A Report from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems

Between Breakdown and the Ballot

How Interim Governments Can Foster Legitimacy and Pave the Way for Credible Elections

MARCH 2026

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How Interim Governments Can Foster Legitimacy and Pave the Way for Credible Elections

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Introduction

By the end of 2025, at least a dozen countries were operating under transitional governments, including some high-profile cases – Muhammad Yunus leading Bangladesh after the fall of Sheikh Hasina, a nine-member Transitional Presidential Council attempting to lead Haiti to its first elections in almost 10 years, and former rebel commander Ahmed al-Sharaa assuming the interim presidency of Syria after overthrowing Bashar al-Assad. Africa's "coup belt" lengthens the list with consecutive or ever-extending transitions in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Sudan.

Interim governments are not all created equal. Even in the sample presented above, major differences are clear – civilian versus military leadership, centralized versus shared power, short versus long transition horizons. What they do have in common – at least in the case of countries aiming to maintain or build democratic foundations – is the need to foster legitimacy, domestically and abroad, and set the stage for trustworthy and trusted elections. Because transitional authorities are usually not elected by the people and their mandates are rarely clearly defined in legislation,[1] fostering legitimacy is not easy. Mistrusted appointees, mistaken approaches, and miscalculated decisions can all erode the perceived acceptability of an already fragile power arrangement.

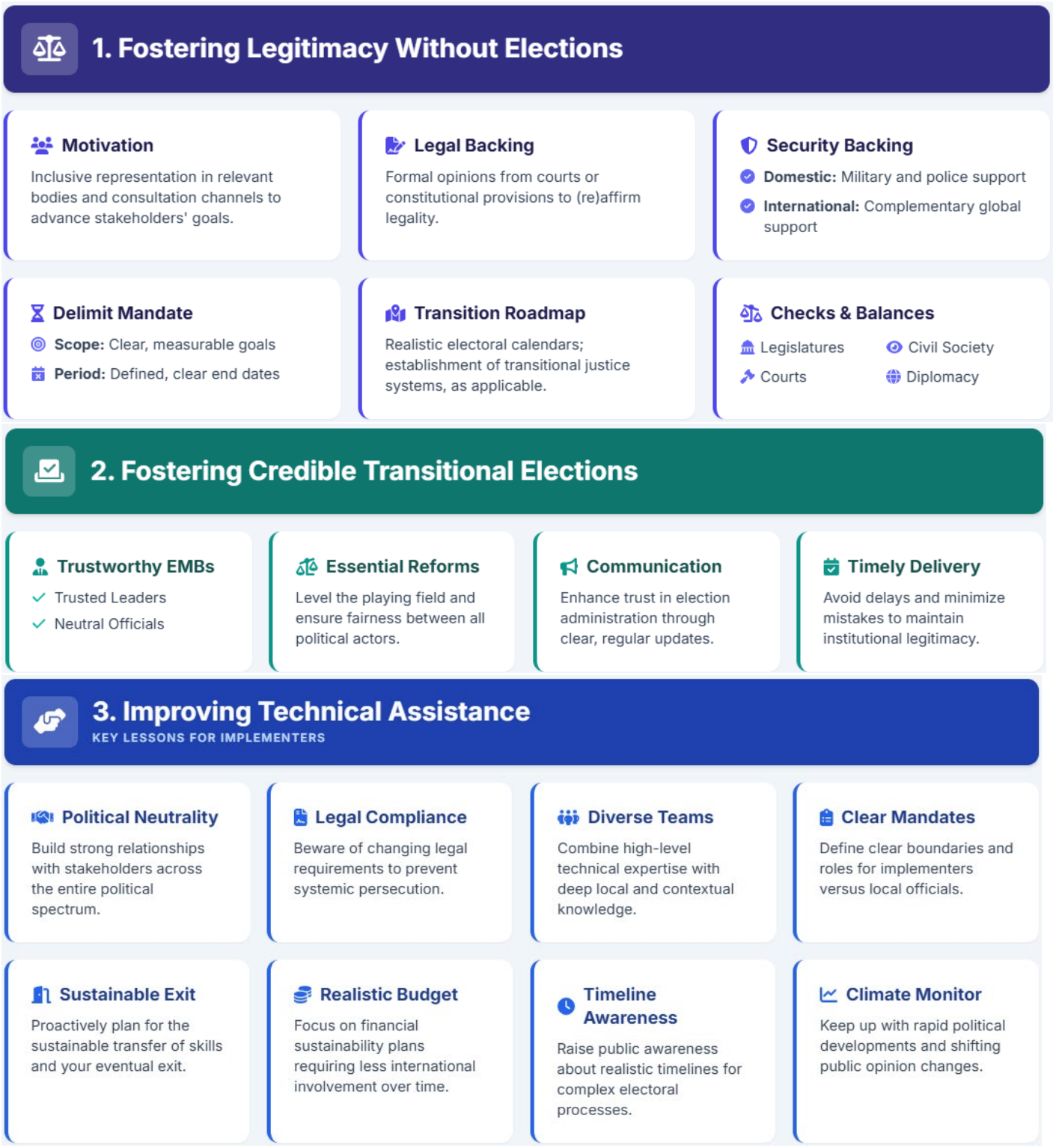
For international partners, interim governments present both high-risk environments and rare windows of opportunity. Decisions taken during these short transition periods – particularly regarding electoral rules, institutional design, and political inclusion – can either pave the way for credible elections and democratic consolidation or entrench instability and future conflict. Drawing from IFES' extensive experience working with transitional authorities and institutions around the world, this paper extracts lessons and recommendations for successful transitions. Rather than looking at broad governance and macro-socioeconomic indicators, the paper focuses on discrete, smaller-scale successes – specific approaches, tactics, reforms, and changes perceived as having had a positive impact in enhancing the legitimacy of a transitional government and leading to successful transitional elections and democratic political processes.

This paper draws on literature from practitioners and academic sources and incorporates original insights from programs conducted by IFES and other international assistance organizations supporting interim government institutions, election management bodies (EMBs), and other local partners during post-conflict or post-crisis transitions.

[1] Constitutionally defined caretaker governments are an exception as their mandates are usually clearer and known by stakeholders, which is more conducive to perceived legitimacy.

Summary Recommendations

The image below summarizes the recommendations discussed throughout this report to help interim governments foster legitimacy and pave the way for credible transitional elections, in addition to lessons technical assistance implementers can apply to better position themselves to support interim authorities.



Defining Interim Governments

Provisional governments can take different shapes and forms. In proposing a simple typology, Shain, Linz, and Berat categorize interim governments as "incumbent caretaker" (led by the outgoing elite, such as Spain's 1976-1977 period under Adolfo Suárez); "revolutionary" (established after the fall of an administration through revolutions or uprisings, such as post-Hasina Bangladesh under Muhammad Yunus, 2024-2026); "power-sharing" (led by different parties or factions, such as the National Transitional Government of Liberia, 2003-2006); and "international" (managed by the international community, such as the Transitional Administration led by the United Nations in East Timor, 1999-2002).[2]

> **Interim governments** are institutions tasked with facilitating a country's transition to democratic political order in free and contested elections *in contexts where rules and boundaries for their work do not exist or are not well defined*.

