

VOICE International

A Quarterly Global Magazine for Voter Information, Communication & Education

Joint Initiative by VOICE.NET & India A-WEB Center

Country Experiences: Conducting Elections during COVID-19



Safe Elections

Masks, Face Shields & Gloves



Thermal Scanning



PPE Kit



Social Distancing



Sanitization of Polling Station



Sanitizer, Soap & Water



Postal Ballot Facility



Webinar on 'Issues, Challenges, Protocols for Conducting Elections during COVID-19: Sharing Country Experiences'

(September 21, 2020)





MESSAGE

In the times of a global pandemic like COVID-19, the challenges of conducting elections has been manifold. Elections, by their very nature, require intense public interaction, mass communication and mobilization. COVID-19 precautionary norms on the other

hand, demand social distancing and avoidance of crowded gatherings. Juxtaposed with that, striking a balance while keeping public health in mind and steering elections for accountable governance in the times of COVID-19, has been a herculean task for Election Management Bodies across the world.

The contextual framework of every country is different - extent and trajectory of the disease varied- as also the capacity of each country to respond to the pandemic and its catastrophic impact. Against this backdrop, I am glad to share that the latest issue of VoICE International on 'Country Experiences: Conducting Elections during COVID-19' with a rich global contribution, is ready for the readership.

EMBs across the world have faced a 'tough predicament' - whether and how to hold scheduled elections in a state of public health emergency. Around 70 national and sub national elections have been postponed in different countries, since the onset of COVID-19. On the other hand, there are countries such as South Korea, Australia, Malawi, Taiwan, Mongolia and many others who went ahead with scheduled elections adopting technology based options with their electoral processes and enormous arrangements required for COVID-19 safe conduct of elections.

In India too, working against all odds and ensuring COVID-19 safe electoral protocols, we conducted elections for the state legislature of Bihar, where the total number of electors is 72.9 million. Election Commission of India inter alia, brought in a comprehensive set of safety guidelines along with extensive voter outreach initiatives to reaffirm the faith of voters in the process. Election Commission of India also extended the Postal Ballot facility to voters above the age of 80 years as well to COVID positive voters. In addition to that, the number

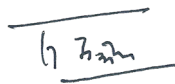
of voters per polling station was reduced, meaning thereby an addition of 33803 polling stations. These changes had huge logistical and manpower implications. Elections were conducted in three phases starting from October 28 to November 7, 2020 with strict adherence to safety protocols. The results declared on November 10, 2020 showcased a high voter turnout of 57.05% and increased participation from women, both higher as compared to last elections. No mean feat indeed!

I take this opportunity to congratulate all the Heads of the EMBs who have conducted elections despite COVID-19 challenge. Their experience is a valuable source of guidance. Hitherto, guidance and support from the International Expert Institutions such as A-WEB, International IDEA, IFES and ICPS etc., has tremendously contributed to evolving efficient and effective strategies for COVID-19 safe elections which enhanced the stakeholder confidence.

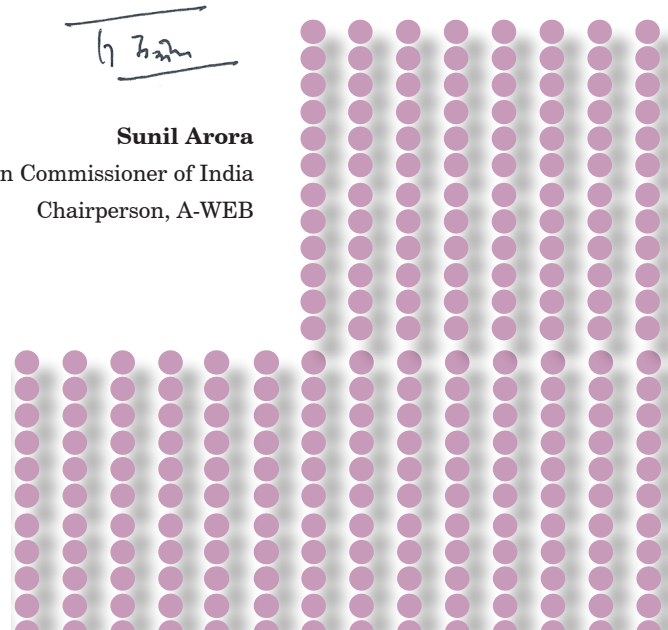
I also appreciate keen interest shown by different EMBs and International Organizations in sharing their experiences on COVID-19 safe elections, by way of contribution to the current issue of VoICE International. I am particularly thankful to Ms. E A Pamfilova, Hon'ble Chairperson of the Central Election Commission of Russia for contributing a very informative article on recent COVID-19 safe electoral exercise in Russia.

The Commission congratulates Mr. Umesh Sinha, Secretary General, ECI and Editor-in-Chief, VoICE International and his entire team at ECI, all the Members of Editorial Board and the Advisory Board for their dedicated efforts in bringing out this issue on a subject that concerns each one of us.

I am confident that global knowledge sharing on the subject will help each and every EMB in meeting COVID-19 challenges, while conducting elections.



Sunil Arora
Chief Election Commissioner of India
Chairperson, A-WEB



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Wishing you a joyful & safe New Year!

It is a matter of immense satisfaction for me to present to you the Issue 2&3 (Volume IV) of VoICE International that carries rich global experiences on 'Country Experiences: Conducting Elections during COVID-19' from across the world.

Since the beginning of 2020, the pandemic caused an unprecedented crisis for humanity. While many national and sub-national elections were postponed due to pandemic, numerous elections were conducted in different countries on time or with adjustments in schedule keeping utmost care, safety and health related requirements of the pandemic. I congratulate all the EMBs, which went ahead with their elections, armed with careful harmonization of COVID-19 safety protocols and showing the path of successfully handling the challenge.

India, being most populous and one of the largest democracies in the world, pandemic posed formidable challenges for Indian Elections on account of a massive size of electorate, large number of Polling Stations & diverse geographic and climatic conditions. However, Election Commission of India conducted Bye Election to 19 seats of Council of States as the first step followed by successfully conducting election for the State Legislature of Bihar involving 72.9 million electors. Before the elections, an extensive consultation with various stakeholders was organized and a comprehensive set of safety protocols was issued. Numerous initiatives were taken to instill the confidence of voters & facilitate the smooth conduct of elections. New communication approaches were explored to reach out to the voters and sensitize them towards their right as well as the facilitates available to them. All these efforts culminated in a record turnout at 57.34% despite COVID-19, even higher than previous elections.

With the aim to share experiences on the subject with the other Election Management Bodies, Election Commission of India organized an International Webinar on 'Issues, Challenges and Protocols for Conducting Elections during COVID-19: Sharing Country Experiences'. On this occasion, Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners of India, Chairperson, Election Commission of South Africa, Chief Election Commissioner of Bangladesh, Chairperson, General Elections Commission of Mongolia, Chairperson, General Elections Commission of Indonesia, Commissioner, CEC Taiwan, Member CCER, Kyrgyz Republic, Secretary General International IDEA, President and CEO, IFES, Secretary General A-WEB and many more experts, shared their valuable experiences on the subject.

I am really happy to see the keen interest evinced by the global community in contributing to this issue on a topic of contemporary relevance and challenge. The issue carries contributions from countries such as Argentina, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, Lesotho, Malawi, Russia, Moldova, India etc., along with global election updates and reports on webinars from international expert organizations like A-WEB, International IDEA, IFES and ICPS.

I thank all the contributors for taking pains to pen down their country specific experiences and sending their contribution. I am especially grateful to Ms. E A Pamfilova, Hon'ble Chairperson of the Central Election Commission of Russia for contributing a very informative article on recent COVID-19 safe electoral exercise in Russia.

