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INTRODUCTION

# Safeguarding election management bodies in the age of democratic recession

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**ABSTRACT**
There is strong evidence that we have entered into a democratic recession – where the quality of democracy is being reversed around the world. As the organisations responsible for running elections, election management bodies (EMBs) are at the fulcrum of the challenge of protecting democracy. This article introduces the special issue on 'Safeguarding Election Management Bodies in the Age of Democratic Recession' which aims to consider the emerging challenges that EMBs are facing, and how they can be best equipped to respond to them. It begins by defining some characteristics of a democratic recession and mapping global trends in democratic quality. It charts global trends in election quality and maps variation in the quality of electoral management worldwide. The article then considers the implications of a democratic recession for EMBs and how international and regional organisations have sought to address these problems. Finally, it introduces articles in the special issue.

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Democracy; democratic backsliding; elections; electoral integrity; democratisation

The history of democracy has been one of progress as the spread of civil liberties and political rights have increased across the globe. Elections have played an indispensable role in this story. Particularly since the Huntingtonian 'third wave of democratisation' in the mid-1970s, the number of people able to take part in national elections has grown exponentially as opportunities to elect and hold governments to account have increased substantially.

There is strong evidence, however, that we have now entered a new era – an era of democratic recession – where the quality of democracy is being reversed. In this era the quality of elections is thought to be declining in many countries. While citizens have the opportunity to register and cast their ballot, their democratic rights are being undermined by gerrymandered electoral districts, threats of voter intimidation or violence during the electoral cycle as well as the disruptive role of the social media and arbitrary state-sanctioned social media shut-downs during elections. Although there have also been improvements in election quality in some countries, with indicators not demonstrating an overall decline in election quality globally,[1] electoral integrity has become a vital policy issue around the globe.

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The future trajectory of democracy is not pre-determined. It is a story yet to be written and the outcome is contingent on the actions of many actors, organisations, communities and individuals, but election management bodies (EMBs) are the fulcrum. It is EMBs that are primarily responsible for implementing the legislative framework regarding electoral competition, voting, counting procedures and processes, as well as the announcement of election results.[2] EMBs worldwide have also participated in and benefited from international, continental and regional norm-setting initiatives for democratic elections, and the introduction of democracy and electoral assistance programmes, in the quest to improve their performance and conduct credible elections.[3] The existence of the continental normative frameworks aimed at the entrenchment of democratic and participatory governance is at the heart of this norm-setting trend globally. In Africa, specifically, the adoption of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance in 2007, which was developed by one of the guest editors of this special issue of the *South African Journal of International Affairs (SAJIA)*, is a vivid example in this regard. This charter came into force in 2012 following its ratification by the requisite 15 member states of the 55-member African Union (AU).[4] Across all the five regions of the African continent, various regional economic communities (RECs) have also developed their own specific normative frameworks for advancing democratic and participatory governance, most notably, the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). While the continental and regional norm-setting trend is commendable, it is worth noting that norm-implementation at continental, regional and national level lags far behind, indicating poor political commitment towards supranational accountability aimed at safeguarding democracy. Although the norm-setting efforts have served as vehicles for norm diffusion, especially since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the historical, political, and socio-economic peculiarities of countries have led to a mixed bag in terms of the value addition of elections to democracy, peace, and development.

This special issue focuses on safeguarding election management bodies in the age of democratic recession. It considers the nature and extent of the democratic recession and how EMBs have been affected by this. It explores the opportunities and threats facing EMBs in the COVID-19 and digital era. It also draws out some policy lessons for EMBs seeking to strengthen electoral integrity during uncertain times.

This editorial begins by introducing the concept of the democratic recession and patterns of democratic decline. It then charts patterns in the quality of elections in recent years at the global level before considering how EMBs have been affected and the new challenges of technology and the pandemic that have emerged. One parallel development has been the growth in international networks to support and strengthen EMBs. This is the context from which this special issue arises and so this is outlined briefly. The editorial ends with some brief concluding remarks, which resonate with the findings of the various articles that constitute this special issue of *SAJIA*.

