The impact of EMBs and other electoral stakeholders on the credibility and acceptance of an electoral process
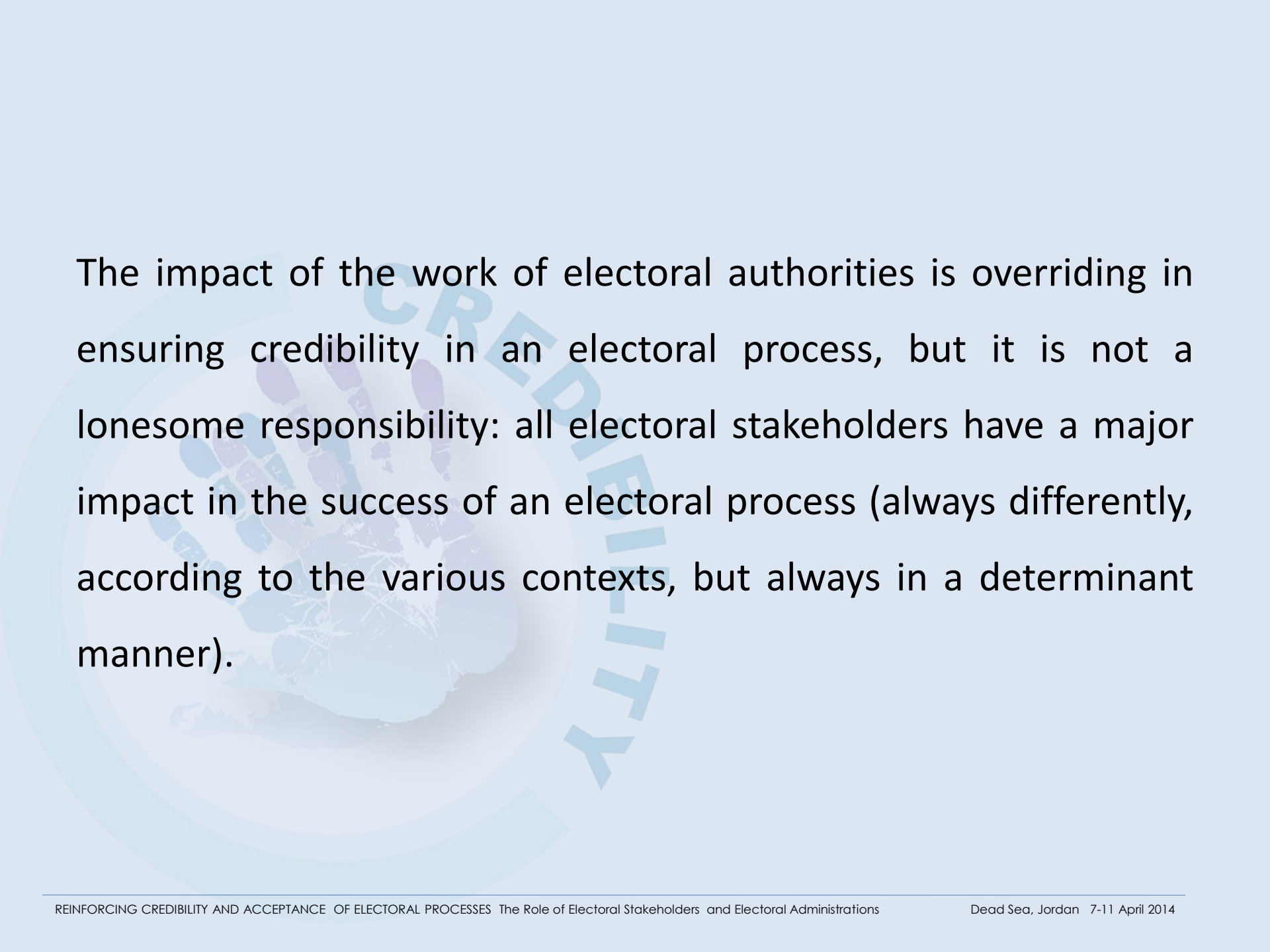
Speaker: Carlos Valenzuela