I am grateful to Mr. Sunil Arora, Hon'ble Chief Election Commissioner and Hon'ble Election Commissioners Mr. Sushil Chandra and Mr. Rajiv Kumar for visualizing the challenges of pandemic and developing a strategy to conduct elections during the challenging period. I thank all the members of the Editorial Board and the Advisory Board for their contribution and support in making this issue a success.

With Best Wishes & Regards,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Umesh Sinha'.

Umesh Sinha

Editor-in-Chief, VoICE International &
Secretary General, Election Commission of India

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Electoral Challenges in the times of Pandemic

Argentina is a federal republic composed of 24 states (Provinces) with a presidential system of government. The legislative branch consists of two Chambers, one of Deputies and the other of Senators. According to the National Constitution, half the members of the Chamber of Deputies and one-third of Senate seats are renewed every two years. Argentina's 24 provinces retain a significant amount of autonomy and the constituencies are able to choose in direct elections both the head of their executive branch (Governor) and the representatives of the legislative branch. These can be unicameral or bicameral with partial or complete renewal of their members, in accordance with the provisions of each provincial constitution.

In 2019, Presidential Elections were held and resulted in Alberto Fernández being elected as the 9th Constitutional President since their return to democracy in 1983. According to the National Constitution, the President and Vice President are directly elected on the same ballot by qualified majority vote and serve a 4 year term though eligible for a second consecutive term. In 2019, 22 out of 24 provinces also popularly elected their Chief Executive Officers (Governors). The provinces of Corrientes and Santiago del Estero did not vote to choose their Governors since they underwent federal intervention in the past and their electoral calendars were

The National Directorate of Elections (DiNE) is continuously working to guarantee the integrity and credibility of electoral processes and to promote the widespread acceptance of election results while maintaining public health in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.

out of phase with the rest of the country. Consequently, in 2021, executive elections will not take place except for the two provinces aforementioned.

In 2021, Argentina will hold National Legislative elections, also called mid-term elections. As stated above, the Chamber of Deputies will renew half of its seats while the Chamber of Senators will renew one third of them, who will be elected by the constituencies of 8 provinces. Also, subnational elections will take place in those provinces where legislative branch is partially renewed.

Since Argentina is a federal country, the federal state is responsible for the organization of national elections wherein each province sets the date, organizes and regulates their own local elections. Due to the electoral laws of Argentina, the national legislative mid-term elections will take place on the second Sunday in August (simultaneous and mandatory open primaries) and the fourth Sunday in October (general elections) of 2021. This constitutes an unprecedented challenge in terms of political agreements needed to implement changes in the voting procedure in order to adapt the electoral process to new health protocols, with consequent rise of expenditures on healthcare materials.

Firstly, should the pandemic extend to 2021, health protocols must be agreed to in consonance with health authorities

both at the federal and local level to cover all phases of the electoral process – from preparatory stages to vote counting.

In this regard, the new protocol must include health regulations related to the prevention of spread of coronavirus during the election day. Following the global trend, online learning platforms would be the preferred outreach alternative to reachout to more people while following social distancing rules.

Besides digital communication tools such as the National Directorate of Election’s website and social media accounts will be key for

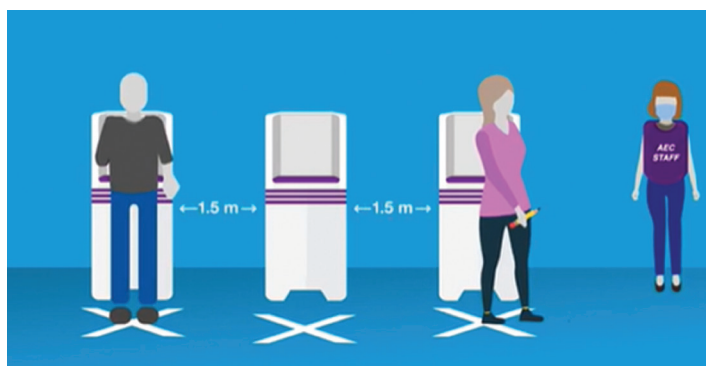
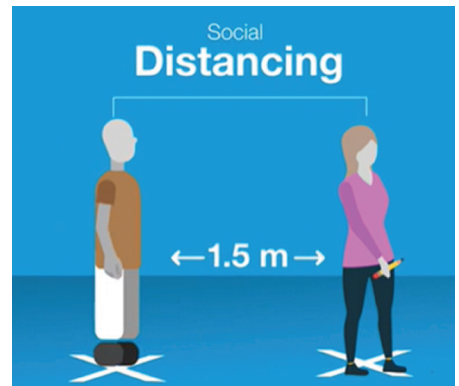
Regarding the training of electoral officials, party representatives and other key actors in the voting process, we are working on readapting training courses to the new pandemic context.

informing the citizenship about health measures and new voting protocols. We believe it will be necessary to optimize communication channels so as to provide precise and up-to-date information regarding the elections.

To conclude, the National Directorate of Elections will face some major challenges if the coronavirus outbreak continues well into 2021. We have a duty to protect the fundamental right to vote and at the same time to protect the life and health of our citizens, a delicate balance we are fully committed to achieve.

Electoral National Directorate
Argentina

Snap Story Australia





Belarus holds Elections during the Pandemic

According to the Electoral Legislation of the Republic of Belarus, Presidential Elections must be held no later than August 30, 2020. The postponement of the election campaign date is only possible if a state of emergency or martial law is declared in the country on the basis of Article 71 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. Since there are no prerequisites for either of the exceptions, presidential elections in 2020 were scheduled by the Parliament for August 9.

To prevent the spread of coronavirus infection, the Central Election Commission organized an internet broadcast of its meetings on the official website. This allowed observers, media representatives, and voters to oversee the adoption of legal acts by the CEC without the need to be present directly at its meetings, and saving themselves from the risk of infection. The same recommendations on the procedure for the holding of meetings were given to the lower territorial commissions and the parent state bodies.

The law stipulates that at least 100,000 voter signatures must be collected in order to nominate a presidential candidate. Signatures are collected through conducting pickets, as well as making door-to-door inquiries. By the decision of the CEC, members of the initiative groups for collecting signatures were required to use personal protection equipment (masks, gloves, and sanitizers).

In addition, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Belarus has developed the following recommendations for members of precinct commissions, observers and voters:

- To examine state of health of each member of the precinct commission. Allow for participation in work only in the absence of any signs of respiratory infection (high body temperature, coughing, sneezing, etc).
- To ensure that members of the precinct commission possess and use protective equipment (masks, gloves, face shields if possible), hand and surface sanitizers.
- To ensure that social distancing is maintained while placing tables and chairs for members of the precinct commission, seats for observers, room for voters, ensuring a distance of at least 1 meter.
- To ensure the availability of skin disinfectants/hand sanitizers in public areas (corridors, halls, etc.), as well as monitoring of regular refilling of dispensers.
- To separate people entering and exiting by placing appropriate signs on the floor, doors, or walls.
- To recommend the use of personal protection equipment (masks, gloves) to voters while voting at polling station, as well as for voting at home. At the request of a precinct commission member, the voter would be obliged to remove the mask and show the face for the identification.
- To recommend that voters present a document confirming their identity in an unfolded form, to show the necessary pages on their own, without handing the document over to a member of the precinct commission.
- To recommend that voters' use their own pens to sign acknowledging



A woman casts her ballot at a polling station during the presidential election in Minsk, Belarus, Sunday, Aug 9, 2020.

receipt of the ballot in the list of citizens eligible to vote, as well as to fill in the ballot.

- To ensure that public pens are disinfected after each voter.
- To organize regular disinfection of door handles, railings, surfaces in voting booths, tables, etc. (at least 6 times during Election Day)
- To ensure that the voting premises where voting is held are wet cleaned during the break from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on the days of early voting.
- To recommend keeping the doors to the voting room and other areas through which voters move-open.
- To arrange regular airing of the premises (without any interruption of the voting process)
- To provide for airing during the breaks from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on the days of early voting.
- To disinfect the surface of the voting box after the close of voting, as well as when organizing voting at the location of the voter, after visiting each of them.
- Voting at home shall be conducted without entering the residential premises and in compliance with the

principle of social distance, keeping a distance of at least 1 meter from each other.