## The democratic recession

Democratic recession implies a reversal of the notable democratic gains that have occurred since the mid-1970s, highlighted by the Huntingtonian third wave of democracy theory, which sought to explain the democratic transitions across the world. Some have

described this reversal as an erosion (a weakening of systems and institutions) and democratic backsliding (which manifests in declining quality of democracy, deepening authoritarianism and at times total democratic breakdown).[5] By 2023, democratic trends worldwide manifest increasing levels of democratic recession, especially in the last decade and a half. Democratic recession attributes include the:

- Unconstitutional changes of government;
- Stifling of democratic rights including multiparty competition and candidates' freedom to campaign and contest elections;
- Constriction of the opposition's access to mass media and campaign finance and inclusiveness of voting;
- Erosion of political accountability, transparency, and the rule of law;
- Increasing corruption in both public and private spheres;
- Pervasive violation of human rights;
- Prevalence of populism and extremist movements;
- Increased tempo of disinformation, misinformation and hate speech campaigns;
- Dissipating social contract and enfeebled social cohesion;
- Weakened democratic institutions under the yoke of a cult of personality;
- Democratic silence resulting from state-sanctioned shrinking civic spaces; and the
- Increasing crisis of the legitimacy of the state.

All these manifestations of democratic recession are highlighted in the various reports on the global state of democracy produced regularly by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) since 2017. International IDEA has described democratic backsliding as a 'sustained and deliberate process of subversion of basic democratic tenets by political actors and governments', equivalent to a different kind of pandemic besieging the small and large and influential democracies that account for a quarter of the world's population.[6] According to International IDEA, authoritarian systems capitalise on democratic backsliding to deepen their hold on power and subvert civil liberties. The last decade has witnessed extensive and unprecedented democratic backsliding affecting the regional geopolitical and economic powers such as Brazil, India, and the United States. By their size, the democratically backsliding countries represent more than 30% of the world's population. Consequently, 70% of the global population now live either in 'non-democratic regimes or democratically backsliding countries' according to International IDEA.[7]

Figure 1 illustrates the quality of democracy between 1900 and 2021, using data from the Varieties of Democracy Project.[8] There are competing definitions of democracy, of course, which can obscure patterns and debates. The Varieties of Democracy maps out six typologies of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian democracy. Figure 1 demonstrates considerable growth in democracy since the 1970s – especially electoral democracy – as part of the so-called third wave. However, it also shows a period of decline since approximately 2014, with a decline in all indicators and conceptions of democracy.

From a global regional perspective, International IDEA has argued that although democracy is the main form of government in Europe, nearly half (43%) of democracies in Europe have seen democratic erosion in recent years.[9] In the Americas, there has

