

# Video and Discussion Guide



American  
Spaces

## **TED Talk:** ***The Unexpected Challenge of a Country's First Election***



**Speaker:** Philippa Neave

**Year made:** 2016

**Length:** 11 min

**English level:** Medium

**Themes:** Election Principles; Democratic Values

[https://www.ted.com/talks/philippa\\_neave\\_the\\_unexpected\\_challenges\\_of\\_a\\_country\\_s\\_first\\_election](https://www.ted.com/talks/philippa_neave_the_unexpected_challenges_of_a_country_s_first_election)

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### **Please note:**

- **American Spaces Coordinators should work together with their Public Affairs Sections** in planning programs for the American Space, and to determine appropriate programming themes and content.
- **Ted Talk videos are available for download.** This is recommended for American Spaces with low or unstable bandwidth.

### **Context (from Ted Talk summary)**

How do you teach a whole country to vote when nobody has done it before? It's a huge challenge facing fledgling democracies around the world -- and one of the biggest problems seems to be a lack of a shared language. After all, if you can't describe something, you probably can't understand it. In this eye-opening talk, election expert Philippa Neave shares her experiences from the front lines of democracy — and her solutions to the language gap.

### **About the Speaker (from [https://www.ted.com/speakers/philippa\\_neave](https://www.ted.com/speakers/philippa_neave))**

Philippa Neave specializes in electoral communications and education, devising information and training campaigns for voters and candidates in emerging democracies. Since 2005 she has worked in electoral assistance as a consultant for the United Nations, developing strategies to inform people on their voting rights, with particular emphasis on reaching women and people with low levels of literacy. She has worked on elections in Afghanistan, Iraq, UAE, Jordan, Turkey, Cambodia, Madagascar, Southern Sudan and Tunisia. Ms. Neave was born in France to an English father and a Danish mother; she speaks seven languages, including Arabic, and is based in Paris. As an Arabic speaker, Ms. Neave initiated and conducted a three-year project to produce the first Arabic lexicon of electoral terminology.

## Key Vocabulary/Places

- **1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights** – Article 21 says everybody should have the right to choose who governs them.
- **Public Outreach on Elections** – information campaigns to inform candidates and voters on where, when, and how to register or how to vote, and why it is important to take part.
- **Illiteracy** – the inability to read or write.
- **Polling station** – location where people go to vote; there are usually multiple locations, and voters usually go to polling station closest to their homes.
- **Vote** – the act of making a choice.
- **Election ballot** – is a device (typically on a piece of paper or card) used to cast votes in an election (for a candidate or issue), usually in a secret vote.

## Discussion Questions

- 1) Can someone retell Ms. Neave's story around the word "observer?" Why this is story important and what does it tell us?

*An **election "observer" is an individual who takes an active role in monitoring that elections are free and fair.** Observers check ballots to ensure they are understandable, make sure no one who is entitled to vote is prohibited from voting and oversee that the ballots once cast are counted correctly. It was found that there were multiple interpretations for the word "observer" in Arabic, none of which accurately described what an "observer" does in the context of an election.*

- 2) What did Ms. Neave ultimately develop in bridging the language gap? What was the process and the result?

*She and colleagues across the Arab region developed the **Arabic Lexicon of Electoral Terminology** where they defined nearly 500 election terms that defined virtually everything you would need to know to organize and hold an election in an Arabic speaking country. They worked in eight different countries. Written in standard Arabic, the UN published 10,000 copies of the pamphlet which can also be downloaded from the internet. Ms. Neave learned that more countries and organizations are starting to use this resource, including Somalia, the newly-formed Arab Organization for Electoral Management Bodies, and the Arab League.*

- 3) This talk highlights the importance of bridging language gaps in elections. Is there a similar challenge in your communities? What solutions are being developed?
- 4) In addition to a shared language about elections, what other concepts or tools are necessary for successful elections?
- 5) How does voting work in your communities? Who/what do you vote for?
- 6) Who can vote? What determines voter eligibility?
- 7) Do citizens understand how they can vote? Is there strong public outreach?

**This TED Talk is translated into twenty languages. A transcript of the talk is also available here:**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/philippa\\_neave\\_the\\_unexpected\\_challenges\\_of\\_a\\_country\\_s\\_first\\_election/transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/philippa_neave_the_unexpected_challenges_of_a_country_s_first_election/transcript)