Taking into account these recommendations, and in order to provide members of Election Commissions with personal protection equipment, the CEC allocated the necessary funds. The positive aspect was that the electoral legislation of Belarus provided for early voting (within 5 days). This was incorporated to reduce the number of voters in the voting room on Election Day and consequently, reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading.

As on August 6, 2020, about 4,300 voters in Belarus were infected with COVID-19, and an even larger number of citizens were in self-isolation (level 1 and 2 contacts that arrived from abroad). In order to exercise the active suffrage of these citizens, the CEC adopted a decision on applying a special voting procedure for them.



The presidential election in Belarus



People vote at a polling station during the presidential election in Minsk, Belarus

Voters from this category could vote at the polling station located in a healthcare facility, or on Election Day at their location (at home). If the voter chose to vote at the polling station, then his delivery and support was to be organized by medical workers who were members of the contact

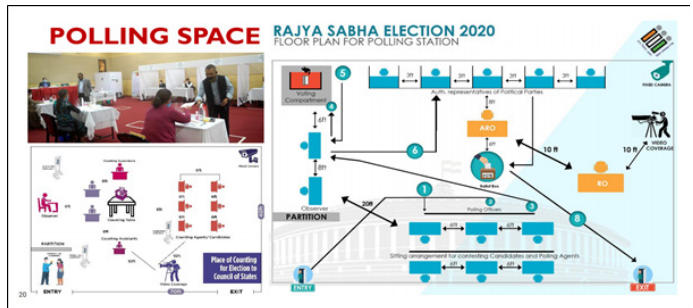
groups for the implementation of the medical supervision of patients at home. If a person opted to vote at home, then members of the precinct commission would go to him.

Due to a large number of accredited observers at the polling stations, the CEC was forced to limit the number of those simultaneously present in the voting premises in order to maintain social distance between citizens. Thus, during the early voting period, no more than 3 observers could be present in the voting room, and no more than 5 – on Election Day. Precinct commissions draw up schedules for the presence of observers in the voting premises so that as many observers as possible could perform their functions. This restriction did not apply to international observers, as well as authorized representatives of presidential candidates, deputies of all levels, who also had the right to observe.

There was a separate voting regime at polling stations established abroad. Each diplomatic mission independently determined the procedure and conditions for voting based on the sanitary and epidemiological situation in the host country.

Yahor Jumantayeu, Chief Expert
Central Election Commission, Belarus

Snap Story India



Strategies for Managing Elections amidst Pandemic

At the time when COVID-19 pandemic has affected every sphere of our lives, the Election Management Bodies are facing a great challenge to change and adapt the mode of their operations to ensure conduct of free and fair elections while protecting the health and lives of all electoral stakeholders.

The Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been zealously working over the past three months to prepare for the safe conduct of the 2020

Local Elections, scheduled for November 15, 2020. The BiH Central Election Commission at its 30th session held on June 26, 2020 passed the Instruction on operations of the election management bodies on the Election Day at the time of COVID-19 pandemic.

This instruction regulates the operations of the polling station committees regarding the arrangement of the polling station, control of order, additional duties of the president of the polling station committees and their deputies, as well as election commissions of basic constituencies and the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Election Day.

Aimed at ensuring the application of best international practices, the BiH

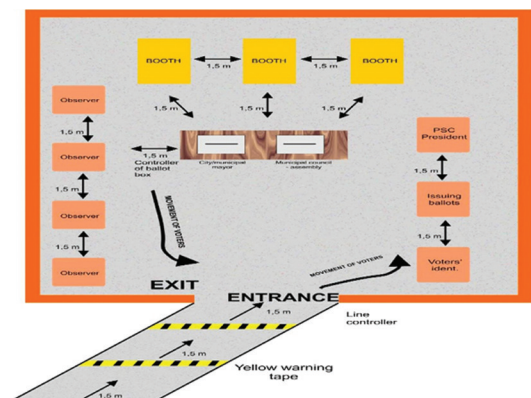
The Instruction provides detailed overview of the additional measures that have to be undertaken at the polling station, including physical distancing, washing of hands, use of protective clothing (masks, gloves, visors, and overalls), as well as disinfection intervals. Furthermore, the Instruction covers the protection of voters and election observers, prescribing mandatory use of masks and physical distancing, covering also the period after the closure of the polling station, before the vote counting commences.

Central Election Commission has consulted the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) with regard to the instruction. Further

measures have been undertaken, in cooperation with the competent public health authorities, to provide the highest possible level of protection and safety both during the preparation of the elections and on the Election Day.

The layout of the polling station is also given that provides the setup as prescribed in the Instructions.

The Instructions also specify means necessary for the safe conduct of Election Day, listing all items (soap, paper towels, protective gear, disinfectants, etc.) to be put in place for the Election Day.



Layout of the polling station



Two-day online education of the members of city/municipal election commissions was conducted.

The BiH Central Election Commission held its 34th session on July 9, 2020, which passed the Instructions on operations of the BiH Central Election Commission at the time of COVID-19 pandemic and epidemiological situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Instructions lay down the operations of the BiH Central Election Commission and its Secretariat aimed at protecting health and lives of the BiH CEC's Secretariat staff. As the situation rapidly changes, the cross-sectoral cooperation and

collaboration becomes an important starting point for managing the crisis.

Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly believes that the strategies for managing elections despite the COVID-19 pandemic do not end with the provision of safety and health protection measures. Here, and at this time, voter information and battling misinformation and disinformation becomes crucial in securing conduct of safe, free and fair elections. The EMBs around the world have also

witnessed a rapid shift in dynamics of communication where voter information and media literacy proved to be of paramount importance, particularly in the electoral context. The period behind us proved that communication and cooperation have a strong impact on increasing transparency and safeguarding democracy. All these activities must be conducted simultaneously, as clear effective information at the time of crisis means greater turnout, safe elections, and continuity of electoral integrity.

Mubera Vulović, International Cooperation Officer, Bosnia and Herzegovina



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Elections in the times of Pandemic: Croatian Experience

C OVID-19) is both a public health crisis and an economic crisis that has also affected electoral processes of many democratic countries around the world. While deciding whether to hold any type of election during a pandemic, the competent authority should take into account the recommendations of health professionals, as well as the current public health conditions in each country, or the subsidiary protective measures in force.

Postponing the elections during a pandemic

In case of not holding elections, it is necessary for the competent authority to make a legal basis to postpone and at the same time determine the deadline for holding the elections. Therefore, all interested parties, especially the public, should be informed of the legal basis and the reasons for the postponement of the election.

In the Republic of Croatia (hereinafter: Croatia), early local elections for members of one city council and one municipality council (hereinafter: early elections) were called on March 12, 2020 and were supposed to take place on April 19, 2020.

COVID-19 epidemic emerged after the announcement of these elections leading to a ban on public gatherings, cancellation of public transport, closing school and universities, quarantine in the place of residence among others. It was then decided to postpone the elections considering the conditions. As legal provisions did not provide the possibility to postpone elections, amendments to the legislation were supposed to take place in accelerated procedure.



President of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) Andrej Plenkovic casts his ballot at a polling station during parliamentary elections, in downtown Zagreb

In this regard, the Croatian Parliament adopted an amendment to the Local Elections Act, which provides for, “The possibility of postponing early elections in the event of special circumstances that imply an event or a situation that could not be predicted and could not be influenced and which are currently threatening the legal order, life, safety and health of the population and property of greater value.”

It was also stipulated that the elections would be held when the conditions are met, or the special circumstances cease to exist, no later than 90 days from the date of their termination. On the basis of the mentioned law, the Government of the Republic of Croatia decided to cancel the decision to call the early elections stating that the election would be held upon termination of special circumstances caused by the declaration of COVID-19 epidemic, but no later than 90 days from the termination of those circumstances.