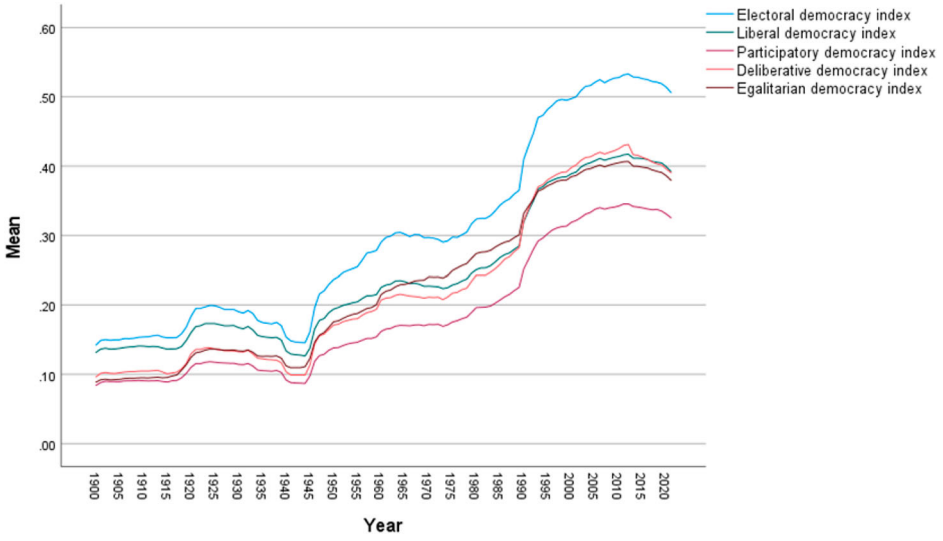


**Figure 1.** Trends in the quality of democracy worldwide, 1900–2021.

*Note*: Measures of democracy are on a 0–1 scale with 0 = low, 1 = high.
*Source*: Authors, based on V-DEM Project: Michael Coppedge et al. V-Dem Dataset Version 12 (V-DEM: Gothenburg, 2022).

been recorded democratic erosion in a third of the democracies – with Bolivia, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala and the US seeing the most declines.[10] There has also been a gradual decline in the quality of African democracy, with more than 15 active violent conflicts across the continent in 2021.[11] The continent had progressed from 3 democracies in 1985 to 22 democracies in 2015; but this dropped to 18 in 2020.[12] For IDEA, the re-emergence of unconstitutional changes of government, military-aided transitions as well as terrorism and violent extremism account for much of Africa's democratic recession.[13] In Asia and the Pacific, even extremely different regime types have displayed attributes that undermine democracy, including ethnonationalism and an increasing role for military and security forces in politics and civilian governance. The region has also witnessed mass protests for democratic freedoms and political reform.[14]

While the literature has drawn much attention to this democratic recession regarding the erosion and backsliding and its implications for development and peace, there has not been equal attention on the impact on electoral integrity and EMBs. The following section begins to explore these problems.

## Electoral integrity in the democratic recession

Elections are an essential, albeit not the only, component of democracy.[15] They provide citizens with the opportunity to hold decision makers to account, to remove them from office and replace them with their newly chosen representatives – or to renew their tenure. They also provide a key moment of citizens' involvement in public affairs, thereby fostering broader democratic citizenship. Is it also the case that there has been a decline in the quality of elections around the world? To what extent have elections therefore contributed towards the democratic recession? If a democratic recession has occurred, then we might intuitively expect that the quality and fairness of elections

have been compromised too. It might be possible, however, that election quality has been maintained around the world – and that it is other aspects of democracy (such as civil liberties, political rights, media freedoms) which have seen the greater decline.

The Electoral Integrity Project maps out global patterns of election quality around the world. Their recent report on Global Electoral Integrity provides an updated picture of the quality of national presidential and parliamentary elections from 1 July 2012 to 31 December 31 2022.[16] Data from a separate study on the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity provide no strong evidence of there being an overall decline in the quality of elections worldwide;[17] global aggregate scores vary a little each year, but there is no consistent decline. This is an important finding, as one would expect such a decline given that global democratic backsliding was dated to 2014. In addition, this was a period where elections were put under pressure because of COVID-19, creating the expectation that election quality might have suffered.

There is some evidence of areas of the electoral cycle becoming stronger and weaker globally. Figure 2 shows the change in the global scores for each dimension of the electoral cycle. This shows minor increases in the quality of elections with respect to electoral registration, media, electoral boundaries and electoral finance. Decreases in election quality are found in other areas with the greatest decline being in the domain of the counting process. These changes are relatively small, however, since they are on a 100-point scale.