Interim governments may be "expected" under certain constitutional provisions – such as caretaker governments established after dissolutions of parliament – or set up in an ad hoc manner to navigate unexpected crises or transitions. Because constitutional caretaker governments typically feature set structures and defined mandates, as well as rules for the elections they are charged with overseeing, caretaker authorities often have limited ability to change systems and the overall democratic landscape.[3] This established role, while constraining, makes it easier for interim caretakers to be seen as legitimate. This paper thus focuses mainly on the other types of interim governments, generally created outside existing legislation, which operate in environments that provide both more opportunities for change and more uncertainty about achieving sustainable and democratic transformation. These are usually interim arrangements emerging after conflict, uprisings, and other deep crises.

This paper thus builds on and adapts Shain, Linz, and Berat's definition of interim governments as institutions tasked with "facilitat[ing] the country's transition to a democratic political order in free and contested elections"[4] by adding "in contexts where rules and boundaries for their work do not exist or are not well defined." This somewhat clean slate creates opportunities not only for democratic change, but also for heightened risks and more uncertain outcomes.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Interim Governments, Donors, and Assistance Implementers

Fostering Legitimacy Without Elections

While a rich body of literature dives into sources of authority legitimacy more deeply,[5] a simple way to conceptualize legitimacy is as *people accepting that the power holder has the right to exert that power*. In liberal democracies, this belief or acceptance comes from individuals winning free and fair elections and exercising power

[2] Shain, Y., Linz, J. J., & Berat, L. (1995). *Between states: Interim governments in democratic transitions*. Cambridge University Press.
[3] Bergman, T., & Lindahl, J. (2024). Defining Caretaker Governments. In *New Developments in the Study of Coalition Governments* (pp. 73–88). Springer, Cham.
[4] Shain, Y., Linz, J. J., & Berat, L. (1995).
[5] For some foundational work on the bases of social power, see French, J. R., Raven, B., & Cartwright, D. (1959). The bases of social power. *Studies in social power*, *150*, 167.

within constitutionally delimitated scopes and periods. But since interim authorities usually cannot count on that source of legitimacy, they need to convince people that they have the right to hold power in other ways, some of which mimic the traditional electoral path. To build or strengthen this legitimacy, interim authorities must show motivation and capacity to advance the interests of the people, pursue legal and security backing, delimit the scope of the interim government's mandate and the period of mandate, and establish and respect checks and balances.

Show motivation and capacity to advance the interests of the people, often reflected in the governments' composition and/or consultation and negotiation processes. Even if voters did not directly choose them, transitional authorities must show both that they will act in voters' interests and, as interests might clash across groups, that they will work toward conciliation and *the country*'s best interest. Depending on the context, the chosen leaders could be civilians perceived as politically neutral, partisan individuals, or a combination of partisan leaders (in power-sharing arrangements), members of the military, and/or even international actors.[6] Regardless of their composition and how representative it is of the country's political groups, the selected leaders can still take steps to signal their intent to meaningfully include a range of stakeholders.

Select advisors and officials who represent different groups (e.g., political, ethnic, religious, regional) to lead and staff governing institutions. This type of representation enables diverse perspectives and interests to be considered in decision-making and helps build these interest groups' trust in the government, increasing the likelihood that the government's decisions and reforms will be accepted by a range of stakeholders.[7] Diverse representation could be particularly useful in institutions that play a role in shaping future power structures, such as EMBs (see more below) or constitutional drafting bodies. In **Syria (2025)**, for instance, members of the transitional People's Assembly were elected indirectly in opaque ways, and filled seats are now dominated by Sunni Muslim men, reducing even further the representation of women and religious minorities such as Christians, Alawites, and Druze. The People's Assembly is supposed to form the committee that will draft a new permanent constitution and thus set the country's power structures and rights framework. The lack of inclusive representation in this body is raising concerns among Syrian civil society and human rights defenders.

Establish inclusive consultation channels that meaningfully incorporate diverse inputs and produce realistic outputs with buy-in from powerful stakeholders. Even if not directly represented in the interim government, different interest groups can make their voices heard through consultation and negotiation processes organized during the transition. For these processes to be productive, those being consulted must have some level of leverage to be heard. In **Tunisia (2013)**, for example, four reputable civil society organizations representing powerful sectors of society – labor unions, lawyers, employers, and human rights defenders – stepped in amid the gridlock of the Troika coalition to develop a roadmap for a political renewal. Not only did the organizers have powerful leverage (e.g., threatening national strikes if negotiations stalled), they also engaged political leaders from across the spectrum and forced them to find consensus and make commitments publicly.[8] **Yemen (2013-2014)** also implemented a national dialogue effort gathering 565 delegates – including women, youth, and members of different civil society groups – in hundreds of sessions over several months.[9] The group reached an agreement on a way forward that

[6] For a comprehensive analysis of benefits and drawbacks of different arrangements, see Shain, Y., Linz, J. J., & Berat, L. (1995).
[7] Kaplan, S. D. (2024). *Inclusive social contracts in fragile states in transition: Strengthening the building blocks of success*. Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT). https://ifit-transitions.org/publications/inclusive-social-contracts-in-fragile-states-in-transition-strengthening-the-building-blocks-of-success/
[8] *Tunisian Quartet in conversation.* (2024, November 15). Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. https://www.osce.org/magazine/248471
[9] Schmitz, C. (2014, March 10). *Yemen's National Dialogue.* Middle East Institute. https://mei.edu/publication/yemens-national-dialogue/

included turning Yemen into a six-region federal state. Although the exercise included diverse members, it failed to get the buy-in of political elites and did not move forward.[10]

Determine early on how to address potential disagreements. To keep up momentum, it is also important for participants to decide early on about how to proceed as disagreements between stakeholders arise. In the recent case of **Bangladesh (2024-2026)**, for instance, the interim government formed expert commissions to propose comprehensive reforms across sectors, including electoral reforms. Once recommendation reports were completed, a national consensus exercise began, engaging parties to get their buy-in and commitment (although the process excluded ousted Sheikh Hasina's Awami League party). A National Charter was developed, composed of reforms most parties agreed on, but participants also had the opportunity to record their dissent on specific issues. The interim government ultimately chose to hold a referendum on the National Charter as a whole without the dissent caveats; it remains to be seen how fully the incoming elected government will follow the Charter now that it has been approved.

