Electoral Trends in Africa

- **Main trend in Africa**: electoral processes are about working towards improved **quality of elections** and in socio-political and economic contexts characterised by various **societal conflicts** (ethnic, scarcity of resources, etc), **lack of a democratic culture** and **poor basic infrastructure**. The majority of countries have an equal chance to consolidate electoral democracy and lose the momentum (Nigeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Malawi, etc).

- **Other emerging trends:**
  - Countries with the tradition of holding democratic elections elections: Botswana, Mauritius, Senegal, etc.
  - Countries where elections helped ushering in a new democratic era: Benin, Ghana, Mali, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, etc. Here holding democratic elections is gradually becoming a “routine”, the “rule of the game” or better the “only game in town”.
Electoral Trends in Africa (2)

• **Other emerging trends (2):**

- Countries where elections were characterised by massive political violence: Kenya, Zimbabwe, Côte d’Ivoire and DRC
- Countries having more or less explicitly rejected democratic elections as the road to power: Swaziland and Eritrea.

• **Other emerging trends (3) :** New forms of coup d’état (Mali and Guinea Bissau)
Electoral Management Bodies: Type and Nature

- Types of EMBs:
  - Independent, Governmental and Mixed EMBs \([\text{trend: independent}]\)
  - Permanent and temporary EMBs \([\text{trend: permanent}]\)
  - Centralised and decentralised \([\text{trend: centralised}]\)

- Other Classification (applies to independent EMBs)
  - Political party representatives versus non-party representatives \([\text{trend: non-party rep EMB}]\)
Electoral Management Bodies: Type, Powers & Functions

• **An EMB** is an organisation which has the sole purpose of, and is legally responsible for, managing some or all of the elements that are essential for the conduct of elections

• **Qualities of EMBs:** independence, impartiality, openness & fairness

• **Functions of an EMB include:**
  – determining who is eligible to vote
  – civic education and information
  – boundary delimitation
  – voter and civic education and information
  – voter registration
  – Receiving and validating the nominations of electoral participants
  – Conducting polling
  – Counting the votes
  – Transmitting and tabulating the votes
  – the registration and funding of political parties
  – electoral dispute resolution
Electoral Management Bodies: Powers & Functions

- Additional functions of an EMB:
  - regulating the conduct of political parties and candidates;
  - regulating the conduct of the media during elections;
  - regulating opinion polls;
  - the accreditation and regulation of the conduct of observers;
  - the announcement and certification of election results;
  - the adjudication of electoral disputes;
  - advising the government and legislature on electoral reform issues; or
  - participating in international electoral assistance services.
Challenges

• Inadequate technical skills to manage credible elections
• Inadequate involvement of women and youth in the electoral processes
• Inappropriate legal frameworks of elections
• EMBs not always playing fully and independently their roles
• Political violence and intimidation
• Refusal to acceptance election results
Lessons for the Future (1)

- There is still a strong link between elections and violent conflict in Africa. Need for combining election management with election-related conflict resolution mechanisms.

- Focus on election support is too narrow. Support to electoral cycle for Long Term capacity development and professionalization of stakeholders:
  - EMB: ongoing capacity building for sustainable election management
  - CSO: lobby and advocacy for reform, civic ed., EO, etc
  - Political parties have often been neglected. Yet they are critical in electoral process & for democratic governance and need support before, during & in-between elections. They face enormous expenses.
Lessons for the Future (2)

• Naïve focus on moral superiority of issue-based voting has led to ineffective electoral assistance strategies

• Unresolved societal conflicts (i.e. land ownership, fishing rights & ethnic competition over resources) are often exacerbated on the occasion of elections

• Appropriate and timely civic education can help reduce manipulation of voters. When conflict is taken down to “uneducated” grassroots in deeply ethnically divided societies, this can lead to bloodshed
Lessons for the Future (3)

- **Short Term** mechanisms for the resolution, management & prevention of election conflict may include high level mediation, Conflict Management Panels and /or Multi-Party Liaison Committees at national, provincial and local levels combined with transparent, inclusive & professional management of elections.

- **Long Term** mechanism for conflict prevention will be context-based and shall entail an inclusive and participatory process for the reform of (1) the electoral system/process, (2) the constitutional and institutional framework, and (3) the devolution of powers to sub-national entities.

- **Ultimately** peaceful elections will require sustainable career opportunities outside politics.