There have been notable declines in the quality of elections for specific countries, however. Declines over the period were especially sharp in Comoros, Venezuela, Tonga, Mali, Benin and Tunisia. Some countries also saw a drop in specific areas of the electoral cycle. The United States saw a considerable drop with respect to the results aspect of the 2020 election – reflecting that there was post-election violence as the Capitol was stormed (and not the technical delivery of the results process) – but improved for 2022.[18]

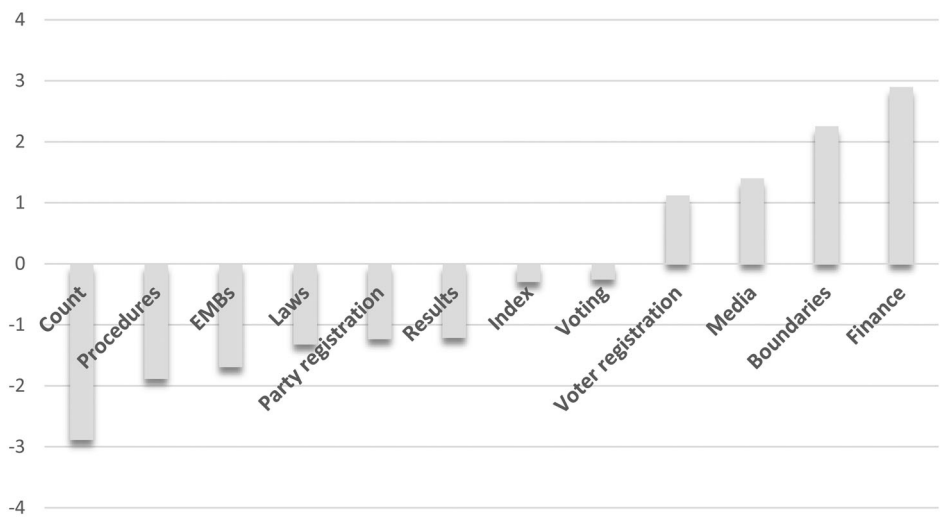


**Figure 2.** Average change in election quality indicator from first election studied to last election studied in the same country, 2012–21.

*Source*: Garnett, HA., James TS, MacGregor, M. and Caal-Lam S., 2023, Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Dataset 9.0.

Overall, there is therefore a good news story for elections. Although there has been the global decline in the quality of democracy, this has not been experienced overall in the quality of elections (Figure 3). Rather, the problems are more isolated to specific countries and specific aspects of elections. This is also a 'good news' story for policy makers trying to protect and improve electoral integrity, because it means that problems are diagnosable – and solutions identifiable. However, we should equally be aware of the size and importance of the defects in elections. Campaign finance continues to be a major issue in most countries. Grappling with how to regulate social media remains a 'wicked problem'. The investment needed to run elections is rising at a time when public spending is under pressure. This special issue therefore seeks to contribute towards the policy solutions that EMBs can adopt and use to protect electoral integrity. Although available evidence shows that the quality of elections has not necessarily plummeted in the context of the current democratic recession, it is worth noting that two worrying trends have manifested, namely: (1) increasing citizens' loss of faith in elections as illustrated by low voter turnouts and (2) plummeting public trust in governance institutions including EMBs.

## Implications of democratic recession for EMBs

An EMB can be defined as[19]:

> an organization or body that 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 and direct democracy instruments – such as referendums, citizens' initiatives and recall votes – if those are part of the legal framework.

Structures, capacities and resources of EMBs vary enormously around the world.[20] The quality of electoral management around the world is known to vary. Figure 4 uses data from the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Index to illustrate country scores for the most recent election in each. The greener the map, the higher the score. The red areas show problematic EMB performance.

