public arena (Gyimah-Boadi 2007). Afari-Gyan engaged personally in communication with stakeholders; actively explaining, actively listening. Electoral technical issues were ironed out ‘inside-the-tent’, rather than in the public eye. This allowed avoiding the public contestation that fuels uncertainty. The EMB also built relationships with traditional leaders to build a sense of shared commitment to peaceful elections. While distrust lingered, the opposition nonetheless made the important decision to re-engage and participate in the 1996 elections (ComSec 1997).

These methods proved to have lasting impact on public trust and social capital, as well as Ghana’s democratic reputation more broadly. In an analysis from 2008, democracy scholar Gyimah-Boadi writes about the electoral commission (EC) that:

There is extremely high public trust of the EC. In all the four general elections, the EC demonstrated sufficient impartiality in handling the electoral process.

It is a credible election authority that can be depended upon for all future elections because it has showed tenacity in the management of the electoral process. When the 1992 election cleaved society, the EC undertook measures that had far reaching consequences on the credibility of subsequent elections. The quality of elections has improved election after election. The electioneering has been marked by [intensified unity] between the EC and political parties. As a result, the chronic accusations of bias, suspicion and mistrust against the EC have reduced significantly. A large number of interviewees rated the EC as the most trusted governance institution in Ghana (Gyimah-Boadi 2007, p. 4).

More than 10 years later, renowned election academic Khabele Matlosa writes in the context of Ghana’s 2008 elections that they came “against the backdrop of growing

disenchantment with the capability of African countries to hold credible and peaceful elections. ... For the EC in particular the challenge posed by the 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections was to maintain its widely acclaimed reputation for efficiency and effectiveness in election management. It can be said that Ghana was expected to show the way forward for the rest of Africa” (Matlosa, 2008, p. 3).

Following 2008 it has been more challenging for the EC to retain the ideal electoral conditions. Political party behaviour, social media disinformation and democratic apathy exist in Ghana as in other nations. However, the Ghana 1996 model of EMB leadership and dialogue methods have affected the community of practice in elections – in Africa and beyond. Afari-Gyan himself served as a mentor for many subsequent commissioners beyond Ghana, emphasising concepts of leadership, professional courage, risk management and managing expectations. Likewise, the Ghanaian practice of liaison committees linking EMBs to parties continues beyond Ghana – whether as a safety valve for tensions or as forum for interparty squabbles. The concept of peace architecture or infrastructure for peace that inspires UNDP programming draws on this and other Ghanaian success stories of relational and locally anchored political dialogue (Alihodžić 2012; Odendaal 2010; van Tongeren 2022).

The Ghanaian trust-building story highlights the imperative and utility of relational trust-building approaches to rebuild and repair damaged institutional trust, with emphasis on fairness and cooperation. With political emotions running high, solving trust problems through improved delivery was not a viable option. Importantly, alongside the Nigerian case (5.2.4), it shows the value of a recognised individual leader to spearhead organisational renewal through visible ethical leadership, in contrast to the example of the Philippines where a third party served as a proxy for trust.

5.2.3 Kenya – the wake-up call³⁶

The standout example of electoral crisis is the simultaneously run presidential, parliamentary and civic elections held on 27 December 2007 in Kenya. The presidential elections in particular were riddled with irregularities and suspicion of fraud. The mismanaged vote count with ensuing serious post-election violence and deepening of ethnic divisions brought Kenya to the brink of civil war, with a thousand lives lost.

The candidates, and their supporters, did not trust the election commission, and they did not trust the results (Gibson & Long 2009; UNDP 2008). While the accusations of rigging were mainly directed against the Party of National Unity, suspicion also fell on the Election Commission of Kenya (ECK) commissioners and ECK staff at the National Tallying Centre in Nairobi.

Because Kenya had long been seen as a stable and important regional anchor of peace and economic stability in a volatile part of Africa, as Jørgen Elklit writes, “this tragic violence was greeted with disbelief around the world” (Elklit 2010, p. 128). The 2002 general elections were seen to be well run and peaceful, and the commission was – to the international community at least – thought to be robust with a highly respected leadership. Domestically, however, confidence in the ECK and in the integrity of the 2007 general elections was greatly undermined by a presidential last-minute appointment of 18 out of 21 new commissioners. This appointment was made at short notice, without consultation as had been expected and agreed in a 1997 interparty agreement: “it contributed to the ECK being considered by many – not only the opposition Orange

³⁶ In addition to in-text citations, this section was built on a cumulative picture derived from reports and additional desk-study case sources listed in Appendix C and interviews listed in Appendix D.

Democratic Movement supporters – as biased in favour of the incumbent president’ (Elklit 2010, p. 132).

The closely contested Kenyan elections in 2007 were deeply flawed (ComSec 2013; EU 2008; Kiai 2008). Delayed legislation, a complex rollout of new technology, and weaknesses in the training of frontline officers were key problems that led to inconsistencies in the ways in which staff operated polling stations. These inconsistencies would have dire consequences. The institutional weaknesses in the EMB manifested in the ‘cutting-of-corners’ and delays that became evident in a disorderly vote count and communication of results.

Rather than taking a step back to reintroduce order and confidence in the count, a fateful decision was made by the ECK to announce the presidential winner under hurried and strained conditions. The surprise official announcement of President Mwai Kibaki as the presidential winner in the midst of the vote-counting problems marked the nadir of the crisis. An equally hurried and under-the-radar presidential swearing-in ceremony immediately thereafter sealed the opinion that something was deeply fishy.

It was the perception of skulduggery and subterfuge, rather than the mismanagement of the count, that help explain why the levels of violence that erupted were out of proportion to the logistical problems in the elections. While the election result was the immediate trigger, the social and political environment in which the unexpected and contested results were announced was, by this time, toxic. Election-related violence erupted in some places even before the announcement.

Documents from the election week itself do not show anything that stands out as worthy of precipitating such a reaction. The week after the 2007 election, the Commonwealth election observer report (ComSec 2007) notes issues of concern including violence, but in no way foreshadows the post-election violence and the political turmoil that followed in early 2008. The reactions of palpable anger – violent and non-

violent – were not framed as frustration with an operationally dysfunctional public agency. That is, the criticisms were not framed in the language of incompetence but rather as fraud, deceit and conspiracy. While the electoral mishap was compounding, in the political landscape things were turning explosive. Underlying and unresolved societal cleavages along ethnic lines, particularly relating to land issues (ComSec 2007) exacerbated both the electoral problems and political problems of floor crossing and party instability of the preceding years³⁷. As one analysis put it, “no single element can be singled out as responsible for the failure to conduct acceptable elections, as all ... elements interacted in complex ways, thereby contributing to the eventual political crisis.” (Elklit 2010, p. 132)

The electoral crisis was on two fronts. An operational catastrophe on the one hand, and societal conflict on the other. The EMB was unable to manage either.

Rebuilding faith in the electoral process in Kenya has proven difficult. Tensions and distrust ran so high in the aftermath, the geopolitical stakes were so high, that the highest international intervention was called in, headed by Kofi Annan. Part of this intervention was an Independent Review Commission (IREC) tasked to analyse and understand what had gone wrong in order to recommend electoral reform.

The carefully composed IREC (4 Kenyans from both sides of the divide, along with high-level international legal and electoral experts) was also known as the Kriegler Commission, as it was led by the highly capable South African former election commissioner and Constitutional Court Justice Johann Kriegler (Elklit 2010; EU 2013).

³⁷ Parliament and election candidature was characterised by flowing party loyalties. None of the major parties in 2007 had existed in the previous elections. Floor crossing was rampant. 300 political parties registered in 2007, only 3 receiving any significant proportion of the vote (ComSec 2007).

Their mandate was to review the legal framework, and through interviews and document review, gain an understanding of the ECK preparedness, public participation and the 2007 operations as they unfolded, with a special focus on the vote count and tallying. This commission's painstakingly careful work painted a picture of unpreparedness, maladministration and poor handling of the crisis, but not of outright fraud. They were neither mandated to – nor did they – assess who the actual winner of the election was. However, their recommendations to improve the electoral process were thorough and urgent.

The years that followed included a comprehensive overhaul of the electoral legal framework and operations. In particular, the previously controversial EMB appointment process was reformed in a painstakingly transparent and thorough manner. In response, political forces showed restraint in their mobilisation of supporters. It was in no-one's interest to relive the violence of early 2008. However, public trust in the results can no longer be taken for granted in Kenya. In 2017 and in 2022, the opposition contested the results, responsibly through the courts rather than the streets.

The Kenyan case perhaps most starkly points to the seeming futility of isolated or short-term trust-rebuilding approaches in a societal context where grievances run deep. The geopolitical importance of Kenya meant that all resources were available to rebuild trust for the election that followed 2008, and subsequently: from vote-counting technology to improve delivery to the highest standards of transparency to recruit new commissioners. The efforts and significant investments have largely been directed towards delivery-oriented, transactional trust-building, and the accompanying 'visuals' (such as televised recruitment). These efforts have moved the needle on several fronts; elections have been held with a high level of technical competence. The high level of technical investments has not been met with a commensurate increase in trust. Reflecting societal rifts and tensions, institutional culture within the EMB remains fraught, meaning

that the longer-term trust-building pathways of predictability and order and meeting the needs and expectations of stakeholders are fragile at best.

Provisional implications for a ‘fit-for-purpose’ electoral trust-building model are to upgrade the importance of relational trust-building strategies where tensions run high, and to extend the timeframes of any expectations of institutional rebuilding.

5.2.4 Nigeria – “bad, worse, worst ... and then better”³⁸

The Nigerian crisis of confidence in its electoral institutions was not precipitated by a particular incident or mishap. Rather, pernicious features of civic culture and political behaviour in the 1990s and onwards manifested in the way that elections were conducted; namely that strong arm tactics were critical to gain or maintain political power in Nigeria. Peaceful democratic mechanisms were not seen as a viable option. Nigeria’s reputation in elections became synonymous with corrupt practice and violence, with the elections of 2007 marking a nadir of a declining integrity spiral.

The role of an EMB to ensure a level playing field for candidates necessitates drawing a regulatory ‘line in the sand’ against undemocratic electoral practices and behaviours. Whether unable or unwilling, the Nigerian Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) did not play this role. The election years of 1999, 2003 and 2007 “could arguably be described as bad, worse and the worst, respectively, in the annals of election administration in Nigeria” as articulated by Bolaji (2014 p. 53). The misuse of violence and money as campaign strategies were met with impunity (Bolaji 2014; Kerr

³⁸ In addition to in-text citations, this section was built on a cumulative picture derived from reports and additional desk-study case sources listed in Appendix C and interviews listed in Appendix D.

2013; EU 2007). In 2007, 1475 petitions were filed against the INEC-declared election results – the highest number to that date (Bolaji 2014).

Public trust in the EMB was at rock bottom. INEC was seen as weak, ineffective, and lacking in both transparency and autonomy (Kerr 2013; EU 2007; Reform report 2008). INEC was seen as either unable to curtail or as complicit in widespread fraud: Bolaji describes the widely held view that political elites had “capitalised on the EMBs’ weaknesses to manipulate the electoral process.” (Bolaji 2014, p. 50). The INEC appointment process – a monopoly for the incumbent president – fuelled the view of the EMB as systemically biased (EU 2007; Kerr 2013). The perceived complicity of INEC in Nigeria affected its reputational legitimacy. The EMB was seen as weak and lacking in autonomy, failing to use bureaucratic tools and regulation as a lever to make a level playing field; as Kerr explains “INEC, the main electoral management body in Nigeria, was censured for its lack of independence from executive control, low levels of transparency, and ineffective election administration” (Kerr 2013, p. 824). Not only was the electoral institution neither equipped nor inclined to safeguard the electoral process by tackling these problems of political culture, but it also fell short in the basics of technical delivery with difficulties in keeping order over the entire custody chain of electoral materials from vendors to the frontlines.

To rebuild trust in the electoral process, in 2008 a designated electoral reform committee recommended a holistic, top–down suite of actions. In April 2010 Acting President Jonathon signalled a commitment to reform by removing the Chairman of INEC, Maurice Iwu only a few months before his term end date, and appointing new INEC commissioners while retaining others. The most significant appointment was that of electoral reform committee member Attahiru Jega, a respected university vice chancellor, to serve as the new Chairman of INEC. The appointment “was met with

widespread approval both within and outside Nigeria, as Professor Jega was hailed as a man of integrity” (ComSec 2011, p. 10).

The changes in the commission brought improvements to the way that INEC worked both on the technical side, but also, notably, on the relational side. Jega embarked on an outreach and relation-building campaign with international as well as domestic stakeholders to gain backing for reforms and to rebuild the image of Nigerian elections. Drawing on ethical values, his campaign for organisational change began within INEC itself with personal visits to regional offices to ensure that a no-tolerance-for-corruption policy, including the firing of officials where necessary.

While progress was palpable on the ‘image-improving’ and internal culture fronts, the knock-on effects of delayed procurement brought an election-day crisis to the 2011 elections. In a shock announcement mid-election day on the 4 April 2011, Commissioner Jega halted proceedings and postponed polling to a later date, a nightmare scenario for any election head. Senior election officials had already been deployed for election-day duty across the country, thousands of polling stations had already opened, and voters were arranging their day to elect candidates to National Assembly. For weeks preceding election day, INEC, the Nigerian EMB, had been on tenterhooks waiting for the arrival of the results sheets critical to electoral operations. The results sheets featured exclusive high-quality paper and unique individual identifiers to polling stations. These features had been designed as part of a carefully negotiated fraud prevention strategy intended to rebuild trust in the process after years of corrupt practice.

For various reasons, which according to the overseas suppliers included the diversion of airplanes to the Fukushima disaster in Japan, the arrival of the anxiously awaited materials to Nigeria was continually delayed. Some parts of the shipment, which also included ballot papers and results sheets, started arriving in time to be disbursed to

the field. The perilously delayed final shipment was scheduled to arrive election-day morning with a transport fleet ready to distribute them. The shipment did not arrive.

A marked difference from previous elections was the communication and stakeholder relations work done by INEC to ease tensions and avert misunderstandings in conjunctions with this logistical emergency. The regular use of methods such as personal telephone calls, press conferences and bespoke meetings helped the restoration of reputation. As the Chair of the Commonwealth Secretariat observer group Festus Mogae announced on 21 April 2011:

In the event, notwithstanding the postponement of the 2 April National Assembly Elections and persistent logistical and organisational deficiencies, and some serious security incidents during the campaign and on the eve of the elections, the 2011 elections in Nigeria, by and large, met the national, regional and international standards for democratic elections. Indeed, they marked a genuine celebration of democracy in Nigeria, helped to redeem the image of Nigeria as a country that was known only for flawed elections and served to restore the faith of the Nigerian people in democracy” (ComSec 2011).

The Nigerian case highlights several helpful points for an EMB trust-building model. An institutionally weak EMB in a context of political strongmanship and rife corruption is a near impossible starting point. The case also highlights that technology, sometimes adopted in the hope that it will be trust-building, can be trust destroying if badly implemented. Delivery trust-oriented measures, like the high-tech results sheets, failed to deliver the anticipated trust dividends. In contrast, as in the Ghana case, the signalling value of a hardworking, trusted individual who systematically worked through and with stakeholders was critical. This contributed to a cautiously optimistic trust-rebuilding that transferred to the institution, as evidenced by the acceptance of the election delay by political party leaders. Different from the Ghana case was the significant internal work to combat corrupt practices from within – this demanded a

delicate balance of threat of sanctions and signalling of higher values in line with cooperation and compliance regulatory theories described in 3.3.4.

The Nigerian case can also serve as a warning for any assumptions that predictability and order, or meeting expectations, is necessarily or always a good thing. In the 1990s in Nigeria, the EMB was predictably corrupt, and the expectations of it were in line with this behaviour.

5.2.5 Pakistan – political danger, bureaucratic calming³⁹

There was a remarkable shift between Pakistani elections held in 2008 and those held five years later, in 2013. The political tumult is the better-known story of those elections: lesser known was the bureaucratic cultural shift taking place within the EMB – particularly in its relationship to its stakeholders.

The 2008 elections were orchestrated to signal an orderly transition from military rule to civilian rule. They were boycotted and seen with suspicion. The Election Commission of Pakistan – as organisers of the election – were tainted by this suspicion. Nonetheless, outside observers viewed the election as having been conducted reasonably freely and fairly given the complex political dynamics playing out in the background with the Musharraf legacy and the influence of the military on politics (Goodson 2008; Nelson 2009). The power dynamics that the transition opened up were explosive culminating in the assassination of Benazir Bhutto on the campaign trail and the return of exiled former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. Political tensions spiralled, continuing after the elections

³⁹ In addition to in-text citations, this section was built on a cumulative picture derived from reports and additional sources listed in Appendix C and interviews listed in Appendix D.

with a mass uprising linked with a lawyers' movement and anger over judicial matters.

The opposition coalition that won those elections initiated major political reforms including the reduction of presidential powers and a general decentralisation of power.

In many ways, Pakistan had a solid transactional trust-building foundation in its capacity to deliver. Pakistan has a long history of bureaucratic capability. Capable election administration is part of that history. The EMB has experienced and knowledgeable officers, and the networks and structures to competently deliver electoral services across the country in a timely fashion.

Pakistan's problem with electoral trust lay elsewhere; in the perceived and structurally embedded weakness of the electoral institution up against powerful political forces. The independence of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was limited because electoral rules were subject to the approval of the President, and, as with many EMBs, the ECP was financially dependent on the incumbent government. According to observer reports, stakeholder disappointments and anger with the EMB have lain with its failure to provide a safe and level playing field for parties, its lack of consultation, its lack of independence and for its inability to provide clean and trustworthy voters' lists. Samad summarises the literature as follows: "the democratic façade was removed in 1999 and the system returned to military rule under General Musharraf. By 2002, Musharraf returned to the tutelary illiberal hybrid model, holding multiparty elections in which the opposition ... faced numerous hurdles preventing them effectively participating. The performance of the ECP ... was much criticised for its lack of independence, its failure to change the government [despite election results]; for the restrictions imposed on political parties and deficiencies in the compilation of voting registers and provision of identity cards" (Samad 2017, p. 512).

Year after year political practices in Pakistan are condemned by the international community. The political environment in which elections are organised is plagued by

violence, military coups and power exchanges based on non-democratic mechanisms. The elections themselves exacerbate and focus the volatility to an intense, high-stakes timeframe, making electoral campaigns a vulnerable, dangerous environment for candidates and party supporters. The subtext of violence can be found at high levels and on the frontlines. That high-profile Pakistani politicians have been targeted for assassinations or have retreated to exile is well known. According to election observer reports, this violence manifests also at district level through heavy-handed demonstrations of power, and at polling station levels through ‘thuggish’ behaviours. Adding to these domestic power struggles, external threats from the Taliban against election workers and voters added to a general sense of insecurity and culture of fear surrounding elections.

The perennial trust problem for the EMB has been its perceived weakness to stave off the influence of these political forces in order to guarantee a fair and secure election for those involved. In comparison with its powerful neighbouring counterpart, the Election Commission of India, the ECP has been seen as unable to use the electoral bureaucracy and its mechanisms to level the playing field, and to keep in line the political forces that seek to subvert this level playing field.

The 2013 elections marked Pakistan’s first handover from one full term democratically elected regime to another (Samad 2017). Pakistani voters turned out in large numbers despite the rise of political violence in the country, as did political parties and candidates to compete in a lively campaign. Thanks to confidence-building measures put in place, the EMB was seen as increasingly effective and independent. The story of these EMB confidence-building measures is a quiet one – an under-the-radar, yet seismic shift in organisational culture and habits.

The vehicle for the shift was a simple mechanism: a decision to develop and adopt a strategic plan, the first in the 50-year history of the ECP. The strategic plan

served as a trust-building mechanism because of its normative (values-oriented) heft, its consultative process and its public communication function.

The values-driven character and values-anchoring function of the strategic plan can be seen in both the final product and the development and rollout steps. The vision⁴⁰, mission⁴¹ and guiding principles⁴² that open the strategic plan (ECP 2010) were the first task of the committee to formulate – and served as the normative anchor for the reform plan that followed. The values anchoring within the ECP occurred as each carefully formulated word needed to be agreed to at the highest levels and needed to be made meaningful in practice in the actionable guiding principles, procedures and training programs which would influence the day-to-day work of staff throughout the organisation. These actionable items – 15 goals and 129 objectives – were developed by four specialised ECP teams. Each included values-driven language of inclusion and transparency, and, importantly, were budgeted and programmed for delivery, monitoring and follow up. The values choices were globally influenced with the reform agenda having roots in the recommendations of international observation reports. An Election Support Group comprising donors and international community representatives showed active interest through engagement, funding and provision of international technical advisers to the planning process. An electoral code of conduct for parties and candidates,

⁴⁰ The vision as outlined in the 2010-2015 Strategic Plan is for the ECP to: “To fulfil the constitutional obligation of holding free, fair and impartial elections in an effective, credible, transparent and independent manner; providing equal opportunity and accessibility to all and meeting the aspirations of the nation for a strong democracy in Pakistan” (ECP 2010, p. 29).

⁴¹ The mission as outlined in the 2010-2015 Strategic Plan is: “To organise and conduct free, fair and impartial elections through enhancing its organisational capacity; preparing and maintaining credible electoral rolls; delimiting constituencies in a credible manner; encouraging voters’ participation; monitoring electoral processes diligently; and building constructive relationships with all stakeholders, and introducing comprehensive electoral reforms in Pakistan” (ECP 2010, p. 29).

⁴² The guiding principles are specified as: Independence, Impartiality, Transparency, Integrity, Inclusion of Marginalised Groups, Professional Excellence, Conducive Working Conditions, Gender Balance (ECP 2010).

a feature of the strategic plan to deal with the violence and behaviours plaguing electoral campaigns, was taken extremely seriously, with 400 ECP teams deployed in the 2013 elections to monitor adherence to the Code (ECP 2013).

The second trust-building feature of the strategic plan was the comprehensive inclusive and consultative character of the development of the plan and reform agenda. The consultations had richness in depth and breadth. Internally, the consultations involved electoral officials at all levels and across provinces – with decisions and ownership from the very top of the traditionally hierarchical organisational structure. Externally – the consultations ranged from focus groups at the local level with traditionally marginalised groups and local advocacy agencies, to high-level formal meetings with political parties, other formal institutions and even the international community. This consultative format was unprecedented in the half century history of the ECP; not only were the concerns and suggestions of voters recorded, but also their feelings (IFES 2013) – again, not something normally associated with the ECP modus operandi.

The third trust-building measure was the public communication drive. The ECP launched a press advertisement campaign and a series of high-level launches to present and explain the importance of the strategic plan. A case study describes just how unusual this wide dissemination was: “It was an unprecedented move from an organisation which was considered introverted and hesitant to discuss matters with stakeholders. Resultantly, it created a lot of respect for the ECP as an even more open and transparent organization” (IFES 2013).

These three trust-building mechanisms built into the strategic planning process were designed to change an institutional culture from within, rather than to solve a one-off crisis or to sway public perception. This culture shift was deeply needed. In contrast to the Australian case described next, in Pakistan the crisis which led to boycotted

elections in 2008 was slow-burning and institutionalised rather than related to a particular incident. The strategic planning process that involved values-anchoring, consultations and public communication signalled genuine intentions to improve the relational capacity and strength of the EMB to navigate an intensely difficult political environment.

Through the strategic plan, the chairperson initiated a consultative planning process that served as a confidence-building tool and a means to gain elite buy-in to changes in Pakistani electoral practice. Certainly, the strategic plan included transactional trust-enhancing elements such as improved voter registration. Ethical values were front and centre in the plan. Importantly for the Pakistani context, the relational strengthening occurred via the consultative mechanisms built into the development of the strategic plan. This process served to consolidate views, build internal morale, and signal ‘good intent’ to the institution’s closest watchers. EMB reputation was improved in 2013 after these measures were introduced. While long-held perceptions and long-learned behaviour are difficult to change with one mechanism, the Pakistani case nonetheless serves to emphasise the relational dimension of electoral trust-building through cultural shifts within EMBs.

5.2.6 Australia – the danger of complacency⁴³

These events shook public confidence in an agency that had hitherto enjoyed the faith of the community and shed light on unacceptable mismanagement practices within the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) (JSCEM 2015, p. 1).

⁴³ In addition to in-text citations, this section was built on a cumulative picture derived from reports and additional desk-study case sources listed in Appendix C and interviews listed in Appendix D.

In the lead up to the events of 2013, the AEC enjoyed a high reputation both domestically and internationally. The EMB was regarded as consistently delivering high-quality services, accurate election results and high voter turnout. Also internationally, the AEC had a reputation as an exemplary and highly esteemed EMB. Hundreds of international electoral officials came to Australia for study visits over several decades; senior AEC officers were requested by the UN to help design and implement high-profile electoral support missions in Namibia, Cambodia and Timor Leste, and the Australian foreign affairs ministry, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), systematically included the AEC in its international governance support efforts in the Asia–Pacific region.

Under the surface, later reports (discussed below) revealed an erosion of capability in parts of the organisation through cutbacks and outsourcing similar to that observed in other parts of the Australian public service (Tingle 2016). This capability loss manifested as a de-valuing of electoral knowledge, outsourcing of electoral tasks to logistics companies, and a nonchalance about centrally issued regulations and instructions. A steady erosion of sound practice culminated in one particular incident in Western Australia (WA) during the federal elections of late 2013.

This incident was the discovery of a discrepancy of 1370 Senate ballots in the post general election recount. A period of uncertainty followed awaiting the outcome of the physical hunt for missing ballot papers, a not unchallenging task in a state 1.5 times the size of Alaska. The uncertainty brought great agitation in particular for the parties, candidates and their supporters in this close WA Senate race. The AEC at the national level handled the crisis in due order: they identified the problem, they made the knowledge public, they initiated an investigation and themselves formally submitted the issue to the appropriate instance. The WA Senate elections were declared void by the

Court of Disputed Returns at the AEC's initiative; elections were re-run at a cost of over AUD\$21.7 million (JSCoEM 2015). The ballots were never found.

There was no evidence of deliberate fraud, and the ballot-handling errors were correctly handled by the EMB once they were known. Nonetheless within the AEC morale plummeted and irritation grew. The vast majority of staff members and temporary election staff were not in any way responsible for the incident, but they suffered public humiliation and bore the brunt of the reputational damage to the agency. Normal work and programs were disrupted.

Electoral Commissioner Ed Killesteyn resigned following 'personal leave', as did the head of the WA office, Peter Kramer. In a public statement, the special minister of state, Michael Ronaldson, declared that "incidents such as this go to the heart of the AEC's reputation", and in a further rebuke, said that he had "personally expressed to the electoral commissioner my strong view that this situation is totally unsatisfactory and that I, as the responsible minister, view this matter very dimly" (*Guardian* 30 October 2013).

In the broader community, worst case scenarios for reputational damage such as rumours of a conspiracy to manipulate the outcome were averted in part thanks to the sober and calming assessments of respected opinion shapers. Election specialist Antony Green from the Australian national broadcaster and political journalist Peter Brent, for example, compared the AEC to EMBs internationally to bring the crisis into perspective in relation to the high expectations on the AEC from the domestic audience. Political stakeholders also showed restraint in their response, limited to commentary such as a sense of being duped, with a false sense of 'how well the AEC were travelling'. In fact, in Australia's stable electoral system, where established politicians can rely on alternating opportunities for access to power, and where business and public policy interests alike are dependent on societal stability, it was in no-one's political interest to publicly undermine the electoral process. Certainly, some political actors at the margins of

politics, specifically, an outlier businessman named Clive Palmer, took advantage of the media storm to publicly raise question marks around the electoral process.

A series of official inquiries followed the incident. Assessments from the Australian National Audit Office and from a Joint Standing committee with representatives of the two chambers of parliament were scathing, speaking of: “systemic failures that left the public and parliament with serious doubts about the AEC’s competence” (JSCoEM 2015). A former police commissioner, Mick Keelty, led an investigation commissioned by the AEC in which he assessed that the crisis exposed incompetence, unsound systems and a culture of disregard for ballot paper sanctity (Keelty 2014). The reports identified a culture of negligence of procedures and management in the transport and storage of ballot papers, problems with structural integrity, outsourced key functions without rigour to ensure integrity, temporary staff without proper guidelines or training, and aberration from national guidelines. The parliamentary committee expressed concern that “some views expressed by AEC officers in hearings showed a lack of understanding of the need to ensure all officers involved in election delivery understand the import of adherence to nationally consistent guidelines upholding the central tenet of the sanctity of the ballot paper” (JSCeOM 2015, p. 30 committee comment 2.107). DFAT began to look elsewhere for agencies to implement its electoral support programs in the Asia–Pacific region. Internal morale at the AEC headquarters sank (DFAT 2017).

One of the early incident investigators, Deputy Electoral Commissioner Tom Rogers, (subsequently Acting Commissioner following Commissioner Killestyn’s resignation), was given a vote of confidence by the responsible parliamentary committee: “The new Electoral Commissioner, Mr. Tom Rogers, has demonstrated to the Committee a clear acceptance and understanding of the extent of work needing to be

undertaken by the AEC” (JSCeOM 2015, p. 30 committee comment 2.106). Tom Rogers was mandated to rebuild the AEC and its reputation.

Under Commissioner Rogers’ leadership, new senior leadership were selectively recruited from other sectors of the public services and rigorous new ballot-handling procedures were introduced that included fencing, chain and padlocks for storage. The internal training regime was radically bolstered with strengthening of the unit, compulsory online training for frontline officers, state-of-the-art training facilities and weeklong on-site retraining courses for staff. This concerted effort to clear the AEC name was signalled with reform-minded and action-oriented language to the wider public through the AEC website and to government stakeholders through the strategic plan. Luckily, while trust in competence had suffered a blow, there were no issues about trust in the honesty or ethics of the implicated offices.

Despite these immediate and concerted efforts, the reparations to the AEC’s institutional reputation were not immediate. Residual hints of lingering reputational damage manifested in a number of ways. One was the institutional shyness exemplified by the notable absence of the AEC in the debates and lead up to the 2016 legislation on Senate voting reform. The voting reform marked the biggest change to the electoral system in several decades, and while public discussion was vigorous, the AEC was silent. The AEC did not contribute the policy advice which might reasonably be expected of the agency that was most knowledgeable on the potential impact of the reform, and most implicated in its implementation. Temporarily, the AEC experienced marginalisation and a loss of standing as a key institution to be consulted, a role which was taken by others such as the Ministry of Finance.

It is important to note that there was never a cover-up of the incident – the AEC and its officers took full responsibility through resignation of the chief officials, by going through all proper channels of investigation, by reconducting the elections and by

implanting necessary operational and cultural shifts. Attending to both transactional and relational trust pathways, these trust-building initiatives paid dividends over time. The dramatic disintegration of electoral trust in the US helped foster a sense of pride in the contrast with the robust electoral culture and institutions in Australia. Subsequent elections were run without incident and the events of 2013 serve as a cautionary tale within the electoral administration, even though they are largely forgotten in the public consciousness.

5.3 Electoral trust dynamics – broad patterns

The historically and geographically diverse cases of Australia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Philippines have ostensibly little that naturally binds them. Yet, each experienced, at some point in their democratic recent history, a period of shaken public confidence in their electoral institutions. Certainly, some environments were more vulnerable to electoral mistrust. The desk studies show that Pakistan and Nigeria had perennial public trust problems; Ghana and the Philippines were in transition phases with much at stake, and Kenya grappled with slow-burning social issues that bled into the elections sphere. However, the example of the trust crisis in Australian elections with the benefits of social stability and decades of experience shows that no EMB is immune to a trust failure.