Managing elections during a pandemic

Elections for representatives to the Croatian Parliament (hereinafter:

Parliamentary elections) were called on May 20, 2020 and took place on July 5, 2020.

Situation related to COVID-19 epidemic in Croatia had started improving in the second half of May 2020, and the epidemiological restrictions had begun to ease.

As soon as Parliamentary Elections were called, State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia (hereinafter: SEC) started communicating with Croatian Institute for Public Health (hereinafter: CIPH) in order to start preparing recommendations and instructions due to hold safe elections in the times of epidemic.

Moreover, a special focus was to secure safe voting on the Election Day, especially in the absence of no postal voting or internet voting. Hence, the only way for voters to exercise their voting right was at polling station

or, in certain situations prescribed by the Act on Elections to the Representatives to the Croatian Parliament (hereinafter: Law) and SEC's Mandatory Instructions, at their homes.

On Election Day, sufficient protective equipment and other safety measures were prescribed for polling station committees as well as voters. This was done to reduce the risk of infection at polling stations, especially the polling stations located in social care institutions and voters in self-isolation or COVID-19 positives.

CIPH, in cooperation with SEC, issued three recommendations for securing epidemiological measures during election

process regarding the work of electoral bodies and for preventing COVID-19 infection during election gatherings.

SEC, in cooperation with CIPH, issued two Technical instructions:

- Technical instructions – voting on the election day and securing epidemiological measures at polling stations
- Technical instructions – voting on the Election Day and securing epidemiological measures at polling stations in social care institutions.

Below is a brief overview of protective equipment and protective measures as was stipulated in the SEC's Technical instructions.

In such exceptional circumstances, the following were taken into account;

- Providing sufficient protective equipment,
- Prescribing sufficient protective measures for electoral bodies;
- Protecting election participants, volunteers and voters during the process of voters' signatures collecting
- Protecting election participants, volunteers, voters and other participants of election gatherings

Protective equipment for polling station committees were: face masks (obligatory); gloves (mainly recommendation but in certain cases obligatory e.g. for polling station committee members that handle voters'

ID's), while protective measures were: temperature measuring before approaching the polling station; record keeping of all persons present at polling station and, disinfection of polling station; taking care of social distancing at polling station; providing that voters disinfect their hands while approaching the polling station.

Protective equipment for voters were: face masks and gloves (recommendation), temperature measuring before approaching polling station; obligatory hand disinfecting while approaching polling station; using their own pen while voting; social distancing with persons present at the polling station.

Special protective measures were prescribed for voters that were unable to approach the polling station and according to the Law and Mandatory Instructions, were able to vote at their homes, including voters that were in self isolation or COVID-19 positive.

Protective equipment for other people present at polling station (e.g. observers, media representatives and others) were: face mask (obligatory); gloves (mainly recommendation but in certain cases obligatory, e.g. in case of skin and nails damages), while protective measures were: temperature measuring before approaching polling station; obligatory hand disinfection while approaching the polling station, social distancing with persons present at the polling station.

Special protective equipment and measures were prescribed for polling stations in social care institutions, when

it came to polling station committees, voters and observers, in order to protect the most vulnerable group of voters – elderly persons. In such polling stations masks, gloves and plastic shoe covers were obligatory for polling station committees. Since institutions were closed for public at that time, it was recommended for polling station committee members and observers not leave premises of the polling station during entire Election Day.

Conclusion

This brief overview of Croatian experience to manage the elections during the epidemic represents two different



Voters wear face masks as they cast their ballots for the Croatian parliamentary election amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic at a polling station in Zagreb.

perspectives on the issue – one was to postpone the elections because of changing the law, and the other was to hold the

elections in specific circumstances that led to strict protective measures in order to prevent spreading of infection.

To hold Parliamentary Elections in the times of epidemic

has been the biggest challenge for SEC so far and, in the end, in spite of all the difficulties, the elections were conducted in a healthy environment, according to the Constitution and the relevant laws, which was in the end confirmed by the Constitutional Court.

Early elections that were supposed to be held on April 12, 2020 were called again on June 4, 2020 and took place on July 12, 2020. The protective equipment and measures that were prescribed for Parliamentary elections were applied at early elections as well.

Albina Rosandić, Secretary General
State Electoral Commission, Croatia



Managing Elections amidst Pandemic: Fijian Experience

C OVID-19 virus has changed the dynamics of how elections are now conducted globally. Elections held under normal circumstances often entail a certain degree of procedural, financial and logistical preparation for all electoral stakeholders involved-particularly for voters and election officials¹. However, during extraordinary times such as this, reacting and responding to an unknown novel virus becomes even more difficult and a challenge to Governments, Parliaments and Heads of States. In the current scenario, the dilemma remains whether to postpone or hold an election based on the guidance and direction issued by their national public health authorities.

Election Management Bodies (EMBs) all over the world are now faced with the difficult task of ensuring that all electoral processes are conducted within the confines of their countries new rules on health and safety protocols. Health and safety concerns remain an important factor in deciding whether or not elections should be conducted during a pandemic.²

Fiji, like many countries around the world faces similar sets of risks and challenges when formulating rapid responses to combat the COVID-19 crisis. Since confirmation of the novel coronavirus by the World Health Organisation in January 2020, the Fijian government had put in place, certain border controls as early as February to minimise the chances of the virus getting into the country. Despite these precautionary measures, Fiji recorded its first case of COVID-19 on March 19 and since then, there have been 28 reported cases with one fatality.

This pandemic has raised some serious concerns for the Fijian Elections Office (FEO) as it commences its election preparation for the next General Election, which has been scheduled in 2022. With limited time and resources at its disposal, the FEO must now acquire new supplies and incorporate new procedures into its existing framework to comply with certain health protocols and provisions that now exist in the country. Introduction of lockdowns, curfews, bans on public gatherings and limiting the movement of people have been the new norm of controlling the spread of the virus, which seems to support the notion that if the virus is to be stopped, people need to stop moving.

This platform has benefited smaller EMBs like the FEO in learning how countries in the region are conducting or planning to conduct their elections during this pandemic.

Taking a proactive approach, the FEO has taken steps to consult with the head of the health sector in Fiji, the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Health & Medical Services and his team on developing guidelines for the FEO to work with by identifying risk points along the various stages of the electoral processes and ways of mitigating these risks. It is important to note that although certain polling processes may be re-assessed and re-evaluated to comply with health safety protocols, it is critical to ensure that implementing new requirements without compromising the integrity or legitimacy of an election is of paramount importance.

Fiji has a voting population of around 645,000 voters and it is forecasted that an additional 20,000 voters will be added to the National Register of Voters by the 2022 General Election. Add to this with 11,000 polling workers required to work during the Pre-Poll voting period and Election Day, we see that hundreds or perhaps thousands of people will be interacting with each other in the 1436 allocated polling venues around the country.

These confined places are an ideal environment for the spread and transmission of the virus and if not controlled, it could become very fatal.

Keeping with international best practices and guidelines shared by IFES³, the FEO intends to follow the same basic restrictions observed by other EMBs who have conducted elections during the start of this pandemic, as also keeping in mind the laws governing the conduct of elections in Fiji. These would include:

- Promoting alternative ways of voting to reduce the number of person to person contact during attendance voting.
- The possibility of identifying bigger and larger polling venues to allow for better ventilation and air circulation as well as to control the physical distancing of people inside and outside of the polling stations.
- The changes to standard polling procedures and physical set up in polling stations to allow for the 1.5m physical distancing requirements and limiting the contact time between polling officials and voters.

During the months of April and May, the FEO had been fortunate to have partnered with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in co-hosting a series of webinars with EMBs, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders in the Pacific region on best practices for conducting elections during a public health crisis.