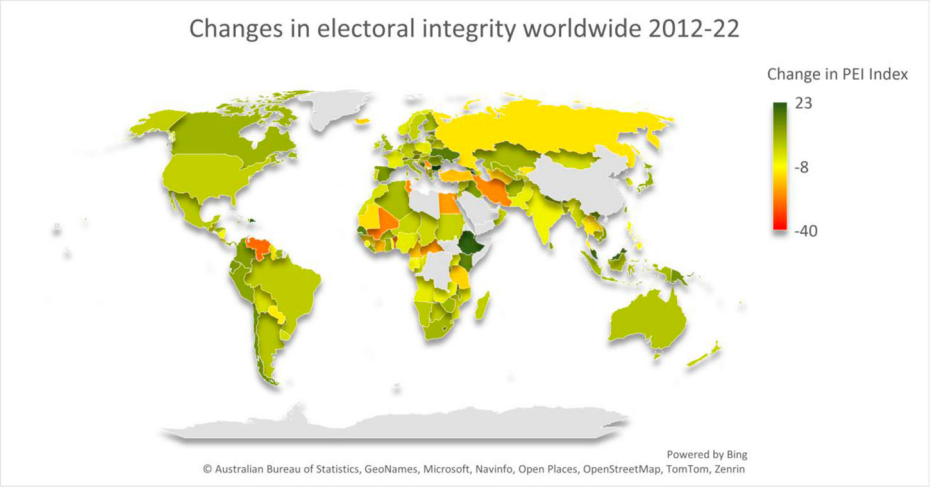


**Figure 3.** Changes in electoral integrity worldwide 2012–22 (first election compared to last election).
*Source*: Garnett, HA., James TS, MacGregor, M. and Caal-Lam S., 2023, Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Dataset 9.0.

While the results vary, it appears that in the longer term, a democratic recession threatens to undermine EMB performance. This is based on several factors. The democratic recession diminishes the scope for enjoyment of fundamental rights. It also constricts citizen participation in the governance process, with far-reaching implications for elections and electoral processes. Constrained citizen participation and engagement under a democratic recession impacts the EMBs' ability to deliver elections and to meet the expectations of the normative regimes in electoral governance so well defined in the literature.[21] EMBs might also be directly affected by coercive pressures exerted upon them by incumbent governments or party bosses. However, there are also a set of wider environmental challenges simultaneously facing EMBs which can affect their ability to deliver elections.

A limitation of much of the existing literature is that it focuses mostly on the EMB typologies (independent, governmental, and mixed models) and the capabilities and constraints of each to deliver credible elections. That is, they measure how each EMB type provides or fails to provide quality electoral management, in terms of realising their core mandate across the three stages of the electoral cycle, namely the (a) pre-voting (b) voting and (c) post-voting phases of the electoral process. With this is considered the implications thereof for the credibility and integrity of the electoral process as well as the legitimacy of the electoral outcome. This approach to determining EMB competencies is important, but narrow; it often pays little attention to the equally important shifting environment and strategic situation within which the EMBs operate when discharging their mandate. For example, when the traditional spaces for citizen participation are closed by authoritarian regimes, the EMB must find innovative ways to engage citizens in new communications platforms. The need for human, technical, financial and other resources and tools for such engagement is the same for all EMBs, regardless of their type.

We therefore need to consider these and other emerging challenges and reflect on how EMBs can be best equipped. Some of these challenges have come from political leaders, party bosses and voters themselves. Democratic institutions worldwide, especially electoral institutions, face many threats to their integrity, often by political forces seeking public office by force or fiat. Election quality is also increasingly being questioned, often without evidence,

**Figure 4.** Electoral authorities' performance index around the world 2012–22.
*Source*: Garnett, HA., James TS, MacGregor, M. and Caal-Lam S., 2023, Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Dataset 9.0.

even in established democracies such as the United States, where remarks by a sitting president casting doubt on the integrity of the electoral outcomes led to public violence.[22] A similar trend played itself out in Brazil where on 8 January 2023, following a presidential election, supporters of a populist far-right former president, Jair Bolsonaro, stormed the Supreme Court, Congress and the Presidential Palace challenging the election results. Bolsonaro had just lost the election to the leftist opposition leader, current President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.[23] In a number of African countries, non-acceptance of electoral outcomes and abuse of office to extend or eliminate presidential term limits often breeds election-related violence and in some instances, as in Guinea (2020) and Gabon (2023), has also resulted in military coups.[24] The cumulative impact of these challenges is that the electoral environment in most countries, including those often perceived as shining examples of democracy, has become more complex amidst high demands from citizens for greater participation and accountable governance. In their constant search for alternative leaders to deliver the social and economic dividends of governance, citizens and civil society organisations have increased their demands on EMBs to be more open and transparent in managing electoral processes. The requests have created new dynamics for EMBs globally in their ultimate bid to organise elections that result in credible outcomes.