This section (5.3) elicits the broad trust patterns that emerged across the cases and shows how, with systemic weaknesses and the almost ‘inevitability’ of something going awry in the electoral process, some mishaps or anomalies will go unnoticed while others will spiral. Trust dynamics are such that the ‘spiralling’ is less about the incident and more about the stakes and the grievances at play. And when the spiralling of stakeholder agitation peaks, it is almost too late for any trust-building strategy to yield short-term dividends, though both transactional trust-building (‘fixing it’) and relational

trust-building (navigating stakeholder concerns skilfully) are critical for medium-term improvement, as in each of the cases.

The electoral trust dynamics discussed in this section show the relevance and interwoven nature of transactional and relational trust-building pathways but complicate any straightforward recipe. Section 5.4 will show that, however well-crafted or successful, no single trust-building intervention was sufficient to guarantee the rebuilding of institutional trust over time or in all contexts.

5.3.1 Systemic and inherent trust impediments

The trust-crisis incidents exposed systemic weaknesses, some of which were beyond the capacity of the EMB to rectify. The desk-study cases illustrated many ways an EMB can struggle to deliver operationally and live up to stakeholder expectations, especially during politically tense historical moments.

Operational missteps in each case showed that EMBs struggled with the myriad moving parts of the electoral process that were ostensibly within their control. Whether as isolated incidents or as symptoms of institutional weakness, mistakes were made. Even for the most well-resourced and experienced case – the EMB of Australia – the decentralisation of critical operational tasks to remote regions and the inflexible electoral calendar was challenging. Inexperience and infrastructure were factors that increased the risk of operating errors. While the Kenyan mismanaged count or the ballot paper discrepancy in Australia could have been attributed to negligence or bad luck, close examination of the incidents that built to crisis (delayed results, missing ballots, mistakes in the voters' register) exposed chains of weaknesses and vulnerabilities both upstream and downstream.

'Downstream' weak spots, while within the responsibility of the EMB, were geographically, chronologically or functionally distant from the headquarters that serves

as mission control for the elections. Inherent to the nature of electoral management, sensitive and operation-critical functions are decentralised; for example, a last-minute emergency procedural change made in Manila affects the reality of a polling station in the remotest villages of Mindanao. The 2013 disappearance of WA Senate ballots pointed to failures in the handling of ballot papers at the frontlines, specifically their transport and storage. This ballot-loss incident took place thousands of kilometres from headquarters. In Pakistan, the Philippines and Nigeria, EMB central directives could be diluted in the face of local 'strongman' political forces. The Nigerian electoral reform commission noted problems that were systemic and ingrained in institutional culture. Even with experienced officers in Pakistan, observer reports noted inconsistent application of polling day procedures, particularly related to closing, counting and filling out results and reconciliation forms.

Across the cases, vulnerabilities or weaknesses in recruitment, training and procedures and routines around the handling of sensitive materials such as voter data or ballot papers were risks for a trust-losing incident. Procedures, materials and planning from central headquarters didn't always make it intact 'all the way out' to the sometimes geographically distant frontlines where voting takes place. In Ghana, poor training undermined local performance. In Kenya, vote-counting procedures and technologies were thwarted by local realities. Certainly, when routines such as rigorous ballot-handling routines or the tabulation and communication of polling station and district results were outsourced (as in the Australian case), this critically jeopardised the chain-of-custody necessary to ensure the integrity of the vote and count.

The temporary nature of the structures put in place for election time and the time-pressed imperatives of each logistical step strained nodal communication and transaction flows between functional units within the EMB (such as finance, policy, procurement, operations, training, and civic education) and levels (central, state, district,

centre). Each of the cases, including Australia, had geographical areas with weaker public infrastructure inadequate for mission critical transportation and communication. These strained linkages can help explain the lack of coherence between decisions taken centrally and how these decisions manifested in procurement specifications, poll-worker training, warehouse packing instructions and procedures manuals. Once polling is under way across the country, so much is out of the control of the EMB due to the inherent constraints of geography, cascade training structures with temporary workers, local dynamics, human frailty and cracks in national infrastructure. There is, in essence, a leap of faith once polling mechanisms are set in motion.

Meanwhile, other 'upstream' vulnerabilities were structurally external to EMB control but were vital for the working environment. The Kriegler Commission's thorough investigation of the Kenya 2007 results transfer debacle exposed systemic weaknesses by showing that the catastrophic lack of competency and materials in the vote-counting phase could be traced backwards to delays in procurement and gaps in law. In all the cases, complex and time-consuming public procurement rules were incompatible with the immediate needs of a material-heavy logistical exercise. These external factors, beyond the scope, mandate or skillsets of the EMB to rectify, exacerbated the difficult circumstances under which subsequent – more visible – incidents occurred.

The systemic weaknesses 'behind' the crisis incidents were thus an amalgamated vicious spiral of difficulties inside and outside of EMB control. In Ghana, the snap calling of the contested 1992 elections put the inexperienced EMB in a difficult position to navigate both transactional and relational trust-building. Sure enough, a chain of systemic failures such as delays in procurement, delays in resource mobilisation, training and material distribution failures led to the severe logistical problems that fuelled Ghanaian stakeholder anger. While these inauspicious dynamics were particularly acute in

the country cases with weak infrastructure, insecure environments or inexperienced commissions; the Australian case shows that the risks of delivery failures applied even to the more experienced and well-resourced of the EMBs.

The cases show how inopportune blending of upstream and downstream systemic failings can lead to the visible failures that damage transactional trust and stakeholder expectations of delivery. Further, that electoral trust dynamics differentiate from other sectors because of the unique mix of an immutable electoral calendar and nationwide high-visibility rollout reach. ‘Upstream’ delays in decision making, financing disbursement, appointments or procurement can be because of legal frameworks or public procurement requirements that are not fit for purpose, but also because of deadlock due to perceived political implications. These delays have knock-on effects in the form of service delivery failures at critical moments such as election day, for example when polling station officials do not have enough time to test or try the results transfer protocols and technologies. With central operations spread thin, dealing with simultaneous deployment and retrieval of sensitive materials and information across the entire country, with thousands of frontline operational staff inducted only in the final weeks or days, the shortcuts necessitated by squeezed time frames and the ensuing deficiencies caused by delays play out precisely when electoral operations are at their most vulnerable stages.

5.3.2 High stakes and political grievance exacerbate stakeholder responses

The general environment of social stability, the depth of societal grievances and the political stakes for candidates affected trust dynamics. The desk-study accounts of altercations and disputes show the difficulties of calm, clear-minded thinking for those most deeply implicated. Notionally, a clear-minded stakeholder would see an incident precisely for what it was. A party leader hyper-aware of the political stakes and fearful of

harm interprets an EMB operational failure or unfavourable decision through that lens. 'Opinions' can spread and spiral, fuelling a disproportional response to an event or judgement in the electoral process.

While historical and socioeconomic intricacies were beyond the scope, mandate or skillsets of the EMBs to set right, these external factors were critical for understanding the utility of alternative trust-building approaches. Simple 'fixing the problem' strategies were insufficient if emotions and political motivations were at play.

Critique and distrust aimed at EMBs were at their most acute when stakeholder grievances intensified. In the Kenyan case, the level and violence of reactions to electoral mishap reflect more on the 'zeitgeist' in political and societal culture at that moment than the incident itself. Analysts have pointed to the links between the election violence and the high level of agitation related to deep grievances at play over land issues and perceived historical wrongs. Similarly in Nigeria, electoral violence was rife precisely along pre-existing ethnic or other fault lines. While critique against the EMB was ostensibly about operational or decision-making failing, these dynamics point to deeper or 'other' emotions or grievances.

The Kenyan case shows the starkest example of societal, political and historical conditions unfavourable for building electoral trust. The INEC, which conducted the transition (crisis) election in Ghana, failed – in stakeholders' eyes – to protect the process from bad political behaviour. This dynamic severely compromised its role and the legitimacy of the elections themselves. The political stakeholders felt this viscerally; external election observers who wrote positively about the 1992 elections did not understand their anger. These international observers did not 'see' the problems – because they didn't 'feel' them. While stakes were lower for political actors in Australia, the aggrieved actors were government officials affected by the interruptions and cost of re-holding an election.

When the societal and political environment was broadly favourable, reputational damage was limited. In Australia, the politicians showed public restraint in their criticisms of the AEC, even though scathing committee reports indicate that they were seething with irritation. A societal backdrop of political stability and broad trust in institutions – including the AEC, meant that – as devastating as it felt for the officials at the time, the EMB was broadly resilient, and subsequent elections occurred without incident. Enthusiasm for cleaner (Nigeria) or more democratic (as in the Philippines and Pakistan) elections buoyed sentiment in favour of the trust-building elections in the cases. EMB trust-building in transitional democracies is easier if accompanied by an environment of hope for better future governance. A democratic tailwind in the form of generalised goodwill can provide a buffer that protects elections against overly critical scrutiny in adjacent elections. By 2008 in the Philippines, the winds of change likely gave a forgiving sheen to administrative election mistakes that would have been harshly judged in the fraught 2007 environment. The difference between Pakistan’s political trauma of the 2007 period and the vibrant pluralism of 2013 similarly demonstrates the impact of context on trust.

In addition to the general environment of goodwill, the disconnect between reputational damage and the reality (whether trust net positive or negative for the EMB) hinges on chains of events and communication that spiral or don’t spiral in ways disproportional to underlying electoral management incidents and realities. Given the scope of the operations, any number of near misses happen that are never known publicly. While the management practices much criticised in the post-mortems of the Australian ballot loss had been ongoing for many years, the reputational damage only occurred when these were publicised widely and linked to a visceral, tangible mistake (the missing ballots). Most aspects of the election had been run well. Near-misses had happened before. The spiral of media attention and politicians’ anger set a different AEC

narrative in motion – defined by one incident rather than the cumulated history and performance over many years.⁴⁴ The 1370 voters affected were a tiny proportion of the millions of well-managed votes nationwide. From a political party perspective, the effects were negligible because first preferences had already been counted⁴⁵, and the electoral outcome was not significantly affected. Most individual voters would likely not have noticed anything wrong without the EMB self-reporting.

In summary, EMB trust crises arose at the juncture between the 'things that went wrong' and influential stakeholders' interpretation of that event. Those stakeholders are, in turn, propelled to respond depending on their situation; the potential impact of an incident on an impending loss, anger related to other dynamics at play in the political environment, or the general atmosphere of the election itself, for example whether there is a wave of goodwill such as in a post-transition election. That is, the vehemence of stakeholder reactions is not only contingent upon the seriousness of the electoral incident. Rather than focusing solely on avoiding incidents, the cases show the importance of understanding political context, information environment and stakeholder mindsets to assess the risks of trust loss and strategies for trust-building.

5.3.3 Adaptive spectrum of trust-building strategies

No single trust-building intervention, however well-crafted or successful, was sufficient to secure the rebuilding of institutional trust over time, nor did any single

⁴⁴ The public trust fall came from the publicity of the practice and the incident, rather than the practice itself. This intuitively self-evident correlation places electoral authorities in a dilemma about how much to publicise a mistake that is discovered internally. Modelling transparency, the AEC Commissioner at the time, Ed Killesteyn, chose to be open about the incident, and himself brought his own organisation to the Court of Disputed Returns.

⁴⁵ Australia uses preferential voting systems whereby voters' first choices are counted on site, but more complex voting choices – which become very important in close elections – are attended to in special counting centres. The ballots were lost in transport between these two types of count.

approach suit each situation. Differences in context and stakeholder mindset demand different trust-building behaviours, attitudes, strategies and intensity of effort. The cases showed example of high-intensity trust-building demands when emotions ran high (Kenya, Ghana) and when aspects of delivery fell apart (Nigeria and Kenya). Lower-intensity trust-building was sufficient where election administration was largely 'taken for granted' as right and good (as in Australia) or when buoyed by democratic headwind (as in the second example in the Philippines). At best, a low-level reaction from stakeholders can indicate an assumption that the appropriate officials will resolve a problem through established channels. A middle path is using administrative processes to convey concerns, such as meetings with electoral authorities or petitions to administrative courts.

Whether genuinely or politically motivated, there may be politically expedient incentives to escalate or respond to incidents more emphatically, particularly when conflicts about the elections play out in public. In Australia 2013, while the public disclosure of missing ballots precipitated a short period of public uncertainty and internal consternation, mainstream parties and media showed restraint and calm. This important stakeholder choice point, whether or not to play out grievances in the public eye, is an essential thread for building an electoral trust-building model and will be revisited in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

EMB's public admission of mistakes (or not) represented a defining 'decision' point on how the EMB presents itself to the public in light of an incident. On realising that critical materials had not arrived on the 2013 election day, Nigerian Commissioner Jega's instinct to personally and quickly hit the telephones to key stakeholders to delay the elections is a compelling example of choice points election commissioners face in a crisis moment. While humiliating and profoundly difficult, public admission of mistakes allowed the Australian and Nigerian election commissioners to reinforce messaging of principled commitment, an opportunity missed in the Kenyan case.

There were trust-loss problems with the vote count and results transmission in the Australian and Kenyan cases, but the similarities ended there. In the Australian case of the missing ballots, electoral commissioner Edward Killestyn immediately went public. The AEC remained transparent at every step and publicly committed to rectifying a wrong. In contrast, the Kenyan vote-counting problems of 2007 were severe and systemic. The ECK Commissioner was unwilling – or unable – to convincingly and publicly explain the discrepancies and delays and what actions would be taken to rectify and ensure the accuracy of the result. Looking at how the dynamics played out, this was unwise. Not going public – not ‘owning’ the problem – fuelled the sense of conspiracy and rumours of cloak-and-dagger night-time dealings that plagued the discourse around the 2007 Kenyan election results. These examples show how ‘delivery’ problems can require ‘relational’ aspects to resolve.

Rather than a fixed checklist of distinct and distinguishable options, these differences in ever-shifting contexts speak to seeing choices of trust-building strategies as an adaptive spectrum or palate of options. The suite of trust-building mechanisms showcased in the cases blended transactional and relational dimensions: the Pakistani strategic planning process improved operations while simultaneously serving as a consultative forum and signalling a ‘listening’ organisation intent on improvements. The Australian post-crisis investments in training improved ballot-handling *and* communication between AEC headquarters and its remotely-stationed temporary staff.

A final note about an adaptive trust-building toolkit: Some trust-building strategies require fewer resources than others. Findings from the six cases show that some trust-building initiatives required significant financial investments, particularly on the transactional side. Examples include importing currency-quality watermarked ballots in Nigeria, introducing e-voting for fraud prevention in the Philippines, and rollout of mandatory e-training to all poll workers in Australia. A number of the relational trust-

building mechanisms were more inexpensive, albeit more difficult to outsource: the decision in Pakistan to publicly and consultatively conduct a strategic planning process; the decision in Australia for the AEC to itself submit the lost ballots issue to the Court of Disputed Returns and for senior officials to resign; the Kenyan acceptance of an international commission and its recommendations.

5.4 Trust pathways and electoral management

The desk-study cases each contained a ‘spark’, something that helped the EMBs address the significant trust challenges that they faced. The previous section outlined the broad trust dynamics across the cases: the difficulty of relying on transactional trust alone, the trust implications of working in a highly emotionally charged arena, and the need to employ a diverse and adaptive range of transactional and relational trust-building strategies.

This section examines the same issues in reverse, namely how electoral trust – that is, the reality on the ground for the trust-building EMBs – can inform our understanding of the trust pathways discussed in chapter 3. The trust pathways discussed in section 3.3 broadly hold and have application for EMBs. Practical applications of these pathways particularly relevant to the EMBs were public admission of mistakes, mechanisms for solving problems and keeping parties informed outside the public arena, and the deliberate selection of individuals seen as highly credible to lead reconstruction after crisis. These show relational trust-building skillsets and methods alongside formal structures, mandates and operational orderings to resolve the areas of conflict that are endemic to elections.

The higher-level pathway of *meeting needs and expectations* speaks to the fundamental and underlying purpose of institutions and warns of a dissonance when an institution performs to its formal mandate but misses the mark on what stakeholders

need or expect. The next two pathways look closer at the execution and operationalising of the institutional mandate, whether over time (*predictability and order*) or specific instances (*delivery and competence*). Recognising trust-building as relational, the next three pathways focus on what relationships need to achieve from the institutional perspective (*cooperation and compliance*) and from the stakeholder perspective (*fairness and do no harm*). The role of *micro-interactions* is the focus of the next chapter.

In following chapters, the pathways will be replaced, step by step, with an evolving and simpler trust-building model that clusters the features of the full set on the basis of insights from the field. The full set has been helpful as an analysis tool, but, as this section will show, the pathways may be tangential or may intersect in ways that are less helpful for a pragmatic trust-building guide to EMBs. At this point, simply differentiating relational and transactional trust streams may suffice.

5.4.1 Needs-and-expectations trust pathway

Meeting needs and expectations is the higher-order institutional trust pathway (3.3.1) that speaks to the fundamental and underlying purpose of institutions and warns of a dissonance when an institution performs to its formal mandate but misses the mark on what stakeholders need and expect. No electoral solution, whether a cleaner voter register or more impartial procedures to appoint election commissioners, could address the societal grievances with deep roots in Kenya, nor the heavy-handed political behaviours in Pakistan or legacy of corruption in Philippines, nor the economic, cultural and security realities of Nigeria that made the political stakes so high. Navigating serious lacunas in democratic culture was beyond the scope, mandate or skillsets of the EMB, regardless of their delivery- or relation-building arsenal. Building trust becomes complicated when expectations of public institutions are grounded in underlying and

unspoken needs and desires that are not directly related to the mandate or the particular transaction at hand.

The EMB lesson can be of interest for trust scholars more broadly, in that it so starkly depicts the linkages between deeper social dynamics and institutional delivery. If institutional trust is inextricably linked to deeper social needs, EMB failures exemplify a threat to stakeholders at a level beyond the immediate impact of the electoral transaction. “It is no understatement to say that the stability of the country was put in the hands of the Commission this March” testified the head of IFES regarding the daunting responsibility carried by the Kenyan EMB in a submission to the US congress⁴⁶. EMB failings signal vulnerability and weakness in a fragile social fabric. As important as the needs and expectations pathway is, an uncondusive environment will limit EMB ability to activate and harness trustworthiness.

5.4.2 Predictability-and-order trust pathway

The *predictability-and-order* trust pathway, with emphasis on reliability and consistency, is relevant also to the EMB context. The cases showed how this pathway was thwarted for EMBs by delays. Delays in procurement, delays in enabling legislation and drafting of procedures, delays in appointments of EMB heads) wreak havoc on an already rigid electoral calendar. Upstream, delays can be caused or amplified by deadlock when decisions, such as appointments, have political implications. Downstream, a compressed calendar puts the national rollout of materials and training to a decentralised

⁴⁶ Testimony of William R. Sweeney, Jr. President and CEO of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems Kenya's 2013 Elections: An Effective Assistance Model? House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations April 16, 2013.

and geographically disparate frontline staff. The delays discussed in the cases, most dramatically in Kenya and Nigeria, necessitated unforeseen shifts in operations that fuelled a generalised sense of instability and disorder.

Electoral reform committees or their equivalents such as those in Nigeria and Australia, provided a proxy for predictability and order when normal processes failed. Formation of such committees signalled that ‘someone was in charge’, that someone was taking stakeholder concerns seriously and took responsibility for outlining options and for ways forward that were understandable, authoritative and transparent. In the Australian case, the committee was a standing (permanent) joint committee of the Senate and House of Representatives; the ballot crisis instigated an investigation. In Kenya’s case, the international commission (IREC) proposed that the ECK be dismantled, to be replaced by a carefully comprised interim body, with great focus on the recruitment and appointment process. Proposed reform measures served to message stakeholders that their concerns were valid.

In both Nigeria and Australia, those who played a key role in the committee – in Attahiru Jega’s case as a member and in Tom Rogers’ case as a key investigator – were later appointed commissioner and as such entrusted with the mandate to implement the changes recommended by the committees. In the spirit of ‘people of integrity ensure institutions of integrity,’ these individuals were seen as uniquely qualified to embark on the institutional reform process in that they had demonstrated commitment to the change package, had insight into the problems, and had already gained the trust of the executive or parliament during their interventions in the crisis investigation period. The sense of predictability and order, initially lost, was restored by the committee that then transferred responsibility to the EMB under the leadership of a highly respected and credible figure.

Addressing issues of contention through reform by strengthening processes, closing loopholes, and clarifying the ‘rules of the game’ through changing law served as trust-building measures. Predictability and order were pursued by demonstrating commitment to changing what was blatantly wrong with the contested elections. The slow, methodical, comprehensive and cooperative strategic planning process in Pakistan exemplifies a systemic way of meeting predictability and order trust-building needs. The trust-building examples in the cases sought greater predictability and order through significant investments in voter registration, ballot-handling, vote counting and results transfer. Through improved accuracy and transparency, even if performative, the EMBs signalled a reestablishment of order and correctness.

5.4.3 Delivery-and-competence trust pathway

If the *predictability-and-order* trust pathway speaks to execution of the institutional mandate over time, the *delivery-and-competence* trust pathway speaks to operations in the moment, the task at hand and the stark reality in electoral management that operational failures will surely occur. The decentralised nature of the operations means that many of those failures will happen at the ‘frontlines’ of the elections.

At the polling station level, trust-influencing flare-ups can be misunderstandings between voters’ expectations and polling station staff’s ability to deliver – commonly voters denied a ballot paper, or disagreements between party observers and electoral officials over valid and invalid ballots during the polling station count. Whether these frontline or other disputes affected the reputations of the EMBs depends on the escalation and storytelling around these events among peers, third parties and political influencers in formal or social media. This third-party endorsement can be a trust-saving lifeline, as was the case of NAMFREL in the Philippines case, or the positive messaging about the AEC by Australian media influencers.

In the catastrophic situation of the materials not arriving for elections day in Nigeria, Commissioner Attahiru Jega worked the telephones to explain what happened to calm worries and outline a temporary path forward; thereby assuring stakeholders of the EMB's commitment and capacity to deliver despite setbacks. Similarly, Commissioner Ahmed Issack Hassan's public commitment to rectifying operational weaknesses in readiness for the subsequent Kenyan 2010 referendum and 2013 elections earned him standing domestically and abroad. These examples speak to the importance of multipronged strategies to address systemic weaknesses while also ensuring the relational competence and institutional readiness to deal with logistical crises 'a la minute'. In all these cases, EMBs built trust through employing relational capital while the capacity to deliver was being put into place.

Delivery and competence are ostensibly the simplest and most straightforward, transactional trust-building pathway elements. And yet, as the discussion above shows, building transactional trust is completely interwoven with relational trust-building tasks, for example to manage expectations, explain delivery issues and to build the potential for third-party endorsement if and when delivery breaks down.

5.4.4 Cooperation-and-compliance trust pathway

Cooperation and compliance-oriented trust-building theory (3.3.4) posits a reciprocal relationship. Institutional trust builds cooperation and compliance; cooperation in the form of consultative and inclusive institutional practices strengthens institutional trust and enhances compliance via rules that are agreed and understood.

The desk-study cases showed a suite of trust-building mechanisms that speak to relevance and efficacy of this cooperation-oriented trust pathway; specifically, the variety of consultation mechanisms designed to formalise, operationalise and strengthen relationships between EMBs and stakeholders. Ghana pioneered and championed

mechanisms to keep political parties informed and solve problems outside the public arena, methods that have since spread through Africa and beyond to form part of the EMB good practice cannon. The Pakistan consultation mechanisms and emphasis described in this chapter yielded remarkable dividends. Its 15 goals developed in partnership with political actors, parliamentarians, civil society actors and the international community signalled an institutional culture shift in a positive direction. In 2013, the major international observation mission wrote: “The elections took place under an improved legal and regulatory framework, which resulted from high levels of cooperation among political parties and meaningful consultative outreach by the ECP” (NDI/ANFREL 2013, p.3). The electoral codes of conduct for multiple categories of Pakistani electoral stakeholders were developed in consultation with actors – creating relational bonds, a mechanism for ongoing communication in the process and incentives for compliance because of the co-created rules. Interestingly, in the Philippines case, the driving force for cooperation towards trustworthy elections was the society-based coalition rather than the undermined and demoralised EMB.

These trust dynamics of cooperation are also relevant for interagency cooperation. The cooperation and compliance trust-building pathway is dependent on the formation of partnerships that share a vision of robust practices and trusted elections. This cooperation is critical for EMBs whether it be cooperating with health agencies in a pandemic, with security agencies to thwart foreign interference, or with relevant organisations to enhance inclusion of potentially marginalised populations.

5.4.5 Fairness trust pathway

A sense of injustice is a source of mistrust for all public institutions, but particularly so for EMBs whose mandate is to provide a level (fair) playing field for political candidates and a result where election loss is accepted. Procedural justice theory

(3.3.5) posits that even unfavourable outcomes like an election loss will be better accepted if the procedures and processes are understood to be fair.

‘Fairness’, impartiality or non-partisanship become particularly contested at certain parts of the electoral cycle, notably appointments (of commissioners) and results of elections. Four of the cases showed public anger at the perceived partiality in the appointments of EMB commissioners in the ‘distrusted’ case elections in Pakistan, Kenya, Nigeria and the Philippines. Important to note is that this anger over appointments was disconnected from how the individuals might or did behave. Rather, the stakeholders expressed concerns of the risk of partisan interests in the composition of the EMB, because of the role of commissioners to make decisions throughout the electoral cycle that have political implications or consequences. In Nigeria, the president’s monopoly over the appointment process of election commissioners had “direct implications for INEC’s popular legitimacy and its ability to impartially organize elections. Since 1999, opposition parties, civil society and the general public perceive the commission as being biased in favour of the incumbent government” (Kerr 2013, p. 824).

Providing a level playing field in elections requires a match in strength between the electoral bureaucracy and mechanisms available to level the playing field on the one hand, and the political forces that seek to subvert it on the other. In this respect, the fairness trust pathway bleeds into the next pathway, that of visibly displaying ethical backbone. The Pakistani EMB was criticised – not for its ability to deliver – but for lack of consultation, for not being independent and most importantly for its inability to ensure a secure, peaceful and level playing field for political actors in an environment of strongman politics. The EMB was seen as consistently unable to withstand powerful forces in stark comparison to the neighbouring Indian Electoral Commission with its

regular displays of ‘standing up to power’ through enforcing regulations, for example on campaign spending.

The stakes of the election outcome make fairness arguably the most important trust-building strategy for one critical stakeholder constituency: the political contestants. Every decision, every appointment, every design choice point, can be interpreted as favouring one or other side. Performative demonstration of non-partisanship at every step thus becomes part of the trust-building arsenal.

5.4.6 Ethical leadership trust pathway

Embodying and displaying ethical values was the sixth trust pathway discussed in chapter 3. Trust loss befell EMBs that failed to display an ethical and impartial ‘backbone’ when political tensions ran high. In the ‘crisis’ elections, the ECP lost trustworthiness over its perceived inability over time to stand up to powerful forces; in Nigeria, lost trustworthiness was associated with proven political corruption; in the Philippines lost trustworthiness was part of the collapse of public institution credibility. In Kenya, the EMB failed to “... stand-up to intense pressures in a very high stakes election” (Leonard & Owuor 2009, p. 3). Note, again, the anger is not mistakes in delivery made by the EMB did wrongly, but rather about a disconnect between expectations of how a vigorous and vigilant EMB ‘should’ behave, and the disappointingly pallid, anaemic reality (in stakeholder eyes).

The converse of an EMB transcending ‘crisis subjugation’ is also relevant for trust. The thorny issue of election commissioner appointments across several cases points to the symbolic value of leadership positions. In the same way that politicised appointment served as an irritant to stakeholders, conversely, the deliberate selection of individuals seen as highly credible to lead post-crisis reconstruction was a tangible and effective trust-building mechanism. While an instinct might be to flee from a crisis scene,

the examples from the cases show relational leadership styles whereby a crisis can serve as an opportunity for consultation, outreach and building internal cohesion.

The hard work to rectify the weaknesses exposed by each crisis described in this chapter has built the public profiles and reputations of several people involved. In Nigeria, Attahiru Jega was widely accepted as the 'right' person to take the Nigerian elections forward; his persistent confidence-building work also won him international recognition including public service awards. In Ghana, Afari-Gyan earned a reputation as a man of integrity. His commitment to inclusion and consultation through the mechanism of interparty liaison groups in Ghana has given him Nestor status among African election commissioners, with the Ghanaian-inspired model spreading to many parts of the world. In Kenya, a meticulously careful recruitment process brought the young Ahmed Issack Hassan to the post who declared a "guarantee to all Kenyans that we will not announce any results that we know or have reason to believe are being rigged" (Al Jazeera 2013). In Australia, the parliamentary committee responsible for elections put their faith in Tom Rogers, the man who had led the investigations into the WA incident. His steadfast focus on strengthening the institutional and cooperative culture of the AEC has given dividends in the form of subsequent smooth elections and the regained confidence of the responsible parliamentary committee. These choices were deliberate – whereby an individual trusted by the affected stakeholders is placed as vicarious public signalling of a trustworthy organisation or ... a striving in that direction at least. Also in Pakistan, the choice of chairperson was part of the confidence-building package aimed to signal improved relationships and elite buy-in to the electoral process.

Addressing institutional culture was a trust-building pathway that signalled commitment to principles and an ethical backbone. In Nigeria, Commissioner Jega brought in a senior team from the outside to support his institutional change efforts. While he did not fire staff from the much-criticised previous regime, what he did was to

clearly communicate that unethical behaviour would not be tolerated from that moment on – and that every misdemeanour would be investigated and prosecuted. If previously corrupt officials changed their behaviour, they were welcome to stay with INEC. Jega’s reasoning was that the incentive systems, rather than the individuals involved, were to blame. In the Australian case, the post-crisis EMB leadership signalled its commitment to a ‘new style’ AEC with a strong message of change through multiple channels. Clearly, ethical leadership belongs in the EMB trust-building portfolio, especially after a crisis.

5.4.7 Transactional and relational as meta trust-building pathways

In the run-through of the trust pathways in the previous sub-sections (with the micro-interactions pathway saved for chapter 6), the same examples appear repeatedly, weaving and winding across the trust pathways. For analysis purposes, the pathways have been helpful as a lens for illuminating behaviours and strategies from different perspectives. But moving forward, simplicity and clarity will be important if a trust-building model is to have utility for the professional community. This goal of simplicity incentivises collapsing the pathways to fewer meta-trust pathways.

The most obvious way of condensing the trust pathways is by reverting to the transactional and relational ways of approaching electoral management work discussed extensively in chapter 3. While the trust pathways in sections 5.4.1-5.4.6 naturally lean towards one or the other (delivery being ‘more’ transactional, ethical leadership ‘more’ relational), the cases show that the lines are not so clear cut. Transactional and relational trust dynamics intertwine. Delivery demanded relational efforts for stakeholders to be ‘on-board’, especially during mistakes. Transactional problems of electoral delivery, such as lost ballot papers, mismanaged counts or poor-quality voter lists, manifest *also* as relational problems in the form of agitated discourse, whether on the streets, social media or in party corridors. The trust-building effects of ethical leadership are enhanced if the

job ultimately gets done, largely nullified if it doesn't. These examples illustrate the futility of designing single-track solutions. The review of trust pathways in this section (5.4) shows two meta-trust pathways – transactional and relational. Subsequent chapters will build on this foundation.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the interplay and relevance of theory driven transactional and relational trust-building pathways to six diverse cases of trust in crisis. Transaction-oriented approaches have dominated the professional literature per the mindset that 'if we organise elections better, they will be trusted'. This is changing. With elections challenged (mistrusted) in so many places despite operational improvements, we now recognise the importance of expanding understanding to the softer 'relational' variables at play.