- Introduction of disinfectant materials such as hand sanitizers or wipes for wiping off high touch contact areas and surfaces.
- Provision of protection equipment (gloves) to polling officials.
- Possibility of having voters come in with their own face masks, which must not be removed till the voters exist the polling venues.
- Encouraging voters to bring their own pen when they come in to vote
 - Introducing voting materials that have plastic coverings (such as voting screens) to allow polling officials to easily wipe down these materials at regular intervals.
 - Instructional posters on safety and hygiene to be affixed outside polling stations.
- Special voting procedures developed for assistance given to persons with disabilities whether inside the polling stations or outside.

The FEO hopes to run a trial on the above changes in the Trade Union elections it conducts for the 47 registered Trade Unions in Fiji. This will ensure that the processes are tested out before a final decision is taken on the feasibility of these procedural changes for the 2022 General Election.

The FEO has already envisioned that the conduct of the next General Election in Fiji will come with a high cost, but that cost is yet to be determined.

Anaseini Senimoli, Director Operations
Fijian Election Office

Source: www.idea.int/, thediplomat.com/, www.ifes.org/



Redefining Election Management amidst Pandemic: Indian Experience

Elections are an integral component of a democracy. The outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic has not only changed lives socially and economically but also surfaced novel challenges upon the global democratic powers across the world. It has shaken all pillars of society and in such a scenario, protecting the rights of citizens and keeping the wheel of democracy rolling is one of the biggest challenges.

As the world moves to a 'new normal', there has been a paradigm shift in election management procedures and policies. Approximately, a hundred national and sub-national elections have been postponed across the world in view of COVID-19, even as over fifty elections have been successfully conducted in different countries as per schedule or with some adjustments in electoral schedules. Pioneers among these countries include Republic of South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, Australia, Dominican Republic and few others.

Election Commission of India started monitoring the impact of the pandemic on elections right from the very beginning. The elections conducted and the elections postponed in different countries as well as strategies adopted by them, have been studied carefully as also the analysis presented by the expert international institutions such as International IDEA, IFES etc. has been deliberated upon by officials from Election Commission of India and numerous stakeholders.

The COVID -19 Safe Election Protocols require additional advance planning in terms of officials, materials, and training besides voter education/stakeholder

education especially in view of scale of operations for elections in India. To further evaluate the challenges, a consultation with stakeholders was organized where each aspect of the election was discussed, carefully deliberated and the inputs from International bodies were shared with them. Thereafter, a new strategy for safe and secure elections was devised.

The routine Biennial Elections for 18 seats of the Rajya Sabha were scheduled on March 26, 2020. However, due to the pandemic, elections were postponed to and rescheduled to May 21, 2020 in Maharashtra and June 19, 2020 in four Indian states namely Meghalaya, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujrat. Following is a brief overview of the planning and specific measures taken during Legislative Elections across Indian states.

Biennial Elections

Maharashtra

Maharashtra conducted their biennial election to the Rajya Sabha for nine seats on May 21, 2020. Appropriate directives were given to all the concerned officials related to the elections in the State. The officers and voters present strictly abided by the following guidelines:

- Mandatory use of face mask
- Scanning through digital non-contact infrared thermometer
- Register of voters names and mobile numbers at the entrance of polling station
- Maintaining social distancing with a minimum distance of 6 feet from each other

Meghalaya

In Meghalaya, COVID-19 precautions were supervised by the Senior Nodal Medical Health Officer deputed by the State Government. Carefully prepared ready-reference pocket guides featuring Do's and Don'ts, minute-to-minute polling sequence schedules, and additional COVID-19 containment arrangements for polling officials were developed and circulated to Polling officials. Voters were timely informed about new protocols and guidelines through the mainstream media and via various customized communications materials. Major emphasis was given to ensuring the following to ensure safe elections:

- Area Sanitization
- Thermal Testing
- Greeting Etiquette
- Masks
- Hand Sanitising
- Physical Distancing



Rajasthan

To ensure the safety of voters, a separate entry and exit, facility for thermal



screening, appropriate queue-position markings to ensure social distancing, mandatory face masks, hand gloves and sanitization of body were put in place. The Secretariat Complex, waiting areas and the polling room were also thoroughly sanitized one day in advance. Media personnel were restricted at designated spots and requested to stay in small groups while following social distancing norms.

Madhya Pradesh

For the seamless conduct of polls, key initiatives such as making special arrangements for voting in a big hall, ensuring dedicated seating for each voter were undertaken. A COVID-19 positive voter and the entire polling team dealing with him/her were provided PPE kits, and the polling station was also thoroughly sanitised before and after his/her vote.



Gujarat

Separate halls were arranged for waiting electors and media persons and two rooms were exclusively kept for isolation for any elector with COVID-19 or suspected to be COVID-19 case. A separate passage from the entry was planned for any elector with COVID-19 and for electors who were detected with a temperature higher than

normal during thermal screening. Apart from these, sanitizers and the provision of running water to wash hands were adequately put in place. Medical and paramedical teams were also kept on standby at the polling venue to attend any emergencies.

Knowledge sharing between EMBs

Knowledge and experience sharing by Electoral Management Bodies is a quintessential aspect in the current times to safeguard the democratic rights of citizens without compromising on their health.

Hence Election Commission of India organized an Webinar on 'International Experiences in Conducting Elections in 2020 during COVID-19' on September 21, 2020 where

the entire A-WEB Community of 106 countries and 16 Partner Organizations were invited. Experiences on conducting elections during COVID-19 were shared by the eminent speakers and the A-WEB Community expressed its resolve and determination to support electoral democracy and fight the challenges thrown up by the pandemic.

General Election to the Legislative Assembly of State of Bihar:

Moreover, General Election to the Legislative Assembly of State of Bihar were announced by the ECI on September 25, 2020. Bihar State Legislative Election (along with other Assembly by elections) is

one of the biggest electoral exercises taking place during COVID-19 times. Following are the comprehensive guidelines:

General

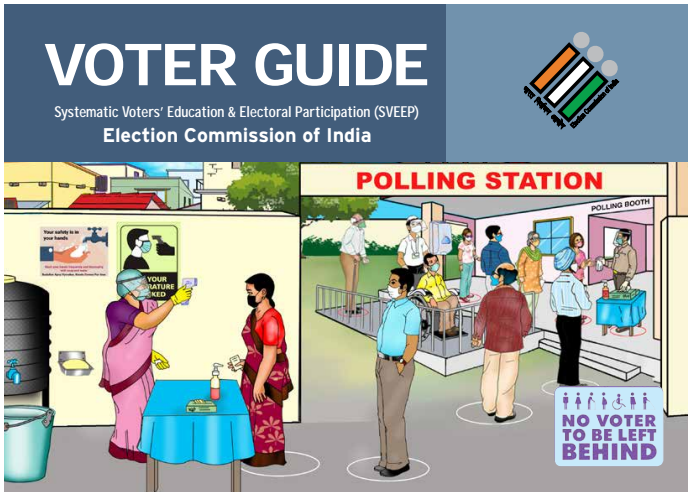
- Several earlier instructions of ECI had to undergo revision and fresh instructions issued.
- All election related processes and premises infused with standard norms of wearing of masks, social distancing, thermal scanners at entry points and thorough sanitization of places and equipment.
- As far as practicable, large size halls to be used for election related activities
 - Training to be organized in online mode and /or decentralized manner in large halls
 - Nodal Health Officer designated for each state, district and constituency to oversee COVID-19 related arrangements

The decision of reducing electors at polling stations from 1500 to 1000 will lead to additional 34,000 (approx.) polling stations in the upcoming Bihar elections (45% above the existing polling stations). This will lead to a massive logistical movement of 1.8 lakh polling personnel and resources for a total of 1,06,000 polling stations in Bihar for upcoming Legislative Assembly Elections.