New technologies, including social media, have presented both opportunities and challenges for EMBs. On one hand, they have provided EMBs with tools for easier and faster communications with various stakeholders in a networked electoral governance terrain. On the other hand, they have created a platform on which misinformation, disinformation and hate speech can quickly spread.[25] To mitigate this problem, and as part of its efforts to strengthen EMB's through its legacy programmes, the Electoral Commission of South Africa, in collaboration with the Association of African Electoral Authorities (AAEA) and the African Union Commission (AUC), has worked to develop principles and guidelines for the use of digital and social media in elections in Africa. Once adopted in November 2023, these principles and guidelines will assist the EMBs to harness the dividends of digital and social media, and to tackle their adverse effects. Such effects arise from the fact that political parties have moved towards data-driven campaigning, which is much harder for EMBs to monitor and regulate.[26] There are also risks of cyber security and overseas meddling in elections to guard against.[27]

The COVID-19 pandemic also posed a major challenge to both elections and EMBs themselves. Various studies have chronicled the constraints that the pandemic imposed for electoral processes[28] and international election observation,[29] among others. The pandemic posed a threat to human life which meant that there was a humanitarian case for postponing elections or providing citizens with other ways to vote.[30] The COVID-19 outbreak therefore exacerbated existing technical, operational, and financial challenges for the EMBs. However, research has indicated that some governments instrumentalised the pandemic to disrupt the electoral processes.[31] The arbitrary reduction of budget allocations by some governments constrained the EMBs' efforts to adapt to the ever-changing environment in election management, with the result that many EMBs could not acquire new technologies to enhance the integrity of elections. In addition, some governments introduced the COVID-19 restrictions to thwart free campaigning for democratic political succession in the country and at the political party levels. The introduction of these partisan and authoritarian measures during COVID-19 significantly affected the performance of some EMBs.[32]

## The roles of international and regional networks

There has been an increase in the number and variety of international and regional networks that have sought to influence, support and be involved in safeguarding electoral integrity around the world since 1945. This trend accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s and has brought about much more dense international networks.[33] These have included the US-based bodies such as the Carter Center, the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). There has also been a growth of regional networks created to advance democratic development and protect electoral integrity such as the Electoral Institute for sustainability of Democracy in Africa (EISA), the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators Network (PIANZEA), the Association of African Electoral Authorities (AAEA), the Electoral Commissions Forum of Southern African Development Community Countries (ECF-SADC), the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), and the Organisation of Arabic Speaking Electoral Management Bodies. Inter-regional and international organisations involved in this area through various initiatives have included the Venice Commission, the Commonwealth and International IDEA.

The Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) was established in 2013 with a vision to enhance EMB capacity-building for inclusive, participatory, and transparent electoral processes.[34] Comprising a membership of 118 EMBs from 108 countries, A-WEB seeks to build the capacity of its members through training programmes such as the election management capacity-building programme, the election information and communication technology programme, and the election visitor programme.[35] Since its establishment, A-WEB has also held dialogue fora focusing on selected topical elections and election management issues to share knowledge and experiences. Currently chaired by the Electoral Commission of South Africa, A-WEB convened its 5th General Assembly in Cape Town, South Africa on 20 October 2022 under the theme 'Safeguarding Election Management Bodies in the Age of Global Democratic Recession'. As will become evident in the next section, this special issue is a by-product of this General Assembly and part of the EMB strengthening legacy initiatives by the Electoral Commission of South Africa under the stewardship of Chairperson Mosotho Moepya and Chief Electoral Officer Sy Mamabolo.

In sum, international bodies play an important role in supporting elections and EMBs. They enable knowledge sharing between peers across borders on best practices, as well as policy transfer or the provision of informal support. They can also bring civil society into conversations to enable them to share their experiences and knowledge with those running elections. International bodies can also collectively champion the case for elections – whether that means more financial support for electoral officials, developing ideas for electoral form or thinking about new innovations. They therefore provide an important opportunity to redress democratic recession.