- "Success or failure of an election has all to do with the credibility of the process – and thus, a perception of credibility is necessary to ensure acceptance of results"

- Generally, we tend to give the responsibility of a guaranteeing a credible process to the electoral authorities;

- However, elections are not just, or even primarily, an administrative exercise; they are first and foremost a socio-political process. As such, and without taking away from the fundamental role of the electoral authorities (both executive and judicial), *responsibility for credible elections lies – at different degrees - with all the different stakeholders that take place in the process*.

Internal and external stakeholders

Internal stakeholders:

- **Electoral authorities** (EMBs and EDR agencies), but also:
- various government agencies;
- political parties and candidates;
- civil society (including but not restricted to electoral observer   groups);
- media

The impact of the work of electoral authorities is overriding in ensuring credibility in an electoral process, but it is not a lonesome responsibility: all electoral stakeholders have a major impact in the success of an electoral process (always differently, according to the various contexts, but always in a determinant manner).

We have chosen to identify five basic principles that, when applied, would guarantee credibility of the work of the electoral authorities, and thus of the preparations and conduct of the elections:

• independence (of action, as compared to institutional autonomy),

• impartiality,

• transparency,

• efficiency (therefore professionalism), and

• sustainability (need for periodic elections and credibility through time).

Electoral authorities do not function in a vacuum – they respond to institutional, legal and political contexts. First off, constitutional and legal dispositions will be the basis of electoral authorities work and behavior.

This is where *legislators* play a major role in setting up the ground for credibility. Many of the principles of electoral administration can be encouraged and secured (or discouraged and hindered) by the overall legal framework, which sets the rules and the game.

Moreover, in regards to the principle of "inclusiveness", conditions for participation in the electoral race are not just determined by laws, but also by political behavior and leadership.

In this regard, the role of **political parties**, but also of **governmental and political leadership**, is paramount. Political behavior, in particular of the agencies in control of the state apparatus, will impact enormously the conditions dictating credible or non-credible processes.

Additionally, electoral authorities cannot (and should not) function in isolation -- productive and positive inter-action between government/state agencies and electoral authorities is essential for a credible process, as long as the principle of independence of action is respected.

Besides their role in shaping the political context, ***political parties and candidates*** play a major role in ensuring a credible process. If the electoral authorities are the referees, the electoral contenders are the key stakeholders of the election. Unfortunately all too often, parties and candidates act as a negative force during an election. Need to respect rules; ethical behavior.