The cases showed how external and internal constraints made it almost impossible to deliver elections flawlessly; a transactional trust-building strategy that solely focuses on the 'logistics' of the electoral enterprise will be inadequate. The cases further showed that the 'stakes' dynamics demanded trust-building strategies that focused on stakeholder relational work, for example, responding to grievances expressed by contestants and their supporters.⁴⁷ This makes sense when we understand trust as often social and emotive rather than rational.

⁴⁷ For this thesis, 'logistics' is the heuristic that summarises the difficulties in infrastructure and delivery, and 'stakes' is the heuristic by which we can refer to all of the emotional and societal dynamics that influenced the stakeholder's willingness to give their trust.

An institution's reputation of trustworthiness is dependent on the opinions of its stakeholders. The perceptions and opinions that underpin trust are not necessarily rationally based on a complete picture of events, nor are these opinions formed in isolation from other social cues or influences. For these stakeholders, especially those vulnerable or fearful of an unfavourable outcome, specific or updated details will not necessarily shift an opinion of what transpired during a particular incident.

The trust dynamics combination of stakes and logistics is arguably unique to EMBs. The harsh twin reality for EMBs that many things go wrong when organising election, and that –when stakes are high – many critical eyes may be ready to work against both transactional and relational trust. While an accurate election result can be gained through transactional means; an 'accepted' result is reliant on relational work.

This chapter (chapter 5) examined EMB–stakeholder trust dynamics at the institutional rather than individual level. The desk-study cases painted a picture of the myriad ways in which delivering an accepted electoral result is challenging to achieve. Each case displayed an example of breakdown or failure to protect the public good of fair elections; whether due to failures at the frontlines (as in Kenya and Australia) or flaws at the institutional level in the institutions (Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya); whether structural (legal, financial), or whether related to capacity, ability or aptitude of the people involved. Certain aspects of the electoral cycle were particularly vulnerable to dispute: the voters' register, the appointment of commissioners and the count. The patterns of incident and interplay in the six cases show that crisis and trust loss came at the intersection of complex logistics with delays and temporary staff alongside high stakes, agitation or political turmoil.

As part of the chapter goal to identify broad trust patterns, each case accounted for stakeholder reaction to these failures – whether in party corridor mutterings, legal challenges, media commentary or violence. The interplay between institutional failures

and stakeholder reaction in the six stories provided a tableau over ways in which a crisis of electoral trust can manifest. A slow-burning erosion from years of low-level corruption and negligence had morphed into a chronic absence of trust in the Nigerian EMB. Amid fierce political tensions in the Philippines of the 1980s, the EMB could not convincingly protect the electoral process from fraud and an environment of rampant political corruption. In Kenya, a grossly mismanaged vote count nearly ignited a civil war. In Pakistan, a modicum of transactional trust in the predictable and adequate delivery of polling events could not overshadow the relational distrust that the EMB could, or would, secure a level political playing field by standing up to power where needed. Despite the EMB's stellar reputation, one public mistake exposed corroded procedures in parts of Australian electoral management. In the Ghana of the 1990s, electoral goodwill turned sour when political stakes grew more acute and inflammatory, exposing flaws and weaknesses in the electoral administration that had hitherto gone unnoticed. The crisis lens helped bring forward trust dynamics into sharper relief than is usually the case in 'normal' electoral management; notably, the cases were chosen carefully because of the range of EMB trust-building conducted in response to these different and challenging circumstances.

The strategies applied to correct delivery problems while prioritising high stakeholder engagement echoed and confirmed the relevance of the transactional-relational trust-building pathways outlined in the theory-focused chapter 2. The twin pressures of complex logistics and intensive stakes had perpetuated and inflamed crisis and trust loss. Publicly admitting and addressing mistakes, establishing meaningful consultation mechanisms, signalling a willingness to change and establishing inclusive reform committees were examples of relational strategies used alongside the delivery-focused corrections such as improvements to ballot handling or recounts.

This fifth chapter showed that a trust-building model needs to support EMBs dealing with operational mishaps under agitated stakeholder reactions. These situations truly put EMB leadership capability under stress, trust at risk and elections in jeopardy.

The findings that simple ‘fixing the problem’ strategies are not enough when strong emotions and political drivers at play has relevance for other institutions struggling to navigate a rapidly radicalising and increasingly sceptical general public. Multiple and genuine trust-building strategies are needed, with short- and long-term perspectives and relational and delivery-oriented dimensions. An EMB trust-building model needs to incorporate both transactional and relational dimensions to handle simultaneously complex, time-bound operations and high-running emotions.

The discussion section of this chapter merged the trust theory pathways with the case trust-building findings, confirming the importance of incorporating relational strategies alongside service delivery imperatives as twin overarching trust-building meta-pathways. The next building block requires a deeper understanding of trust dynamics at the inter-personal level of electoral management work. Chapter 6 provides these insights and granularity by closely following the frontlines of EMB–stakeholder interplay in seven Tunisian districts deep in election preparation and campaigning mode.

Chapter 6. EMB – stakeholder interplay at the frontlines: The case of Tunisia

When the people will to live, destiny must surely respond. Darkness must disappear, and chains will certainly break.

– Tunisian poet Aboul-Qacem Echebbi

“Tunisia’s pragmatism and moderation have nurtured hope in a wretched region and a troubled world,” wrote the *Economist* in its motivation for choosing the small North African nation as its 2014 ‘Country of the Year’. The adoption of a reformist constitution and the conducting of legitimate legislative and presidential elections were milestones in 2014 that manifested the Tunisian determination to model the democratic ideals of the Arab Spring.

In this second findings chapter (chapter 6) I account for the fieldwork component of my PhD research conducted in that for Tunisia momentous year of 2014, observing the intense preparations for legislative elections. Held on October 26, Tunisian citizens were voting for five-year-term candidates to form a new assembly which would replace the National Constituent Assembly (NCA). The NCA, elected in the first post Arab-Spring elections in 2011, had served as a constitutional drafting body and a transitional legislative body.

The first findings chapter (chapter 5) identified the strategies and responses that EMBs made to crises and how these strategies connected with trust pathways, thereby showing the relevance of transactional and relational trust in the electoral context. In this second part of the empirical journey, I go deeper into these themes, using participant-observation methods to understand how trust-building plays out at a granular level. In this chapter I account for this journey: I describe the EMB–stakeholder interplay in Tunisia, examine the internal and external issues that affected trust in the electoral commission, and present a model for understanding EMB trust-building which is inclusive of what happens in micro-interactions between EMB officers and electoral

stakeholders. In so doing, this chapter attends to the second thesis research question (RQ2): *What behaviours, attitudes and strategies build and foster trust in the electoral institution and its processes?* as well as the first research question on the micro-level trust dynamics. Throughout the chapter, research journal and interview quotes are interspersed to illustrate key points.

The importance of holding well-run and trusted elections was patent to Tunisian officials, political elites and voters alike. The legislative elections, if held despite external threats and concerns about domestic instability, would mark the consolidation of the transition process away from authoritarian rule that had begun in the Arab-Spring revolution of January 2011. These elections would establish the first iteration of the most important institution to secure, anchor and represent the new Tunisia: a permanent legislature.

The trust pathways described in chapter 2 point to trust as built and lost in the interplay between actors. Historical moments create intense interplay, and this chapter will account for the intensity of interplay during this historic moment for Tunisia in 2014. The imperative to get the operational aspects of the election correct was enabled by competent public administration and strong international support; as such, *delivery and competence* trust-building pathways were reasonably secure. The imperative to ensure societal buy-in to the new democratic trajectory put to the test the excellent relational skillsets of Tunisian election administrators. This chapter shows how the local electoral authorities worked diligently to build trust by attentively and respectfully attending to the *needs and expectations* of first-time candidates that represented a wide range of voters, from secular-urban to deeply socially conservative. Fairness, cooperation and ethical leadership were accepted as part and parcel of the delivery imperative as well as meeting the needs and expectations of candidates.

Where Tunisian EMB trust-building fell short was ensuring a sense of *predictability and order*. Late decisions, late arrival of resources, and ever-changing instructions meant that local electoral authorities (IRIEs) found it impossible to provide certainty and clear pathways to agitated candidates, putting trust at risk. Section 6.1 describes the cadence of trust interplay across stages of the electoral cycle, while section 6.2, informed by Tunisia case findings, revisits the theory-driven trust pathways of chapter 3 and the findings of chapter 5 with the purpose of further identifying and clustering the most salient dimensions relevant to electoral trust, informed by micro-level data.

6.1 EMB–stakeholder interplay across electoral phases

The Tunisia 2014 election deepens our understanding of trust interplay in that it displays the implications and repercussions of favouring one method of trust building over another. As this chapter will show, smooth delivery and the reputation of competence were compromised when responsiveness to political entities was overly emphasised.

This chapter section (6.1) describes a series of electoral stages during which electoral officials interacted with stakeholders. These electoral stages were framed by the electoral system used for the legislative elections; a closed-list proportional representation system with candidates elected on a list basis in multimember districts. To qualify to be on a ballot paper, independents, parties or coalitions needed to submit ‘lists’ or slates of candidates. Voters voted for these lists only, rather than any individual candidate names. Throughout this chapter, these ‘lists’ are sometimes referred to with the French ‘Listes’ in the research journals. The seven individuals on those ‘lists’ are candidates. Not all politically engaged stakeholders are candidates, so sometimes the term ‘political actor’ is used instead. All of these terms – lists, candidates or political actors – speak to the main

stakeholders of interest in this fieldwork research. It is their trust in the electoral institutions that is of interest.

The conduct of the elections was tasked to a newly re-formed EMB (ISIE). This national-level ISIE set electoral guidelines, conducted centralised procurement and provided internally oriented training and externally oriented voter education. Meanwhile, operational matters and direct communication with candidate ‘lists’ (the entities to be elected) were handled by seven temporary and district-level bodies called IRIEs throughout the country.⁴⁸ These are the ‘EMBs’ of interest in the research, and it is their attitudes and behaviours towards the political stakeholders (the ‘list’ candidates) and the effectiveness of their trust-building strategies that are in focus.

As is praxis in countries transitioning to democracy, great emphasis was placed on establishing the legitimacy of the ISIE and IRIE structures, and on the calibre of the senior officials. While 2014 marked the first legislative election, the peace process design had already included democratic stepping-stones such as elections to interim bodies that had gone reasonably smoothly, giving the newly formed ISIE a good start. The political commitment to the process was of inestimable value. Tunisian political and religious elites watched closely as the democratic trajectory of Egypt fell apart ‘next door,’ convincing the (very popular) Tunisian equivalent of the Muslim brotherhood to keep a low profile, a moderate stance and uphold a Tunisian modern-democracy image which included conciliation with political opponents. In comparison with its neighbour Egypt, Tunisia has no strong army to speak of, meaning that a military coup was not an option.

⁴⁸ In addition to the 27 in-country IRIEs, there were six out-of-country, making 33 in all.

Overall commitment to Tunisia stability trumped resentments between actors or incentives to deviate from the democratic trajectory.

Stakeholder perspective on the legitimacy of the EMB:

We have experiences from 2011 and now again this year with ISIE and with IRIE. We believe that both were **neutral**. The 2011 elections were held quickly, and the authorities didn't have means or time, but at least it **behaved neutrally**. There was a **national agreement** and elections now fall under a (parliamentary) committee ... We created an electoral law. This time, ISIE was voted for by a 2/3 majority of the NCA which, considering the divisions in Tunisia, is almost like a **consensus vote. It is neutral, independent**. The law provides it with all the means to work. **I am not unsatisfied with anything. I have no reservations. I want it to do its job.** IRIE District C was elected by committee. **We wanted it to have the means to work independently.** It's **doing its best in the framework of the law** (District C Head of List September 17).

As my primary interest was in how the Tunisian electoral authorities coped at the micro-level with the interactive and operational pressures of these elections, the district-level electoral authorities were the main object of research. Embedded in an international observation mission, I followed the IRIE–stakeholder interaction through interviews and direct observation in seven electoral districts and was granted full access to the electoral authorities and their preparations in the greater Tunis region.⁴⁹ The seven districts in my area of responsibility included central Tunis divided into two electoral entities, three

⁴⁹ As described in chapter 3, I served as a long-term observer for The Carter Center (TCC), an organisation that has developed a solid reputation and specialist expertise in the area of election observation. The Carter Center methodology is multiphase (of the electoral cycle), multilevel (from elite level interlocutors to street-level presence), and anchors election reporting and assessment on international obligations. The TCC field office in Tunisia had maintained a consistent and active presence since the Tunisian revolution, and as such was well placed to follow the events of these particular elections. As an accredited observer, I had an all-access pass to the elections in my area of responsibility, logistical and interpreting support, a comprehensive induction on arrival, and access to specialist legal, electoral, political and media expertise on the Tunisian elections. For the fieldwork component of my PhD, I kept a nightly research journal with key interview quotes, direct observation notes, reflections, media clippings and notes from conversation. The research journal forms the data set for this chapter. Excerpts are interspersed throughout the text.

densely populated suburbs and two districts of a more rural nature.⁵⁰ Within the five urban districts were intense levels of political contestation, the most voters, and the highest numbers of candidate lists (up to 60 on the ballot paper in some districts). I interviewed candidates from registered lists electoral commissions, members of civil society and external observers. The interview subjects were chosen to reflect the diversity of the political spectrum: Islamist, left, neoliberal parties and coalitions and unaffiliated individuals. I interviewed these key actors about their experiences during the phases of candidate registration, campaigning, monitoring of political financing and operational preparations for polling. The electoral stages for research observations were: (a) setting up the district-level structures; (b) candidate list registration; (c) lottery draw for ballot placement; (d) preparation for polling; (e) monitoring of political funding; (f) preparation for polling; and (g) counting and acceptance of results. This list covers every phase in which IRIEs, as temporary bodies, interact with district-level candidates.

This chapter first provides a description of each of these phases, starting with a description of the EMBs that oversaw implementation in the seven districts (6.1.1). Actions that contributed to the trust-building pathways were observed in each stage and are summarised at the end of each subsection (6.1.2-6.1.7). Section 6.2 then takes up the task of integrating findings across the stages for a higher-level analysis of how trust-building actions strengthened some pathways and weakened others. This higher-level analysis provides direction for further clustering and re-shaping the theory-driven trust pathways from chapters 3, and given a first test for usefulness for the electoral context

⁵⁰ Tunis 1, Tunis 2, Manouba, Ben Arous and Ariana that form greater Tunis, plus Nabeul 1 and Nabeul 2 in the adjacent northeast of the country.

through the desk studies in chapter 5. This clustering and reshaping of trust pathways results in an emergent and bespoke trust-building model for EMBs, presented in section 6.3, for further validation and refining in chapter 7.

6.1.1 Setting up local EMBs: IRIE responsibilities

The district-level EMBs (IRIEs) were structured as follows. Operational matters such as preparing and conducting registration and polling were handled by a technical secretariat, led by a regional coordinator. A district election commission composed of a chairperson and three members took decisions on electoral matters, and also took primary responsibility for interaction with the community of electoral stakeholders, such as candidates, observer groups and the media. These district members were recruited from persons of standing in the community, most often judges and lawyers. They received guidelines from the ISIE and operated within the electoral law and timetable, with certain discretion within those limitations. IRIE members or officials were given formal training at the national level on a rolling basis for each stage of the election, with one or two of the members receiving training, then in turn debriefing their colleagues and the secretariat staff.

The responsibilities of the IRIEs spanned the voter registration, campaign, polling, count and electoral disputes phases of the electoral cycle. The stages where the IRIEs interacted most intensely with parties and candidates were the candidate registration phase, the lottery draw for positions on the ballot paper, and the monitoring of the political campaign and political funding. Based on trust literature understandings that trust is lost and built in interplay, these are the stages where district-level (frontline) interplay in the form of micro-interactions occurs.

The first task of the newly established IRIEs was to conduct the voter registration campaign. This took place during the hottest months of the year, coinciding

with the fasting month of Ramadan. The commitment that the IRIEs members and staff showed during this period, diligently operating under difficult conditions, such as travelling in the backs of open trucks in the blazing sun without food and water, sent early signals to local stakeholders that these frontline election officers were seriously committed to the assignment.⁵¹

A recurring point in the interviews was the calibre of the IRIE commissioners. Heads of List expressed appreciation that commission members were senior, respected people, known in the community. Interlocutors often specifically mentioned whether the commissioners were professors, judges or lawyers, indicating their ‘civilian’ role was important in pre-establishing credibility. Certainly, the commitment to task on the part of the Tunisian electoral officials at both the national and regional (district) level was extraordinary. Candidates spoke highly of the way they were treated by IRIEs in their interactions. When candidate interlocutors were asked about their confidence in their respective IRIEs, they consistently mentioned *how* they were treated, rather than, for example, how the IRIEs were structured, or what types of procedures were chosen for the elections. Quotes from these interviews included the phrases: “they were professional”; “they treated us equally”; “I was surprised by how we were treated with respect”. The district commissioner behaviours mirrored the national commissioner Chafik Sarsar’s style. Continuously visible throughout the process, he answered his own telephone, met hundreds of concerned individuals and organisations, and gave positive and upbeat answers that were on the whole well received.

⁵¹ I arrived in Tunisia only at the tail end of the voter registration period. However, interlocutors spoke retroactively of the difficult conditions for IRIE officials during this period.

From observations at this stage, the defining features were care in selecting commissioners for the EMBs who had qualities of ethical leadership and who engaged with others with respect and patience. The message from the commissioners was that everyone was important and deserved a hearing and support.

6.1.2 Candidate list registration

The attitudes, values and behaviours of transparency and service-mindedness displayed by IRIEs gave political entities, in particular during the earlier parts of the electoral process, the sense that IRIEs were there to support rather than thwart their efforts. The closed-list proportional-representation electoral system with its multimember districts meant that ballot papers were unique to each IRIE-level district. To qualify to be on the district-level ballot paper, independents, parties or coalitions needed to submit a slate of candidates known as a 'liste'. Voters would vote for these lists/slates, rather than for individual candidates. The electoral law required gender parity on the lists, with all candidate lists alternately including women and men. The law also requires youth representation by stipulating that all candidate lists in any constituency that has at least four seats must include a person no older than 35 among the first four candidates (IFES 2014).

For the 2014 legislative elections, the Tunisian political environment was still in such flux, and the electoral system requirements so generous, that the opportunity to participate in elections was readily available both to mature political actors and to complete newcomers. In the post-revolutionary space, hopes and aspirations were prolific, diverse and widespread, not yet all channelled into major parties as tends to happen over time in democracies. Throughout the country 1327 candidate lists competed in the election, of which 810 were from political parties, 170 from coalitions and 347 independent-candidate lists (IFES 2014).

As such, the candidates that the IRIEs were dealing with were a motley crew. Normally, the IRIE commission members dealt directly with the heads of lists, that is, the #1 placed persons on the registering candidates' slates. In the districts I was following, these heads of lists ranged from senior statesmen and heads of major Tunisian parties to individuals who thought they would 'throw their hat in the ring'. Each head of list was to be offered the same level of service from the IRIEs. The following quote is from a woman who worked in the social services section of the public administration and decided to become a candidate; it exemplifies the wide-open nature of the political landscape.

A stakeholder's first impressions of the EMB:

My concern is with the poor. After the revolution nothing changed. I decided to become political. I consulted the electoral law. I found it through Google. I read it. I checked the deadlines. I went to the ISIE website. I presented my candidacy. I respected the requirements. Regarding IRIE, I liked them a lot. They were happy to receive us. We presented at the beginning of the period. It was well organised. They were cooperative. Our dossier was complete, so we had no difficulty. I had a question at one point; I used the #1814 hotline. When you call, they answer any question. I was satisfied (District B, Head of List, 1 October).

Stakeholder perspective on candidate registration:

The IRIE of District D were **cooperative**. There were no problems. When there were some small issues with the documents, they called us at a certain point. We appreciated their work (District D, Head of List, 18 September).

The first electoral cycle stage that I observed was arguably the most important for establishing the calibre of the EMB-political stakeholder relationship. The candidate list registration period was a litmus test of the organisational capacities of the political entities and an intense period of interaction for the IRIEs. For the parties, independents and

coalitions, establishing who would be on the lists in accord with gender, youth and other requirements, along with producing the required documentation, was a first experiment of translating political enthusiasm to specific administrative deliverables.

For some, this went smoothly; for others, this marked a first indication of a lack of cohesion or organisational skills on the part of some of the more inexperienced political entities. The Ennahdha party had been the most successful political force of the 2011 elections. Experienced and well organised, in 2014 they managed the candidate nomination process methodically per centrally mandated guidelines. In stark contrast were the Popular Front coalition, who were a coalition of leftist and pan-Arabic nationalist parties determined not to split the left vote as had happened in 2011. For the Popular Front, the district-level processes of deciding which aspirants were to be allotted to which slots on the candidate 1-7 list were drawn out and inflamed. In one of the districts, the representatives spoke of an 11-hour meeting. In another district, the head of list spoke of almost round-the-clock deal-making and negotiations, with relational wounds yet to be healed at the time of our interview. Each of the dozens of political entities had stories somewhere between these two extremes.

The gender and youth requirements for filling those slots made the candidate nomination process particularly complicated.⁵² As described above, what was to be voted for were the 'slates' of seven candidates known as Listes. The problems of forming the lists were particularly complex for coalitions. Obviously, each 'head of party' of the

⁵² The end results were fascinating from a gender perspective, watching as the women grew into their roles. I met one Ennahdha parliamentarian who had been an engineering student in 2011 and had been asked to stand on the list on one of the lower slots. To her surprise she got in. Three years later she was an accomplished and articulate politician for her party. I spoke to an Al Jomhuri woman candidate who had the number 2 slot for these elections, who was struggling to find childcare so she could manage the gruelling hours expected of her, serving as a reminder that while the formalities for political equality were truly in place, the infrastructure was not.

coalition would hope for a winnable position on the candidate listing. Most of these were men. The zippered requirements for alternating gender on the slates meant that at least three of the seven positions needed to be women, while the youth requirement meant that one of the first four had to be a youth. This complex equation of fulfilling legal requirements and fulfilling aspirant expectation meant handling the disappointment of heads of parties who did not get slots, as well as the propelling into prominence of women and youth who may not have expected their rapid progression. The experience sheds light on the trust pathways of *meeting expectations* and *fairness*.

The responsibilities for the IRIEs during this period consisted of providing information and guidance to political entities regarding the requirements for submitting candidates for the elections, formally accepting the documentation, checking the documentation dossiers for completeness and informing political entities if something was missing. Following the close of the deadline, 6pm on Friday 29 August, the IRIE commission members accepted or rejected the submissions, and then informed the entities of their decision as well as next steps. IRIEs published or posted physically on the walls of the office the names and candidates of the accepted lists.

Stakeholder assessment of EMB:

The welcome was good. The organisation was good. The choice of locale was much better than 2011, much more **open and welcoming** [an old building, with a courtyard in front and big tree growing in one of the rooms]. As a party, we recommended to all our districts to submit the lists in the middle of the period, rather than waiting until the end when most parties submitted. What I liked was that when a group came to present a list, they were given a specific time when their list would be processed. In our case it was a half hour wait. They were well organised. They acted with professionalism. They made sure of the documents piece by piece. Then they would issue a receipt right away. There were some delays because of the internet connections – this is normal for that time in Tunis when the network is overloaded, and so we could understand, it was beyond their control (Head of List, District C, 17 September).

Stakeholder perspective of interplay:

We were **well received**. The **welcome was elegant**. They took **well care of us**. We were **greatly surprised by the care** that they showed us. We hope that they will continue like this (Head of List District D, 22 September 2014).

The IRIEs were doing these tasks in most cases at the same time as their physical workspace (the IRIE offices)⁵³ was being painted and furnished, and staffing, routines and equipment consolidated. The many delays and compressed time frame for the elections and in particular the last-minute NCA approval of the ISIE, meant that the district organisations were being created and equipped during the same weeks as they were expected to deliver electoral services. These delay-and-time problems will be addressed in detail later in this chapter.

This meant that in some cases this interaction with potentially hundreds of candidate aspirants took place in corridors, courtyards or unfurnished rooms, with the sparsest of office equipment and supplies as support. Nonetheless, the IRIE's expressed pride in their work in reflection of this period.

EMB perspective on interplay and service-mindedness:

The timing for the candidate registration was between 22 and 29 August. Between the first day and the 28th just a few registered. On the 29th, most arrived on the last day, and in the last hours of the day. We closed the door at 18:00. They received a [queue] number. We were here until midnight. Some dossiers were not complete. At 8 pm there was no possibility of them rectifying these problems, for example notarizing signatures. So, 14 lists were refused. 11 made appeals.

Almost all accepted the decisions. One refused to accept the decision. The 11th was the list Y. The administrative court ruled in favour of our decision. If they had come earlier in the week they could have avoided these problems (District D IRIE Member).

EMB perspective on interplay:

[Q. How do you feel about how you handled the relationships with the parties?] “We feel proud” (District D IRIE Member after Candidate Registration).

The IRIEs, with their commitment to direct communication, support to candidates and open-door policies spoke of up to 20-hour workdays during this period. They described the final hours of the last Friday of August (the cut-off period) as the most intense, with approximately half of the lists submitting in the final hours. They described crowded scenes with more than 50 people in the waiting room, sometimes former bitter political rivals. Nonetheless, the atmosphere was good, described ‘like a market’ with plenty of chatting and good cheer. This relationally attentive behavioural strategy by the IRIEs paid off in reputational cachet among direct stakeholders. During, and when asked about, the candidate registration phase, candidates and representatives of political entities consistently reported the IRIEs as doing very well thus far, often describing the IRIE commissioners with superlatives. The two quotes that follow illustrate the candidates’ positive sentiments to almost the full range of trust-building pathways: surpassing *expectations* (‘I was surprised’); *delivery and competence/cooperation and compliance* (‘they were ready and cooperative’, ‘despite how many people were there, they were perfect’, ‘in 5 minutes they had checked everything’), *fairness* (‘treated everyone equally’, ‘he is a judge’), respectful micro-interactions (‘dealt with us with respect’ ‘helpful and very welcoming’). The relational skills of the IRIE, and the general camaraderie between candidates (‘everyone talking to each other’) compensate for failures in *predictability and order* – note the heat and the chaos described in the middle of the second quote.

Stakeholder perspective of interplay, example 1:

IRIE District E – they were ready and cooperative. The President was open, he had a very easy manner, his administration dealt [with us] with respect. He treated everyone equally. He is a judge. I was surprised by the ease with which he dealt with us. I have heard that in other places it was different, problematic, like in Gafsa (Head of List, 9 September 2014).

Stakeholder perspective of interplay, example 2:

The [electoral] administration is new, the second experience as ISIE. I entered in [District D]. The documents required were not difficult to make. The [District D] IRIE was perfect. No problem. The people were **helpful and very welcoming**. I had no problem. There were some organisational problems from the parties. For example, in ISIE there is a requirement that members of the list and the supplementary lists either present themselves in person with their identification, or that their signatures are notarised. Most of the parties chose the option to bring all of the candidates in person to the registration point. This means about 10 people, from three to four parties, all in the same area at the same time, 40-50 people, it was **like a market, it was so hot**. It would have been better to have come with just one person. **Despite how many people were there, still they [the IRIE] were perfect**. Four parties were there at the same time when I registered. Two had arrived ahead of me. Each party[list] needs 1-1.5 hours. So ... when the IRIE president saw that I was alone, and that all my documents were complete, they took me to an office on my own. **In 5 minutes they had checked everything**. I only waited for my receipt of completion. ...When I presented my candidacy in [District D] I found 2-3 parties, who oppose each other, **everyone talking to each other** (Head of List District D, September 2014).

Some applications for candidature were rejected because the IRIEs assessed that documentation was not correct or not complete. There was opportunity for the lists to appeal through the courts. On the whole, rejected lists accepted the assessment calmly, either moving forward through legal means or gracefully bowing out. In my research journal for that week, I reflected on visits to the districts the week after the candidate registration cut-off, I write ‘so far, continued buy-in from all’. In my interviews IRIE members stressed that they gave every chance to the parties to get their submissions

right, to set them up to proceed rather than the converse (Research Journal, 3 September). This behaviour speaks to the fairness pathway in legislation, supported by implementation.

EMB perspective – preparing for emotional responses to rejection, actively deploying relational skills:

We were **worried** about the reactions of the parties to the rejections. We called in the army just in case but there was no need. Even the parties of the lists we rejected **we were able to speak with them and reason**. We told them about the right to appeal at the courts of first instance. Six will. We told them this rejection isn't definitive, that we could be mistaken (IRIE member, District A, RJ, 9 September 2014).

Stakeholder perspective:

This was our 2nd experience with IRIE. The 1st (2011) was **encouraging**. This time **the experience was welcoming and good**. They were **neutral**. They welcomed all the lists. It was **fluid (smooth)**. Concerning our lists, **we had no problems**. We waited for the legal deadlines. Our list was **accepted** (Head of List, District C, 15 September 2014).

If we were to plot the trust-relevant interplay between Tunis electoral stakeholders (the list candidates) and the EMB (the Greater Tunis IRIEs) on a graph, the candidate registration phase described in the text and illustrated by research journal excerpts points to both high points and dips that can serve as early warnings. The following extended research journal quote of reflections in a discussion between three IRIE members exemplifies the highs and lows:

EMB perspective – pressure and commitment:

We feel better now – a week of judicial procedures, we have appeals, only a few. Last week we went through two big **pressures**. Accepting candidates: most lists were presented in the two last days. We **worked until 11 pm** on many days, or even **1:30 in the morning**. The 2nd pressure was opposition to our decisions. ... Thank god that those that were rejected did not persist. This is **proof that they were convinced of our decisions**. (another member says “we wish they had. On the other hand some persons presented opposition to persons that are on another list. This went to court, but the decision of IRIE was upheld. For us, our purpose for publishing lists is for **transparency – to allow people to see all**. In court we defend our positions. We are **friendly** with all candidates, we are neutral (3 IRIE members, District C, Research Journal, 15 September 2014).

The trust-building highs are the consistent relational attentiveness to stakeholder needs. In this and earlier quotes the IRIE members point to their dedication (the late hours), ‘friendly’ and open-door approach, thus embodying and displaying the ethical values of impartiality consistent with electoral administration. In line with procedural justice theories, even in tense interactions such as rejections and disputes noted in two of

the quotes above, transparency and pathways for redress showed a commitment to fairness and level playing field. This was remarkably effective for cooperation and compliance in that the decisions were accepted and the atmosphere remained calm; the stakeholder quotes in this section speak to an appreciation of the EMB efforts, of the respectful nature of the micro-interactions.

Foreshadowing the trust problems later in the process, our trust graph would show a concerning dip already in the candidate registration phase on the trust pathway of *predictability and order*. The communication from central ISIE to the districts was last-minute and confusing, meaning that the IRIE members had to use all their relational skillsets to keep candidates onside despite mixed messages and difficulties in giving clear instructions. Importantly for knock-on effects to *delivery and competence*, last-minute changes and last-minute messages caused extra work that exhausted officials and put candidates on edge already at this early and ‘relatively’ easy stage of an electoral process. Luckily, the honeymoon period of the EMB–stakeholder interplay in the Greater Tunis region, thanks to a repository of good will on the stakeholder side, and strong relational skillsets on the EMBs side, continued also through the next electoral phase, that of preparing the ballot papers. Relational and transactional trust are, as yet, tracking well.

6.1.3 Lottery draw for ballot placement

Ballot order is extremely important: because of the default tendency of voters to tick the first option, the highest spot on the ballot is coveted by parties and candidates. For this reason, many EMBs introduce lottery draws for the ordering of candidate or party names on a ballot paper.