## This special issue

This special issue focuses on 'safeguarding election management bodies in the age of democratic recession'. It draws from select papers presented at the 5th A-Web General

Assembly and International Conference, hosted by the Electoral Commission of South Africa in Cape Town. Additional papers were commissioned by the Electoral Commission of South Africa specifically for this special issue. The international conference had symbolic importance in terms of its timing and hosting. The year 2022 marked the build-up to 30 years of South Africa's liberation and transition from apartheid to multiparty democracy in 2024. South Africa's democratic transition was not for the country's sake alone but the rest of the continent. It opened doors for endless opportunities across different economic sectors and hugely contributed to promoting democratic governance, peace, and development on the continent. As a product of this democratic transition in South Africa, the Electoral Commission of South Africa's hosting of the conference also had a substantive significance. In line with its vision to be a pre-eminent leader in electoral democracy, the Electoral Commission of South Africa has conducted credible elections since its establishment in 1994. The goal of the conference was to discuss the phenomenon of democratic recession, its implications for EMB effectiveness, its impact on electoral integrity internationally, and how to address it to deepen democracy, ensure stability, and promote peace and development. It brought together practitioners, academics and civil society voices under one roof.

The special issue begins with two articles focussing on the broader macro trajectory of democracy. Khabele Matlosa begins the special issue by tracing the value of democracy, the global patterns of democratisation and democratic retreat and then the key structural drivers. These include the crisis of contemporary capitalism and globalisation. Superstructural factors include populism, the resurgence of war, unconstitutional changes of government and mismanagement of diversity. The most notable effects of democratic recession are high levels of voter apathy and declining public trust in governance institutions. In the second article, Mohamed Salih posits that democratic recession emanates from the crisis of state legitimacy. This is a result of four main factors, namely, shifts in global geopolitics, a crisis of representative democracy and the widening wedge between citizens and the state, a reconfiguration of democratic silence, and the rise of populism and post-truth political framing.

Four articles then focus more specifically on EMBs – the public authorities responsible for delivering elections who often find themselves situated in contexts of democratic recession. Sonali Campion and Attiharu Jega trace some of the ways in which EMBs have been affected by the democratic recession. They then map out global trends in the quality of EMB performance in more detail. They report no overall pattern of decline which might be associated with backsliding. However, case analysis of Ghana and Zambia demonstrates that in some countries long-standing weaknesses are being exploited in increasingly polarised political contexts. Toby James and Holly Ann Garnett provide a cross national analysis to identify the factors that shape EMB performances. They demonstrate the importance of bureaucratic culture, organisational independence and EMB capacity. External factors are also important, however, and political polarisation in society makes elections more difficult to deliver. A range of policy instruments are available to promote electoral integrity. Toby James et al examine the inside-wiring of EMBs by providing data on their workforce sizes as well as the degree to which they provide training. They provide a framework to measure the extent to which training is institutionalised for election workers – the 'unsung heroes 'of democracy. Dirk Kotze then provides an important case study of one particular EMB – the Electoral Commission of South Africa. He investigates the commission's

mandate, highlighting the centrality of its institutional independence with respect to the appointment and removal of its commissioners, its budgetary and financial autonomy and its public accountability. He concludes that the organisation has performed well, helping to consolidate electoral democracy in South Africa, but trust in the body is undermined by broader mistrust of public institutions among the citizens.

As noted above, EMBs are located in broader shifts in the societal environment. Three articles identify key challenges posed by the power of technology. Nanjala Nyabola profiles the impact of social media on individuals and institutions, arguing that it is neither 'purely good' nor 'purely bad' but can have a 'paradoxical effect of simultaneously strengthening and undermining democracy'. Nighat Dad and Shmyla Khan propose an international human rights framework for understanding the digital nature of elections. Rafael Rubio and Vitor de Andrade Monteiro profile how the Superior Electoral Court in Brazil has developed policy interventions to prevent the spreading of electoral misinformation and disinformation.