Pursue legal backing. Since many interim governments arise amid constitutional collapse and legal uncertainty, their very existence is vulnerable. Some political actors may reject the interim authorities' mandate and try to undermine it, potentially creating a power vacuum or sparking a new crisis. Creating or invoking legal support for the interim body, particularly from independent institutions (where they still exist or are grounded in the constitution) can help mitigate these threats. In **Bangladesh (2024-2026)**, the interim government that took power after the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked the president (who traditionally had a merely ceremonial role) to seek a formal opinion from the country's Supreme Court on its legality, invoking the country's constitution. The court ruled that the interim government was necessary, even though caretaker government provisions had been removed from the constitution years before. The court later dismissed petitions that challenged the government's legality, reaffirming legal support to the interim authorities.

Pursue security backing. While legal backing is helpful to legitimize interim governments, it cannot always protect them from forceful coups, particularly those orchestrated by military branches or opposition factions within the country. Ideally, security backing should be provided by competent domestic forces, but such backing may also be reinforced by support from international and multilateral troops. The military ideally plays the role of an ally throughout the transition, but constraints must be put in place to avoid undue interference and power grabs.

Secure domestic military support. The military, when competent and trusted, can be a powerful ally to interim authorities. By providing support, it can play a deterrent role and prevent potential competitors and spoilers from attempting to take over or undermine the interim government's authority. In **Bangladesh (2024-2026)**, the military played an important role during the uprising that removed Hasina from power by simply standing aside. Despite concerns it could attempt a takeover, given the country's history of frequent military coups, the army chief vowed to back the interim government through an 18-month transition period. Tensions still emerged during this time, particularly when the interim government attempted to try army officers for crimes committed during the Hasina regime, but the relationship between the military and the government remained stable. A survey showed that the army was the most trusted institution in the country during this period, approved by 79 percent of respondents.[11] In **Mali (2020-present)**, on the other hand, the military's role during a political crisis has been destabilizing. The army first staged a coup that put a civilian interim president and prime minister in power, although the military held key posts. When the civilian leaders tried to reshuffle the cabinet, the military felt threatened and Colonel

[10] Transfeld, M. (2015). *The Failure of the Transitional Process in Yemen: The Houthi's Violent Rise to Power and the Fragmentation of the State.* German Institute for International and Security Affairs. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2015C06_tfd.pdf

[11] National Survey of Bangladesh (2025, December 1). *International Republican Institute.* https://www.iri.org/resources/national-survey-of-bangladesh-september-october-2025/

Assimi Goïta, the original military coup leader, staged a "coup within a coup,"[12] arresting the interim authorities and establishing himself as president.

Consider tapping into regional or international security support. When domestic security forces are unable or unwilling to protect the transition process, interim authorities might benefit from inviting international support. These forces can serve as neutral arbiters and mediators in contexts of mutual distrust, in which rival factions might hesitate to disarm. In countries where security forces are weak or considered to be partisan, international support can also encourage voters to feel safer as they head to the polls, particularly when the international forces represent multilateral institutions with no obvious favorites among contestants. In **Somalia (2004-2012)**, for instance, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was supported by Ethiopia and then the African Union. TFG was extremely fragile and under constant threat – first by the Islamic Courts Union and then by Al-Shabaab. International security support guaranteed TFG's survival, although experts argue that it also created dependence and hindered local legitimacy.[13]

International support can also backfire, especially if troops engage in misconduct or are seen as a tool for foreign interference. In **Haiti (2004-2017)**, the United Nations sent a stabilization mission (MINUSTAH) to support the interim government after a 2004 coup. Investigations have shown that MINUSTAH peacekeepers were implicated in sexual abuse, trafficking, and exploitation of children.[14] Smaller follow-up missions were established and tasked with strengthening local institutions and the police, but Haiti remains troubled by insecurity. Without a longer-term plan for domestic forces to handle security after international support ends, conditions can deteriorate again and jeopardize the sustainability of new governments.

Delimit the scope of the interim government's mandate and set clear milestones. The mandates of interim governments vary significantly but, at a minimum, they include keeping the country running and preparing for transitional elections. In certain contexts, interim governments are more ambitious and seek to make fundamental reforms before transferring power. This type of expansive mandate might have public support, especially in countries where trust in traditional political actors is low and there is a perceived need for overhauling the system to usher in a new political order. Particularly in these cases, however, it is crucial to make this mandate clear, delineate tasks to different public institutions at national and subnational levels, establish milestones, and seek buy-in from political, legal, and military authorities to contain spoilers and avoid sabotage.

Establish and deliver on milestones. Clear milestones enable stakeholders to monitor the interim government's performance and progress. They should be practical and measurable and depend on each transitional context, but could include, for instance:

- Release of political prisoners
- Repeal of repressive laws and dissolution of repressive institutions (e.g., censorship laws, strict regulations that hinder the registration of candidates and political parties, illegitimate paramilitary forces)
- Removal of compromised officials/appointment of independent officials, including in EMBs, courts, and anticorruption agencies
- Mitigation of incumbent advantages (e.g., limiting access to state resources in campaigns, expanding political parties' access to the media)

[12] Mali, a Coup within a Coup (2021, May). *International Crisis Group.* https://www.crisisgroup.org/qna/africa/mali/mali-coup-within-coup

[13] *Somalia's Transition: What Role for Sub-National Entities?* (2012, January). Chatham House. https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Africa/0112report.pdf

[14] Vahedi, L., Stuart, H., Etienne, S., Wisner, S., Lee, S., & Bartels, S. A. (2022). "It's because We are 'Loose Girls' That's why We had Children with MINUSTAH Soldiers": A Qualitative Analysis of Stigma Experienced by Peacekeeper-Fathered Children and Their Mothers in Haiti. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 37(23-24), NP22673-NP22703.

- Development of an electoral roadmap and completion of electoral tasks (e.g., inclusive voter registration, party registration, observer accreditation)
- Establishment of transitional justice commissions and systems to address legacies of human rights abuse, crimes against humanity, and other social trauma

In delivering on these or other milestones, the interim government enhances its legitimacy while advancing a fairer and freer environment for transitional elections, showing its capacity to address past mistakes, correct injustices, and enable broad democratic participation.

Delimitate the period of mandate. It is difficult to determine a general desirable length for transitions because, depending on the context, authorities might need more or less time to rebuild, reform, and establish basic conditions for credible new elections. The Institute for Integrated Transitions mentions 6 to 18 months as a typical transition period (except in power-sharing arrangements), with potential extensions to complete assigned tasks.[15] Extensions can be perceived as power grabs by interim authorities – and sometimes arguably *are* – so they should be considered very carefully and avoided as much as possible.

Negotiate a realistic transition period from the beginning. Interim authorities might underestimate the time needed to prepare institutions and staff for elections, particularly if they are not intimately familiar with the state of current institutions. They should seek advice from public servants and officials not seen as compromised by their affiliation with previous regimes, technical experts (including international partners with relevant comparative expertise), and other local stakeholders.