Once candidate registration was complete and adjudicated, ISIE/IRIE could proceed with preparing the ballot papers for each district. The IRIEs favoured direct communication means such as telephone and person to person when contacting or

informing candidates and stakeholders about electoral events or procedures. For the lottery draw for ballot spots, for example, the commissioners or coordinators personally telephoned every single head of list as well as election observer groups.⁵⁴

To avoid any accusation of favouritism regarding ballot placement (e.g. for the coveted first spot), the ISIE instructed the IRIEs to perform a transparent ceremony to calm any potential fears and display orderliness and fairness. In the following account, one such ceremony is described in detail. As it is the first time all participating lists (political entities duly registered) are together in the same room with the IRIE, it serves as a significant moment for understanding interplay. Performative and public, this ceremonial event displays EMB decisions on how to manage sensitive milestones, and candidate decisions on whether and how to demonstrate acceptance and *cooperation*.

Ballot Draw District A – Notes from Direct Observation

Today I observed the Lottery Draw for spots on the ballot paper for the legislative elections in the constituency of [District A]. The number received represents the sequential placement on the ballot paper, and also where campaign posters may be placed. The coordinator **telephoned each list** to invite them to attend [signal disorganisation / but also personal and direct communication], and also **called observers**, including us. Representatives were convened in one room at the IRIE at 10 am on a Sunday. First the president of IRIE took advantage of the presence of all to **inform/remind them** of their campaign obligations, especially handing in bank account info and the names of the designated financial delegate.

⁵⁴I received a telephone call from the Tunis 1 regional coordinator informing me of the lottery draw mid-day Saturday. He had telephoned more than 50 heads of candidate lists as well. Similarly, my colleagues received calls from other IRIE commissioners or coordinators. With a background in election administration myself, I couldn't help wonder if this was the most time efficient method. Likely it was a necessity caused by last minute arrangements and deadlines. However, it was clearly effective for cementing bonds between the candidates and the IRIE. At the well-attended event the following day, the atmosphere was extremely collegial and almost celebratory despite the hot weather and rather long-winded ceremony (see description).

At the head table was the president, three IRIE members and the regional coordinator. One by one, the president presented names of lists, each on a square piece of paper, which he held up in turn. After calling out the name, the name was repeated twice by other members. The person in the audience representing that list came to the front table to present identification, to confirm that the name was correct, and to sign a log book. The representative was then asked to put the piece of paper into a plastic yellow canister (like a kinder egg), and to put that canister into a transparent (glass or plastic) box. This process was repeated for all the candidates.

Behind and above the head table was a projector screen where the names of all the lists were highlighted as they were called out. The room was full of list representatives, perhaps two hundred in all (which means some lists sent multiple people). The **atmosphere was calm, supportive, expectant, serious but also with willingness to laugh**, for example at some of the list names (one 'Les Miserables'). The **IRIE members at the head table seemed confident**. When all of the party names were in plastic canisters in the transparent box, the president asked the attendees “**Do you trust the IRIE** legal expert to draw the names, or would you prefer a neutral person [from the street]?”. The **audience gave their assent** for the IRIE member to draw the list names.

He did so, **one by one**. First he **announced** the number that the list drawn would be allotted, starting with #1. He then called out the name and showed the piece of paper to the audience. The record-keeper, at the computer, then ‘copy’d the name from his document of registered lists, and ‘paste’d it into the slot #1 on the **main screen for all to see**. In the audience, **participants helped the record-keeper** find the name (from the list of 46, some long, many similar) by calling out – ‘close to the bottom’ ‘under ...’ and so forth.

A youth list got the first number. The major party Ennahdha got the 11th. Many **were writing down** the sequencing on pieces of paper. Some **took pictures** of the projection screen with their tablets or smartphones. Others telephoned or texted once they knew their numbers. At one point a question (of procedure?, confirmation?) was asked (in Arabic). The president **answered in an explanatory tone** and the **party member gave a thumbs-up**.

At one point at the end, someone called out something (in Arabic) and there was **some agitation**. When I contacted the people involved, with an interpreter, the story was as follows: some of the independent lists and smaller parties are **feeling marginalised** regarding media coverage. They are angry with the general media environment, as being

sewn up by big interests. But they are specifically angry with HAICA (the higher authority to monitor the media environment) with the allocation of debating spots to the lists (in the context of the free spots that all lists receive). They **are angry** that in the debates small entities are pitted against small entities and big against big – they say this means they will never have a chance to get viewers. They want the chance to be pitted against the big parties. To that end they are organising a meeting Monday... When I asked if they had any **complaints about the IRIE they said no, none whatsoever.**

A simple reception was held afterwards in the inner courtyard (of what once was the [royal] Bey's house, and after that Ben Ali's party HQ). The **atmosphere was fine, many gathered around the IRIE president** (Research Journal, 27 September 2014).

The bolded actions (said, did) and reactions (calm, laughter, assent) in the description illustrate a series of noteworthy signals in the trust interplay between the EMB and the stakeholders. The calm and expectant atmosphere was a good foundation for the lottery exercise; similar behaviours could have yielded highly different results had the atmosphere been crackling with tension from the start. For this, the EMB deserve credit for the relational 'pre-work' (personal telephone calls to all in the room), aided by the historic nature of the elections and the fact that most candidates went into the process with a modicum of goodwill.

During the interplay, the EMB officials were consistently demonstrative in their transparency efforts. The palpable *fairness* inherent in the randomness of a lottery draw was substantiated by a little-known youth list gaining the sought-after ballot first spot, and the goliath party Ennahda only eleventh. A feeling of being a 'part' of the process was crafted by the real-time lottery results projected on a large screen, by the call-and-response active *cooperation*, by consistent 'checking in' ('are you ok that we draw?', 'is this understood?') and by responding earnestly to questions.

The bestowing of a sense of ritual, ceremony and importance to the event was clearly a deliberate choice on the EMB side. The reality is that choosing ballot order

could have been done much more simply and efficiently by a single bureaucrat at a desk. Instead, the EMB made relational design choices: the historically significant Bey Palace as a venue; the highest IRIE members holding the ceremony; a highly participative session and celebratory coffee and cakes at the end.

EMB perspective:

The best method to communicate with the lists [parties, independents, coalitions] is by direct communication. We have an **open-door policy**. It is important to treat them all equally, whether they are large or small. **The one who enters the door first is the one who is served first** (District D IRIE Member 25 September).

The atmosphere of hope, the sense of historic importance, and the common understanding of the rules in the room trumped any advantages of disrupting the process, illustrating the ease of cooperation and compliance when relations remain good. In our notional ‘trust curve’ of this case, this lottery draw marks the apex. The coming sections (6.1.4-6.1.6) describe how, as elections grow closer, logistical tasks become more complex, and stakes grow higher. The relational dividends and goodwill cache built to this point are strained.

6.1.4 Monitoring of political funding and the electoral campaign

EMB perspective:

[Q: do you feel ready to tackle tricky party financing issues?] Our advantage is our status. We were recruited carefully. We are known in the community, known professors. We are accountable at this level. We are trustworthy, and neutral. We are difficult to corrupt (IRIE member).

During the campaign phase, a special ‘walk-in’ office was set up in each IRIE where political entities registered their campaign events. Not only did the registration requirements allow for pluralism in terms of who could serve as candidates, but also, at

least formally, the stringent political financing and campaigning rules created an exceptionally level playing field. Tiny, inexperienced independent lists (like Roses of Ariana), coalitions (like the Popular Front and the Democratic Alliance), as well as established parties (like Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes) each had to submit the same documents and follow the same procedures. For some, the process of determining candidates was well organised and structured. For others, there was a scramble. The same was true of political funding. Each political entity had the same frameworks and restrictions, but some had ready access to funding while others struggled.

In the weeks preceding the elections the dynamics changed quickly. From a common starting point, like the open mouth of a crocodile, the mature, well-resourced, well-connected, well-advised⁵⁵ and well-organised actors quickly gained traction, while inexperienced or idealistic actors were left behind. The Islamist party Ennahdha, and the secular, liberal Nidaa Tounes found their feet early and took the campaigning lead. As elections came closer, less organised but hopeful actors who sensed pending disappointment directed anger outwardly, reacting to these two forces with confusion and anger.

The emotions in motion during the campaign were not primarily about any aspects how the election was managed, and the political entities – large and small – largely *complied* with regulation. Rather, deep-seated fears and anxieties came into play, reflecting larger geopolitical forces such as the spectre of radical Islam and residual anger at kleptocratic practices during the ousted Ben Ali regime. Many political actors in

⁵⁵ The international organisations attached to the American Democrat and Republican parties were both on hand to train and advise parties in Tunisia, as were a number of Europe-based organisations. One interlocutor observed that the Ennahdha party seemed to be following the campaign structure and planning advice from the training ‘to the letter’.

Tunisia – from large and small parties alike – lived with recent memories of repression; many interlocutors spoke of jail time, fear for family members and loss of jobs for political reasons during the Ben Ali years. These concerns about Islamist backsliding and the fear of return of old elites were easily triggered as agitation arose in political actors nervous about potential loss. These fears and residual anger were projected onto the parties that were gaining traction, Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes, who, in addition to vicariously representing the objects of deep-rooted fears, also had access to enviable resources and organisational cachet.

Party financing and campaign spending can easily become highly contentious in any election, as this is where any realistic hopes or pretence of assuring a political ‘level playing field’ easily falls apart. Certainly, this was also the case in Tunisia. While financing was difficult to ‘observe’, I did speak to interviewees about their understanding of the money-politics links.

One less well-resourced but highly engaged young political actor that I interviewed was vitriolic and detailed in his descriptions of a flow of foreign money (Qatari) used for the distribution of goods in poor neighbourhoods and pressure on voters. He described a system of direct control over influential people in densely populated areas such as café owners and informal transport drivers in 2011 and was convinced that the same was true of 2014. His description fit with a generalised sense, across the interviews, that how money for political entities was sourced and how it was spent was a raw, sore issue in Tunisian electoral discourse. In my role as Carter Center observer, while we noted that this money-politics nexus was infecting debate, we lacked concrete evidence of any illegal electoral financing activity. The IRIEs that I spoke to expressed similar dilemmas – they heard generalised money-politics complaints but what they heard was not actionable, because they could not be traced to specific incidents. Reflecting on informal conversations and formal interviews on this ‘hot’ topic, I note in

my research journal that the feelings of anger and assumptions of malpractice seemed to be a legacy of the funding and vote buying scandals and rumours that surfaced in the aftermath of the pre-revolution 2011 elections. When stakes become higher, triggers of former injustices and improprieties seemed more likely to invade thoughts and conversations.

Stakeholder analysis – warning signs:

Our analysis so far: Of concern is the picture of a **money-politics electoral culture emerging from 2011** and setting the tone for this campaign. This can be countered by competent political finance monitoring, by a strong voter education campaign addressing the secrecy of the vote, and by procedures that guarantee the integrity of the vote (countering vote buying). Our sense so far is that the wealthier parties will work ostensibly within the political financing laws, but will stretch the boundaries of what is possible by blurring the lines between charity and campaigning. Our sense is that this issue is a **festering irritant** for the less wealthy parties, which, **if provoked or disappointed could lead to anger with authorities or process** (Excerpt, observer report).

Best practice in elections points to the importance of finance rules and expenditure limits for political campaigns for transparency, to avoid corruption and to enable a level playing field. Linking to trust pathways, this best practice speaks to predictability and order, fairness and attending to needs and expectations. Rules restrict certain types of donations, set out reporting requirements and define sanctions for non-compliance. ISIE took these best practices very seriously. With guidance from international advisers, they designed a cutting-edge and ambitious money-politics program. To create more equitable conditions for campaigning and to combat the fears of dominant forces ‘buying’ the elections in 2014, the electoral authorities put in place strict restrictions on campaign spending and put unprecedented human resources and regulation into monitoring this spending. This process speaks to the trust pathway of compliance and cooperation through rules and monitoring. Each district had as many as

40 financial monitors overseen by designated officials from the Ministry of Finance to ensure compliance with the stringent campaign financing regulations. The status and calibre of the IRIE officials helped them navigate this difficult period of the process.

The legislative electoral campaign began with a sputter (rather than a bang) on 4 October. In part, the lacklustre start reflected the disorganisation of most of the lists, who had neither their posters ready,⁵⁶ nor had fulfilled the requirements of advance registration of campaign events. But partly the quiet was due to the convergence of the first days of campaigning with the important family and home-based celebration of Eid-el-Adha on the same weekend, as well as torrential rains in parts of the country, including the capital city. The campaign period built up momentum and speed, and by the middle of the campaign any serious candidates were up and running with information tents, leafleting, and posters in the allocated locations.⁵⁷ The campaign ended on 27 October allowing for a quiet period before election day.

Stakeholder perspective early stages of campaign:

So far, we are happy with IRIE. Every time we ask for a time and a place, we get it (Campaign Manager, District B).

As with the restrictions on public funding, the restrictions on campaigning created an unusually level, albeit sedate, playing field. The permitted posters were of

⁵⁶ The campaign regulations restricted paid advertising on television or billboards. Each list was allocated poster slots on prominent walls throughout the districts, and allowed two posters each at specified dimensions and with messaging specifications (names of candidates, campaign slogans, and platform points). Posters could be posted from 4 October. On that day, only Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes had posted. By a week later, perhaps a quarter of the lists had posted.

⁵⁷ The Election Law contained many prohibitions on the types of campaigning and locations where campaigning could take place. The Election Law stipulated that campaigning must comply with fundamental principles such as the neutrality of public administrative offices, places of worship, and the national media as well as transparency of funding. It prohibited campaigning and distributing campaign materials at the premises, or by members, of public administrative facilities, public institutions, or private institutions not open to the public. The use of state administrative resources was prohibited, as was campaigning in educational institutions (IFES 2014, p. 3).

specified and modest size, and hung beside others from competing lists, allowing for direct comparison. The allotted television slots put heads of list in similar studios (chair, table, and ISIE logo backdrop) to explain their program in the allotted minutes. The timing slots for television were allocated randomly, with lists allowed to choose from three timings.⁵⁸

It was in this phase that scepticism about the IRIEs first appeared in my notes of interviews and conversations. During this period, the IRIEs had the mandate to put sanctions on parties regarding breaches of campaigning rules. Irritated comments directed at IRIE decisions or actions were of three main types: those who felt they had been sanctioned ‘unfairly’; those who felt that others who had breached rules should be sanctioned more harshly; and those who felt that the campaign rules and procedures were too onerous. Breaches and complaints were primarily about ripped posters, street banners (not allowed, but circumvented cleverly), decorating cars (not allowed), permissions for information tents, events permits and the rules around advance notice for events and items.

Stakeholder perspective – cracks in EMB approval sentiments:

IRIE was fine during candidate registration. Everything went well. However, we are unhappy now. The poster places we have been allocated are dirty, the walls are bad, they are in dangerous areas like close to the river. There are people who systematically tear our posters down. IRIE knows who they are. IRIE should be finding them. Or you! The observers. And yet, the burden of proof is on us. IRIE asked us to provide the ID and the picture of the perpetrators. Also, it is too

⁵⁸ This rigorously fair approach advantaged smaller parties who had a fighting chance to present their programs and materials on the same scale as the larger actors. Contrast the modesty of the Tunisian walls of side-by-side black and white posters, with the Sri Lankan elections held a few months later, where life-size posters of the incumbent could be found everywhere, or contrast the talking head tv slots with the heavily funded political advertising found on US television during election years.

complicated to get the permissions to our campaign activities. To put up our information tent we needed 4 permissions. We had to inform the IRIE [for compliance with the electoral law], we had to apply to the municipality, and we had to go to the administration of the electricity, and then they sent us to one more place (Head of List, District A).

In stark contrast to the harmonious ballot lottery described in the previous section, these initial murmurings of unfairness gave a sense of generalised unease creeping into the EMB-stakeholder interplay. While the main issues of contention during this phase were between political entities, such as the anger over the distribution of back-to-school packs and Eid lambs by party-linked charities and the early and extensive media coverage offered to high-profile politicians,⁵⁹ some of the generalised anger spilled over to authorities such as the EMB. The mismatch between the principle of a level playing field that ensures fairness, and the stark reality that strong parties will always have an advantage, even where campaign and financing rules are as strict as in Tunisia, played against the IRIEs and ISIE who looked ‘toothless’ in the face of the influence of strong political elites. The trust pathways of *meeting expectations* and *fairness* – in this case that a responsible institution would ensure compliance and a level playing field – were compromised. This level-playing-field problem for the Tunisian EMB makes visible a tension between the trust-building pathways that emphasise a supportive approach, and the trust-building pathways that show that an institution is doing its job by monitoring and sanctioning.

⁵⁹ Nidaa Tounes’ presidential candidate Essibi (and later president of Tunisia) managed to figure prominently in the media before the legal start of the legislative campaign. Legally this was possible because only *legislative* candidates were forbidden from campaigning. For smaller, less-well-known political entities, seeing leading personalities prominently in the media breached the principle of a level playing field and fair media. Since it did not break the law, this practice continued, leaving a sour taste among other political actors.

6.1.5 Preparation for polling

While parties were in campaigning mode, for the EMBs the pre-poll period was critical for operational preparations including the recruitment and training of the ‘frontline’ officers that would work at the polling stations and meet the voters. I observed training in three districts, and was particularly vigilant for any relational trust-building messaging in addition to the expected focus on polling and counting procedures.

The training emphasised both the transactional and relational dimensions of polling work. The trainers spoke of the importance of creating a good and welcoming atmosphere in each polling station, centring the value of micro-interactions and good relationships, and also to make voters feel in safe hands and create a climate of confidence. Voters and the party agents present at polling stations were to understand that the polling station president had the authority to take the final decision on matters in the event of conflict – ‘Il y’a un chef’ as one trainer put it. The next quotes speak to being an authoritative leader providing order and predictability as well as competence. The second quote speaks to being hardworking and committed to the task, caring about people and the election.

EMB messaging:

Any objections to the decision can be noted in the polling station book. We’ll discuss, but I’m here to decide (messaging from the trainer to the polling station officials at the training sessions, Districts A & B).

EMB messaging:

Tell people at closing, with your voice and with your manner, that you will all be there until midnight – so create a good climate with your words (messaging from the trainer to the polling station officials at the training sessions, Districts A & B).

Preparing for polling had many logistical steps and tasks, fully occupying the pre-poll expanding staff at the IRIEs, such as preparing the warehouses for reception of

polling materials, securing the polling stations, recruiting polling officers, preparing for ballot and materials transport, and preparing the tabulation centres – all critical for the trust-building pathway of delivery and competence. ISIE and the IRIEs were well aware that beneath the logistical were matters of relational importance, and as such, confidence-building opportunities. Firstly, political entities and observers would want assurances that polling and counting procedures were correct, fair and proceeding as scheduled, speaking to trust pathways of delivery and competence. Secondly, these entities needed to understand the procedures as well as their roles and avenues of redress, speaking to trust pathways of predictability and order, as well as fairness.

And certainly, my research journal shows many examples of how the ISIE/IRIEs continued to engage and display relational empathy and diligence during this period. IRIE officials were, on the whole, welcoming of the many onboarding observers as elections drew nearer, patiently explaining and displaying warehouses and polling plans. IRIEs set up tabulation centres in a dedicated and creative way. One interlocutor who travelled through the country checking on tabulation centre readiness spoke of how creative IRIEs were in ensuring a place for stakeholders to watch the tabulation, such as setting up microphones, arranging for tabulation computer screens to be projected on the wall, and even organising a TV monitor for the observer podium with transmission from the computers. ISIE ran a mock tabulation process for observers in advance to fully explain the procedures that would be used. Transparency was thus built into training and design, and implemented in the districts by staff, demonstrating trust pathways of *fairness*, seeking of *cooperation* and honouring values-anchored, ethical-leadership principles.

This immediate pre-election period marked a sapping of the energy levels of the IRIE just as the nervousness and agitation of the political actors was rising. Timelines throughout the electoral process had been compressed so tightly – and the looming E-

day concrete-wall deadline created a garbage-compacter kind of workload pressure. New core staff were recruited, but their lack of induction time put additional pressure on the longer serving officers. Meanwhile, for political entities the moment of truth was approaching – including nervousness and need for clarity and reassurance; while for electoral observers in the thousands, this period marked their ‘raison d’être’. Similarly, the media expected full access to information at this time. Each stakeholder group had grown accustomed to welcoming and responsive IRIE officials and continued to expect the same level of service also during this period of peak demand. The logistical and relational demands thus clashed in an array of contexts. As IRIE (and ISIE) officials stood in warehouses with mountains of critically important equipment to inventory, or in their office buildings with hundreds of polling workers arriving for accreditation, they were juggling incessantly ringing cell phones –phone calls from ISIE headquarters (with ever-changing instructions) or from political entities with concerns or observers or media with informational demands, not to mention calls from their own frantically busy colleagues. In our trust tracking, we can see in situations like this that trust pathways can collide. The ‘delivery’ pathway was jeopardised while EMB officials were overly attentive to the relational needs and expectations of stakeholders.

The public vetting of polling station officers provides one example of the collision between operational imperatives and potential confidence-building opportunities. Explicitly to avoid the accusation, and reality, of infiltration by partisan (known party member) polling officers, the IRIEs were to publish lists of recruited polling station officers for public and political entity scrutiny. While on the one hand the polling preparation openness demonstrated tangibly the EMB commitment to non-partisanship and transparency, on the other it added layers of complication in an already difficult situation. Certainly, some districts handled the multistage recruitment process smoothly, even though it involved many steps: an initial recruitment of several thousand

polling officers, publishing of names, receipt of complaints from political entities, period of review (until 29 September), replacement of polling officers in question. For other districts, this time-sensitive, logistically and relationally complex process turned nightmarish and fraught.

Here is an example. District E had difficulty even with the first step – to recruit enough polling station officers. Their stark rural-urban divide was compounded by an equivalent socioeconomic divide. These demographics were problematic because the ‘out-of-town’ areas needed educated polling staff to serve as chairpersons, but such persons were primarily available ‘in-town’. The town-recruited educated candidates were normally women without their own means of transport, and for reasons of both gender and transport were unwilling to relocate from the towns to the out-of-area stations where staff were needed. In 2011, IRIE District E experienced a host of ‘no-show’ polling staff on election day when they had attempted to place people in areas other than where they lived. This recruitment-and-placement problem that they already struggled with was compounded when certain political entities systematically lodged complaints against recruited polling officials, and then their rival entities systematically lodged against the replacements in a painful political game that wore on the patience and capacity of the IRIE, and wasted precious preparation days. The accommodation of stakeholder needs collided with the operational imperatives. The high-level leadership and competence to steer the ship and give confidence was dangerously absent, leaving mid-level officers in a difficult situation.

Another example of relational and logistical imperatives colliding was the aborted last-minute idea of switching polling centre chairpersons around the district in a

randomised (lottery draw) way.⁶⁰ ISIE President Chafik Sarsar spoke of this initiative to Tunis-based national-level stakeholders. Meanwhile the idea had not been anchored or received or least of all executed on the IRIE level. While responsive on the part of Sarsar (likely responding to a concern from a political entity or observer) and notionally a reasonable idea from a confidence-building point of view (to prevent perceptions of local elites ‘sewing up’ results on their turf) the mixed messaging and confusion that ensued undermined confidence in EMB competence, presenting the EMB as erratic and misaligned between its national and district offices.

Warehousing and materials preparations exposed exhaustion and last-minute tendencies that were to have dire repercussions for the count. Packing instruction flowcharts were mistakenly not included in the materials given to polling stations. The lack of packing instructions were to cause a series of serious transactional trust-undermining mishaps by polling centre presiding officers, as the next section (6.1.6) will explain. *Delivery-and-competence* trust pathway problems such as this may not be unusual and may be fully understandable but can be capable of creating chaos and distrust if not dealt with.

The IRIE commissioners seemed not to be backed up administratively, nor did they receive timely and helpful guidelines from headquarters.⁶¹ In many cases they

⁶⁰ To placate criticism about potential bias, only days before polling ISIE president Sarsar suddenly announced a last-minute measure to move polling station chairpersons around. Likely, a political stakeholder placed a concern that polling station presidents nonetheless could wield influence in areas where they live. Sarsar declared to international observers that he would introduce a lottery draw to determine where polling station chairpersons would move. While this idea to increase impartiality made notional sense – operationally it was impossible in the time available. Polling-station staff had been recruited and allocated. Political entities had had the opportunity to vet the recruited persons.

⁶¹ As a rule, IRIE officials were highly professional in the sense that they did not normally complain to outsiders. This statement is based on a composite picture of the IRIE frustrations that nonetheless leaked out during interviews, and on insights from those who worked often with the national (ISIE) level authority. One observer said “there are too many lawyers in ISIE, they don’t want to let go [of procedures] until they are perfect” (RJ October 2014).

shouldered the many questions and concerns of stakeholders without adequate background knowledge. While the IRIEs presented an ‘under control’ and united face outwardly, there was internal annoyance with the national level ISIE. One interlocutor described an intended two-day training course by ISIE for IRIEs that turned out to be four hours of actual training and the rest IRIE representatives complaining – about lack of timely information, about mixed messages from headquarters, about their difficult conditions and about procedures that didn’t make sense in practice. As a new organisation, ISIE officials had no time to ‘land’ in their professional roles before the whirlwind of electoral obligations was upon them, which could explain the indecisiveness and inability to let-go-of and effectively disseminate procedures and instructions in a timely manner.

Electoral officials at national and district levels were ill- prepared, trained and supported for the intensity and stress of the pre-polling period. The national-historical importance of the mission, the time constrictions, the materials arriving at the very last minute, the security surrounding the effort, the temporary nature of the staff and working infrastructure, and the ever-changing, last-minute procedures all made for gruelling conditions. The tasks these electoral officials had to implement under these conditions were also impressive. Their mandate was to register hundreds of thousands of voters; recruit, vet, train and pay thousands of polling station officers; send and retrieve, correctly, registration and polling materials to centres throughout their districts; deliver a satisfactory polling experience to a diversity of voters; and announce accurate district results. The delayed adoption of the electoral law and formation of the EMB meant there were no margins for delay at any stage. The watchful eye of vigilant (and not necessarily well-inclined) domestic election observers meant that there were no margins for mistakes either. To add to this work burden, and the conditions, the expectations stakeholders placed on them were significant – to be accessible, to answer questions (as those posed

by the many observer groups) or to provide information or deal with candidates' grievances from candidates. These queries and demands alone could easily take up a full 'normal' working day.

In the preparation for the polling phase, it is the delivery and competence trust pathway that rises in importance and devours the time and energy of officials. However – because of the impossibility to catch every mistake and compounded by the perceptual expectation gap – relational strategies were also needed.

6.1.6 Polling and counting

Polling day was reasonably smooth and calm to the relief of many. For those who watched CNN or other news outlets with an outsider perspective that focused on the wider context, the milestone of election day was everything hoped for. From the perspective of domestic CSOs keen to play the watchdog role, there were plenty of isolated incidents to find fault with, which they vociferously did. From an election administrator's perspective, there was a sigh of relief that, with a lot of luck and the extraordinary efforts of all involved, the weaknesses in planning didn't result in any disasters during the daytime voting.

The count and tabulation process had multiple layers each characterised by the exhaustion of all involved. From an observer standpoint, it seemed that electoral officials (from polling station level and up) could, and did, conscientiously follow instructions if clear, but were vulnerable to mistakes and loath to deal with anomalies. The relational aspects of the steps of vote counting and tabulation, that were laid out in the manuals and that had been practiced in training, were adhered to carefully. Heads of polling stations read out each vote and conducted the tallying in full display of local observers and entities. Packing counted ballots and results forms for transport from the polling stations was characterised by confusion.

In election work, logistical mistakes can have political consequences. As a close observer of the chain of material flow in Tunisia, I could trace the confusion at the polling station counts and the chaos of the counting centres on election night back to mistakes in the packing and mistakes at the warehouse which in a chain of events led to irate and distressed stakeholders at the counting centres many hours later. As foreshadowed in the section on warehousing and materials preparation (6.1.5), the packing instruction flowcharts were not included in the materials given to polling stations. This omission led to polling-station staff struggling to find the correct information in their manuals for how to pack and prepare the results sheet protocols, leading to discussion in the polling station in front of party agents and observers, and leading to many staff improvising or reverting to what they remembered from their training.

Because procedures were changing up to the last minute, there was no guarantee that the instructions they received at training remained correct. In consultation with other observers, we noticed the same mistake in most if not all districts, and we estimated that 5% of polling stations in Tunisia made packing mistakes – which had serious consequences for trust. In good faith but lacking correct instructions, the polling station presiding officers in confusion packed the protocols (the *procès-verbal*, an all-important document that contained the polling station results) in the ballot boxes, which were then sealed. This small mistake had outside consequences, both causing an atmosphere and general sense of confusion, but also causing critical delays to the election results, as these boxes were destined for storage under guard in warehouses, whereas the protocols should have been in the tamper-evident bags headed for the tabulation centres to be counted towards the district electoral results.

After the polling-station count and the polling centre closing procedures, the staff waited for the ballot-box transportation, provided by the military. This proved to be a

long wait, the transportation was painfully and unnecessarily slow, causing already exhausted polling-station workers to wait hours in the middle of the night after their work was completed, and also caused the tabulation centres, completely ready, to stand idle for many of the critical election night counting hours. The use in Tunisia of the highly respected military for the transport of sensitive materials such as the sealed ballot boxes with the used ballots was for confidence building rather than efficiency reasons.

At the tabulation centres, IRIE concessions (information and access) to stakeholders varied from nebulous to resplendent. Tabulation centres were set up in the sports arena, with accredited observers, media and candidate monitors in the audience seats up the sides of the walls. Most steps from the reception of tamper-evident bags to the double entry (computer and manual) tabulations were difficult to follow, understandably. For some steps, some IRIEs constructed almost ceremonial procedures, announcing each aspect, displaying any details on a projector, allowing members of the ‘audience’ (accredited observers, political entity representatives, and media) to participate, and explaining pedagogically. Because of the number of protocols that were mistakenly placed inside ballot boxes (for reasons described above), IRIE commissioners called in candidates, media and observers to watch the retrieval of the protocols. The political agents present grew agitated, many not understanding why the ballot boxes needed to be retrieved and opened, and in the intersection between disappointment in likely impending loss and a mounting atmosphere of stress and chaos in the counting centre, foul play was suspected. Meanwhile, video clips of polling-station presiding officers trying to retrieve the protocols from sealed ballot boxes were spread on social media and in local observer press conferences, spreading a public impression that something was fishy with these elections – a narrative that could play into the hand of any actor interested in discrediting the elections.

I observed a painful example of this at the tabulation centre for District A. The IRIE members called the political entities to watch the retrieval and opening of the seals of the ballot boxes in which protocols had mistakenly been placed. The IRIE officials explained patiently what had happened and what needed to be done. Suspicious, tired and agitated political entity agents contested every move. IRIE officials, exhausted themselves, were clearly close to breaking point, and struggled to stay polite and conciliatory. Interlocutors described similar situations in the other districts. The EMB relational ‘extra mile’ to include parties and observers in every step, so successful in earlier stages of the process, was failing miserably now, just when stakes were highest.