Electors

- Number of electors in each polling station reduced from 1,500 to 1,000 to ensure social distancing and ease of voting for elderly and vulnerable electors



- Road Shows: The convoy of vehicles should be broken after every 5 (five) vehicles instead of 10
- Election meetings: Public gatherings/ rallies allowed subject to extant COVID-19 guidelines

Polling Station Arrangements

- Electors whose temperature was recorded above normal in two consecutive temperature checks, to vote at the last hour of poll with strict COVID-19 preventive measures
- Use of Booth App at Polling Stations
- Earmarking three queues each, for male, female, and PwD/Senior citizen voters
- Deployment of BLOs and volunteers

Candidate Nominations

- Number of persons to accompany candidate for nomination form submission reduced from 5 to 2
- Nomination form and Affidavit could now be filled up online may be submitted before the Returning Officer
- Provision for Candidates to Deposit Security Money online or deposit in cash in treasury
- Staggered timings for prospective candidates
- Number of vehicles allowed for nomination reduced from 3 to 2
- Candidates could seek their elector certification for nomination online

Non-compliance of Instructions – Anybody violating instructions on COVID-19 measures would be liable to be proceeded against as per the provisions of Section 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. Besides legal action under Section 188 of the IPC and other legal provisions as applicable. Measures were being adopted to ensure that instructions are complied with strictly.

to ensure adequate social distancing

- There shall be three queues each, for male, female, and PwD/Senior citizen voters
- A polling/counting agent to be relieved if he/ she has

Campaigning/ Political Parties

- Door to Door Campaign restricted to 5 (five) persons including candidate



- high temperature and record to be maintained by the Presiding Officer
- Hand gloves to be provided to the voter, for signing on the voter register and pressing the button of EVM for voting
- Help Desk for distribution of token to the voters on first come first basis so that they did not have to wait in the queue
- Voters would only be required to lower the facemask for identification
- COVID-19 patients who were quarantined would be allowed to cast their vote at the last hour of the poll day at their respective Polling Stations, under the supervision of health authorities, strictly following COVID-19 related preventive measures.

Postal Ballot Facility

Postal Ballot facility was introduced to strengthen the participation of senior citizens & PwDs. Following electors could avail the option of Postal Ballot facility:

- Electors, who are marked as Persons with Disabilities (PwD)
- Electors above the age of 80 years
- Electors employed in notified essential services



- Electors who were COVID-19 positive/suspect and in quarantine (home/institutional)

Counting of Votes

- Number of counting tables in a counting hall reduced from 14 to 7
- Display of result from Control Unit (EVM) on a large screen to avoid crowding by counting agents
- More halls were arranged for counting by appointing additional Assistant Returning Officers (AROs)
- For Postal Ballot Counting, more AROs were engaged so that counting in separate halls could be planned



Connecting to the Voters

Election Commission of India strives to give voters a hassle free voting experience. In view of the persistent situation of the pandemic, the prerogative was to ensure the safety of voters while securing their right to a democratic franchise.



- Mass gatherings and in-person contact were being avoided.
- Contact-free and digital mediums for all outreach activities i.e Television, Social Media etc were being preferred.
- Specialized awareness campaigns for contact free awareness and demonstration of EVM-VVPAT were being undertaken in order to strictly contain the spread, if any.
- Steps had been taken up to ensure wide dissemination of COVID-19 safety measures, election related information and to ensure adequate facilitation and safety measures for enhancing participation of people in polling.
- Reminder services on poll days had been planned.

- On the day of the poll, a voter would be able to see the number of people queued up in his/ her polling station by entering the EPIC number, wherever Booth App was being used. Considering the COVID norms of social distancing, a voter could plan his visit to the polling station accordingly.

Bihar State Legislative election (along with other Assembly by-elections) were the biggest exercises conducted during COVID-19 times, comprehensive guidelines with advance planning had been issued. Commission's relentless efforts and well designed implementation of safety measures marked an emphatic victory of electoral democracy over COVID-19 pandemic with a voter turnout of 57.05%, higher than the previous election.

Umesh Sinha, Editor-in-Chief, VoICE International; Secretary General, ECI

*Complete Guidelines are at <https://eci.gov.in/>

Elections conducted during COVID-19 in India

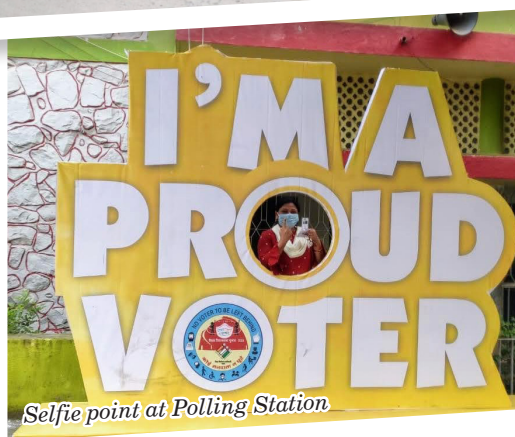
Snippets



Sanitisation team at polling booth



Social Distancing during SVEEP rally



Selfie point at Polling Station



Polling team wearing PPE Kit



Polling booth managed by Women



A PwD voter arriving to cast her vote

Elections conducted during COVID-19 in India

Snippets



Distributing gloves



Polling Team wearing PPE Kit



A PwD voter arriving to cast her vote



Voters' standing in marked circles to maintain social distancing



Hand Sanitisation at Polling Booth



Temperature check at Polling Booth



Strategies for Managing Elections in Pandemic

In an attempt to promote voter participation in the electoral process, The Independent Electoral Commission has employed a number of strategies to enhance knowledge of voters in democracy and elections. It included joining hands with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), political parties' youth league representatives as educators and training of different key stakeholders on the process. The motive was to get every eligible voter on board.

The Civic Education Programme was introduced as a Participatory Initiative for Social Accountability (PISA) with involvement of relevant government ministries.

Civic and Voter Education in Lesotho

To promote civic education, The Independent Electoral Commission together with all the partners established

a franchise model which will be used as a sustainable strategy for the programme. The model comprises of Independent Electoral

Commission as an overseer and the Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (LCN) as an implementing partner to providing civic education on the ground. IEC and LCN have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to clarify roles and responsibilities. Preparations for implementation of the model are in progress and, it will soon kick start.

The PISA programme has currently developed two curriculums: for adults and youth. All the member organisations of LCN are obliged to adhere to both of them. The role of LCN is to monitor the member organisations while IEC to monitor LCN.

The contents of the MOU include scope, areas of cooperation and collaboration, principles of MOU, obligations of two parties, structure and operating procedures. The sole responsibility of IEC is coordination of partnership framework, hosting of the programme, ensuring that LCN accounts, allocation of resources and reporting to PNSC. LCN on its part would forge synergy with member organisations providing civic education; ensure that they adhere to the curriculum and code of conduct, effective coordination and provision of technical and administrative support.

Engagement of member organisations was done through expression of interest. Interested members made their bids and they were selected according to the criteria that was set by GIZ.

The rationale behind the two parties working together was that IEC would be responsible for disseminating knowledge, understanding of sound democratic and electoral processes in Lesotho and would

receive. Funding from public funds. LCN is an umbrella body for non-governmental organisations, which is voluntarily building capacity of Basotho in

different areas of their livelihoods and gets funding from donors.

Franchise Civic Education Model

The Franchise model functions with the Programme National Steering Committee (PNSC) and Programme District Steering Committee. It comprises of; IEC, LCN,

Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture, National Assembly and Senate, as well as Non-Governmental Organisations; at national level. The plan was to start implementation in the month of June, 2020. However, it did not go as planned due to COVID-19; lock down and health risks.

At present, efforts to revise prior strategies are made through virtual meetings between GIZ, LCN and IEC to accommodate the new era of COVID-19. The model has revised activities into minimal community based, centre based, and Civil Society led dialogues, and maximise media-based, and other citizen participation mechanisms to maintain social distancing and other safety measures. Thus, there will be more radio, TV, social media-virtual and voice messages than face to face meetings. This will be happening from September, 2020 onwards, under the oversight role of IEC and it is fully funded by GIZ and European Union.