In **Haiti (2025)**, the then-leader of the Transitional Presidential Council, Leslie Voltaire, promised to hold elections in November 2025, but the head of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) stated months later that it would be impossible to do so before February 2026, given extreme insecurity, lack of funding, and weak infrastructure. The CEP later submitted a new electoral calendar, announcing elections in August 2026 (1st round) and December 2026 (2nd round). These multiple postponements have made stakeholders skeptical that the elections will actually happen.[16]

Clearly communicate the transition period and the rationale for it. Interim authorities should communicate transparently with the public throughout negotiations and planning, providing clear explanations for the proposed transition timeline and what will be accomplished during that period. They should also aim to communicate that information alongside relevant domestic and international political actors, security forces, civil society representatives, and other reputable figures who can convey support to the transitional government. Going against this good practice, in **Mali (2021-present)**, Colonel Assimi Goïta, after installing himself as a transitional president in 2021, was granted a second five-year mandate by his military allies in the National Transitional Council in July 2025, despite having pledged to return the country to civilian rule. Instead of a clear rationale for the extension, authorities stated Goïta's mandate would be renewable "as many times as necessary until the country is pacified," without providing measurable indicators or security goals that would trigger elections.[17]

Establish and respect checks and balances. As voters cannot remove interim authorities through the ballot box, transitional governments lack this key vertical accountability pillar. Strong horizontal accountability mechanisms

[15] Interim Governments: Lessons and Guidelines. (2020, November). *Institute for Integrated Transitions.* https://ifit-transitions.org/publications/interim-governments-lessons-and-guidelines/

[16] Blaise, J. (2026, January 6). Inside Haiti's road to 2026 elections: CEP revises calendar, keeps Aug. 30 vote date. *The Haitian Times.* https://haitiantimes.com/2026/01/06/haiti-cep-maintains-elections-august-30-2026/

[17] Mali junta chief Assimi Goïta grants his own unlimited presidential mandate (2025, July 10). *France 24.* https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20250710-mali-junta-chief-assimi-go%C3%AFta-grants-himself-unlimited-presidential-mandate

(internal state checks) become even more important, as does diagonal accountability (media and civil society oversight), for keeping interim authorities in check.[18]

Consider transitional legislatures and oversight councils. While interim authorities often govern by decrees, interim legislatures may inform, review, and ratify or block these decisions, imposing some constraints on interim executive authorities. In some cases, they may also draft laws. In **Tunisia (2011)**, for example, the Higher Authority for the Achievement of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition (HIROR) included political parties and civil society representatives. It advised the interim government and drafted electoral laws and regulations that paved the way for elections.

The composition of such transitional legislatures can also become a source of conflict and gridlock, however, so their establishment must be weighed carefully. In **Sudan (2019-2021)**, the Constitutional Charter established after the ouster of Omar al-Bashir mandated the creation of a Transitional Legislative Council to act as a check on the executive power conferred onto the Sovereignty Council. Military and civilian factions could not agree on the composition of the council and the body was not formed. Without significant constraints, military leaders eventually staged a coup in 2021. In early 2026, Sudan's Democratic Block Alliance resumed conversations about creating the Transitional Legislative Council as a pivotal step toward a civilian democratic transition.[19]

Strengthen independent courts. The judiciary, if it can operate independently, may serve as a crucial horizontal check on interim governments, ensuring their activities and decisions remain within agreed boundaries and relevant legal frameworks. Courts can rule on the legality of decrees and protect citizens' rights during extraordinary circumstances. In many cases, however, especially when the interim government stems from a military takeover, authorities ignore court rulings or appoint loyalist judges to rubber-stamp their decisions. Maintaining or strengthening independent courts can help prevent this concentration of power.

In **Pakistan (2023)**, the law establishes that elections must be held under a caretaker government within 90 days after the dissolution of the National Assembly, a practice formalized in the 1980s. In 2023, however, the outgoing government approved the administration of a new census days before departing, an action that would trigger a redrawing of voting districts, which the Election Commission of Pakistan stated would take months to complete. The Supreme Court issued a ruling forcing the Election Commission and the president to negotiate a day for the elections, preventing further delays and the extension of the caretaker government's rule.[20] In **Bosnia (1995-1996)**, the courts also played a crucial role in enhancing trust during the transition process, making solid decisions that were largely seen as unbiased. Courts' composition was also mixed, combining local professionals from different ethnic groups and international experts, which helped dissipate suspicions of bias.

Enable civil society and other independent oversight. In addition to including civil society formally in transitional institutions, interim governments can facilitate the work of independent groups and media in monitoring transitional developments through regular press conferences, consultations, and information sessions. In **Benin (1990)**, transitional authorities strived to make deliberation and decision-making as participatory and transparent as possible. The country's 10-day "National Conference of Active Forces" engaged hundreds of civil society representatives, religious leaders, and political figures. Proceedings were broadcast live on national radio and television. The public's awareness and involvement in the process are considered one of the main factors that prevented an attempt by the military to disturb the transition.[21]

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[18] See more about promoting autonomy and accountability in independent institutions in Shein, E., & Ellena, K. (2022). *Guardrails for Democracy*. https://www.ifes.org/publications/guardrails-democracy

[19] Sudan's Democratic Block seeks to form transitional legislative council (2026, February 6). *Sudan Tribune*. https://sudantribune.com/article/310351

[20] Pakistan announces February 8 date for delayed elections (2023, November 2). *Deutsche Welle.* https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-announces-february-8-date-for-delayed-elections/a-67288028

[21] Seely, J. (2009). *The legacies of transition governments in Africa: the cases of Benin and Togo.* Palgrave Macmillan.

In a different scenario, civil society stakeholders in **Syria (2025-present)** have made repeated complaints that the transitional process and decision-making are alienating them. They were denied the right to monitor the 2025 indirect elections for the People's Assembly and have little access to Assembly member workings. Civil society is constrained, especially in coastal areas, and security forces have blocked initiatives to promote political dialogue and reconciliation.

Leverage international support as checks and balances. Bilateral donors, international organizations, and assistance providers can contribute to imposing checks on interim governments by exercising financial and diplomatic pressure and providing or revoking aid and technical assistance if interim authorities violate agreements. International partners might be caught up in the sunk-cost fallacy, a phenomenon characterized by reluctance to abandon a strategy after investing heavily in it. For instance, donors and implementers of assistance might not want to halt support to a country's authorities after assisting them throughout the transition and "erase" perceived gains made during that period, even if the authorities start showing signs that they will not commit to a democratic process. In such situations, credible threats that support will be halted could be more effective in steering decision-making back to a democratic path. To make informed decisions based on interim governments' real intentions and avoid the sunk-cost fallacy, donors and international organizations should invest in systematic political analysis and rely on their diplomatic staff, assistance implementers, and local partners to provide insight into transition developments.