Chaotic interplay in real time:

Notes from telephone interview with the international observer following District D that showed breakdown of EMB-stakeholder relations: The tabulation is still going on – 3 days after the elections, and the legal date when official national results are due. The Head of List for Fronte Populaire **asked that counting be stopped, and spoke to media and to observers.** He wants a recount (or reelection?). He called Hammemi [the presidential candidate] to call Sarsar [the Election Commissioner]. Asked for a recount with the notary present. Sarsar didn’t answer. Sent ISIE team and training team. Verified computer with manual count (which wasn’t the issue). Meanwhile Nidaa said 1 polling centre missing. A party agent there had followed the count and the ballot boxes. There was a numbering mistake on Nidaa’s part. **Stressed. Struggling for 5th seat.** 10:30 front Populaire **demonstrations.** Went to get ballot boxes from the IRIE office, **yelling** ‘Sarsar Degage’, recalling the slogan from the revolution ‘Ben Ali degage⁶²’. **Deadlock.** Representative from IFES came down. Quarter to midnight ready. Results at 2:30 Thursday morning (Research Journal, 2 November 2014).

⁶² ‘Get out!’ or ‘Scram’

Tabulation continued for days, and the ISIE were barely able to announce the results before the midweek deadline. In this section we saw delivery and competence failures, certainly. The biggest failure, however, was in meeting underlying ‘needs’ for order and predictability. Overly responsive and obliging officials overemphasised short-term relationships over long-term predictability and order. This strategy was helpful in the earlier preparatory transactions, but not sufficient or sustainable once staff exhaustion set in and risks to electoral goals were realised.

6.1.7 Acceptance of results

At the IRIE level, agitation and confusion rose especially as the final of the multimember seats in each district were being decided. The accumulated mistakes, the exhaustion, the protocols-in-ballot-box debacle, added fuel to contestation around perceived unfairness or error among candidates vying for the final seats of the multi-member districts.

Interplay breakdown – observer notes:

Dramatic interplay in the ‘watching boxes’ of the tabulation centres. IRIEs exhausted, and sick of being accommodating now that party reps are getting more agitated, and don’t respond. Nonetheless, they press on with transparency, e.g. the ballot box openings. Similar dramas in other districts, with mistakes due to exhaustion, last minute hiring, ‘lost boxes’ rumour in Nabeul. Struggles for last seat – e.g. Nabeul 2, Ariana. Drama in Ariana – insults against Sarsar, a protest ‘sit in’ (Research Journal, 2 November 2014).

These dynamics of exhaustion, confusion and agitation were playing out at the district-level tabulation centres – certainly in Tunis, and according to other observers also around the country. Meanwhile and in stark contrast, at the national level, Tunis-based political elites were neither waiting for the official results, nor heeding the agitation of the local level. Rather, on the morning after the elections they were negotiating a way

forward for Tunisia whereby the two largest parties respectively accepted (Nidaa Tunis) and conceded (Ennahda) electoral victory.

There were far too many political entities for the number of seats contested, which of course signalled naivety, and also resulted in disappointment as the campaign moved forward without them. From enthusiastic beginnings to humiliation with people not turning up at events, lack of supporters or finances to launch campaign, and the final humiliation of few or no votes. These actors could well, according to political science understandings, have become ‘spoilers’ who could have contested or disagreed with the elections.

So, why was there buy-in of the election results? Domestic monitors provided virtual catalogues of ‘breaches’ the EMB had committed. Why did potential spoilers (losers) resist taking advantage of electoral mistakes to publicly undermine the elections?

One reason given by interlocuters – and clearly evident in everyday discourse – was the general sense that Tunisian interests trumped party interests. Security was a universal concern of the interviewed political actors across party political lines. The external forces threatening Tunisia’s fragile democracy were evident in the news every day: the collapse of neighbouring Libya, the arms being transported across porous borders, and the activity of jihadists recruiting for the war in Syria. The example of the descent into militarism and the stagnation of the democratic enterprise in Egypt were followed closely by Tunisians. This shared concern of external threat mitigated internal animosity between Tunisian actors and likely contributed to encourage potential ‘spoilers’ to stay inside the fold. It bound election participating parties together towards a common goal of successful elections as proof of Tunisian stability and as a counter-example to the failed or failing democratic revolutions in Egypt and Libya.

Stakeholder commitment:

Terrorism is a threat, there are destabilising influences in the region. The Tunisian social fabric is strong enough to resist, the real Islam is about love and compassion (Head of List, District E, 9 September).

A second reason could be the prospect of openings for ‘losers’ in this election, which may have served as a safety valve in concordance with thinking from political science (Lijphart 2004; Anderson et al. 2005). Presidential and municipal elections were to follow closely after these elections providing a ‘new opportunity’ not far down the road (2015) to keep potential spoilers inside the fold. As a society still in a post-revolution, ‘early days of a better nation,’ atmosphere, political candidature was one, but not the only, avenue of involvement. The economy, civil society and the arts were all in movement, providing outlets for engagement – candidates had other fronts on which to pursue their goals.

The external environment provided the backdrop to which the EMB’s reputational legitimacy was tethered. External factors – the Tunisian political context at that moment and the composition and motivations of the political entities – were instrumental to the ultimate acceptance of the electoral result. These external factors also contributed significantly to the political and electoral environment in which trust-building became difficult and almost futile for the Tunisian EMB.

The Tunisian election results were accepted and the EMB reputation emerged shaken but intact. For any fragile democracy, and for Tunisia in particular, these two achievements were essential and remarkable, leading, for example, US Secretary of State John Kerry called the accomplishment “a beacon of hope, not only to the Tunisian people, but to the region and the world” (The Carter Center 2014). This larger story overshadowed the frayed and fraught interplay by the end of the count at the district

level. What was happening at the macro level was positive overall for institution building but at the micro level there were many wounds that were yet to be healed.

6.2 Towards an EMB trust-building model

In previous sections, we deep dived into micro-interactions and trust dynamics across the critical electoral phases of intense EMBs interaction with candidates and other stakeholders. Aided by the trust pathways lens, we saw successful transactional delivery of the electoral phases, where delays in decision making at the central level were mitigated thanks to the competence and dedication of EMB officials at the district level. Relational methods of performative transparency, intended for trust-building, worked excellently in the early stages of candidate registration and ballot lottery draw. When the atmosphere was hopeful and collegial, relational work was impactful. The trust problems lay neither with the transactional nor the relational skillsets and behaviour identified in chapter 5 as important for EMB trust-building.

This section will re-examine the Tunisia case for a fuller picture of trust dynamics at the micro level and illuminate the special nature of the trust-building challenges that EMBs face in day-to-day work. This chapter confirms that delivery is a precarious sole basis for electoral trust recognising the difficulty of achieving perfect delivery; and clarifies relational competence as critically important, but as insufficient for ensuring excellent delivery or electoral trust. Through this re-examination, an additional dimension for the EMB trust-building model emerges.

6.2.1 The dividends and trade-offs of respectful micro-interactions

The quotes interspersed through the chapter show that – of all the trust-building strategies – respectful micro-interactions were where the Tunisian local administrators excelled. Public administration literature points to this ‘frontline’ or ‘street-level’ interplay

as important for trust-building work (3.4); the glowing reviews from candidates on how they were treated (see especially 6.1.2) confirms the dividends of such hands-on relationship building. However, there were trade-offs and limits to this strategy.

Closely related to other trust pathways discussed in this section, the heavy investment in relational strategies was certainly deliberate in design. But the *respectful micro-interactions* pathway in particular was very much initiated and improvised by the electoral officials themselves, and reinforced by the internal culture of the district-level EMBs. The ‘above and beyond’ mindset by electoral officials, characterised by extraordinary levels of transparency and service-mindedness were exemplified through the explicit open-door policies, attitudes and behaviours. Walk-in office culture, the personal greeting of candidates during various phases, staying open until early hours of the morning, spending hours with an individual political entity explaining procedures, and providing direct phone numbers to the commissioner were examples of the frontline trust-building micro-interactions, especially during the early phases, that gave dividends in the form of a trust cache for the EMB. This trust cache in the form of strong approval ratings until deep into the electoral preparations could not, however, sustain trust through the difficult phases.

Respectful micro-interactions were not sufficient to allay stakeholder anger or worry. By the time of the district-level count, respectful interplay was compromised by cracks in the capabilities of the IRIEs characterised by procedural confusion and mistakes, compounded by rising tensions as the margins tightened for receiving the final of the multimember seats. The vigilance of the domestic observer groups who vocally displayed and amplified every electoral aberration fuelled rather than dissipated these tensions. Of course, disrespectful interplay would have exacerbated the tensions; the trust cache and the continued civility were helpful for preventing a tense situation from escalating.

The emotional investment of respectful micro-interactions came with a price-tag. The combined burden of operational (what needs to get done) and relational (engagement with the candidates) work took its toll on electoral officials. Many IRIE officials spoke of having neglected their family lives during this period. All were visibly exhausted as elections drew nearer. In my research journal, I noted that the burden these officials were under, and the conditions they worked in, were not unlike officers heading to war, or health workers heading to a disaster relief assignment. I watched the officials in hot warehouses awaiting materials arriving in military transport, low on sleep, eating on crates, constantly on the phone, surrounded by armed military, trenches and barbed wire. The difference is that military personnel or disaster relief personnel are well-trained and well prepared for the rigours of their assignment. IRIE personnel were not – they were trained only on electoral procedure, not on how to deal with demanding stakeholders on no sleep. These frontline working conditions, so inconducive to both transactional and relational trust pathways, are not unique to Tunisia, and cannot be discounted in the quest for relevant trust-building strategies.

6.2.2 The limits of transactional trust-building

The dynamics at the granular level accounted for in this chapter have confirmed some of the broad patterns presented in chapter 5. As in the desk studies, also in Tunisia, organising elections proved a highly complex task incorporating complicated logistics, tight timeframes, geographical obstacles and sensitive data conducted in a tense environment. Further, the Tunisia case illustrated how electoral officials share a common professional sentiment of being misunderstood and under fire when the operational limitations of geography, finance, capabilities and time access clash with ‘unreasonable’ expectations from stakeholders coloured by political interests and vulnerabilities. And that the uncertainty inherent in electoral processes brings an element of agitation that

puts even the most innocent of transactions into potentially suspicious light. And finally, that the results of this difficult equation, that of performing a complex task in an agitated environment can, if not managed, play out in electoral conflict and mistrust.

One finding from chapter 5, was the need for an adaptive spectrum of trust-building approaches. Similarly, this chapter's description of polling and counting put on display the complicated implications and repercussions of favouring one method of confidence building over another. Smooth delivery and the reputation of competence (critical to calculated trust) were compromised when responsiveness to political entities was overly emphasised.

The time put into being responsive to stakeholders was time not spent with the operational obligations of the elections. While the benefits of an interactive style can be combined with efficiency if thought through, planned for and resourced – this did not happen in the Tunisian legislative elections.

In stable democracies where elections are routine and election administration is under the radar, delivery and competence may be sufficient to ensure legitimacy. Legitimacy assumes alignment between an institution's core values and mandate with its governance, delivery and reputation. Trust-building demands the effective communication of this alignment to citizens and directly implicated groups (electoral stakeholders). In the Tunisian case, with the backdrop of authoritarian rule and a scramble for power with the opening of democracy, the conferring of legitimacy on the EMB needed more. This is why so much attentiveness was put to confidence and legitimacy enhancing methods. The democracy plan, media discourse and international attention were designed and directed towards legitimising the EMB. In this way, needs and expectations on the EMB were high – but these expectations were directed towards their character rather than their technical skills. The 2014 cohort of senior electoral officials were acutely aware of this legitimacy cargo. The fragility of democratic hope and

the international and domestic scrutiny encouraged and reinforced behaviours and measures that reinforced confidence. Certainly, the individual officers portrayed in this chapter embarked on this work with an attitude and commitment to excellence. Nonetheless, they struggled.

The Tunisian case illustrates vividly the finding from chapter 5 on the limitations of delivery-based trust in the electoral context. Adding to those insights, this chapter suggests we examine competence and delivery separately. The highly competent and motivated election officials struggled to ensure delivery of services hampered by delays in procedures that further compressed a rigid electoral calendar, adding work stress to the temporary and inexperienced frontline workers. Compounding the work stress was the intense scrutiny of certain phases of the electoral cycle, particularly the count, by onlookers – whether observers, oversight agencies, party agents or media. If these onlookers are agitated, as in the Tunisian count described in 6.1.6-7, the working conditions are akin to frontlines under siege. Under such conditions, the respectful micro-interactions necessary for trust-building are rendered almost impossible or ineffective. As we continue the journey to understand trust-building in elections, exhaustion and working conditions is clearly an important theme to bring forward and address. While the training (described in 6.1.5) and internal motivation given the historic nature of the elections prepared the officials remarkably well for the relational dimensions of their task, the long hours tested their endurance precisely when the needs were most acute – during the critical hours of the count. The EMB–stakeholder interplay was caught in a spiral un conducive to trust: that of officials growing less accommodating and showing cracks in their competence, just as candidates grew more demanding.

The delays that squeezed the 2014 electoral calendar in 2012 and 2013 when a number of stalemates and conflicts threatened to thwart political forward movement. To pass the electoral law and constitution, both content and process required significant

negotiation. Draft after draft was contested and stalled. The appointing of a new ISIE was also subject to these stalemates. With the disgruntlement of the population over the squabbling, intervention from trade unions, civil society and the private sector, as well as outside nudging⁶³, all were finally pushed through. While many interlocutors understandably and warmly spoke of the importance of the Nobel Prize-winning national dialogue process in 2013–14, nonetheless, from an operational perspective, the dialogue and consensus building paralysed or delayed many steps. By the time all of the hurdles were finally cleared at the NCA level, the timeframe with which to develop procedures and infrastructure to organise elections was dangerously compromised.

The next culprit was from delays in procedures. These delays had ripple effects from central office outwards and in effect pushed frontline officers into an untenable position.

The ISIE is paralyzed with a hyper centralization of the decision making process. The ISIE has become an inefficient Tunisian administration with no initiative or decisions being taken. To add to the injury the executive director **is weak** and the BoC [board] **is divided**. The ISIE gives the impression to be immobile. For instance only a handful of capacity building activity took place since 2015 while this should have been one priority. I could add many more examples of simple administrative decisions that are taken by the BoC which take ages, several months for very simple issues.... With IRIEs, no efforts have been deployed to further consolidate them although they will bear the burden of the next elections. In fact in most IRIEs you will find only the coordinator and the admin/fin persons (email correspondence with interlocuter 2017 that illustrates the dynamics that underpins delay).

⁶³ A Swiss organisation, for example, worked quietly and effectively behind the scenes to arrange ‘dialogue’ at critical moments.

In the later stages of election preparation described in sections 6.1.5-6.1.6, the trust problems were not with the voters. Solid training regimes prepared polling workers to deal with voters respectfully and competently; polling day was smooth and cooperative in the observed districts. The highest risk of a trust plummet from voters was from the counting and ballot transfer phases described in sub-section 6.1.6 and 6.1.7. In the election administration world, these hours late in polling day are critical – this is where the ‘magic’ happens – where ballots cast by voters during the day turn into election results and a new political order. While the preceding months of election preparation may have occurred under the radar, in this late-night phase all eyes are on the election officials. Their competence is on display.

Unfortunately for the Tunis district-level EMBs, the behind-the-scenes operational mistakes and delays from earlier phases manifested as confusion during counting and packing in polling stations after the close of polls and distressed the work of the counting centres set to receive the polling-station results protocols. The mixed messages about how to pack the polling-station results protocols (designated envelope or with the ballots in the sealed ballot boxes) was negotiated in the (for electoral trust) unhappy intersection between exhausted electoral officials, agitated candidates and over-enthusiastic domestic monitors. ‘Gotcha’-type pictures were posted on social media of polling officials trying to extract the protocols from the sealed ballots – not a serious problem from an electoral point of view, but terrible for perception. Luckily for the acceptance of the elections more broadly, at the macro level other dynamics were at play that overshadowed incidents such as this one.

6.2.3 EMB relational trust-building

The Tunisian case provides a unique lens to understand the dividends and the nature of EMB relational work. To this point of the chapter, I have explained how the

EMBs went over the top trying to please, with the IRIEs explicitly prioritising confidence-building behaviours and practices such as direct communication (telephoning instead of emailing), service-mindedness (spending up to 3-4 hours with a candidate explaining, staying in the office until midnight), open-door policy (drop-ins at office, including after hours; mobile phone numbers handed out); and expressed sympathy and solidarity with candidates (declaring ‘we are here for you’ to political entities).

The intense relational trust-building strategy was necessary to a point. The Tunisian elections were the playing field for the many actors and conflicting aspirations in the post- tumult and repression environment. To leave out the option of blaming the EMB, that is, to create a protective bubble around the EMB from the crossfire that inevitably comes in an irritated environment, required intense relationship management on the part of the electoral authorities. The support, understanding and confidence that IRIE intentions were genuine is a testament that the relationship investment paid dividend and was instrumentally helpful.

The relationship-building emphasis made the process smoother – political entities were largely compliant and necessary transactions went as smoothly as could be expected in an environment where most processes were new for authorities and candidates alike. The stakeholder quotes interspersed through sub-sections 5.1.1-5.1.3 show high appreciation of EMB behaviour; their active cooperation and compliance as proof of the high trust levels and high spirits early in the process.

The Tunisia case illustrated the behind-the-scenes efforts on the part of the EMB to sustain this cooperation. When asked about their contribution, the declared motivation of the most senior officials was supporting this phase of democratisation in Tunisia. These senior officials made it clear that they were not doing the job for the remuneration, which they said was lower than the salaries from their regular professions such as lawyers, judges and university professors. The situation in Tunisia differed from

the chapter 5 desk-study cases in that this sense of higher purpose was reflected also in the candidates, a dance from two sides who were equally active and committed. No-one wanted the elections to fail; the new commission was buoyed on a trust-conducive wave of support and democratic hope. The legitimacy, promise and historical dignity bestowed on the process extended to those involved – EMB official or political contestant. With this cushion of goodwill, the relational hard work of long hours, performative transparency and open-door policies gave dividends in the form of active cooperation and compliance from the extraordinarily wide field of political contestants. The performative repeatedly reiterated support for the democratic process and fair elections helped to mutually reinforce this sense of shared purpose.

6.2.4 The limits of relational trust-building

The cooperation derived from the strong sense of shared purpose and the relational skills of the EMB came at a price. Smooth delivery and the reputation of competence (critical to calculated trust) were compromised when responsiveness to political entities was overly addressed, as in the examples of introducing last-minute measures of moving polling station chairpersons around. Core operations suffered when critical EMB personnel were engaged with extensive explanations or transparency measures (e.g. opening ballot boxes to retrieve protocols in a public ceremony) to individual candidates, observers or journalists, rather than with their own personnel in time-sensitive decision making. These lessons have wider implications. If we see cooperation and compliance in the electoral space as both adhering to rules and as accepting of results (and accepting loss), neither relational nor transactional skills alone may be sufficient.

Micro trust-losses cascaded from the campaign phase. Smaller and newer political entrants were perhaps naively shocked and incensed to discover that there is no

level playing field in an election when larger parties have access, resources and networks; blame for this political reality was placed on ISIE (recall the *fairness* as well as *needs and expectations trust pathways*). The issuing of sanctions against for breaches to campaign rules understandably strained relations with campaign managers, particularly those who were less well-organised (and likely to breach rules). These trust dynamics are inherent to electoral management and to the EMB-candidate relationship; smaller parties will inevitably feel exasperation as larger parties encroach on political space, and neither the handing out or receiving of sanctions and fines relieves irritation for either party.

The monitoring and sanctioning role during the campaign thus put a damper on the ‘shared purpose’ positive dynamics, by creating a distance between the EMB and the candidates. A wariness on both sides crept in, and the sense of being on a shared pathway could no longer serve as a trust buffer. No amount of relational work or ‘displaying ethical values’ assuages the annoyance at an issued fine or sanction. Conversely, any reluctance to stop non-compliance undermines expectations of order and competence.

In line with chapter 5 findings that the political environment moderates (or inflames) stakeholder responses, the Tunisian case reminds us that we are wise to see any trust-building exercise in its context and to recognise the limitations of any trust-building strategy if conditions don’t allow. By watching an electoral process in real time, we can see, additionally, that this political environment and conditions for trust-building can shift and change at different moments within the same electoral cycle. Compliance from stakeholders is not assured, regardless of how cooperative and relationally skilful the behaviour of the EMB. While the goodwill built from kindness and dedication established a helpful trust cache, the affective strengths were not enough to sustain stakeholder goodwill through to the count. Under the radar of the good-news election

story run by the major media outlets, at the local levels the polling station count and counting centre tabulations were messy and contested.

6.2.5 Predictability and order as a third meta-trust-pathway

Of all the trust pathways, predictability and order was the weak link for the Tunisian EMB. Relationships broke down as the intensity of the electoral cycle mounted. The needs of the political actors were not only varied, but also unrealistic and tainted by high strung emotions that are natural in a contest. That some stakeholders will sense unfairness at some point can be seen as a given, natural part of a competitive process, and can be an important datapoint for course correction, whether through public communication, task forces, initiating electoral reform or reinforcing certain areas of operations. The problems lie therefore not with the sense of unfairness, which may be valid, but rather with escalation or with festering.

Not knowing where to turn or what avenues of redress are available can compound a sense of unfairness and create an environment of tension and agitation. As we saw in the final hours of the count, when tensions and agitation ran high, rumour and misinformation flourished, and supporters took to sit-ins and yelling for the commissioner to resign. As a positive counter-example, in the candidate registration phase, clear pathways were established and communicated for each step – queries and concerns were channelled appropriately, such as to administrative tribunals or higher instances with rapid response times. In the Tunisian case, while agitation rose as part of the natural cadence of an electoral process, importantly, when political entities knew step by step what to do and what was happening, they were calmer (6.1.2; 6.1.3). When there were mixed messages or lack of clarity, their agitation rose (6.1.4; 6.1.6-7).

The importance of clarity and redress as an antidote to unfairness speaks to the meta-trust pathway emerging, one that puts certainty and stakeholder security needs at the forefront.

IRIEs frequently found themselves in a knowledge vacuum as procedures and decisions on electoral matters were handed down from headquarters (ISIE) in the very last minute – leaving IRIEs unable to give stakeholders advance warning or clear advance information. Subsection 6.1.5 describes in painful detail the detrimental effects of lack of knowledge flow or timely procedures on local officials leading to both relational and transactional problems – not being able to explain what was next or what was expected.

The Tunisian case illustrated the relevance of delays and time pressure for understanding the particularities of EMB trust-building. Short timeframes compounded weaknesses in knowledge flow and inadequate decisions. The squeezed electoral calendar was, in turn knock-on effect of a series of processes beyond EMB control, beginning with the early controversies about the ISIE appointments and the deadlock in the NCA. Already fraught relationships between central and local EMBs were severely tested when exhausted district-level officials scrambled to accommodate both sensible and unrealistic last-minute demands from headquarters. These are lessons relevant beyond Tunisia. The case shows how compressing phases of the electoral cycle led to mistakes, brought risk to frontline officials and exposed vulnerabilities. The care that had been taken to recruit respected local officials, their painstaking relation-building and their own morale was decimated when they needed to front a group of candidates to explain a last-minute decision that they themselves disagreed with or had to answer questions with ‘I don’t know’.

The trust literature points to predictability and order as important because of deep-rooted needs for ‘respect and security’, particularly among people or populations that have experienced trauma, as in Tunisia. Like Sarsar in the anecdote, the Tunisian

district electoral authorities were similarly exemplary in the ‘respect’ dimension. In response, candidates expressed satisfaction: that they felt seen and well taken care of. The Tunisian electoral authorities failed, however, to make candidates feel secure.

Insecurity is inbuilt in elections: what voters will choose is only guessable, at best. However, that inbuilt insecurity can be exacerbated or alleviated by measures put in place, usually in the form of well-known and well-understood procedures for every step of the electoral process. As a new commission, the EMB did not have the luxury of a legacy of well-known procedures, and so should have compensated this with a redoubled effort to establish and explain procedures. ISIE failed to do this – issuing late and conflicting guidelines. The knock-on effect downstream was that IRIE officials were not able to clearly tell candidates and other stakeholders what was coming, when, what would be required, what was expected, what alternative pathways might be available – because they didn’t know themselves. This was devastating for trust. For these reasons, the Tunisian case suggests that predictability and order rise to the top as a key trust pathway in the electoral context.

6.2.6 Summary and implications: towards a three-dimensional approach

The painful and painstaking process that created ISIE – the deadlocks, negotiations, national dialogue processes – contributed to its legitimacy: it had clear purpose (the elections critical to the societal change demanded in the Arab Spring), composition (unanimously approved by the acting legislative representing all sides of politics), resources for ensuring delivery (a battery of advisers from overseas, strong domestic skillsets), and significant start-up capital of goodwill.

Alongside important external factors, the trust-building practices were internal factors that contributed to an accepted result and a shaken but intact reputational legacy. Reaffirming the findings of chapter 5, a high degree of direct communication, explicit

open-door policy, rituals of transparency and common purpose, and the choice of senior, respected people as the public face of the EMB were important choices for building a foundational trust cache. Certainly, trust and open communication lines buttressed crisis periods as IRIEs strived to incorporate trust-building practices and mechanisms into their operational structures. The trust cache, built on *respectful micro-interactions*, compensated for difficulties in ensuring *fairness* and living up to stakeholder *expectations* later in the cycle.

The characteristics and circumstances that negatively affected the reputation (the ‘shaken’ part of the ‘shaken but stable’ assessment) lay in the nexus of EMB lack of clarity and stakeholder agitation. Chapter 5 posits that the seeds for electoral crisis, and the dynamics that complicate electoral trust, lie in a confluence between logistics and stakes that expose systemic upstream and downstream vulnerabilities. This Tunisia chapter closely observes the micro-interactions and transactions that characterise the systemic weaknesses relevant to Tunisia, and potentially beyond. The ‘seeds’ for crisis, or weaknesses unfavourable for trust-building, identified in this chapter included the knowledge vacuum for district-level officials, delayed or last-minute procedures and decisions on electoral matters, inability to give clear advance information, mistaken understandings about roles and responsibilities, and perceived injustices.

While many Tunisian field case findings (chapter 6) aligned with and deepened understanding of the desk-study findings (chapter 5) and the trust pathways identified in chapter 2, there are also areas for adjustment or rethinking. Chapter 5 concluded with transactional and relational as valid and major trust-building streams for EMBs, that is, a two-stream or two-dimensional approach attending to the technical (delivering elections well) and the affective or relational (treating stakeholders with respect and fairness).

In chapter 6, the trust pathway of predictability and order has risen as distinct and significant. The behavioural equivalents of predictability such as clarity, consistent

procedures and avenues for redress were important because they attend explicitly to the anxieties of the stakeholders. The Tunisian case showed the importance of differentiating out and attending to this certainty dimension rather than conflating with relational or transactional trust-building. By watching an electoral process closely, we can see that relational confidence-building behaviours such as transparency, openness and service-mindedness only went 'so far' to assuaging candidate anxiety and concern and that heated discourse on electoral issues had little to do with specific operational issues or actual events. With hindsight, the Tunisian EMB could and should have spent less time on individual relation-building and more on procedural rigour.

The *predictability-and-order* trust pathway is particularly important for EMBs because of the underlying agitation and residual anxiety characteristic of the political environment during an election period, particularly in high stakes or post-crisis. The Tunisian case showed clearly how in a tense and charged atmosphere political stakeholders had intense needs for certainty. In the Tunisian electoral cycle, political agitation and tensions ran high precisely when operational demands were at peak, creating difficult, sometimes impossible, situations for the electoral authorities to navigate with their reputation intact.

While the relational strategies were extremely helpful for creating a buffer to protect the EMB's reputational legitimacy, they were not enough to calm an environment where distrust fomented. The very nature of the electoral environment – the stakes, the intensity of public focus, the vulnerability and fragility of candidates – fostered or created an agitation that went well beyond what the EMB official could affect through their consultations, liaison mechanisms and open-door policies. What was lacking was stable ground, meeting the expectations of predictability and security that are necessary for trust. While an electoral outcome is by its very nature uncertain, to be assured of procedural justice, the political contestants needed to understand – step by step – what

was upcoming, who to turn to for what, what was expected of them, when and how, where to go for questions, and where to go for grievances. Because of endemic delays, conflicting instructions and last-minute changes, frontline EMB officers were not able to provide these stable foundations for political activity – to the detriment of electoral trust.

Anger and confusion obstructed trust-building; shared values and commitment to the electoral process were never in doubt. While not relevant for Tunisia, one can assume that relational strategies would be insufficient also to deal with sophisticated, game-playing political actors intent on thwarting the system, manipulating any weaknesses or leveraging networks of influence over individual officers. Rigorous, contextually adapted and codified procedures can serve to insulate election officials from these risks.

There were also sustainability issues with the highly interactive approach taken during the 2014 legislative elections. The inhuman workload on officials due to the compressed timelines and the expectations to be ‘always available’ to all stakeholders were upheld due to the high calibre and motivation of the officials (judges, professors) and the adrenaline that these critical elections pumped in the blood of those involved. When elections ‘normalise’, so must the work burden and expectations.

A three-dimensional trust-building model that specifically adds ‘pathways for certainty’ to the transactional and relational trust-building streams provides a reminder to those involved in designing electoral processes that various stages of the process will inevitably get messy and prepare stakeholders and electoral officials accordingly to use multiple strategies. Moving from agitation to a place of common purpose requires processes, structures and mechanisms that accommodate grievances, concerns, last-minute changes and all of the other aspects of unstable ground. In practice, this means preparing electoral officials for the intensity of the pressured environment in which they will work. This also means avoiding changes or delays; prioritising procedures; having

systems in place for communication outreach packages; and ensuring that officials and stakeholders have time to assimilate the procedures, implications and requirements.

The three dimensions are highly interconnected, with each potentially strengthening the others. Adding an explicit third dimension means that predictability and order is not lost in the extraordinary effort that both delivery and relational trust-building demand.

6.3. Conclusion

This sixth chapter has shown the relevance and the interconnectedness of the trust pathways in one electoral context and proposes that three meta-pathways can explain much of the variability in trust-building across electoral stages (this chapter) and also across election sites (chapter 5). Of the three electoral meta trust pathways at play, the Tunisia case described in this chapter showed the first dimension of *competence and delivery* as reasonably successful in Tunisia, a second dimension of *respect and responsiveness* as highly successful in Tunisia, but the important third dimension of managing expectations by providing *certainty, predictability and order* as weak.

The case showed that Tunisian authorities acutely recognised trust-building as an integral part of electoral management work. In the stages of preparation and execution of the 2014 legislative elections described in detail in the chapter, the district electoral officials took on this trust-building cargo earnestly and intently, sacrificing working condition comfort and operational efficiency to accommodate the concerns of electoral stakeholders. With hindsight, the Tunisian EMB could have spent less time on individual relation-building and more on procedural excellence. Anger and confusion obstructed trust-building; shared values and commitment to the democratic process were never in doubt. What was lacking was stable ground, meeting the expectations of predictability and security that are necessary for trust.

A three-dimensional view of trust-building accommodates the delivery and relationships of respect identified in chapter 5, but also upgrades the additional dimension of explicitly and actively providing certainty to stakeholders. In the next chapter we will seek confirmation of the accuracy, universality and usefulness of this three-dimensional model in dialogue with experienced election practitioners.

Chapter 7. Refining an EMB trust-building model: electoral practitioner interviews

This chapter accounts for a series of 31 in-person interviews that elicit the lived experience and reflections of practitioners who have tried, tested and been exposed to a full range of trust-building mechanisms and behaviours, and who have seen firsthand the trajectories and consequences of trust loss. The purposive, convenient and snowball sampling was done within the time and resource constraints of the PhD through one dedicated trip and other opportunistic moments to speak to recommended or known election experts who had experience in multiple countries whether as evaluators, administrators, observers, project implementers or donors. The chapter follows the cadence outlined in the research questions, but from a practitioner's working perspective: how does electoral trust-building work (RQ1); what behaviours and mechanisms support electoral trust? (RQ2); and, importantly, the pragmatic and existential question: what can EMBs do to increase trust? (RQ3). In this 'check in' with the protagonists - those who have experienced and affected electoral trust-building and trust loss - this chapter brings closure to the empirical stage of the PhD research journey.