Dialogue on the report of low and declining voter turnout

Plans to hold the dialogue are currently in progress and the report has not been officially published. The reason for this dialogue is to ensure inclusivity in the planning and preparation of all mitigating activities and strategies recommended by the report, and come up with a viable, all inclusive, practical intervention incorporating all aspects and spheres of

democracy and elections in Lesotho in such a manner that no one is left out.

This is also going to adopt the strategy of virtual mode of dialogue and minimal physical interaction while discussing the findings and recommendations of the report. Participants of the dialogue will include IEC and its staff, political parties' representatives of Civil Society Organisations, Government Ministries, chiefs, Local Authorities, Institutions of higher learning, experts from elections, democracy and governance fields, development partners, and any other relevant partners. This will also complement the ongoing civic education

While PISA programme activities are implemented, the Independent Electoral Commission is also in the process of holding a multi-stakeholder dialogue to discuss and appreciate the report findings and recommendations on the study that it has recently completed on **'the reasons for low and declining voter turnout in Lesotho'**.

programme in the name of franchise PISA model under the leadership of IEC.

IEC coping during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 era, IEC has adopted the WHO guidelines and the decrees of the government of Lesotho. In addition, it has provided its staff with PPE (face masks, sanitizers, encouraged wearing of masks, frequent washing of hands as stated in the guidelines and maintaining social distance for minimising risks of being infected or infecting others. Besides, IEC staff is currently working in shifts to avoid rapid spreading of COVID-19 and holding virtual-webinar meetings to contain the spread of the virus.

Lydia Macheli, Civic & Voter Education Manager, Independent Electoral Commission



Malawi goes for Presidential Elections amidst Pandemic

Malawi conducted Presidential Polls on June 23, 2020 amidst Covid-19. The elections followed after a court ruling that nullified the 2019 elections conducted on February 3, 2020. It directed to conduct a fresh Presidential Election within 150 days. Following the strategy to conduct the election as also preventing the spread of the virus.

Announcement of the elections

It is a tradition to bring together electoral stakeholders (political parties, CSOs, Development Partners, Government Departments, Traditional Leaders, Security agencies) and announce the election. The Commission released the electoral calendar in a press briefing. The event was organized adhering to the health guidelines of the government.

MEC ceases voter registration during lockdown

Immediately after the launch, the Commission embarked on voter registration and voter register update exercise.

During the time, the government was evaluating options to contain the spread of the virus because of rising number of cases. Minister of Health and Population announced lockdown from April 18 to May

9, 2020. Therefore, Electoral Commission had to stop the first phase of voter registration. However, the Commission resumed the preparations for the elections after a court ruling against lockdown

Violations by political parties during campaign

Amidst strict observance of the Covid-19 preventive measures the Commission proceeded to receive nomination papers from aspiring candidates. Three candidates were found eligible and allowed to campaign.

The official campaign period run was from May 2 to June 21, 2020.

- Each polling station had a pail of water for voters to wash before they proceeded to vote.
- Voters were encouraged to bring their own personal protective gear like masks and hand sanitizer
- Voters were asked to queue two arms apart. Ushers were trained to control each queue
- Polling staff were also given hand sanitizers, masks among other wares

Adapting voter education and mobilisation

The Commission used several strategies to disseminate the information about election process. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, the

Commission abolished strategies which included events such as road shows and drama group performances. The Commission also modified the approach to public meetings with traditional leaders.

To adhere to the safety measures, only traditional leaders were invited and given the message to further spread it through various forums existing and events happening in the villages.



Electoral Commission officials at a tally center in Blantyre verifying votes from districts.

Measures on the polling day

Polling took place on June 23, 2020. Out of 6,859,570 registered voters, a total of 4,445,385 turned out to vote resulting in a 64.81% voter turnout. This was lower than the general elections held in 2019 with 74.44% turnout. The lower turnout percent could be a result of the trends from previous by-elections as well as the voters’ concerns about their safety.



President Peter Mutharika gets instructions on how to vote from a presiding officer, in Thyolo district.

The Commission implemented the following safety measures to prevent the spread the virus. COVID 19 safety measures were circulated on all public messages released by the communication including radio and television updates.

Absence of international observers

The Commission sent out invitation letters to International Observers including the European Union, African Union, and the SADC among others on June 12, 2020.

However due to travel bans and two week quarantine rule, international observers couldn’t come on board.

Impact on the elections budget

The Commission revisited its elections budget to cater for Covid-19 activities and amenities. The Commission had to procure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which were not included in the election budget as it was prepared before the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of \$1million was spent on this.

There were also extra payments for services such as transportation due to lack of availability of enough buses and other vehicles.



Residents line up to vote in Malawi’s election

Also, to comply with the social distancing rules training of the field staff were conducted in smaller batches, which further added to the overall cost of election.

Sangwani Mwafulirwa, Director
Malawi Electoral Commission



Training of Electoral Officials in Moldova amidst Pandemic

In Republic of Moldova, the first person tested positive of coronavirus was reported on March 7, 2020. After the successive assignment (starting with February 24) of the yellow, orange, and red code alert, on March 17, the Parliament established a national state of emergency for 60 days. After the cessation of the state of emergency, a state of emergency in public health was established, initially, for the period May 16 - June 30, 2020,

after which it was extended until August 31, 2020, with the possibility of repeated extension depending on the evolution of the epidemiological situation.

Electoral Process in 2020

Following is the status of the elections that were scheduled in the Republic of Moldova during the period of pandemic/ state emergency.

Date of Elections	Type	Locality	No. of Voters	Status
March 15, 2020	Parliamentary Elections in one single-member constituency (partial elections)	Hîncești district	61560	Held two days before state of emergency was established 14425 voters turned out to the vote
May 17, 2020	Local Elections in two localities (new elections)	Tîrnova village (Dondușeni district) Nucăreni village (Telenești district)	3090 831	Elections were postponed when state of emergency was established. Afterwards they were rescheduled for September 6, 2020. Now the process is running.
November 1, 2020	Presidential elections (ordinary national elections)	Countrywide	3286304 voters	The date of elections was established by the Parliament and the electoral process was supposed to start on August 15, 2020.

The current legislation of the Republic of Moldova does not provide any alternative voting methods such as early voting, postal voting, or Internet voting. There are two voting options available as of now:

- Voting in person at the polling station
 - Voting with a mobile ballot box
- Both options involve direct contact of election officials with the voters and generate a series of challenges for election administration.

Safety measures

For the New Parliamentary Elections in Hincesti district held on March 15, 2020, the electoral officials were staffed with masks, gloves, and sanitizers. CEC approved hygiene protocols and also instructed lower level EMB to respect social distance (1 meter) and other key measures. It was worth mentioning that no increase in COVID-19 cases were observed after E-day.

CEC developed an anti-COVID management plan for September local elections and November presidential elections. It provided for safety measures for electoral officials, other electoral stakeholders, and voters for Electoral Period, Election Day, counting and tabulation process. Procedural and operational documents were produced in consultation with public health authorities and in line with WHO recommendations.

CEC anticipates an increase of around 10% of the election budget for equipping the polling stations with anti-COVID equipment and disinfectants.

To gain from the international experience, CICDE initiated a series of engagement activities with other EMBs. In May and August 2020, CICDE developed a Policy brief³, 2 podcasts and 5 Facebook lives⁴ with experts from countries that organized or intend to organize elections in 2020.

Electoral Training

In Moldova, the training of electoral officials (members and staff of District election commissions and Polling election bureaus) is conducted by Center for Continuous Electoral Training (CICDE)². The Center develops training programs and information materials for election officials and other electoral stakeholders. CICDE uses modern teaching strategies adapted to the learning needs of adults. This includes small group exercises, role-play, simulations, case studies and a interaction between participants. In quarantine, CICDE had to cancel or

reinvent many of its activities.