In **Burkina Faso (2014-2015)**, the International Follow-up and Support Group for the Transition in Burkina Faso (GISAT-BF) was led by the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, and the United Nations to provide financial, technical, and logistical support during the country's transition period. The GISAT-BF included financial institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, a composition that helped condition financial assistance on the government actually following the transitional roadmap. Local civil society, trade unions, and political party representatives were also involved, providing firsthand information to the international community. The GISAT-BF's pressure and coordination with local actors have been credited with neutralizing a 2015 coup and reinstating the interim government.[22] After the 2015 elections, however, the international community drastically reduced its involvement in Burkina Faso, and national institutions could not prevent the political and security crises that ensued.

Fostering Credible Transitional Elections

As discussed in the previous section, a key task of interim governments is to set the stage for credible elections that consolidate the country's democratic transition. While they do not *guarantee* democratic strength, elections (transitional and subsequent cycles) are a crucial feature of strong democracies. Thus, the rules and processes that interim governments establish to govern future transitions of power matter, just as much as – or even more than – their efforts to foster their own legitimacy. This section thus focuses on how interim governments and EMBs operating under them can create a more conducive environment for credible elections.

Establishing or preserving trustworthy EMB leaders. Inclusion and representation are important not only in the composition of the interim government, but also in the institution tasked with organizing transitional elections. The de facto or perceived dominance of a group in decision-making bodies could alienate other actors and decrease trust in the fairness of future elections. Bringing in people from different backgrounds and group affiliations can enhance a sense of belonging and representation and increase overall trust in interim institutions as people see "advocates" empowered to have a voice and help shape decisions and processes. A common factor that seems

[22] Burkina Faso expresses gratitude to the African Union for reversing Coup d'État (2015, September 29). African Union. https://au.int/fr/node/25861

crucial in building mutual trust among competing stakeholders for advancing democratic transitions is their acceptance of electoral authorities who will steer the process to elect a new government.

The level of involvement that stakeholders deem satisfactory in the formation (or reformation) of independent EMBs varies. In some cases, they might accept technocrats seen as nonpartisan; in others, they might push to send party representatives to ensure their rights and interests are protected. Interim authorities must work with stakeholders – including political parties, civil society, and groups that have been historically marginalized – to identify acceptable EMB compositions and, regardless of the model chosen, strive for fairness and transparency in leadership selection.

In **Mozambique (1994)**, the peace agreement signed in 1992 guaranteed that a third of the members of the future National Election Commission would come from a militant group, the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), enabling this stakeholder to participate in decision-making, administration, and oversight of the elections and contributing to buy-in. The day before the elections, RENAMO's presidential candidate announced a boycott, but was pressured to rejoin the process and ultimately accepted the results. The situation deteriorated after the 1999 elections, however, with lower levels of international support and oversight and a concentration of power by the governing party, the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO).

In **Liberia (2003-2005)**, on the other hand, consensus was reached in favor of a nonpartisan EMB. The 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement prescribed reforms to the electoral system and the reconstitution of the National Elections Commission (NEC) to guarantee its independence and conformity with election integrity standards. The document specified that appointments to the NEC would be made by the chairperson with the advice and consent of the transitional legislature (NTLA) within three months after signing of the peace agreement, and that the commission should be composed of "men and women of known integrity."[23] The NEC was led by a former chief justice widely considered to be nonpartisan. Losing candidate George Weah threatened to reject the results, but massive oversight conducted by observers corroborated the integrity of the elections and forced Weah to concede.

Establishing or preserving trustworthy and competent election officials. Overhauling the leadership is important, but often not enough to restore trust in election processes. Ensuring that technical staff and lower-level election officials are also competent and neutral in their performance is critical for the perceived integrity of high-stakes transitional elections. Interim authorities can facilitate this neutrality by integrating people representing different demographics across election administration levels, removing people who have been involved in corrupt practices in past elections, and ensuring all officials receive comprehensive training to avoid that any errors are perceived as deliberate fraud. In **Bangladesh (2024-2026)**, for example, the interim government formed a committee to investigate allegations of irregularities in the three previous elections held under the Hasina regime and identify politically compromised individuals. Following the investigation, the committee transferred or retired hundreds of district commissioners (who had served as returning officers) and appointed new officials to mitigate new allegations of irregularities.

Although authorities might be eager to disassociate the process from individuals seen as aligned with past regimes, they should also avoid, when possible, engaging in massive purges of public servants and depriving institutions of needed technical expertise. In **Iraq (2004-2005)**, following the "de-Ba'athification" process and purge of civil servants, transitional authorities struggled to identify technically skilled and politically neutral officers. The new Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) was thus composed of individuals with little to no experience running democratic elections. According to assistance implementers interviewed for this report, external experts had to guide IECI officers through basic operations to rebuild capacity. In contexts where a total purge is seen as

[23] *Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia and the political parties.* (2003). https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/lr030818peace20agreement20btwn20govliberia2clurd2cmodel20and20the20political20parties.pdf

necessary, authorities must secure the time and resources to recruit and train new officials or to borrow expertise from the international community as a stop-gap measure.

Implementing essential legal reforms to level the playing field and ensure justice.[24] While some interim governments have very limited mandates and are expected to simply keep the country running until elections can be held, others are expected to implement changes to ensure transitional elections are credible and competitive. The transition period can provide a window of opportunity to effect reforms without one actor monopolizing or spoiling the process to maintain its advantages, but the unelected character of interim authorities also compromises the perceived legitimacy of any changes. This tension can be mitigated by ensuring buy-in from stakeholders through consultations and negotiations or by securing their commitment to carrying out reforms after elections are held.

Ensure that reforms to mitigate bias or undue advantages and promote credible elections apply to all institutions and branches of power. Even if the EMB does everything in its power to administer fair and credible elections, the process can be compromised by other institutions that play a role in elections. For instance, voter rolls managed by a co-opted or politically biased ministry could be manipulated to disenfranchise voters from specific groups, biased security forces could intimidate voters in opposition strongholds, or partisan courts could rule unfairly and deprive certain political actors of impartial adjudication. Interim authorities should thus encourage credibility-enhancing reforms across all relevant institutions and branches of power.

In **Bangladesh (2024-2026)**, the interim government announced a plan to implement ambitious reforms ahead of transitional elections. The reforms encompassed not only elections, but also public administration, security forces, and the courts, as major stakeholders agreed that the Hasina regime had compromised the impartiality and integrity of all major governance institutions. With key stakeholders pressing for the quick administration of elections, the government implemented some limited reforms and prepared other major reform proposals, which were presented to the public for approval through a referendum along with the transitional parliamentary elections. The "yes" vote won, and the new elected government led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party is now tasked with carrying out the reform package, even though the party had expressed dissent over some specific reforms. The approach avoided extending the transition period but also made reform implementation more dependent on the political will of partisan leaders.