This final research step tests the trust-building model built through theory, desk studies and participant observation described in the preceding chapters. The chapter thus achieves dual goals; that of verification ('does this way of seeing electoral trust resonate with you?'), and that of forging forward towards the pragmatic outcome foreseen for the thesis ('so ... how do we do it?!') by adjusting a trust-building model anchored in theory to suit the practical reality and particularities of electoral work.

7.1 From trust theory to trust-building

By this point in the thesis journey, the emerging electoral trust-building model has adapted trust insights drawn from theory to case examples and across an electoral

cycle. This chapter tests assumptions with the help of experienced practitioners with insights into why and when electoral trust might differ from trust in other public institutions, and whether the trust-building mechanisms identified in chapters 5 and 6 are universally applicable as useful guidance. The justification for drawing on an epistemic community is accounted for in 4.3.6-7. The entire journey into which this chapter fits is summarised in table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Electoral trust and 3D model: theory-to-action summary table

Dimensions	Chapter 3	Chapters 3, 5	Chapters 6, 7	Chapters 7, 8
	Deep-rooted human needs (foundation for trust)	Citizen expectations on public institutions	Electoral stakeholder needs and expectations	Implications for EMB trust-building (3D model)
D1- Transactional trust pathway: delivery	Need for physical, economic, social security – fulfilled through public services.	Public services delivered per institutional mandate – meeting citizen needs.	Stakeholders expect electoral services to be delivered.	Run elections (visibly) well Foresee and overcome typical logistics problems of electoral calendar, temporary staff.
D2- Relational trust pathway: building shared ownership	Deep-rooted needs for respect and dignity. Fears of loss and harm: needs to be listened to. Needs for values alignment.	Institutional representatives defend public good – reassure citizens that values are aligned, that public good is in safe hands, and that citizen is valued.	Political stakeholders have vulnerabilities and fears because of high stakes. Assuaged by being consulted, listened to, included, spoken of and to respectfully. Values messaging, behavioural transparency.	Active stakeholder work to foster a shared sense of purpose and ownership. Extensive consultation and relational work – display behaviours of transparency, empathic listening, reassurance, reiteration of impartiality.
D3- Regulatory trust pathway: fairness and certainty Building a common platform	Needs to feel secure, in safe hands, will be treated fairly. Needs for avenues of redress. Fears of harm and loss.	Due process. Displays fairness in distribution of service, provides pathways for redress. Meet security needs through explained rules, procedures.	To mitigate agitation from potential or pending loss, stakeholders need to feel certainty that systems are in place to protect them from deliberate/unfair harm. Procedural correctness/level playing field/avenues for redress.	Works to ensure a common platform, level playing field, ‘rules of the game’ that feel fair and are well understood. Displays procedural and administrative transparency. Relational work of assurance of fairness and level playing field.

				Transactional/regulatory work of establishing and enforcing rules of the game, provides avenues for redress.
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Table 7.1 shows a snapshot picture of the model under development through the thesis journey, including a sneak preview of the findings of this seventh chapter. From left to right we find; first, the theoretical understanding that to understand trust – one needs to understand underlying needs and expectations. Needs are deep-rooted and accentuated by trauma and uncertainty; expectations can be managed or manipulated – to the detriment or the advancement of trust. Trust-building work, therefore, must work both with fulfilling needs, but also with meeting and with managing expectations. This trust-building work has both relational and transactional pathways – these are not parallel tracks, but rather two ways of seeing behaviours – and a reminder to include both. For example – and here we move to the right side of table 7.1 - by ensuring that a transactional procurement process includes a relational inclusive design and consultation phase.

Trust theory explained that trust dynamics rest on the needs and expectations of trust givers on the one hand, and the ability to meet those needs and expectations by the entrusted on the other. These trust needs – such as those for respect/dignity and those for security – are particularly potent after trauma where security needs are linked with a visceral fear of harm. Further, regulatory theory showed that citizen ‘Expectations’, while more superficial and manageable than ‘Needs’, are nonetheless important for understanding and negotiating trust in public institutions. Failure to meet expectations results in lost trust. The failure can be on the institutional side if the expectations are reasonable. However, expectations can be unreasonable. Misunderstanding of the institutional mandate is when stakeholders expect something beyond what an institution can or should deliver. In chapter 6, this was exemplified by stakeholder anger and the

expectation of the Tunisian EMB to ensure a fair media coverage beyond its remit (see first column of the table 7.1).

The case-study findings of chapter 5 confirmed that stakeholders in elections have expectations of delivery of services (D1) which necessitated transactional trust pathways. This involved competence, predictability and order, and ‘doing what you say you will do.’ This finding was echoed through the phases of the Tunisian election described in chapter 6. Case-study findings and the Tunisian fieldwork also supported the relational argument of this thesis. Here it was demonstrated that in order to earn stakeholder trust, an investment had to be made in treating people with respect and procedural fairness (consulted, included, informed), listening and engaging in cooperative problem solving as much as was possible, and being open in disclosing a moral compass and ethical principles. The Tunisian case also brought into relief the importance of the trust needs to feel secure and in safe hands, to have pathways for redress and assurance of fairness (D3). This security-oriented dimension had neither been captured in election-focused literature, nor adequately captured in the trust pathways developed from the theoretical base. It is possible that theoretical attention to administrative pathways for fairness in the trust literature has been crowded out by psychological theories of procedural justice (feeling accepted and listened to – relational considerations) and by taken-for-granted constraints of administrative law in mature democracies (leading to default trust). Where legal institutions are unable to provide certainty around the trustworthiness of authorities (and this may well extend to mature democracies in recent times), the model for trust-building requires a third dimension. This was the subject for further exploration in conversation with practitioners. Was this third dimension of

predictability and security around electoral processes important and separate from transactional and relational considerations in EMB trust-building?⁶⁴

Chapter 6 showed how relational trust-building required behaviours that accommodated the stakeholders in their vulnerability - inherent to the contest – and their needs to feel respected by being consulted, included, spoken of respectfully, and listened to (see D2 row in table 7.1). Chapter 6 showed further that electoral trust-building requires that the EMB also mitigate the agitation from potential or pending electoral loss. For this reason, predictability and certainty as trust pathways are upgraded to a dimension equal to transactional trust-building (D1) and relational trust-building (D2). Trust-building with the added third-dimension demands helping stakeholders feel the certainty that systems are in place to protect them from deliberate or unfair harm, such as procedural correctness, protecting a level playing field and providing avenues for redress (see D3 row). The 3D model as an explanatory tool thus combines the well-understood technical delivery imperatives of election administration with the relational dimensions of public service, as well as with the less recognised appreciation of stakeholder needs for certainty and clear pathways for redress.

Chapter 7 marks the next step in the development of this 3D electoral trust-building model – the move to action. Aided by practitioner pragmatism, this chapter addresses RQ3 ('how?!') and shifts towards an EMB trust-building model that is both desirable and practicable for electoral work in the field. The starting points for conversations with practitioners are:

- (a) the first trust-building dimension of running elections visibly well (D1)

⁶⁴ See the middle columns of evolving model in table 7.1

(b) the dimension of public communication and genuine stakeholder engagement

(D2)

(c) the dimension of orderliness which is evidenced by a shared understanding of

the 'Rules of the Game' with rules and fairness ensured and seen to be in play

(D3).

As table 7.1 reminds us, the research journey thus far has identified deep-rooted needs of respect and security as those most relevant for public institutions in general and for electoral management in particular. Stakeholders can 'expect' services and behaviours that transcend what an EMB can reasonably deliver, especially if newly formed or poorly resourced. In this expectation-delivery dissonance lies the root of the trust problem. As we saw so clearly in the chapter 5 cases, the political stakes and the logistical challenges particular to elections compound and accentuate these difficult trust dynamics. The 3D model in its pragmatic and action-oriented form - represented in the column on the right in the table – is co-developed with this chapter's informants as a practical guide for practitioners as they design and implement electoral processes.

7.1.1 Midway stocktaking - three trust-building dimensions

The transaction or delivery oriented first (D1) row of table 7.1 represents a natural starting point of any public trust journey, including elections. This is where we find the 'normal' elements understandable as delivery of electoral services, such as complete voter registers, effective logistics and accurate election results. The inclusion of delivery as a trust-building dimension is intuitive and obvious, important for trust in public institutions in general and for electoral institutions in particular because of the operational enormity of the single-day, whole country event. Or, as is increasingly the

case, a multi-day event with multiple voting options for voters. This dimension, in the language of theory, meets rational trust requirements and political trust needs.⁶⁵

The second row displays the characteristics of the second trust-building dimension (D2). D2 is about empathetic relation-building – engagement with explicit respect, fairness, cooperative and co-design habits, professional approaches, user-friendly liaison mechanisms and active communication of values. It meets the affinitive trust requirements described by Stern, the relational requirements described by Llewellyn, the social trust needs as described by Putnam, and the fairness and procedural justice work of Tyler, all as described in chapter 3 and represented in multiple trust pathways.

The third dimension (D3) is shown across the third row. D3 is about regulatory certainty, predictability, reliability, procedural clarity, assurances of safety, avenues of redress and the avoidance of delays or destabilising changes. This dimension meets procedural-justice and post-trauma needs for stakeholders to feel secure and in safe hands, but also rational-trust needs. Regulation is about preventing harm, and much of this dimension is about preventing harm largely through rules that are followed or enforced, rules that prevent arbitrary domination (J. Braithwaite 2022). Much attention is given to preparation and making sure that the path forward is clearly articulated to ensure calmness and no surprises, where possible keeping to known routines. While closely related to transactional trust, the third dimension is different in that, to be competent and effective one can change course at the last minute and deliver masterfully but through doing so also profoundly disturb the semblance of routine and normality which is critical when there is unease. It has elements of both transactional and relational trust.

⁶⁵ See chapter 3 for detailed citations.

In this model, a trustworthy EMB sees high value in all three dimensions. It is competent and effective; respectful and responsive; stable and predictable. The normative purpose of the model is to convey the message that trust-building requires excellent delivery but also more: attending to stakeholders needs to feel respected (listened to) and needs for predictability and certainty (in safe hands). The idea is that how necessary each dimension is, and what will be required to meet those needs for delivery, respect and security will differ in context. In some contexts, a website, a telephone number to call, and timely information may be enough – in another, intense relational work might be essential. The important thing is attending to or meeting the needs of the context, and in that way, recognising that a checklist approach to elections is ineffective.

It was this 3 D model, schematically depicted in figure 1, that was brought to the practitioner community for testing, adjustment and validation.

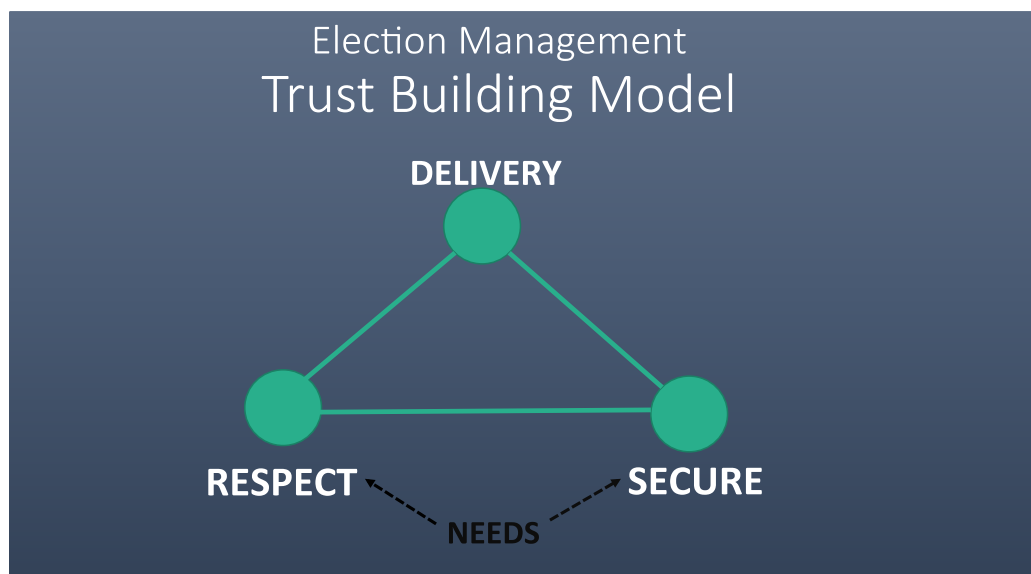


Figure 1 EMB Trust Building Model – Needs Oriented View

7.1.2 Informant responses to the trust-building model

The community of practice respondents were able to associate the three model dimensions (the trust ‘meta-pathways’) with recent experiences, with critical, formative incidents in their careers, and with electoral situations they were familiar with even if not self-experienced. In short, the interviews with professionals confirmed that the model was sufficiently well grounded in EMB experience.

Interviewees were also willing and able to rank and assess each model dimension as well as compare and contrast between the dimensions. In some cases, this required an initial prompting or renaming from my side. In some instances, the interviewees themselves renamed dimensions or aspects of the model. This renaming process is reflected in the sections below which cover the work of revising the trust-building model.

7.1.3 Aligning trust concepts with practitioner wording

A challenge with using the interviews with practitioners research phase as validation for the emergent trust-building model was that words are used differently in trust theory and in election practice (see Appendix D Table 1 for summary). In the semi-structured interviews, I asked the question: ‘how do you use the words credibility, trust, and legitimacy in your normal work with elections’. The purpose of the question was to tease out (understand) current discourse in professional circles and to revise the 3D model to be relevant to this discourse. There were no respondents who understood the words/concepts to be unimportant.

The words trust, legitimacy, etc. are being thrown around. There is an increasing acceptance of sensitisation work because of the importance of ensuring acceptance and legitimacy (R#1).

One category of informant used these words regularly but in a vague (imprecise), intuitive and aspirational sense – as a backdrop or a preface to a point or an action, e.g.

‘trust/legitimacy is important for...’. Respondent #10 said that variations of these terms are now standard in awarding technical assistance projects, for example, ‘how will this project support EMB credibility’. Other respondents were more specific with thoughts on what elicited or manifested as legitimacy, trust or credibility (used interchangeably). Specific linkages (what elicits, supports, or indicates trust or legitimacy) were: political will (manifested in turnout and involvement); technical adherence to process (correct voter registration, accurate vote counting, etc.); adherence to international obligations; EMB independence; and EMB appointment. These aspects correspond both to delivery by mandate and professional best practice.

Importantly, interviewee stories of lost and built trust reinforced the trust-theory insights that flux, uncertainty and avoidance (of responsibility, of open communication, of taking a stand where needed) are anathema to trust-building, and also reinforced the empirical findings that electoral trust-building, therefore, must take into consideration the agitation, stakes, fears and vulnerabilities in the environment. I asked if the sentiment that – ‘you are in safe and capable hands, you will not be harmed’ resonated as a way of describing the attitude needed to guide trust-building efforts. While an unconventional way of describing EMB management practice, it did fit the sentiments.

7.1.4 Addressing practitioner reflections on the trust-building model

The interviewees from the community of practice related to the 3D trust-building model well – that is – as natural, sensible, appropriate in essence, but needing refinement to better reflect professional discourse and current realities in the electoral-management space. The interviewees saw the model in a normative rather than explanatory way – a way of seeing how things should be done, rather than as a way of understanding how things are done. They were able to associate the model with recent or critical, formative electoral experiences, and – as displayed earlier in the chapter – they were able to rank or

assess each dimension specifically. In some cases, this required prompting or renaming from my side, in some instances the interviewees themselves renamed dimensions or aspects of the model. This renaming process forms part of the work towards a revised model. When explaining the model to members of the community of practice, I needed at some points to reach for 'other' ways of describing the model. Examples that I used to exemplify trust theory and my three-dimensional application were:

- Scenario to explain D1, Delivery:
 - “Imagine you have shoes to be repaired. You will trust your shoemaker if he or she predictably gives you your shoes back, repaired well.”
- Scenario to explain D2, Relational:
 - “Imagine a more complex scenario, where you are vulnerable in some way – for example bringing a child to the emergency department at the hospital. You are afraid. How the staff treat you (whether with respect and understanding or not) will be extremely important.”
- Scenario to assemble the three dimensions, and to introduce D3, Pathways of Certainty:
 - “Imagine a scenario where the outcomes are unclear and where trauma is involved– early-stage cancer. It will be important that your medical teams are competent (D1) and respectful/kind (D2). You may also want guidance for your journey, such as a step-by-step guide or flowchart as to what happens next: what you and your family can do and what support you can access. You will want assurances of reliable systems in place. You will want to understand the roles and responsibilities of the different actors, timelines and communication mechanisms. Basically, you want as much information as possible to (albeit to some extent artificially) create stable ground and predictability (D3) in an unstable, and traumatic, situation.”

These scenarios were helpful to make the theory-driven trust dimensions vivid and meaningful to the interviewees. In all cases, they were able to apply the dimensions to the electoral-management process.

What resonated very well was describing D2 as building common purpose (the ‘political will’ mentioned by many as critical to electoral management work), and D3 as a common platform or rules of the game. Seeing D2 as about common purpose means that it is about the relational work needed both internally with the morale of officials and externally, for example with contestants and media channels to overcome the temptations to be spoilers, to convince stakeholders to avoid the alternative discourses that might serve short-term interest but that undermine long-term national interest. This community building, ideally, helps everyone be trustworthy and trust others.

Another way of interpreting the work of D2 was that of seeing elections as shared societal responsibility, which eschews reductionist and transactional ways of seeing elections. As one interviewee put it, “I hate the paradigm of service delivery because it breaks away from the sense of shared societal responsibility” (#28).

Similarly, D3 slowly morphed through the course of the interviews, to be ultimately reframed (with help from the respondents), as a common platform or rules of the game in contrast to the ‘security’ wording that was more prominent in the trust literature. In the revised version, D3 oriented rules-of-the-game manifest in the form of transparent and jointly understood procedures, timelines, roles and responsibilities, flow charts and mechanisms for complaint and redress. To provide stability and common ground, these tools for predictability would need to be coherent, established, codified accessibly in plain language and available, so that there are no surprises – so that each stakeholder knows what is coming, what is expected of them, what they can expect, who they can turn to if unhappy at any point.

Another wording that resonated well to describe D3 was ‘procedural clarity’ – giving the same sense of a common platform for understanding so that expectations could be brought into line with institutional realities. Both forms of wording spoke to the importance of procedures that had clarity in the sense of being coherent, transparent and

accessible – without bias. This way of approaching D2 and D3, if managed well alongside with D1 delivery, means that a huge source of reputational damage is averted – namely the risk that when things go wrong, the actions are interpreted maliciously or are misunderstood as unfair or partisan.

In general, with the practitioner community, D3 was best understood when described as the rules of the game being known, accepted, credible. The concept of ‘safety’ taken from the literature that underpins D3 did not help explain D3 to this community; for those involved in running elections, the safety concept is too broad and emotive. Moreover, when linked with the concept of security, order, and certainty (emphasised in trust literature), there was anathema because these words conjure up the language of authoritarian states. As one interviewee said:

My concern with the words stability and certainty is that they can be associated with authoritarianism, in particular ‘certainty’. That a process is certain doesn't mean that it is trustworthy – it can be a bad process. I would call the dimensions Respect, Responsiveness and Reliability (R#18).

The conversations with practitioners provided insight for trust-building actions; these actionable steps are exemplified in the right-hand column of table 7.1. Multiple respondents emphasised the importance of explicitly upgrading transparency in any trust-building guidance. While implicit in the findings from previous research steps, this validation exercise pushed transparency to the foreground. I added behavioural transparency, aka honesty, to D2 and procedural and administrative transparency, aka accountability, to D3. This fit worked, as D2 is about a manifested transparency, with open-door policies, senior officials ‘getting out there’ among people, communicating frequently and in a friendly manner, being open both about mistakes and intentions. D3, from a transparency perspective, is about the regulatory procedures, processes and

decision making. It is about rules being well known, distributed, accessible through the formats that are used in that context (whether paper- or web-based) and seen as fair.

The concept of elections administrators as ‘professional’ was one that resonated well with this community of practitioners, and professionalism with its accompanying characteristics of sound judgement, competence, experience and ethical base was expressed as a prerequisite for being able to navigate the three dimensions, in particular D2. The importance of avenues of redress, complaints processes that are functional, well known, effective, timely and fair was another theme throughout the interviews that helped make sense of how to operationalise the essence of D3 as predictability-oriented trust-building to meet security needs.

7.1.5 How the three trust-building dimensions interrelate

As a quantitative exercise, I asked the 31 interviewees to use a Likert-like scale to rate each trust-building dimension between 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The purpose was twofold. Firstly, it was a useful strategy to ensure that interviewees could see distinctions between the dimensions and generate conversations on clarification if need be. Secondly, it provided validation that the model held up for practitioners; that is, that people could see its relevance and ‘run’ with it. No interviewee rated any dimension below the midpoint of the ‘not-important-to-important’ scale, that is, lower than 3 (see Appendix D Table D2). Their responses to this task varied but can be grouped into five clusters or types.

The cohesive approach

The first type of feedback was that the three dimensions need to be in alignment. Some even said that it didn’t matter whether high or middle (3-5) – these were each part of a cohesive strategy. For those who chose ‘3’, their reasoning for the lower number was

not diminishing the importance of the dimensions, but rather making the point that we must accept that the quality of elections is lower in some cases. These cases may be countries in transition, emerging from conflict or in a chaotic political environment. These cases of lower quality may be in areas where public administration is known and well understood to be weak, and where this weakness is accepted, both domestically and internationally,

The ‘two-is-good-enough’ approach

The second type of feedback was that if you – as an EMB – are strong in two of the three dimensions, this strength compensates weaknesses in a third dimension. For example, ‘if you have D2 and D3 you can tolerate mishaps in D1’. D2 and D3 emphasise relational skills to build commitment to and faith in the electoral process – and if these relationships are robust and functioning, inevitable mistakes in delivery (D1) can be ‘acceptable’ to stakeholders without causing a crisis. As one interviewee put it: “delivery is possibly the least important because so much can weaken it. Perception surrounding why the delivery wasn’t right eases because of the other two, D2 & D3. If relationships are well established, you have a buffer. The stronger the two are, the weaker the other can be”; however, “an egregious error in one can lessen the buffer that the other two provide” (#25).

The contextual approach

The third type of feedback was that the relative importance of the dimensions for trust-building would differ depending on the context. This composite picture shows responses dependent on stage of trust:

Losing trust	Delivery failure (D1) as ostensible cause – underlying weaknesses in D3 and D2
Building, rebuilding trust	Requires active D2, also D3 to alleviate fear

Maintaining trust	Requires D3 and D1
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For example, one respondent gave the example of organising Senate elections in Liberia during the Ebola crisis. He said that the intense communication work conducted by the EMB during this crisis was about D2 (relationships) and about D3 (giving people a sense that there was a step-by-step plan). It was about calming people and letting them know that the authorities were concerned and were working hard on their behalf. The electoral commission had daily meetings with health authorities, regular meetings with parties and weekly radio sessions. The technicalities of the elections were less important.

Making the same point - that context matters - the same respondent gave different weightings for the scenario he had experienced in South Sudan. For the South Sudan referendum, as well as for the post-referendum tasks – the only priority was delivery – the relational, or predictability aspects were not important. The respondent was one of several who either asked to rank the three dimensions twice, reflecting different scenarios or to make the point that their weightings would be different if the context changed.

The singular approach

The fourth type of feedback was that one dimension was more important than the others. Interestingly, the interviewees in this category differed as to which of the dimensions was more important. It seemed that assessors, those whose main task was to assess an electoral assistance project (rather than implement), thought delivery the most important. Their focus was on ‘what was accomplished’. Those who ranked D2 highest were people who had just experienced crisis and mistrust, and whose experience led them to acutely believe relationships as most important. The practitioners with a long experience of technical assistance or hands-on administration ranked D3 highest. They

third dimension (D3) was somehow perceived as an under-the-radar ‘given’. At the same time, the relational emphasis of D2 was seen as a good practice, but not necessarily essential, as an add-on. Meanwhile, for those who had worked in post-conflict elections, D2 was widely seen as the most important of the dimensions. For these peacebuilding professionals, the D3 rules and eventual D1 mistakes paled in comparison to the heavy D2 lifting required from societal leaders to convince all the key actors to remain inside the electoral process. Finally, for development-oriented practitioners, it was D3 that stood out as critically important for building sustainable and accepted institutions over time. Fair rules, fairly implemented – they suggested – would facilitate the task of building the long-term stability (=predictability) necessary for developing rooted electoral trust over time, regardless of any isolated D1 incidents or D2 misunderstandings that inevitably occur in any given electoral event.

Overall, the reactions to the 3D model, even when contradictory, were such as to assert its value as a tool to shift focus to the stakeholders’ (trust-giver) perspective. This shift of focus introduces additional dimensions above and beyond delivery-oriented improved technologies normally presented as trust-building solutions.

7.1.6 Summary of feedback regarding 3D model

With this validation chapter, I am consolidating and revising the electoral trust-building model in response to practitioner discourse and insights. Practitioner engagement during interviews signalled that the pragmatic, action-focused iterations of the model could indeed be useful as a professional development tool and management guidance by shifting focus and making explicit the need to attend to the relational and security-oriented dimensions of electoral management work, above and beyond the more technocratic work of logistics and contract delivery.

By making these complex trust dynamics visible, the model can serve as a reminder to senior officials, donors and policymakers that multiple approaches are required for trust-building. In spite of some of the informants believing that one or other of the dimensions was more important or fundamental, their stories (consolidated in the next chapter section) revealed that all dimensions were engaged to some extent and not always in ways that were obvious or in the front of the minds of the story tellers. A traditional starting point for an election ‘war story’ of lost trust is focus on a delivery failure; but in the retelling of their own distress and that of others there were hidden stories of relational breakdowns and unaddressed trauma that spoke to D2 and D3 dynamics.

The three empirical phases of this research have moved theoretical underpinnings (why do people trust?) in a step-by-step fashion towards a focus on the practical mechanisms of how to build trust. For example, that planning, and procedures meet security needs and that pre-election consultation processes along with open lines of communication fosters a shared understanding of the role and value of the EMB.

In this chapter, refinements to the 3D model accommodate the final thesis goal. This shift is represented by the two final columns in table 7.1. The least affected is the first dimension of delivery-based transactional trust – which was intuitively understandable and more easily actionable. Through the thesis research phases, the understanding of D2 has moved from a generalised sense that relational work matters for trust, to a specific need in electoral management to build allies and community through a variety of stakeholder-focused strategies that are respectful and genuine. I reframe D3 to more strongly reflect administrative transparency, due process and redress, shared understandings of procedures and processes – in short, the rules of the game. With these changes, the model not only holds but also resonates with the community of practice.

Aided by the third layer of empirical data covered in this chapter, I can now argue with confidence for the specific addition of D2 and D3 as meta-pathways that matter for the EMB trust-building arsenal. Actions and strategies flow from these pathways, while no trust dividends are guaranteed. Unique for election management, the twin trust stumbling blocks of high-stakes and complex logistics demand special attention to signposting clear, transparent and fair procedures and processes beyond that normally assumed to characterise public institutions. To build the confidence necessary for accepted results, EMBs and societal leaders must work relationally with contestants to actively advance the shared purpose through which commitment ('political will') to a peaceful electoral process transcends any short-term political gains achieved by undermining an electoral event (D2). But, this sense of shared purpose can only be achieved if contestants are convinced of/by the procedural clarity that assures that the mechanisms are – in fact – fair enough for them to accept that an electoral loss really is a loss rather than a stolen victory; and that there are mechanisms available to right the many inevitable small wrongs that appear along the pathway to an election (D3).

7.2 The vocabulary of electoral trust

By speaking directly to practitioners, the validation exercise provided nuance on a key issue that arose in previous empirical phases. Namely, is there something about working with elections that makes it different from work in other sectors? If, as argued in chapter 5, trust-building looks 'different' than the pathways identified in the literature, is that because electoral trust itself is different? This foundational questions of the nature of the problem to be solved, was the object of the first interview question 'Can you tell me your thoughts on how EMBs lose trust, and can you describe to me an electoral process in which trust was lost?' with follow-up questions on aftermath and the rebuilding of trust.

In this section of chapter 7, practitioner reflections and trust stories are clustered by themes. The themes are ordered to support the 3D model revision beginning with a delivery-oriented cluster of anecdotes that speaks to (D1), through a relational work (D2) cluster, to a rules-oriented predictability (D3) cluster. Note that these clusters are constructed post facto – in the interviews, interviewees spoke freely in story and reflection form in answer to open questions of lost, built or maintained trust.

The utility of the stories is to inform the development of the trust-building model by building on stakeholders' 'own' words used as they spoke of EMB trust lost and regained, thus building a practice-anchored vocabulary of electoral trust. Appendix D Table 1 places this rich vocabulary schematically into the 3-dimensional trust-building model.

7.2.1 Transactional trust and the electoral context (D1)

Echoing earlier findings, discussions with the respondents made clear that D1 (delivery) dominates election administration and electoral assistance because of the visible consequences of failure and the immediacy and scale of the operation; large-scale movement of trucks, security forces, handling of sensitive materials and data. Planning and design of elections focus on the task at hand; the institutional culture, recruitment, allocation of resources of an EMB or an electoral assistance mission understandably reflects this privileging of the operational. Unless a crisis of confidence is at hand, normally very little effort is invested in deliberately and intentionally understanding or attending to stakeholder concerns. The purpose of a strong operationally oriented culture is of course to make the election happen on schedule and in compliance with legal framework and any negotiated post-conflict agreement. From a trust perspective, the visible presence of an operationally oriented EMB with trucks and papers and offices

reassures stakeholders that the process is under control and that services will be delivered per expectation (D1).

During the interviews, the first stories of lost trust that came to mind for the practitioners were those related to classic delivery (D1) mishaps and failings. The interview stories validate a concern discussed in chapters 4 and 5 that a sole focus on delivery is risky because the twin realities of operational failures and external disruptions mean that something will sure go wrong. The stories with dramatic imagery included raining ballots from a helicopter in Juba; ballots blowing down the street in Port au Prince (#7); the media reports of the removability of ink in Afghanistan as ‘exposed’ by Christiane Amanpour on CNN (#8, #20). Several dramatic, visceral ‘trust-delivery’ themed stories revolved around the count. The following story experienced by one of the respondents illustrates, echoes and validates the findings from 5.2.3 (Kenya) and 6.1.6, that problems of the count originate long earlier, and illustrates how delivery trust conflates with relational trust.