The final articles focus on other policy instruments to improve elections. Oagile Dingake tackles the importance of constitution-building and the pivotal role it plays in safeguarding electoral integrity and its power to stunt the growth of democratic recession. Inclusiveness is a central dimension of electoral integrity, as Michael Lidauer et al remind us. They explore the concept of inclusiveness through a case study of electoral practices in the EU – examining the extent to which legislation and EMB practises facilitate voting for persons with disabilities. The importance of electoral assistance is set out by Baïdessou Soukolgué as a policy mechanism. Measures include civic and voter education, supporting peer organisations, professionalising civil society and using electoral observation reports to inform change. Robert Gerenge outlines the role of inter-governmental bodies in tackling democratic backsliding, critically reviewing the role of the African Union (AU) as a norm setting institution in promoting democracy and electoral integrity.

The special issue is then completed with reviews on some of the new key texts which contribute towards reshaping future research trajectories on democratic recession, and on elections. The books reviewed are as follows:

- Francis Fukuyama, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (London: Profile Books, 2022) reviewed by Sishuwa Sishuwa.
- Nic Cheeseman and Brian Klaas, *How to Rig an Election* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) reviewed by Pearl Sithole.
- Adam Przeworski, *Why Bother With Elections* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018) reviewed by Victor Shale.
- Sarah Birch, *Electoral Violence, Corruption and Political Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020) reviewed by Leontine Loeber.

## Concluding remarks

There is strong evidence to support the claim that we have entered a new era of democratic recession in the 21st century. This trend has undermined much of the progress around the world in terms of democratisation seen in the previous decade. Concomitantly, a worrying trend towards autocracy is manifest across the globe. This has led to

considerable challenges for EMBs – institutions that are at the coalface of democratic development, ensuring that citizens are able to cast their vote and that parties and candidates are able to contest the elections. We might expect a decline in the quality of elections too. The impact on the quality of electoral integrity has varied enormously by country, however. This reflects that EMBs have experienced challenges unevenly – but also that many have been successful in protecting electoral integrity. Nonetheless, the challenges that they face are grave, significant and growing. However, even as elections are the key ingredient of democracy, they are not synonymous with democracy; democracy involves much more than just elections. Accordingly, measures aimed at addressing democratic recession must, of necessity, transcend elections in both form and substance.

## Notes

1. See: Holly Ann Garnett and Toby S. James, 'Electoral Backsliding? Democratic Divergence and Trajectories in the Quality of Elections Worldwide,' *Electoral Studies* (2023).
2. Helen Catt et al., *Election Management Design: Revised Edition* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2016).
3. Toby S. James, *Comparative Electoral Management: Performance, Networks and Instruments* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020).
4. Khabele Matlosa, 'The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance: Origins and Odyssey,' *African Journal of Democracy and Governance* 5, no. 3 (2018): 3–42; Misha Wiebusch, Chika Aniekwe, Oette Lutz and Stef Vandeginste, 'The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance: Past, Present and Future,' *Journal of African Law*: 9–38.
5. International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy: Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era: Annual Report 2021* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2021). Also see L. Diamond, 'Facing Up to the Democratic Recession,' *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 141–55. S. Levitsky and L. Way, 'The Myth of Democratic Recession,' *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 45–8.
6. International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy*, iv.
7. International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy*, 6.
8. Michael Coppedge et al., *V-Dem Dataset Version 12* (V-DEM: Gothenburg, 2022).
9. International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy 2022: Forging Social Contracts in a Time of Discontent* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2022), 24.
10. International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy 2022*, 28.
11. International IDEA, *The State of Democracy in Africa and the Middle East: Resilient Democratic Aspirations and Opportunities for Consolidation* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2021), 15. Online at: https://www.idea.int/gsod-2021/sites/default/files/2021-11/state-of-democracy-in-africa-and-the-middle-east-2021.pdf.
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35. The number of EMBs may increase or decrease for various reasons. Also, there are countries which have more than one EMBs hence the higher number of EMBs over the number of countries.

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