Ensure laws and rules, old and new, are enforceable and consistently enforced. Interim authorities are often under suspicion of conferring preferential treatment to specific actors – including themselves – to achieve or maintain power. To prevent real or perceived bias, it is critical to ensure that reforms aiming to level the playing field are implemented effectively and that laws and rules are applied fairly and consistently to all stakeholders.

During the People's Assembly indirect elections in **Syria (2025)**, legal deadlines were inconsistently applied; rules were treated flexibly and, at times, changed without formal amendment; and electoral lists were revised without judicial justification. The High Election Committee, after declaring that no appeals had been filed and preliminary results were final, issued a revised list one month later that removed two candidates, reinforcing perceptions of arbitrariness and political interference.

Ensure clear and effective standards for participation in elections. Another set of rules crucial to the perceived fairness and legitimacy of transitional elections is the one governing who can run in those elections. Especially following repressive regimes, wars, and other episodes of significant violence, it is important that stakeholders agree on standards for candidates' eligibility and that voters know that their candidates and potential new leaders have been vetted and, if proven to be involved in past crimes, have faced justice. Setting these eligibility criteria is

[24] For a broader discussion on how to ensure electoral reform processes are democratic (not only during transition periods), see the Global Network for Securing Electoral Integrity's (GNSEI) "Principles for Democratic Electoral Reform Processes" (2024): https://www.ifes.org/document/gnsei-principles-democratic-election-reform-processespdf

often contentious,[25] and thorough judicial processes often take time, potentially delaying election timelines. Interim authorities must navigate these pressures and establish criteria that can be realistically enforced in a timeline deemed to be reasonable.

In **Afghanistan (2005)**, for instance, election authorities sought to disqualify potential candidates with active links to illegal armed groups. Although 1,100 candidates in the 2005 elections were identified as having links to illegal armed groups, only a little over 30 were effectively disqualified, because of either insufficient evidence or fear that disqualified individuals would pose a threat to the electoral process. In a comprehensive report on the issue, the International Center for Transitional Justice argued that the vetting process had failed due to an incomplete and poorly defined legal framework, lack of resources and capacity to run the process, and lack of political will by the Afghan government and the international community to make sure people were vetted fairly.[26] The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, acknowledging that it would not be possible to finalize convictions ahead of elections, proposed as a solution to empower the Afghan government to expel members of the National Assembly post-election if evidence of their involvement in criminal activity surfaced, but the proposal was ignored.[27]

Enhancing trust in the EMB through transparent communication. Given the high stakes and general mistrust that often permeate the pre-transitional election environment, it helps to have a trusted EMB that regularly and consistently communicates with political actors and the general public, providing rationale for decisions, creating opportunities for feedback and recommendations, and issuing updates on progress toward electoral milestones.[28] In a preliminary statement after the **Bangladesh (2026)** transitional elections, the European Union Election Observation Mission stated that the Bangladesh Election Commission "displayed transparency and openness, responding promptly to media queries, sharing information of public interest, and maintaining dialogue with political parties."[29] The commission's efforts and the recognition from domestic and international observers contributed to the results being widely accepted as credible.

Abstaining from running in transitional elections. Several leaders who managed their countries during transition periods have gone on to run for elected office. While transitional leaders might be rewarded with electoral victories, their political aspirations often end up compromising public trust in the fairness and neutrality of the reforms they are leading, or of the elections themselves. For instance, instead of working to level the playing field and removing advantages that led to grievances in previous elections, transitional leaders who want to run for office might resist making substantive changes so they can leverage the same systemic advantages. Regardless of whether their conduct during the transition period is impartial, their political aspirations can severely compromise how the public and other political actors see that period and ultimately perceive the credibility of transitional elections.

Bolivia (2019-2020) offers a striking example. The caretaker government led by Jeanine Añez was tasked with organizing elections within three months after the annulment of a process considered by some major observers to

[25] Additional IFES guidance on setting candidate eligibility criteria in post-conflict and other contentious contexts is forthcoming. Contact the author for more details.

[26] Ayub, F. Deledda, A., & Gossman, P. (2009). *Vetting Lessons for the 2009-10 Elections in Afghanistan*. International Center for Transitional Justice. https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Afghanistan-Vetting-Lessons-2009-English_1.pdf

[27] Ayub, F. Deledda, A., & Gossman, P. (2009).

[28] For detailed guidelines on how EMBs can improve communications with political parties, see IFES' Strengthening Election Management Body Communications with Political Parties in Elections: https://www.ifes.org/publications/strengthening-election-management-body-communications-political-parties-elections

[29] Preliminary Statement: "A credible electoral process propels the renewal of democracy" (February 14, 2026). *EU Election Observation Mission* https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-bangladesh-2026/preliminary-statement-credible-electoral-process-propels-renewal-democracy_en?s=410527

be fraudulent.[30] Upon assuming power, Añez extended her mandate to almost one year amid the COVID-19 pandemic and engaged in an aggressive purge of officials associated with Evo Morales' Movement for Socialism (MAS) party. Añez decided to run for elections despite initially pledging not to seek the presidency, a controversial action that arguably undermined public trust in the neutrality of the caretaker government. Former allies criticized Añez's decision and another candidate, Carlos Mesa, stated that her "presidential candidacy disrupts her historic role and the credibility of the transition."[31] Ranking low in the polls, Añez dropped out of the race about a month before the elections, but the damage was done. Upon returning to power, MAS pursued its own revenge and arrested Añez.

Another case of broken promises took place in **Chad (2024)**. Following the death of President Idriss Déby in 2021, his son, Mahamat Déby, declared himself transitional president. In October 2022, he extended the transition period for another two years and, despite previously stating he would not, joined the race to succeed his father. Déby won the May 2024 elections with 61 percent of the votes, although opponents contested the results. Interim Prime Minister Succès Masra also ran against Déby.

In **Bangladesh (2024-2026)**, interim leader Yunus managed to resist the temptation. The government dealt with accusations of political bias from different actors affiliated with different parties throughout the transition, but Yunus stated from the beginning – and maintained through his tenure – that he would not run in the elections. Three other members of his cabinet, however, resigned to join a newly created party. Although their pre-election resignations followed legal requirements, the party connections made the interim government more vulnerable to accusations of partisanship.

Providing domestic and international stakeholders with access to pre-election, election-day, and post-election processes. Enabling thorough and comprehensive access by domestic and international stakeholders signals that the interim government and election authorities are striving to meet expectations and willing to be held accountable. The mere presence of observers can help deter wrongdoing such as fraud and manipulation,[32] further supporting the success and acceptability of elections. Positive reports from observers can also help shield authorities from bogus accusations by political actors aiming to undermine the transition. Access should be extended to election preparation tasks (e.g., voter registration, transportation of materials, poll worker training) and post-election procedures (e.g., results management, dispute resolution).