‘We will never forgive you for this’ hissed a leader of the smaller Inkatha party to the operational head of the EMB at the South African 1994 elections. As apartheid unravelled at the beginning of the 1990s, there were no guarantees that the transition would be peaceful. The Inkatha party were deeply divided about whether to participate in the historic 1994 elections or not. In a series of phone calls between the UK and South Africa minutes before ballots were printed in London, the Inkatha leaders vacillated between participating and not participating. The ballots were printed without Inkatha – and in the end, a sticker was added to the already printed ballots – their participation was considered ‘that’ important. (R#29 – paraphrase summary)

Reflections on the incident above illustrates other points about the challenges of delivery-based trust foreshadowed in previous chapters: the inherent delivery challenges, the external disrupters, and the mitigating or exacerbating impact of the conditions and level of goodwill in which the election are held. The interviewee vividly recalled a series

of flaws leading up to the election: regulations and procedures were seriously delayed because every aspect was new and fraught; these procedures changed on the fly; with delays and uncertain procedures then affecting the clarity of instructions in the critical poll worker training phase, and the rigour of programming and testing of the computers and software used to tabulate the results. This configuration of weak points produced election result errors where, for two whole hours, the ‘untipped’ Inkatha party was shown as leading the results, until the glitches were solved. The party leadership’s anger at the positive – then adjusted negative – results was palpable and explosive. The overwhelming victory of Nelson Mandela and the spirit of goodwill in the country mitigated these mistakes. The anecdote echoes two strong themes of the Tunisia case, a lack of predictability and stability that gave a chaotic feel to the electoral management (detrimental to trust), mitigated only by the broad consensus to the democratic pathway from citizens and political actors. As in the Tunisian case, the overall legitimacy and historical imperative of events trumped delivery concerns; as in Tunisia, relational skills helped keep losing candidates within the process.

7.2.2 Relational trust and the electoral context (D2)

The respondents validated the premise that trust-building required a relational approach beyond the delivery of an electoral event. Drawing across their stories or reflections of rebuilding trust, they reaffirmed or accentuated mechanisms also identified in previous chapters: consultation processes, open-door policies and open lines of communication, liaison mechanisms at all levels, as well as conveying values-anchored language and comportment in communication and interactions, such as via information meetings, websites, calendars, mailouts and complaints forms.

The principal reason for prioritising such practices was to make it easier for electoral stakeholders to understand what was happening and why, and, critically, for

avoiding misunderstandings. Misunderstandings played an outsize role in the ‘lost trust’ stories which included the following:

- opposition candidate George Weah did not understand and then misrepresented the electoral system for second round elections in Liberia – firing up his supporters in anger
- CNN misrepresented and shed doubt on the reliability of the ink used for voters’ fingers in Afghanistan
- presidential candidate Xanana Gusmao in East Timor misrepresented issues related to the ballot paper.

The problem with misunderstandings or misperceptions of electoral processes was not only on the stakeholder side, but also on the side of authorities. One interviewee said that he had noted that when ‘things start to get hot’ there are authorities who then shut down and stopped communicating (#3). Another said, ‘Precisely when they should be communicating, they don’t’. The interviewee speculated that this was likely because of internal problems, or a misguided notion that staying out of the public limelight would avoid bad publicity; #26 confirmed this as precisely the problem – if under pressure, the EMB recedes into anonymity and distance instead of engaging.

Peacebuilding-election experienced interviewees tried to describe the atmosphere after armed conflict to explain why delivery was simply never enough to assuage concerns. One interviewee said that stakeholders were ‘genuinely worked up in a state of paranoia, anxiety and frenzy’. Others spoke of an inherent, built-in distrust (Afghanistan). Interestingly, one interviewee noted that agitation in society could be positive for trust in an electoral commission – giving the example of South Sudan, which started on an A+ rating after the initial referendum on independence. Since then, however, the role and pedestal position of the electoral authorities was diluted as competing priorities of food security, IDPs and civil war diverted focus from electoral matters (informant #11).

To my mind, the biggest problem area is procurement. Plagued with political interference and lack of capacity and knowledge (#7).

The danger of relational work is the risk of corruption and reputational damage. Some relationships may be stronger than others and officials may be ‘captured’ to the point of furthering the interests of favoured parties while disadvantaging others. The theme of procurement arose during multiple interview – as a source of delay and logistical headache but also as making election officials seem untrustworthy if their names were connected to scandals or lucrative contracts: “if you can’t handle money, how can you be trusted”? Interviewee #28 explained that the handling of money affects trust because an authority who handles money carefully and transparently (or the reverse) is likely to be trusted in other areas of its remit. Interviewee #13 gave the example of the chief electoral officer in [country Z] who was suspected of conflict of interest with a real estate deal regarding premises for the election commission. Her attempts to clear her name by ‘forum shopping’ through three instances before resigning tarnished her personal reputation, as well as the EMB’s reputation. In the view of the interviewee, being tainted with a procurement scandal negatively affects the ability of senior officials to have credibility in handling an electoral crisis, even if unrelated to the issue at hand. In summary, managing relationships was understood as critical trust-building work, in tandem with D1 and D3 work.

7.2.3 Predictability trust and the electoral context (D3)

The interviews helped confirm and deepen understanding of the rise of the *predictability-and-order trust pathway*. The stories and reflections from the interviews provide insights into why this dimension that emphasises certainty and clarity is particularly relevant to elections: the linkage between electoral calendar and delay; aberrations in procurement for elections, justified by electoral calendar; and the feelings of insecurity

and stakes unique to political contestants and their supports. Procedural clarity, rather than ‘predictability’ resonated with informants as a way of framing the D3 trust-building dimension.

The dominant theme of delay – also affecting transactional trust and relational trust discussed above – is particularly important for linking the unique features of electoral management with the importance of attending to predictability-oriented trust-building. Delays compound growing agitation because of the sense of flux, uncertainty and lack of clarity. Delayed procedures render the calming of rising tensions impossible; for example, if officials are unclear in their information to contestants who are already in an agitated and vulnerable state.

The lesson that is often learned too late: electoral timetables are unforgiving. Why are there often delays? There can be political motives – it is in someone's interest that there be a delay. Also, sometimes there is no trust - outsiders propel the process forward (#7).

The NEC [National Electoral Commission] in [Country M] is about to be completely switched out: now there is no electoral law (it is being introduced), completely new commission, new voter registration and there is an election next year! I can't help thinking it is being set up to fail; these are inhuman conditions in which to organise an election (#15).

The trust-loss stories of the havoc caused by cascading delays from legislation to procurement to distribution were clearly suboptimal preconditions for providing the calm and steady electoral leadership needed to reassure stakeholders.

[The commissioner] was respected. But there was a lack of internal communication inside the [EMB]. The timeline was very tight. There was not time to build a team or a common strategic vision (#1).

The introduction of technology to electoral processes is often presented as trust-building, as a proxy for trust because of the potential to improve voters' list, prevent fraud or provide quicker and more accurate results. However, an alternative narrative of an inverse relation between technology and trust-building also emerged in the interviews. An interviewee explains:

Why obsession with technology? Esp biometric voter registration
Because 'we put our trust in technology because we can't trust each other' e.g. in [Country Z] right now. In [country X] they really tried to dissuade from biometrics – ... instead but cabinet, both parties insisted, and [Donor Country Y] – 'like knights in shining armour' offered to loan and to provide goods. There is an irresponsible push for technology, such as in [Countries Z and W] currently pushing for iris-scanning voter registration (#11).

Counterintuitively from regarding technology as an enabler of delivery, technology instead came up frequently as a thorn thwarting electoral delivery.

[Country X] bought in all these computers that would be obsolete by the next elections, the cost of storing them would be more than buying new ones for next elections. Why biometric? They thought that technology would prevent fraud [and build trust]. It isn't technology that prevents fraud, however, it is the procedures (#7).

A number of interviewed practitioners had personally been involved in technology procurement processes that they felt highly uncomfortable with – as unrealistic within the timeframe, as expensive, as inappropriate for the context or infrastructure of the country. They described the introduction of technology as fraught at every stage: who gets the contract? Why is it introduced? Who understands how it works?

Interviewees described stakeholders who insisted on technology as a silver bullet to solve perceived trust problems: for example, to 'clean' voters' lists or to speed up the

delivery of accurate results. Further, some spoke of the contrasting and complicated reality that hasty or inappropriate use of technology brought with it.

The EMB [International Electoral and Boundaries Commission – IEBC] was composed just 15 months before elections, in 2012. The Chairperson was chosen for reasons of acceptance by the contesting parties rather than experience. What they had to do would have been challenging for even the most seasoned administrators. Delays... each step needed to be transparent, each step was prolonged, last minute. Some legislation never got passed (financing). People say technology failed. No! It was a failure of project management. Delayed procurement, cell phones for transmitting preliminary count got to polling stations late – after training. – polling officers forgot password; weren't sure what to do, or they didn't get delivered. 60% worked/were used (#11).

The interviewees painted a picture in which the delayed procedures and delayed equipment that plagued transitional or post-crisis elections as a whole hit the procurement of technology most sharply.

The interviews underlined the rise of the importance of predictability in trust-building through practitioner reflections on how reform or change impacted trust. A ‘delivery isn’t enough’ theme that emerged from the interviews identified stakeholder uneasiness over change. One interviewee told the following anecdote based on his observations of voter behaviour over time in multiple US states: if they voted on paper in previous years, he declared, then they expect to vote on paper again. If they voted on a machine in previous elections (as in a recent top of mind case of his) and the change was back to paper – equally they were disrupted and dismayed.

To paraphrase his story and similar observations from other interviewees: regardless of the benefit of the change, if the experience for the voter/candidate was unknown and unexpected – trust problems or scepticism arose. Another interviewee explained that the predictability and familiarity of the experience to the voter was more valued than the perceived good of the process.

One interviewee spoke of a reality in the electoral assistance world whereby there are strong pressures for change, reform and innovation after a crisis – and an assumption that the way of doing things was at fault, rather than the way it played out. This assumption perpetuated a cycle of constant change in internationally funded elections. For these reasons, many of the interviewees, burned by the experience of sub-par or delayed procedures, gravitated to the D3 section of the model in the spirit of ‘rules of the game, well understood’ as being precisely the opposite of what they had experienced.

D3 as ‘clear rules of the game’ also appealed to interviewees in the sense of helping assuage the concerns and insecurities of vulnerable electoral stakeholders – not only political actors, but also particular groups in society. For EMBs, one interviewee explained, it is about stepping into the shoes of their ‘clients’, and planning rollout of electoral phases in such a way that reassures and assures, that assuages fears and concerns. In this way, those sensitive to the importance of D3 acknowledged the importance of D1 and D2.

7.2.4 Three dimensions as one approach – with practitioner vocabulary

The final category of questions to the interviewees solicited reflections on maintaining stakeholder trust – moving the focus away from the crisis scenarios that were easily top of mind – to think about the long term and sustainable good practice that would keep public confidence ratings high.

‘EMBs cannot become complacent’ summarises the key advice; that is the necessity of consistently assessing and reassessing, scanning the environment and renewing processes where needed. This ‘stretch, restore, reinvigorate’ approach demands making use of all professional development opportunities for staff, including exposure to regional and international practice. Specific mechanisms mentioned during the interviews were practices of post-election audits, and post-election stakeholder summits to start

planning for subsequent elections. Additional suggestions of good practice focused on slowing down change and conducting pilots. Where quick changes can be destabilising, slow and thoughtful changes and reform can be galvanising – as opportunities to listen, reflect, consult and include a wide variety of stakeholders into the process. It is also the opportunity to cooperate with the university, business and other public service sectors to trial and methodically develop new and appropriate technologies. Smaller elections, such as trade union elections, can serve as opportunities to test, gain buy-in or further develop innovative practice. These innovative practices can be about efficiency, but can also be about inclusion, as pointed out by two specialists interviewed – one on gender, and one on the accessibility of elections for people with disabilities.

Planning, emphasised in interviews, provide another example of three dimensions as one approach. In line with the importance of procedures for continuity and reliability, a sound and early planning process can serve both the building of common purpose (D2) and a common platform (D3). Planning also allows for risk management and contingency plans (D1, D3). As many of the interviewees pointed out, mistakes and mishaps are inevitable: “Better to plan for mistakes than for no mistakes” (#18). Respect, responsibility and responsiveness was the framing that one interviewee gave to the overall approach of the institution. The responsibility aligns with the notion that an EMB is a protector of core values – an institution of governance, a guardian of democratic values – rather than a service delivery agency following a checklist of tasks.

Several interviewees imagined a continuum of lost trust through regained trust to sustained trust in which D1 delivery increases in relative importance as electoral work is ‘normalised’. Over time it would be less important to have a charismatic leader, for example (as in the Ghana example above), and the institution itself would need to take over the trust-building and trust maintaining roles through consistent delivery over time.

The visible ‘humans of integrity and strong communication’ don’t need, as much, to be proxies for shaken institutional legitimacy.

I will never forget my first year at the commission, standing at the fiasco of a counting centre – chaotic, badly planned - wondering “what on earth did we do at HQ to lead to acceptance of the results?” Ten years later the process was shipshape thanks to training, planning (#13).

One interviewee articulated the following idea in response to this question of maintained trust. He spoke of the concepts of stock and flow. In his view, a cache of trust and reputational capital buffers the ebb and flow of activity around D1, D2 & D3 (#8). He gave the example of the Indian Electoral Commission as embodying all three dimensions.

The model described in the table D1 in Appendix D is adapted to the words and trust messaging used by and resonating well with interviewed practitioners. In the table, words drawn from the theoretically anchored trust pathways are replaced with concepts, practices and vocabulary adjusted to relevance for electoral management practice. For example, ‘D2’ originally the relational pathway as suggested by the trust literature – was really all about building a sense of common purpose around the elections. Common purpose is about building a team mentality and loyalty to a shared goal. This sense of common purpose would then carry the actors through difficult times. As one interviewee put it, the EMB’s job of maintaining trust demands continually considering the backdrop of the whole society – no procedures, for example, can be designed in a vacuum (#18, also #22). The legitimacy spiral with coherence between values, delivery, and structure discussed in earlier chapters is replaced by practitioner-oriented messaging on the importance of democratic values-messaging and open communication for EMBs and the dangers of not doing so, as exemplified the following interview quote:

In [Country P] there is a culture of Hedging. The EMB doesn't vigorously or publicly defend values – it is just not in the public servant culture to do so (#14).

The interviewed professionals were acutely aware of the precariousness of the field moving forward. 'Jaded' by experience, they were reticent towards any simplistic solutions but rather appreciate a nuanced view of electoral management work with multiple perspectives, especially the perspectives of stakeholders who will ultimately pass judgement and determine whether the electoral result is – indeed – an accepted one that leads to an orderly transfer of power.

7.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I present findings from the interviews with members of the community of practice in electoral management and electoral assistance. Based on insights from these interviews, I developed a revised trust-building model that was consistent with the academic literature and fit for purpose for the context of electoral practice. Specifically, I adapted the second and third trust-building dimensions to reflect the two strongest themes emerging from practitioner experience, the ideas of shared purpose and shared understanding of the rules of the game. In so doing, the thesis provides a social perspective to what has been seen as a technical and administrative problem and provides a wider range of pathways for EMB trust-building policy and practice.

The electoral trust-building model outlines three dimensions (3D) that need attending to: transactional (D1), relational (D2) and security-oriented (D3). While the technical delivery imperatives of election administration (D1) have been well understood, the model places an equivalent emphasis on relational dimensions of service and values-

based communication (D2) and recognition of stakeholder needs for certainty and clear pathways for redress (D3).

The experiences, reflections and stories of the electoral epistemic community served to anchor the research in current professional discourse, providing a validation and correction mechanism for the trust-building model, and bringing an additional layer of trust-building insights. Their engagement signalled the value of a pragmatic, action-focused model for professional development purposes.

Chapter 8. Trust dynamics and an EMB trust-building model

The thesis research questions⁶⁶ sought understanding of the trust dynamics at play between EMBs and their stakeholders, with special focus on insights that can support EMB trust-building moving forward. Building on the step-by-step findings described in previous chapters, this section consolidates the answers to the three research questions and presents an EMB trust-building model.

8.1 Socio-relational interactions at the micro-level (RQ1)

The first research question (RQ1) asks simply: what is really going on at the micro and macro levels? Using a socio-relational lens, if we are going to 'do' something about trust-building, what are the electoral institution dynamics that we need to understand and to consider for citizen trust-building strategies? To frame this discussion on the RQ1 thesis findings, let us first confirm the overall premise of the thesis that trust matters in running elections – it affects relationships among stakeholders and EMB staff at a micro level and it ripples out to affect the acceptance of results at the macro level.

The research undertaken in this thesis reaffirms the understanding that trust problems in elections indeed exist; they are real, they matter, and they are difficult to resolve. Challenges in the electoral field have morphed from how to run elections to how to run elections whereby the results are accepted. Lost trust riddles every transaction with complication. The Tunisian fieldwork showed how hard the electoral officials worked to

⁶⁶ (RQ1) How are micro-interactions important for trust-building? (RQ2) What behaviours, attitudes and strategies build and foster trust in electoral institutions? (RQ3) How can trust building be incorporated into the electoral management process?

gain trust, and how quickly it was compromised when ‘the going got tough’. The practitioners confirmed the trust problems with story after story of trust lost because of the interplay between delivery problems and political dynamics in given contexts. Trust problems are present also in parts of the world where elections had previously been taken for granted. In Kenya, challenging electoral results has become normalised behaviour as part of institutionalised distrust in the electoral system. In 2016 and again in 2020 and 2022, the US president himself sowed mistrust through his regular use of the word ‘fraud’ to speak about elections in his own country; the Brazilian president followed the playbook by undermining confidence in the EMB in advance of a potential loss.

Linked to the risks of political game-playing is the difficulty of assuming a linear trust dividend if elections could be organised better, that is, building trust incrementally through continuous improvement in the way in which elections are structured, organised, planned and prepared for. In reality, only a handful of insiders and expert outsiders understand the intricacies of electoral multi-year planning, an ever-expanding plethora of voting options, planning for parallel operations across the country, and electoral reform initiatives to tweak the system on multiple fronts (legislative, operational and political).

More widely known and shared are the perceptions and opinions of the many who shape the narrative of this otherwise opaque reality. Opinions can be shaped and shared on partial knowledge only, leading to a disconnect between how an EMB is really tracking and how the public narrative is developing and spreading. The stories stakeholders share can be about how the elections are structured (fairly?), are organised (competently?) and how preparations are playing out (smoothly?). These perceptions and the narratives that ensue are no doubt influenced by direct experience and observations of what is happening on the ground in terms of the EMB’s performance. But there are many other influences in addition to the ‘reality’. As explained by the trust theory in chapter 3, these perceptions are affected by fears, by the stakes at hand, by pressures or

information from others. Narratives that are misaligned with reality can be shared with honest or malicious intention. Either way – they impact trust.

This disconnect between reality and perception explains why when an EMB is in a positive spiral, that is, trusted with a positive political atmosphere - the narrative of an election can be better than the reality. In chapter 7, interviewees told stories of the ‘do-no-wrong’ euphoric atmosphere at the 1994 South African Elections with a Mandela victory despite shambolic logistical mistakes, impossible timelines and political acrobatics that plagued the administration of the elections. In the disconnect between reality and perception, all too often, the opposite is true. As the chapter 5 cases show, an electoral appointment seen as partial, or the loss of ballot papers – even when there is no proof that election results would be affected– takes on outsized importance and concern. While this reality makes life difficult for EMB officials, for democratic accountability proportionate reaction to errors is justified – a sceptical and vigilant stakeholder group is precisely what will keep officials on the straight and narrow path. The challenge for EMBs is to keep things proportionate and hold the ship together.

Finally, the dynamics are shaped by the trajectory of the electoral process, and the cumulative forces that shape the disconnect between reality and perception described above. The overarching dynamics can be thought of as pressure fronts building. An election has a cadence, a build-up to a crescendo. If we take the general environment first: as election day draws closer, anticipation, agitation, uncertainty, nervousness, excitement mount. Decisions and investments are put on hold. Legislation and executive decisions are either pushed through fast or held back. An EMB serves as a bulwark against political power bent on victory by any means at any cost if not held in check, and yet also at the mercy of those same forces for the legislation, time and resources needed to do the job.

In chapter 5, I describe the key twin pressures unique to elections using the heuristic terminology of logistics and stakes; many other names could denote the operational capacity on the one hand and political context on the other. 'Logistics' refers to the transactional dimensions of electoral work: the operational workings, structures in place, resources, capacity and infrastructure. These logistical conditions determine whether an EMB is being 'set up to fail' by being under resourced, wrongly staffed or working with inappropriate legislation. 'Stakes' refers to the entire environment that shapes people's perceptions of the institution: their personal experiences, fears, hopes and needs; collective experiences. Stakes can describe the situation for an EMB keeping raw power in check under a ticking timeclock where any trust failure can jeopardise the acceptance of the result, particularly where there is festering or residual post-conflict trauma or intergroup grievances.

We can think of stakes as the goals of individuals and groups that unavoidably conflict, and that put individuals and groups in competition. In more turbulent societies or where resources are scarce, the stakes can be existential for political actors or particular groups in society. The electoral 'stakes' put stakeholders on edge. The stakes are highest for the candidates— their reputation, livelihood, careers are on the line. While the stakes may be lower for voters, nonetheless every businessperson, health care professional, parent, pensioner, homeowner, unemployed youth or activist has something to gain or lose from the outcome of the election. Media, social media or coffee shops are forums for expressing worry, outrage, speculation, opinion polls display shifting information, all potentially feeding a general sense of insecurity or building of tension.

While the stakes are mounting at the societal level as one pressure front, on a separate front, the 'logistics' or operational pressure-front similarly and simultaneously builds, mounts and looms. Unique to electoral management are the risks of delivery failure from the combination timelines that are too tight, delayed procurement,

infrastructure not fit for purpose, and inadequate training or procedures for the officers at the frontlines of operations. For everything to go smoothly on election day: polling stations opening across the country on time, with well-trained staff and the right equipment; for results to be counted accurately, for each voter to find themselves correctly on the register – presumes years of careful planning, appropriate financing, legislation, interagency cooperation, technology and the capacity of thousands and thousands of temporary workers. Each form of increasingly common special voting arrangements – absentee ballots, mobile polling or early voting – adds new complications and vulnerabilities. The relevance for trust is of course the delivery angle: trust in public institutions demands that the institutions provide the service for which they were created.

These complications and vulnerabilities inherent to electoral management profoundly affect trust dynamics. Logistical imperatives require decisions to be taken that will impact stakeholders. These decisions may need to be taken at short notice, under sub-optimal conditions and without due consultation. Logistical complexities and unrealistically short timeframes lead to an inevitability of mistakes which affect stakeholders. Hurried decisions and logistical mistakes may not affect electoral results but can nonetheless affect stakeholder confidence that the electoral process is reliable and that they will not be harmed. Stakeholder fears of harm are directed not only to the electoral process decision or mistake but by extension to the authorities in charge. It is these dynamics which implicate our thesis protagonists: the EMBs.

Public institutions and their stakeholders are in a relationship. Institutions exist for a reason – to fill a societal purpose, to protect a public good. Here, the trust theories on trauma and deep-seated fear of harm are relevant for our investigation. Institutions are meant to provide the sense of security that humans crave – to address the deep-rooted fears of harm that fuel why and how we organise our societies. Our healthcare institutions address our fears of bodily harm, our schools address our fears for the future

wellbeing of children, the military alleviate our fear of an external enemy and the police mitigate our fear of criminal harm. These institutions perform – they deliver, and they are judged, appreciated, used, dreaded, looked to for comfort. Institutions make demands of us – our tax money, our data, our freedom of movement during a pandemic – we fall into line when these demands are part of societal norms (such as a census) or when a greater good or evil is at stake (such as conscription). This is the relationship, the dance, where institutional trust is built and lost.

This thesis has been driven by the imperative that weakness in electoral trust has worrisome destabilising repercussions beyond any single election – societal cohesion and economy are affected. The higher the stakes, the deeper the existing grievances - the more risk of electoral mishap or decisions serving as a tinderbox that can rapidly turn toxic. These dynamics shape the environment in which EMB trust-building responses and behaviours matter.

8.2 Behaviours, attitudes and strategies for electoral trust-building (RQ2)

As with the first research question, the second research question is deceptively simple sounding: (RQ2) What behaviours, attitudes and strategies build and foster trust in electoral institutions? In hindsight, despite a treasure trove of evidence and new datapoints, a straightforward answer remains elusive. Trust for how long? Individual or collective trust? Individuals meeting at the polling station level? Or the public bestowing legitimacy on the institution itself? Formal codified strategies and measures, or informal or informal person-to-person trust?

These questions accentuate the warnings issued by scholars who embark on trust work more broadly (see chapter 3): trust is not only messy, multileveled and ethereal, but it is also difficult to predict an outcome. Nothing about trust is easy; as the Tunisia case

showed, when you build trust through one pathway, you may compromise progress along other pathways. Certainly, for our object of interest, EMB trust-building is challenging at best, insurmountable at worst. As we have learned in this thesis, delivery or 'logistics' problems that affect trust are not necessarily solved by delivery solutions. While ostensibly (in the public narrative) losing trust is related to the operational failings of the election commission, we have shown how through digging deeper beneath the surface, there are other narratives to be learned about failed delivery. These more nuanced accounts can reveal complex underlying problems of political culture and residual damage from past injustices.

To navigate these trust-building complexities, the broad meta-pathways emerging through this research journey speak to the utility of competent behaviours (for transactional trust), empathic attitudes (for relational trust) and stability-oriented strategies (for regulatory trust).

8.2.1 Operational excellence and competent behaviours (D1 – transactional trust)

The first cluster of trust-building behaviours, attitudes and strategies revolve around delivery and the display of 'competence' that is foundational to transactional trust (D1 in the trust model). This thesis research journey reinforced a set of intuitively simple logical steps – or perhaps premises - to explain the importance of this cluster.

The starting premise is the institutional mandate. The institution's legitimacy hinges on the social good remaining valued as general societal values change; on the institution's ability to deliver or protect this public good; and on public opinion accepting and agreeing that the institution is delivering on this mandate.

The chapter 3 literature covers the importance and mechanics of transactional trust, albeit under different names in different disciplines, such as reliance, operational or rational trust. We place trust in those individuals who do what they have promised to do.

Those that renege on that promise may be trusted differently – perhaps as good-hearted people that we can trust to be interesting or kind - but we cannot ‘rely’ on them. The ‘reliability’ of an institute is judged by past performance: in the case of EMBs, whether it did in fact deliver calm, orderly and accepted elections in past years matters, recognising that the most recent event or the most recent scandal will be freshest in the collective memory. Each safely delivered election helps build the public trust ‘bank account’. Each remembered scandal draws from that account. As behavioural economists remind us, bad news stories linger longer than good or neutral news stories (Kahneman & Tversky 1979; Thaler 2005; Thaler & Sunstein 2009). The inevitability of ‘bad’ stories in running elections leaves EMBs consistently one step behind when assembling a trust-building arsenal.

Delivering an election requires many competencies, and the appropriate types of competencies work in harmony– legal, procedural, logistical, educational, managerial, technical – and at every level. Because the logistics of an election are so challenging – and because it is a ‘one-off’ event depending on careful coordination leading up to one moment – the EMB is in a particularly precarious position with it relying on impermanent staff or untested procedures.

Under normal circumstances, delivering the event is the most meaningful channel for trust-building in these environments. Developed countries with stable and established institutions put a high value on competence; political agents and citizens assume good faith and orderly practices as part of democratic culture. In the Australian case, the one isolated ballot loss incident signalled a breach of institutional competence. The trust-rebuilding effort put ballot-handling and training at the forefront to demonstrate commitment to operational excellence moving forward; this type of mistake would not happen again. This investment in competence and operational excellence paid dividends. Through the smooth delivery of subsequent elections, the EMB reputation is back on

track, albeit with the ballot loss as a painful professional memory and a cautionary tale for EMB staff.

Delivery-based trust is less important under certain circumstances. Under external threats, such as a pandemic, a cyber-attack or a natural disaster, stakeholders can overlook or understand logistical failings if public communication is effective. Crises put leadership on display, in particular the relational skillsets of cooperation, delegation and communication.

Similarly, in post-conflict situations, extreme poverty or early days of democracy, there can be more tolerance for operational failures. The values and good intentions of the EMB, its ability to navigate the political context, and the strength and perceived fairness of the rules in place are more important for critically important ‘first event’ trust-building than its technical competencies.

But even for places where transactional trust is important – where citizen confidence presumes the competency of the agency in charge of the elections – nonetheless this trust-building strategy is hard. As discussed in chapter 2 and in the cases in chapter 5, logistical difficulties to the delivery of a well-run election were such that, even in the most well-organised EMBs, a purely transactional approach to trust-building was neither possible nor sufficient for the purpose of delivering electoral outcomes perceived as fair and legitimate. Trust-losing mistakes will happen no matter how excellent the competencies of the officers in the agency. Avoiding and handling those mistakes requires multipronged and pre-emptive trust-building strategies such as those covered in the next two sub-sections.

8.2.2 Empathic attitudes and shared purpose (D2 - relational trust)

The second cluster of trust-building behaviours, attitudes and strategies revolve around the social and relational dimensions of EMB work (D2 in the trust model). Trust

theory pointed to the cumulative effect of individual processes on the perceptions that shape trust and the ‘lubricating’ benefits of functional relationships for smooth delivery and overcoming hurdles that arise. The presence of vulnerability or residual damage of past injustice demands a reassuring empathic manner signalling that ‘clients’ will not be harmed. Elections are particularly impacted by these dynamics because political stakeholders are inherently vulnerable and nervous if they have a lot to lose.

This thesis research journey showed this cluster as important for elections the higher the potential for stakeholder misunderstandings. The behaviours identified as particularly effective to build immediate confidence in individual processes were consultation, negotiation and communication. In day-to-day transactions and interactions these behaviours manifested as open-door policies, transparency, values-driven decision making and active outreach. When problems or misunderstandings arose, the relational ‘hard work’ was as or more important than solving the technical problems at hand.

Cumulatively, the thesis points to reassurance, signalling commitment and openness to reform and other empathic and values-oriented attitudes as making a difference for compliance and trust, and potentially averting or mitigating the ‘spoiler’ behaviours that are so detrimental to wider public confidence. Chapter 6 observations showed clearly how the empathic attitudes and behaviours of the EMB (the Tunisian IRIE) mattered deeply to the individual political contestants during the electoral period. Chapter 6 respondents spoke of the importance of intense relational work to keep angry or disappointed party leaders ‘inside’ the tent.

The political investments or ‘strategies’ of consultation, inclusion, public reflection and openness and values-anchored communication mattered for turning around the trust challenges in the chapter 5 desk studies. Meanwhile, the community of practice interviewed for chapter 7 emphatically confirmed the importance of these relational trust-building strategies to be both institutionalised in the work and the value

of these relational skillsets by leaders – especially in crisis situations where intense relational work is required to calm agitation and rescue the electoral process at stake.

Relational dimensions are at play in each logistical or operational micro-transaction as materials change hands, voters register and parties examine their placement on ballot papers. The relational demands intensify, as attested by the lost trust stories reported in chapter 7 when stakes are high, tensions rise, rifts exist, and results are unexpected, or where there is a sense of administrative mistakes, fraud or malpractice. So, while ‘one step removed’, relational behaviours, attitudes and strategies are indeed critical to electoral outcomes perceived as fair and legitimate by key stakeholders.

Of particular importance for this thesis is that relationship building did not mean looking the other way when rules were broken or arbitrarily privileging ‘difficult’ customers. Relationship building occurs within the confines of probity and professional conduct. Being captured by special interests is a risk, but remaining detached from and dismissive of stakeholder grievance is a greater risk for EMBs.

While critically important for the success of transactions ‘in the moment’, the lasting effects of the relational, empathy-oriented behaviours, attitudes and strategies may be more fleeting and ethereal than the operational, delivery-oriented aspects of EMB work. Relational trust dividends depended on the most recent transactions – whether self-experienced or reported by trusted sources. In Tunisia, this was clear when during the initial phases of the electoral preparations, the candidates spoke very highly of the IRIEs. However, when the IRIEs were mandated to sanction political actors for breaches of the campaigning regulations, these positive views quickly soured.