Buy-in of political parties is indispensable to increase the trustworthiness of the process (and there are many different ways to do so), but good faith from contenders is just as important.
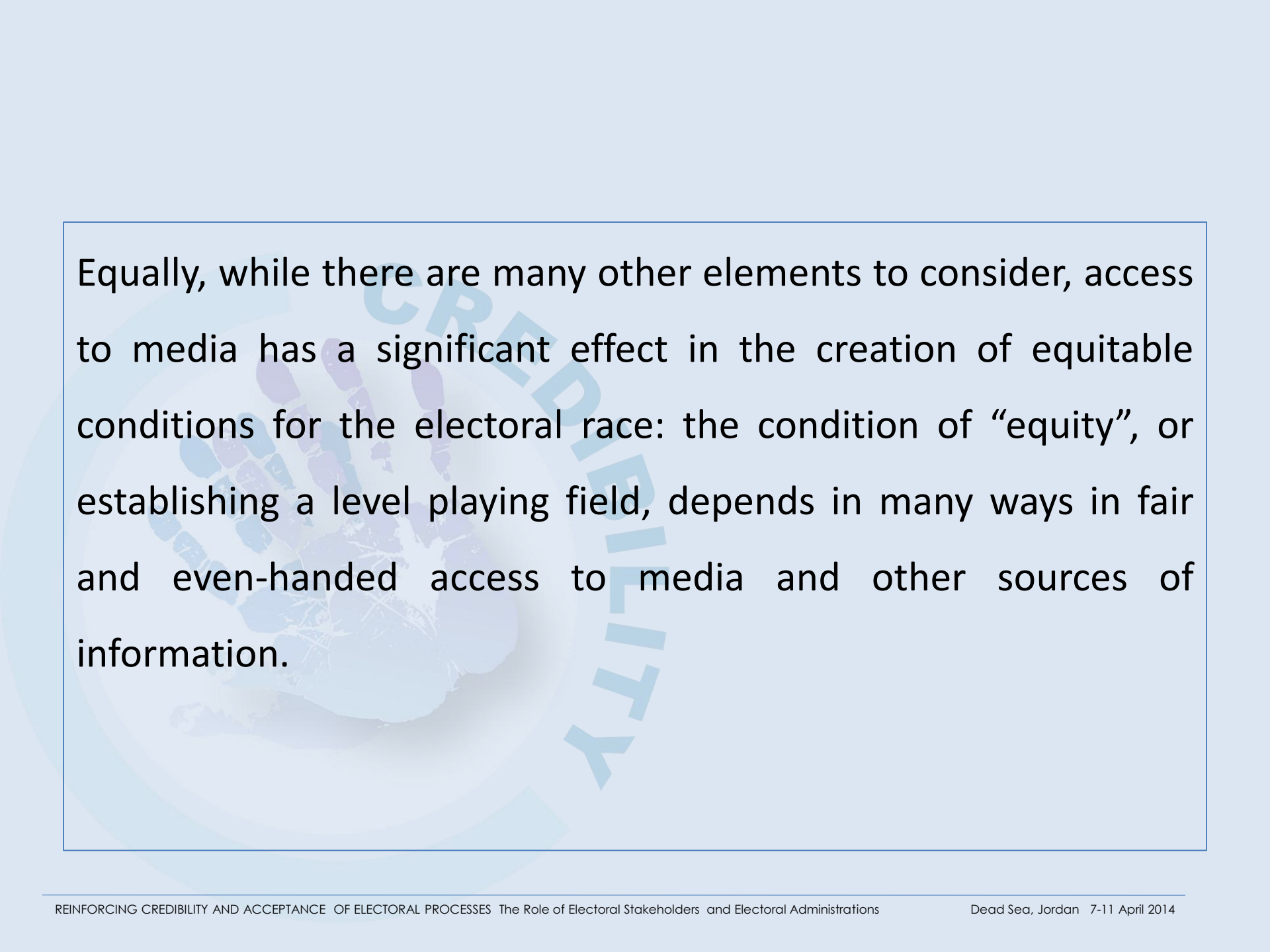
Civil society and media also play a major role in ensuring credible elections.

Electoral observation, a major vehicle for transparency.

But lack of professional and ethical observation can have hugely negative, even detrimental results.

Additionally, civil society role in mobilizing and sensitizing the electorate, as well as channeling demands for legislative processes.

Credible elections are also all about voters making informed choices and the engagement of public debates about ideas, programs, parties and candidates.

Equally, while there are many other elements to consider, access to media has a significant effect in the creation of equitable conditions for the electoral race: the condition of "equity", or establishing a level playing field, depends in many ways in fair and even-handed access to media and other sources of information.

The impact of the work of electoral authorities is overriding in ensuring credibility, but : all electoral stakeholders have a major impact in the success of an electoral process.

All stakeholders are responsible and accountable, in different ways, for the overall credibility of the process.

None of the stakeholders (not even the electoral authorities) can ensure by themselves and in isolation the credibility of an election of or an electoral system – it is the action, attitude and behaviors inter-twined and inter-related that will, at the end, create ultimate trust and acceptance.