In a previous transition period in **Bangladesh (2008)**, elections were organized by a nonpartisan, military-backed caretaker government following two years under a state of emergency. Then-leader of the losing Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Khaleda Zia, initially rejected the results, but international and domestic election observers concluded that the process was free and fair and met "most key democratic benchmarks."[33] Facing this consensus from observers and realizing that no foreign government (including traditional allies) would back her claims of fraud – and that the military-backed caretaker government was prepared to hand over power regardless – Zia's party conceded.

Delivering elections on time. Interim governments can lose support, and their legitimacy can erode even when they are well-intentioned and committed to relinquishing power. Delayed elections, even if for reasonable reasons, are often seen as authorities' attempts to remain in power. To avoid delays, interim authorities should, in addition

[30] For more details on the controversy over fraud allegations, see Kurmanaeav, A., & Trigo, M. (2020, June 7). A Bitter Election. Accusations of Fraud. And Now Second Thoughts. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/07/world/americas/bolivia-election-evo-morales.html

[31] Ramos, D. (2020, January 27). Bolivia's Anez sparks fierce backlash with election bid. *Reuters.* https://www.reuters.com/article/world/bolivias-anez-sparks-fierce-backlash-with-election-bid-idUSKBN1ZQ1JF/

[32] Borzyskowski, I. (2019). *The credibility challenge: How democracy aid influences election violence*. Cornell University Press.

[33] Zia rejects Bangladesh poll result. (2008, December 31). *Al Jazeera.* https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2008/12/31/zia-rejects-bangladesh-poll-result

to ensuring timelines are realistic from the start, set up a detailed operational plan with clearly outlined tasks and assignments, identify capacity and resource gaps, and secure support as needed to complete activities on time.[34] If delays are completely unavoidable, the EMB should notify stakeholders as soon as practicable to avoid frustrating expectations a few days before planned polls. In requesting an extension, the interim government and EMB should once again provide a clear rationale and revise the electoral calendar accordingly and realistically to reduce the chances that additional extensions will be needed.

Leveraging Assistance Implementers

While interim authorities might be able to navigate and overcome the challenges by themselves, assistance providers can support these actors in myriad ways. In addition to lending technical expertise, resources, and the political neutrality that is rare in transitional contexts, they may offer other practical benefits.

Anticipating windows of opportunity for political transitions and building understanding among stakeholders about the scope of reforms needed. Particularly in contexts where elections have not been credible for many cycles and civic space has shrunk, democracy champions may have limited access to information on existing electoral irregularities and vulnerabilities or the space to freely discuss reforms. Assistance providers may be able to create those opportunities, convening stakeholders and equipping them with comparative knowledge and international standards and best practices, helping them conduct more targeted advocacy and act faster when windows of opportunity such as political transitions arise. Having well-equipped stakeholders on the same page about needed reforms and paths to democratic change can reduce transition timelines, fast-track credible elections, and mitigate uncertainty about the country's political future.

In **Czechoslovakia (1989)** before the fall of the Soviet Union, Western organizations provided support to dissident groups that later organized under the "Civic Forum" umbrella. Unified and with some clear shared goals, the group was able to act quickly once opportunities for change arose.[35] The communist government relinquished power after a few days of protests and the transitional government administered elections less than seven months after assuming power.

Being the only constant through protracted or multiple, sequential transitions. Shuffling and the short tenure of interim authorities can disrupt plans and initiatives to prepare for elections, hinder institutional memory, and waste resources as processes are repeatedly started from scratch. In some cases, assistance providers might be the only bridge between outgoing and incoming election personnel. They must remain politically neutral to foster relationships of trust with different leaders and try to provide continuity for initiatives started before personnel changed.

Between 2011 and 2019, **Egypt** held three presidential elections, two parliamentary elections, and four constitutional referenda, most of which had to be administered by temporary, ad hoc bodies before the permanent National Election Authority was established in 2017. Each successive temporary election commission had completely new leaders and staff, a fact that severely undermined institutional memory and progressive professionalization.

Conferring political and technical legitimacy to interim authorities and fostering engagement with civil society and the public that the interim government might not manage alone. Either for lack of resources or the public's insufficient familiarity with new authorities, interim governments might struggle to engage stakeholders, hold consultations, and communicate progress toward goals. In addition to providing these resources and creating these

[34] For detailed guidelines on developing election operational plans, see IFES' *Introduction to Operational Planning: A Guide for Election Management Bodies*: https://www.ifes.org/publications/introduction-operational-planning-guide-election-management-bodies

[35] Glenn, J. K. (2000). Civil society transformed: International aid to new political parties in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 11(2), 161–179.

communication channels, assistance providers – as reputable and nonpartisan actors – can help confer legitimacy to such interactions and thus encourage participation. International experts can also evaluate and help corroborate EMBs' decisions, minimizing risks and suspicions that actions are technically flawed or politically compromised.

Improving Technical Assistance to Transitional Authorities

Based particularly on the extensive and firsthand experience of technical assistance providers in transitional environments who were consulted for this report, below are some lessons and recommendations to optimize the success and effectiveness of technical assistance to interim governments.

Emphasize political neutrality and build relationships with stakeholders across the political spectrum. A strong neutral position can facilitate the inclusion and participation of a diversity of stakeholders in technical assistance programs and facilitated dialogues. Emphasizing neutrality can also prevent program interruptions in case of sudden government changes, as implementers may not be seen as strictly affiliated with the previous leadership. In **Egypt (2011–2019)**, for example, IFES worked with every new interim and elected government during sequential transitions and transfers of power between rival political actors, ensuring the continuity of projects and progress toward electoral process improvements.

Complete organizational registration and comply with local laws. In addition to fostering trusted relationships with stakeholders across the political spectrum, it is important for external actors to cover their legal bases (e.g., formal registration to operate in in the country, work permit requests, and general compliance with local laws and regulations). Doing so signals respect for the country's legal frameworks and deprives any new government of cover or pretense to abruptly halt activities they see as unfavorable to their political goals. Although not part of an interim government, **Kenyan** authorities in **2016** suspended an IFES civic education program on the grounds that IFES was not duly registered in the country. IFES had completed a registration process different than the one that authorities were now demanding, but the government was strict in enforcing the new requirement.[36]

Strive to build diverse implementing teams that combine needed technical expertise and contextual knowledge. Although international assistance providers can confer neutrality and trust in programs amid often high levels of mistrust among local groups, there are also drawbacks. Interviewees mentioned some cases and accusations of perceived "colonialism" when mostly white implementers from wealthy countries assumed leadership of local institutions and processes to "help" local partners. Despite the experience of implementing organizations from the Global North in similar contexts, there is often also the perception that they will not truly understand the dynamics and needs of the country (usually in the Global South). It is thus critical – both for the practical effectiveness of programs and for greater local buy-in – to ensure implementing teams have the relevant background and country/regional and language experience, in addition to technical skills.