Relational trust-building approaches is thus impactful for the fast-moving and ‘in the moment’ trust fluctuations, but less effective for the more long-term and robust concept of institutional legitimacy. We can see trust is fickle and fleeting, while legitimacy has the firmer societal foothold insofar as it reflects how an institution delivers on its

mandate over time. While a kind word is remembered by an individual, whether the institution was able to provide an orderly election or not will loom larger in the collective memory. However, relational behaviours contribute to such legitimacy in that the ability to deliver depends on the hundreds and even thousands of personal, digital and interagency micro-transactions that collectively build a major operational exercise such as a national election.

8.2.3 Stability-oriented strategies (D3 – regulatory trust):

The third trust-building cluster encompasses the behaviours, mechanisms and structures that reinforce stability and safety in electoral processes. This third cluster (D3 in the EMB trust-building model) gains salience in the thesis findings and has a strong footing in the trust literature that, across the disciplinary spectrum, emphasises the importance of predictability for trust.

The third dimension of stability is achieved through trust-building behaviours, attitudes and strategies that fortify or embody consistency (as non-arbitrariness), clarity and reassurances of what is in place to deliver a fair election. Using a social-psychology mindset, this cluster speaks to addressing deeply rooted security needs of citizens. This is particularly important for citizens who are directly impacted – and thus fearful – of an electoral outcome that is a loss. But also, especially in post-conflict, authoritarian or corruption-plagued countries, addressing a generalised fear or sense that something untoward could be underfoot.

Consistency in electoral services enhances electoral trust to stakeholders because of the value attached to familiar systems and procedures where stakeholders can relax in the ‘remembering’ of how something worked before. The memory of something that worked fine last time instils an ‘I know how this works’ sensibility. In the empirical chapters of this thesis, we can note candidate registration systems, voting systems,

polling-station placement and registration requirements and process as examples where stakeholders over many cycles gain a familiarity with - and even an attachment to – as Graeme Orr so deftly expresses it, as the ‘Rhythm and Ritual’ of electoral processes (2015). At the micro-level of specific EMB–stakeholder transactions, seeing the same people over time at the same office with the same phone number can signal order, continuity and the safety that familiarity brings.

Unfortunately – in the fast-moving world of elections – continuity of procedures and personnel is not always possible. And in truth, not always desirable. A take-home message from expert practitioners in chapter 7 is that it is counterproductive to jeopardise consistency on a whim; doing better means managing change. Where reform is necessary, a proxy for continuity is clarity. In the case of reform or change that is unfamiliar to the stakeholder, clarity means carefully and repeatedly explaining the ‘what, why, how and when’ of the changes. Timely inclusion of key stakeholders in design and development processes builds familiarity with the ‘new’, and, at best, recruits allies that can vouch for the new processes with their respective constituencies. Clear pathways for actions need to be spelled out as early as possible and as widely as possible. Everyone needs warning that the process is changing. This finding speaks to the importance of strong public communication skillsets and mechanisms within EMBs, particularly during any time of change.

Stability and safety reside not only in repeatedly experiencing or having explained the ‘what is’ as in the scenarios described in the two paragraphs above. A final aspect of the stability cluster is reassurances on the gamut of ‘what if’ scenarios that can so easily build in the minds and discourse of concerned, fearful, vulnerable stakeholders. For example, in the Tunisian case, the EMB was unable to provide stability in the sense of consistency of procedures, since the elections authority in its current make-up was so young and untested. Nor was it able to clearly (with clarity) explain new systems and

procedures, due to the chaotic last-minute delays that meant that these systems and procedures were unknown by frontline officials, sometimes up to the same day when they were supposed to play out.

EMB reassurances around ‘if this happens, then here is what you can do,’ so essential for calming worried candidates, has a counterpart in the socio-legal disciplines. Formal avenues for lodging complaints and seeking redress are important for assuaging fear of harm in any transaction. Redress is a difficult concept in elections: the steady march to an election day with an election result gives very little space for transforming a wrong into a right. For example, there is no redress possible for a duly registered candidate that discovers she is not on the ballot paper. The harsh reality is that, for candidates, a fear of harm is fully justified when the implications of a mistake or a misstep are irrevocable.

For this reason, carefully crafted pre-emptive redress and reassurance pathways are of critical importance in uncertain environments. The Tunisian EMB demonstrated this dimension excellently, for example during the candidate registration period. While the instructions for submission had some lapses of clarity, the avenues for redress were clear: if the submitting candidate ‘lists’ were unhappy with the outcome on administrative grounds, there was one pathway clearly outlined. If the candidates were unhappy on political grounds, for example suspecting bias in the decision, there was a second pathway. Interviews with nervous candidates showed that this mechanism – even if not used – served as calming balm to assuage the many, many ‘what if’ fears.

The need to attend to fear of harm and deeply rooted needs for security are more pronounced in democracies where the residual effects of grievances, conflict and trauma manifest in responses to electoral decisions. The chapter 5 case crises, especially the Kenyan crisis turned violent, revealed and accentuated socio-historical dynamics that predated the elections at hand and that were beyond the scope for any EMB to realistically

address as part of its electoral preparations. It is in these environments where a trust-losing crisis is closer at hand. As this thesis has shown, in societies where historical grievances ran deep, the stakes involved - for the candidates in particular - contributed to the creation of a highly charged political atmosphere of agitation whereby any electoral decision or EMB action was seen through a lens of concern and/or fear of perceived harm.

A lack of blueprint and the sense that the EMB was 'winging it' in the public eye make crisis points such as those described in chapter 5 so compelling for understanding trust. An impression of institutional shakiness, difficult for any public trust, is of course compounded by the logistical pressures and the political stakes discussed extensively in this thesis; imagine a pre-election press conference with an EMB unable to explain how they will resolve an unintended consequence of an ill-thought through decision that is seen to impact vocal political forces.

The importance of stability as a trust-building strategy may have previously gone unnoticed - 'taken for granted' - in established democracies where a virtual spiral of 'it has always been this way' and 'I know how this works' reinforces and reassures citizens, candidates and observers alike. However, the world is changing. Building institutional trust requires gauging stakeholders' sense of safety and ensuring predictability.

Misinformation, political financing scandals, cyberhacking, the 2020 pandemic, migration and demographic changes, and the rise of technology and alternative voting forms mean that even the oldest electoral systems are in flux across Europe and North America. The inbuilt trust that came from a well-worn and well-known systems can no longer be taken for granted, which will mean that these trust-building strategies will be relevant also for the most complacent of EMBs.

8.3 Incorporating trust-building into electoral management (RQ3)

The third thesis research question asks how to incorporate trust-building into electoral management. The three-dimensional trust-building model has specific and practical implications for the craft of electoral administration. Based on what we have seen so far, electoral trust-building requires electoral services that match stakeholder expectations, fostering a sense of shared purpose through relational work and consistent and clear rules and pathways that provide a reassuring and stable common platform for all involved. Incorporating these three dimensions of electoral trust-building into electoral management processes, whether to new or old EMBs, is no simple or quick endeavour.

Importantly, any attempt at an ideal-type ‘here are the steps to trust-building’ will fall apart because of the conditions under which EMBs have to work. The three empirical chapters in this thesis displayed a harsh reality of legislative delays, unrealistic timeframes and the recruitment of inexperienced staff as examples of the hindrances to building operational capacity, empathic values-based relations and the predictability necessary for trust-building. All in particular contexts proved futile for trust building, at least in the short term.

Navigating these hindrances by ‘muddling through’ could potentially suffice in taken-for-granted electoral events. Any possibility to fly under the radar slips away when stakes are high. For the trust-troubled EMBs discussed in this thesis, political agitation and tensions around electoral processes were at the highest level when there was the most to do, creating challenging conditions for trust-building. The EMBs were simply unprepared for the scope of the task at hand: some were unprepared for the operational scope (such as the Nigerian case), others were unprepared for the intense relational work required to calm agitation (such as in Pakistan), while predictability and consistency was a

challenge in others (as in Tunisia). This trifecta of skillsets and conditions, in absentia, thwarts effective trust-building.

These imperfect conditions add an additional layer of complication to any simple answer for this pragmatic third research question. Trust hinges on the ability of EMBs to navigate the intensity and complexity of the electoral environment. EMBs need both supportive and responsive institutions working with them – for fast-track procurement, additional skillsets such as cybersecurity or for quick legislative fixes. They also need the resources, tools and skillsets to handle whatever comes. Crisis situations demand resolute action, but resolute action is effective only if the mechanisms needed have been foreseen and can be quickly set into motion. This in turn means assessing what is ahead. Risk management involves having in place early warning strategies and having the rules of the game that provide a pathway to channel grievances or perceived unfairness. In assessing the capacities of the EMB, the story of readiness and of reaction becomes more telling than the crisis itself.

It is only with a supportive environment, with adequate staffing and resources, and with a modicum of legitimacy already in place, that the trust-building strategies described in this thesis have a chance to be enacted and effective. And even in this optimal scenario, there is no formula: different trust situations demand a different trust-building mix.

8.4 Conclusion

The three dimensions of the trust-building model – delivering excellent services, building shared purpose, ensuring predictable pathways – should be viewed not as a checklist for the next EMB going into the field but rather as a ‘way to look at’ what needs to be done as EMBs prepare for their mission. The model is a reminder to see the situation from multiple perspectives – and to think beyond the issue which is ostensibly

at issue. The ability to see anger over an appointment of a commissioner as a fear of harm, means recasting the potential responses beyond a formulaic transactional legalistic or formal response about that particular appointment. Deeply rooted needs for security and respect are more important when a fear of harm is present. If unattended, stakeholder anger and feelings of injustice can complicate transactions and information flow with the electoral authorities. Assuaging those fears requires a holistic strategy that includes the long hard yards of intense and sustained relational work and takes into consideration the disconnect between how EMBs perform and how stakeholders perceive and interpret that performance.

These relational, stakeholder-oriented imperatives of EMB work have implications for recruitment, training, timelines and accountability structures. The new generation of senior electoral officials, in particular in fragile democracies under international and domestic scrutiny, are acutely aware of this, and ensure that measures such as hotlines, consultations and liaison officers are built into electoral processes alongside operationally focused measures. Even so, these steps have emerged from practical experience and wisdom in the field. Taking time out to gather experiences and written reports into a conceptual model designed explicitly to address the trust deficit problems that EMBs face is a way of systematically consolidating and sharing knowledge, and most importantly, providing a better knowledge infrastructure on which future generations can build.

Chapter 9. Elections in safe hands (conclusion)

When a former election commissioner learned that I was embarking on trust in elections, he wrote the following in an email to me:

I have to say I found when conducting elections I felt only a hair's breadth away from major disaster. The complexity of the logistics and processes involved along with the fact that you are relying on the abilities and diligence of 60,000 part time enthusiasts will always take you close to the edge.
Building trust is very difficult and takes time, while losing trust is brutally simple and often fatal (2013, private correspondence).

I have carried this quote with me through every stage of the thesis, as it encapsulates a deeper truth of the matter. The use of dispassionate words such 'trust' and 'public confidence' render palatable something that is potentially darker and more visceral; a feeling of dread and being close to a precipice. For societies, a collapse of institutional trust has consequences for economic development and security. But – as the quote illustrates - the feeling of dread of an election that risks careening out of control is also at the individual level, whether it is the candidate who faces an impending loss with disbelief or the election official facing irate confrontations and scathing public criticism amidst profound stress and exhaustion. In investigating complex EMB-stakeholder trust dynamics at multiple layers, this thesis addresses the human dimensions of electoral management work and renders any kind of simplistic or linear trust-building solutions to be naïve, disingenuous or irrelevant.

This concluding chapter reflects on the significance of an adaptive trust-building approach going forward. First, a brief recap is provided of how we arrived at our destination of a trust-building model for EMB implementation.

9.1 Thesis cadence – a brief recap

The purpose of this thesis has been to delve into EMB experience – through case files (chapter 5), through participant observation (chapter 6) and practitioner experience (chapter 7) – and to test these experiences against a substantial academic literature on what is required to build trust. A consolidated review of cross-disciplinary literature revealed a series of theoretical trust pathways that resonated as relevant to electoral management (3.3), namely that trust is likely to be built in circumstances where (1) needs and expectations are met; (2) there is order and predictability in how the electoral process proceeds; (3) there EMB is competent and able to do its job; (4) the EMB engages in cooperative activities involving all parties to build a shared purpose and commitment (‘compliance’); priority is placed on fairness of procedures; and (6) EMB are run by people of visible integrity with ethics and a moral compass. Traditionally, for policy makers and EMBs embarking on electoral preparations, a premium has been placed on transactional trust building in the sense of structures, protocols and procedures that ensure integrity, as summarised in chapter 2. But will this suffice? Can the trust-building theory from other sectors or disciplines illuminate other utile trust-building pathways?

The next three stages (chapters 5-7) involved testing theory against the realities of the workplace of electoral management. First, six desk studies provided insight into whether there were lessons to be learned from applying trust theory to what has been documented of trust building by EMBs in crisis. No claims can be made about the representativeness of these case studies. They were not selected to reflect the general work of EMBs. They were selected because there was sufficient documentation of the experience of crises and of responses that showed at least some success in trust-building (a ‘spark’).

Analyses confirmed that a purely transactional approach to EMB trust-building would not suffice. Election management involves juggling the unique twin pressures of logistics and stakes. Logistical difficulties confound delivery even for the best-organised EMBs because of compressed calendars and temporary staffing. An operational problem does not occur in a vacuum. When logistics go off course in a climate where stakes are high, trust loss in the process can spiral in a way that is disproportionate to the incident. Relationship-oriented strategies to rectify the crisis were essential in the case studies where deeply-rooted grievances or high political stakes contributed to a highly-charged atmosphere. Trust-building demanded operational excellence *and* the relational ‘hard yards’ of consultation, negotiation, and communication that signalled commitment and openness to reform.

But how does the management of logistics and stakes simultaneously happen at the coal face, is there risk of one crowding out the other? Chapter 6 provided the answer. There is a third dimension: logistical competence and relational connectedness, certainly, but also structures, safeguards and plans actively designed to settle agitation and build a sense of predictability and confidence in a process. As a participant-observer in the Tunisian elections, it became clear that relationship-building in the sense of being attentive, empathetic, transparent and inclusive was not enough. The Tunisian case showed that reassuring candidates that they were in ‘safe’ hands was not just a matter of being communicative and responsive but required attention to planning, preparation and public dissemination of steps in the process and grievance procedures should things go wrong. Words are not enough; the trust-building work of dealing with the vulnerability and fears of stakeholders requires stability and sturdiness of processes and structures.

The final stage of the journey was to test these findings against those for whom the trust-building model was intended – the epistemic community of EMB practitioners. In chapter 7, this epistemic community validated and further developed the emergent

trust-building model through their reflections on lost trust, regaining trust and maintaining trust. In their stories of trust loss in EMB–stakeholder interplay, they spoke of the difficult working conditions under tight timelines and a lack of support systems for electoral officials in their critical frontline work. Trust crumbled in scenarios of chaos and overwhelmed officers – failing to deliver, failing to communicate, failing to reassure. They reported strategies that saved situations, based on their experiences and what they had witnessed.

The sense of the three dimensions of transactional, relational and security-oriented trust-building held up, but the theory-anchored ‘wording’ of these trust-building meta-pathways did not resonate at all. On the basis of the practitioner conversations, it became clear that that the model made more sense if framed differently than that dictated by academic convention, as (a) delivery, (b) building shared purpose and (c) building a common platform or ‘rules of the game’ – as described fully in chapters 7 and 8. In essence, the tone was changed from the language of shortcomings to the language of building on strengths.

9.2. Institutional trust and democracy – post-thesis reflections

Moments of crisis and precarity are openings for cultural change, policy rethinking and societal redirection, for better or worse. For the West, the current crisis of democracy is a loss of innocence, the forfeiture of ‘taken for grantedness’ that the centre will hold, and that our institutions are strong enough to withstand external pressure and protect us from harm. Cyberhackers from unfriendly regimes and domestic opportunistic political fringe actors have proved willing and able to take full advantage of vulnerable and exposed weaknesses in our political and societal institutions. Threats of further destabilisation entrench a sense that our institutions cannot be trusted to do their job.

In these situations of precarity, distrust of institutions is not confined to a minority, disgruntled because of personal grievance, or to authorities plagued by corruption or incompetence. Instead, and worryingly, law-abiding and social-norms upholding so-called 'good citizens' hold perceptions that a system is under siege. These 'good citizens' may find themselves in a situation where they believe in the institution's legitimacy, and where they value the good it protects, but they can no longer trust designated agencies' capacity to cope with external stressors and manage the tasks at hand. The guardian of the treasured public good cannot be trusted with the good in its care – the good is left exposed and vulnerable. An unprotected and overwhelmed good was our health and aged care systems during the Covid pandemic, as exemplified by the dread within each citizen upon realising the rapidly declining odds of a ventilator being available to a beloved parent should the need arise. For this thesis, the vulnerable good is our electoral democracy; our ability to count on stable transitions of power.

The looming sense of precarity plays out in citizen-state interplay. A nervous or agitated taxpayer, school parent or patient behaves differently than one who is confident and relaxed about the transaction at hand. Officers at the frontlines of meeting concerned citizens may be more or less skilful in handling such trust-relevant transactions. Deep-rooted needs for security and respect – essential in times of trauma or precarity - can be met, disregarded or neglected. Often, professional development schemes lack attention to these necessary skill sets.

The dynamics of contested legitimacy and legitimate concern profoundly affect EMBs, who are tasked with protecting an attacked public good (the electoral process) while simultaneously feeling under attack or undermined. The Swedish and Canadian EMBs have recorded hitherto unknown examples of lack of civility in polling stations, with voters behaving aggressively towards polling station staff. Across Europe and the US, EMBs are finding themselves under-prepared and unsupported to shift from under-

the-radar public service delivery to a role that demands publicly and fiercely guarding a fair playing field for democracy. They can and do learn from Australia, where the 2013 ballot paper crisis obliterated any residual traces of bureaucratic complacency. That jolt that things can go very wrong prompted an exponential increase in the AEC's commitment to train and support its frontline workers, conduct community work, tighten ballot-handling routines and introduce risk management practices.

When state institutions fail, and people lose hope that authorities will help, they turn to alternative sources of authority. This known-and-accepted reality can sometimes mean that parallel nodes of formal and informal power coexist. The alternatives are limited when people lose faith in EMBs to organise fair elections. Media, observers, or civil society groups can be alternative sources of understanding of the election at hand, but they cannot organise elections. Legal institutions are an alternative pathway for determining or examining contested results – a temporary solution at best. For an alternative narrative about the fairness of elections, a disgruntled or defiant public can turn into loose coalitions around hashtags such as ‘#Stop the Steal’ to collectively coalesce around an alternative storyboard.

Only EMBs are capable of and mandated to organise elections. Democratic stability depends on their capacity to deliver and be trusted in this capacity. Democracy advocates in transitional democracies are all too familiar with heavy-handed political pressure and difficult conditions and have experience with strategies and structures that work, such as investment in institutional resilience, CSO engagement and effective civic education. Such experiences can serve as learning opportunities for the cracks, aches and pains of institutions in older democracies.

Countries that have experienced authoritarianism have put robust constitutional measures in place to safeguard institutional independence. Countries with high political corruption have put in place independent EMBs and have put a premium on vocal

leadership. Countries where frontline delivery has failed have responded by investing heavily in training and professional development. Introducing these measures is an uphill battle if incumbent power is threatened, which is why those championing the efforts are passionate about their cause. There are global lessons that can be shared about the mechanisms introduced in these various contexts, but there is also inspiration to be drawn from the passion and commitment from the societal actors that design and advocate innovative protective mechanisms, whether policy-engaged academics, professionally courageous public officials, or vigilant and well-informed civil society leaders.

9.3. Implications for research and practice

For electoral integrity scholars, this thesis provides a platform for further exploring the oft-neglected ‘softer’ sides of behaviours and attitudes in electoral administration work. For institutional and regulatory scholars more broadly, the special case of EMBs can provide insights of relevance for institutions who are similarly concerned about future or ongoing trust loss. This thesis presents three dimensions that, when they are all strong, are mutually supportive in building trust. This may appear self-evident. But it does well to remember that for more than two decades the academic trust literature was divided on whether trust was transactional or relational (Braithwaite and Levi 1998, Job 2007).

For practice and policy, this thesis reaffirms and upgrades planning, relational and reflective work as part of the scope of EMB work. In particular, this thesis highlights the centrality of relational management that communicates empathy and provides predictability. Relational trust-building becomes more imperative in societies and historical moments when the political stakes are intensely high. Compliance and cooperation are not self-evident when emotions are in motion; high stakes and risk-of-

loss open the door for agitation-building en masse. Agitation is emotional; overcoming inner turmoil requires steadying nerves for rational thinking and rationalising. When there are discrepancies between expectations of the electoral process and how events play out, we can imagine an internal monologue among affected stakeholders: ‘What is fair? Who is benefiting? What are my obligations and responsibilities? What are other people telling me – my opponents and supporters?’ Inner monologues will play out differently between a candidate who trusts the EMB and has trustworthy colleagues who also trust the EMB versus a situation for a candidate who trusts no-one. Understanding these inner monologues and stakeholder motivations can beneficially guide policy development and process design.

Placing a trust-lens on delivery draws attention to the urgency of securing realistic time horizons for electoral work and reform processes so that there is an opportunity to implement trust-building pathways. Electoral calendars and operational plans have underestimated the time, skills and effort that is necessary to manage relationships and re-set the electoral process. Building shared purpose and a common platform are on-going and intensive parts of EMB work; preparing officials for this work has implications for professional development and institutional design.

The social lens guiding this research has been remarkably germane for events in the world during the 2013–23 timeframe, such as disinformation scandals, foreign interference in elections and a pandemic. The literature, cases, practitioner knowledge, and recent real-time events converge on one central point. Trust hinges on the ability of EMBs to navigate the intensity and complexity of the political and social environment of that moment in history. Stakeholder anger and feelings of injustice complicate transactions and information flow with their electoral authorities; human emotions, motivations and understandings necessarily affect the reality of how an EMB behaves and how stakeholders perceive the EMB. Failures of EMBs and companion institutions

to navigate these emotions – especially anger with its corollary of violence - has repercussions for democratic political transitions, social cohesion and citizen livelihood. When stakes are high as the goals of political contestants unavoidably collide, there need to be pathways to some success – the success of a democratic election and the benefits for society – as well as a belief that future electoral success is possible.

Appendix A: Positionality statement

Qualitative research honours inductive style focuses on individual meaning and renders researched situations as complex (Creswell 2014). This complexity puts the researcher in a prominent position as meaning maker guiding key inductive choices. Positionality matters because researchers cannot be separated from their research: “researchers’ relationship to those they study as well as their procedures influence their findings”; therefore, researchers should account for their “complicity in the problem they trying to address” (Pelias 2011, p. 663, also Holmes 2020). Positionality matters for this research as my professional history brought background, insights and access, but also a predisposition or bias to favour the relational dimensions of electoral work. Access and opportunity influenced case choices, interviews and the ability to do fieldwork; the predisposition to attend to the relational influenced data analysis choices and the decision to focus on interplay.

I began working with elections in 1992 as a District Electoral Supervisor in a war torn, socially and infrastructurally devastated Cambodia. Despite the contextual inexperience of the electoral organisers, voter participation and confidence (with over 90% voter turnout) was overwhelming thanks to the faith that the Cambodian people placed in the UN mission (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) which served as the electoral authority. In 1994 in post-civil war Mozambique, the electoral management structure was carefully designed to support trust rather than efficiency, by availing a formula that included former warring faction members in the EMB plus international advisers (including myself) as a buffer-type confidence-building measure.

Having felt the palpable postwar tension and distrust, I was convinced that this trust-building approach was a significant factor in the ultimate acceptance of the results, allowing the country to move forward as an African success story. For my master’s thesis

(1995), I explored how the role of money (political financing) had eroded trust in elected representatives and the electoral system in Japan, resulting in national political crisis and complete systemic overhaul. Just before embarking on the PhD journey, I worked in Guinea and followed the powerful story of electoral crisis and leadership as it unfolded.⁶⁷ This PhD research journey is my first, and longed for, opportunity to reflect, explore and untangle these issues of trust, reputation and legitimacy.

Because of the lived professional experiences described above, I brought to the PhD a predisposition that trust, attention to stakeholder needs and normative behaviour matter deeply to the running of elections. I embarked on this research project wanting to find out what mattered to key electoral stakeholders when they decide to provide or withhold support to an electoral process. While not all elections are as dramatic as those I worked in, and not all EMBs will have experienced the ‘ills’ described in the thesis chapters, nonetheless there is a universal element in the electoral trust problem. Most, if not all, senior officials will be cognisant of the risks of those types of dynamics emerging – as one former commissioner told me in private correspondence, when something happened elsewhere, he always felt: ‘there but for the grace of god go I’.

But while my visceral conviction that ‘trust mattered’ was strong, I arrived to the PhD journey with little tangible evidence or access to scholarship to support this claim. Luckily, I was in good company. As discussed in chapter 1, a number of studies were under way examining how public confidence related to electoral phenomena such as timing of elections, quality of elections and the structure of EMBs. Their explorations accompanied and informed the research journey. However, because these studies

⁶⁷ This Guinea story is described in chapter 1.

conformed to a structural and legal paradigm for viewing elections, and because my professional inclination and worldview are more pragmatic and administration-oriented, I took a different pathway to the political science-oriented, public-confidence-interested, scholarly colleagues.

I oriented instead towards a normative 'how trust works' framework in the hopes of helping election designers to better shape the attributes, incentives and structures to favour electoral excellence. I wanted to conduct research that 'pushes forward' the field of election administration with tools or models that are directly applicable by practitioners and policymakers. From this perspective, for EMBs to attend to credibility issues, officials and policymakers must be armed with a full set of strategies that are relevant to and anchored in practice. Addressing something so esoteric as credibility requires looking beyond the classic structural, legal and logistical building blocks of election management, that is, the electoral 'hardware' of regulations and institutions, and attending to behaviours, attributes and mechanisms that affect public perception.

To summarise, my background shaped and guided research choices and opportunities. As an experienced practitioner I had networks and access; as one of very few women in the field I had a predisposition to value the relational dimensions of institutional trust; as a child of a WW2 European refugee, a visceral understanding of how trauma shapes relationships between citizens and the state influenced inductive analysis interpretations. The thesis findings on the importance of relational trust can be seen with this positionality in mind. The emergence of strong findings on predictability and certainty were, however, unanticipated, and can be attributed to the step-by-step method choices.

Appendix B: Datasets

Research step (phase)	Purpose / (How this phase addresses research questions)	Dataset
1. Desk case study.	For RQ1 Dynamics of trust in elections -Identify broad patterns For RQ2 – Attributes of trust-building – Identify broad patterns	Primary documents (e.g. project documents) Secondary documents (observer, media, and academic) Notes and memos
2. Fieldwork – Tunisian legislative elections – seven districts interviews and observation	For RQ1 –Investigate the impact of micro-interactions on macro processes by observing interplay, interviewing and monitoring general commentary on EMB performance For RQ2 – Identify interpersonal characteristics for trust-building For RQ3 – Preliminarily constructing a trust-building model	Interview transcripts Primary and secondary Documents gathered in field. Research journal with observations and reflections
3. Interviews with community of practice	Based on practitioner knowledge: For RQ1- Inviting additional reflections on micro-macro electoral trust-building For RQ2 - Verifying a taxonomy of trust-building attributes For RQ3 – Confirming and further developing a model of trust-building for EMBs	Interview transcripts

Appendix C: Desk-study case sources

Items are listed in chronological order. Cited references are included also in the reference list – the list below are the original dataset used for the grounded analysis.

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Appendix D: Practitioner vocabulary and interview notes

Table D1: Three Dimensions of trust-building – using words from interviews

	D1	D2	D3
Values	Delivery that is effective, accurate and timely.	Behavioural transparency, Message of EMB as guardian of fair process.	Administrative transparency, procedural clarity. Pathways for stakeholders that are effective, timely & fair. Message of EMB as guardian of fair electoral process.
Focus	Internal operations.	External relationships. Fostering shared purpose.	Rules of the game. External communication. Creating a common platform.
Mechanisms	Operational plan, procedures, processes, handbooks, training schemas.	Consultation meetings and dialogue forums. Open-door policy, getting 'out there' (among people), communicating frequently and in a friendly manner, consultation processes, crisis-response communication capabilities.	Information meetings. (Shared) strategic plan, electoral calendar, roles and responsibilities clarity, summary of procedures. Well-known division of roles in society. Transparent 'reasoned' decision making, information formatted and easily available, forms intuitive and user-friendly. Functional pathways of redress, risk aware & crisis ready.
Attributes	Competent, efficient, effective, professional.	Kind, respectful, friendly, helpful	Steadfast, predictable, reliable, competent. Knowledgeable, professional.
Skillssets	Operational.	Communication.	Communication.
Crisis management	Risk aware: inevitability of mishap / best efforts to avoid mishap. Meticulous preparation, planning, training.	Communication strategies – of risk & of resolve, displays of leadership (resolve & higher purpose).	Avoidance of misunderstandings. Clarity about the nature of mishap, and the pathways to resolution. Strong communication lines to outside.

Trust Dividend	Stakeholders trust competence.	Stakeholders trust well-meaning intentions. Shared purpose to pull through crisis and avoid spoilers. Relational buffer. Third-party allies - public defender of EMB.	Stakeholders trust resolve. Shared platform (to avoid misunderstandings). Smoother external transactions (compliance)
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Table D2: Summary table: respondent reactions to 3D model

		D	D2	D3	Comment
		1			
#1-6 Model Rankings not Requested					
#7	scenario 1 – initial	5	4	3	The more mature, the less relational needed, the more D1 & 3 will suffice.
#7	scenario 2 – maturing	4	3	4	
#8		3	4	5	Consistency and reliability and continual updating the most important, respect 2nd and these will buffer any delivery problems. The opposite is inviting problems– things get misunderstood. Especially if anything goes wrong.
#9	scenario PwD	4.5	5	5	Respect and symbolism matters most at this point in the battle for many PwD (people with disability)
#10	Scenario South Sudan	5	2	3	For referendum – ALL that mattered was delivery
#10	Scenario Liberia – Ebola	4	5	5	In the uncertainty of Ebola times – the constant negotiatins, and the continuing updating to voters – was more important than delivery.
#11	Scenario Zim	3	5	4	All that matters now is relation-building – no trust. Mechanics only marginally interesting.
#11	Scenario Kenya	4-5	3		D2, D3 under control, already organised. After tech mistakes of 2013, proving competence is top priority.

#12	Trust surveys global	4	4	4	D3 critical – procedures etc. on time: if you don't know, delivery is impaired.
#13		4	4	5	(the more experienced practitioners put D3 highest – younger put it lowest).
#14		5	5	5	Pakistan is on a journey D1-D3 (weak in D2, encouraged to improve)
#15					
#15		5	3	5	That the relational is important (as customer service thinking) is western. Soviet equivalence of bureaucracy and coldness...
#16		3-5	3-5	3-5	Important thing is all three need to be in alignment.
#17		4	4	5	Relative importance of D1 and D2 depends on context
#18		3	5	3	D3 is about managing expectation. Temptation to overpromise. I would look at these three, and contextualise
#19		5	5	5	EMBs need to connect and be responsive
#20		3.5	5	4	
#21		4	4	4	
#22		4	3	5	
#23		4-5	3-4	4-5	
#24		4	4	4	
#25		4	5	5	
#26		4	5	5	
#27		4	4	5	D3 first because of importance of redress
#28					Can't take such a complex process and make it simple in this way. Planning is key.
#29					Preferred not to rank.
#30		4	4	5	Planning & Scheduling keeps the rest together –telling people what is coming is critical.
#31		5	3	3	Depends on context. Delivery as all-important.

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