Clarify mandates for assistance implementers and local authorities, decision-makers, and staff. To avoid confusion, bottlenecks, and misperceptions about undue external interference, it is important for local actors and international assistance providers to be on the same page about their mandates and the scope of their assignments. What is expected and wanted from international assistance providers can vary significantly from country to country. After the Velvet Revolution in **Armenia (2018)**, for instance, assistance implementers were asked to facilitate interactions among local stakeholders and guide discussions to enable them to draft election legislation – largely a moderator role. In **Fiji (2006)**, on the other hand, local stakeholders wanted to skip broader consultations and requested international supporters to draft a purely technical electoral code based on international standards, which they would then revise and tailor to the specificities of the country.

[36] Odhiambo, R. (2019, January 20). Kenya cancels Sh2 billion US civic education fund. *The Star.* https://www.the-star.co.ke/opinion/star-blogs/2016-12-19-kenya-cancels-sh2-billion-us-civic-education-fund

Coordinate with other assistance implementers and donors. Competition for funding can disincentivize voluntary coordination between assistance implementers with similar scopes of work, and limited funding in general can prevent communication between implementers working on different but connected sectors. Yet, particularly in the new foreign aid environment, this coordination is essential to reduce duplicative efforts and waste and to ensure consistency in assistance. For instance, instead of having two implementing partners investing in different solutions to the same technical problem, coordination could enable one partner to cover the purchase of required equipment and software while the other leads training for officials to implement the solution.

Plan sustainable transfer of skills and exit. To foster local ownership, prevent dependence, and ensure the sustainability of progress, external implementers – especially when leading important political processes – must mentor local staff and create opportunities for hands-on experience, aiming to transition from a leading to supporting and monitoring role. In **Afghanistan (2005)**, following a 2004 election largely administered by international experts, a Post-Election Strategy Group was established to develop a comprehensive roadmap for the Afghan Independent Electoral Commission, including recommendations on how to structure the commission, develop operational plans and budgets, and retain and train staff. The Post-Election Strategy Group report emphasized the need to ensure that the Independent Electoral Commission's operations would be sustainable from a political, legal, institutional, technical, and financial standpoint.[37]

Given the severe cuts in U.S. and global foreign assistance funding in 2025 that will deeply restrict longer-term engagement, this thoughtful transfer of skills is even more critical to prevent setbacks after transitional elections.

Develop a sustainability plan with a focus on realistic budgets and less international involvement. Implementers should draft practicable exit plans to ensure local partners retain the knowledge and skills they need to continue operations once external support ends. But the transfer of technical expertise is not the only factor influencing the sustainability of operational success. As implementers shared, the problem was often financial; authorities had acquired the skills and knowledge they needed but did not have the same access to resources to cover salaries, logistics, and imported products and services. EMBs and assistance providers should carefully consider the costs of chosen materials, equipment, and other solutions, and prioritize those that incur fewer maintenance costs.

Implementers shared that in **Kosovo (2001)**, while international assistance covered the initial costs of software or the bulk of labor to produce manuals and civic education material, local institutions were able to cover maintenance and updates in subsequent elections. Across countries, however, local institutions seem to struggle to keep up with salaries and compensation at the level provided by international organizations. Several staff trained during assistance programs left their organizations for higher-paying jobs with assistance providers, a trend IFES has previously documented.[38] The discrepancy between the compensation offered in most countries' public service and compensation in international organizations is a thorny issue. Lowering the salaries of national staff working for international implementers is also not an optimal solution. One strategy to mitigate the problem is to support EMBs and other public institutions to develop clear career paths and professional development opportunities for their officials to retain talent and promote fair compensation.

Help raise awareness among stakeholders and the public about realistic timelines for electoral processes. Implementers shared that interim authorities, new powers ascending during political transitions, and even the international community often lack sufficient knowledge about election operations and become impatient with proposed transition timelines. Key political actors who have a good chance at gaining power under existing circumstances might also want to avoid reforms that could reduce their advantage. In this sense, they might view

[37] *Post-Election Strategy Group (PESG) Progress Report* (2005, September 27). https://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/asia/AF/PESG%20progress%20report%20ENG.pdf

[38] Buril, F., & Dinman, B. (2021). *Increasing the Success and Sustainability of Democracy and Governance Interventions in Post-conflict Countries: Analyzing Literature Findings and Partner Perspectives.* IFES. https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/migrate/transitions_2_report_final.pdf

international organizations that help "delay" elections as impediments to their ascension to power and implementation of their agenda. To help mitigate this pressure, implementers should support interim authorities to raise awareness about the timelines of key processes and the importance of reforms that level the playing field and enhance the integrity and credibility of elections in the long term.

Keep up with changes in the political climate and public opinion regarding election processes and timelines. Election processes are complex and may require extensive implementation efforts, but there is a tradeoff between quality and speed. As some interviewees shared, enthusiasm for international implementers usually fades over time. Citizens might prefer improved but imperfect elections in a shorter time frame over waiting years to address every aspect that needs to be fixed. Program implementers should support interim decision-makers and election authorities to collect and analyze data, identify relevant shifts in political dynamics and public opinion, and adjust priorities and timelines accordingly.

Final Considerations

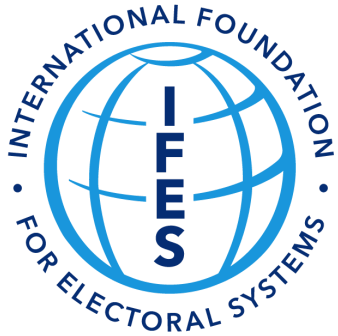
Interim governments usually operate in high-stakes, low-rules environments where legitimacy is the primary currency for stability and where decision-making and performance can make or break the country's democratic future. Supporting these governments to gain legitimacy through good governance and effective rule-setting for transitional elections is a first step in the right direction.

It is, of course, also important to acknowledge that successful transitional elections are not enough to guarantee a sustainable democratic future. This assumption has led to major strategic mistakes. The international community should not – as it has often done in the past – use post-conflict or post-crises elections as an "exit strategy" and take away technical, financial, and operational resources after an election when they are still needed – or needed even more – for sustainable transitions.[39] As scholar Thomas Carothers has noted, many countries that did move from a transition to holding reasonably regular and genuine elections still found themselves in a "gray zone" (categorized by terms such as "partial democracy," "illiberal democracy," or "electoral democracy"), where elections either simply traded the country's problems from one party to another or confirmed over and over the dominance of a single political force.[40]

Transitional elections should not be seen as the end of a country's trouble and uncertainty, but rather as the beginning of a new opportunity to consolidate fair institutions, processes, and frameworks. The stronger the foundations during this period, the higher the likelihood that this opportunity will be seized.

[39] Lappin, R. (2010). The Unique Challenges of Post-Conflict Democracy Assistance. *Peace Review*, 22(2), p. 182. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402651003751479

[40] Carothers, T. (2002). The end of the transition paradigm. *Journal of democracy*, 13(1), 5-21. https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-end-of-the-transition-paradigm/



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