For 2020 Presidential Elections, CICDE adopted a new approach to the training of electoral officials.

A special video graphic for polling staff, showing the anti-COVID measures approved by CEC, would be used for training purposes. Other stakeholders such as observers, representatives of electoral competitors, collectors of signatures, voter's lists responsible etc. will also be advised to follow one of CICDE e-learning courses or to register for CICDE online seminars.

Dr. Arina Kraijdan & Dr. Doina Bordeianu,
Deputy Director, Central Electoral Commission

Snap Story India



Chronological Analysis of COVID-19 on Elections

The novel coronavirus disease COVID-19 impacted our individual and collective lives and rights to an extent never experienced before. Since the beginning of 2020, when COVID-19 became a global pandemic, the responses of countries all over the world have differed substantively, with serious implications for the democratic environment.

Recognising at an early stage the challenges this crisis may pose to elections worldwide and as an essential element for the stability of democratic societies, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) initiated a research project meant to monitor the global impact of COVID-19 on elections.

With different types of elections scheduled for 2020 and the responsibility of shaping the future of their countries for the years to come, authorities in many parts of the world found themselves in a quandary. The situation facing them was deciding whether to hold elections as initially planned or postpone them, without proper interagency collaboration and consultation mechanisms in place, with limited resources, no contingency plans and face a deficit of trust.

In the described landscape, the timing and sequencing equation had become more complex. Pressing for elections in the face of a public health threat could be dangerous, could

decrease turnout, and therefore undermine the legitimacy of elected officials. Likewise, postponing elections may be perceived as an effort to derail democracy.

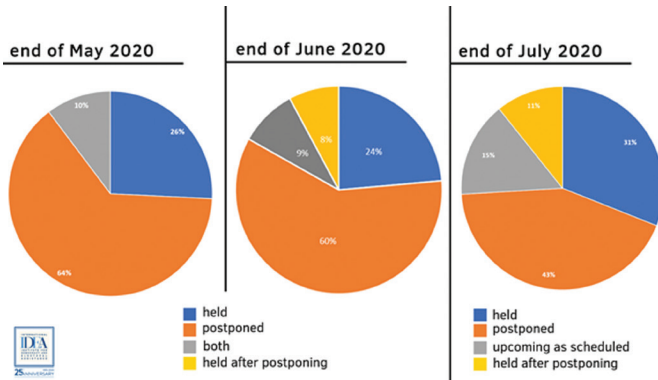
The decisions of governments all over the world varied from indefinitely postponing the polls (Armenia, Ethiopia, Peru) to holding them as initially planned (Israel, Japan, Malaysia), and more recently to holding elections that had been previously postponed (France, Poland, Sri Lanka, Serbia) or even deciding on a second postponement (Bolivia).

The predominant tendency identified at the beginning of the crisis was to postpone the polls without setting a new date. However, a majority of the countries (more than 70%) that did reschedule the elections, established a day in the second part of the year, thus adding them to the other polls initially planned for this period.

Although there had been cases of elections where no health and safety measures were implemented (Vanuatu in Mach and Kiribati in April), most of the countries and territories that decided to go ahead with the polls amid COVID-19 have held elections with a wide range of risk mitigation measures in place (the Dominican Republic, the Republic of Korea, Singapore) and

through implementing special voting arrangements or scaling up the existing ones (the German state of Bavaria). The measures meant to minimize the health

In conflict affected areas, holding regular and predictable elections is vital for the local and even regional stability, as stated in International IDEA's analysis for Peace Lab, based on Institute's research of the current evolutions worldwide, the key points for electoral administrators, governments and civil society organizations on administering elections, on previous comparative studies on elections in crisis situations, timing as sequencing in elections and its Electoral Risk Management Tool.



risk and ensure a safe voting environment during the pandemic led to an increase in the cost of elections, while in some countries the electoral management bodies (EMBs) are already facing funding cuts due to the economic impact of COVID-19 crisis.

Thus, the decisions on whether to hold or postpone elections should be the result of a comprehensive assessment of all the implications across the entire electoral cycle, according to the recommendations made in International IDEA’s Policy Brief: Managing Elections during the COVID-19

Pandemic Considerations for Decision-makers.

Moreover, the first Technical Paper on Elections and COVID-19 by International IDEA emphasizes that decisions must be made to ensure democratic institutions function as they ordinarily would do,

The Republic of Korea was one of the first countries to hold elections amid the COVID-19 pandemic and International IDEA documented in its second Technical Paper the response of the country in the face of the virus threat, the national political context and the measures implemented by the authorities to ensure a safe voting environment. They included mail voting, early voting, preventive safety measures at polling stations such as temperature screening, social distancing, masks and gloves, staggered voting times. A code of conduct was elaborated and widely disseminated by the electoral authorities to inform the voters about the new procedures.

during extraordinary times, such as the outbreak of a global health pandemic. It offers an initial overview of key points for electoral administrators, governments and civil society organizations on administering elections amid the continued spread of COVID-19.

However, the last minute implementation of special voting arrangements with the aim of ensuring the organization of inclusive elections in times of pandemic, provides a favourable ground for manipulation and disinformation, in the context of an audience already overwhelmed by the huge amount of data and information- often contradictory- it is permanently exposed to,

as it is mentioned in International IDEA’s Communication guidelines for EMBs during COVID-19 crisis. The issue reaches its most worrying point when false information, related to thistype of measures, is widely spread by state leadership entities, generating even more confusion among the population.

The countries that have managed these pandemic elections well – like South Korea – not only had excellent logistics, but also suitable communication strategies and consultation and collaboration mechanisms between agencies and enjoyed areasonable level of trust among the voting community.

Antonio Spinelli, Senior Advisor
International IDEA



Preserving Electoral Integrity during an Infodemic

As election authorities work to conduct elections safely during the COVID-19 pandemic, their efforts may be undermined if the information space around elections is inadequately defended. Changes to election procedures due to COVID-19 in particular may provide fertile ground for information manipulation that can disenfranchise or endanger voters. Viral misinformation, hate speech and disinformation-laced influence impact the information environment around COVID-19, with implications for electoral integrity, trust in democracy and the protection of fundamental human rights, including political rights.

The proliferation of information about COVID-19 has created what the World Health Organization (WHO) terms an infodemic, in which individuals struggle to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it. While the overabundance and varying reliability of COVID-19 information has broad implications for public health. It also impacts the ability

to conduct elections with integrity during these unprecedented times. Public safety necessitates a range of alterations to election processes and procedures. The combination of significant changes to once-familiar voting processes and increased difficulty identifying reliable information, creating an environment vulnerable to misunderstanding and manipulation.

In the context of elections, the information challenges stemming from the proliferation of COVID-19 content are only adding to the pre-existing challenges to mitigating misinformation, disinformation and hate speech. In addition to misinformation – which by definition is incorrect information generated without the intent to deceive – domestic and foreign actors are using COVID-19 disinformation and hate speech for political advantage and to amplify anti-democratic sentiment.

Disinformation is false or misleading information that is created or disseminated with the intent to cause harm or to benefit the perpetrator. The intent to cause harm may be directed toward individuals, groups, institutions or processes.

Misinformation is false or misleading information that is shared without the intent to cause harm or realization that it is incorrect. In some cases, actors may unknowingly perpetuate the spread of disinformation by sharing content they believe to be accurate among their networks.

Hate Speech is ‘Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.’ (United Nations)



IFES designed an initiative to strengthen the digital literacy of educators and students in response to disinformation and false narratives around COVID-19.

require voters to learn new information. In this environment, traditional voter suppression tactics may become harder for voters to discern. Mistakes and irregularities in election administration, which are likely to increase due to new procedures, may spawn narratives of widespread fraud. Additionally, bad actors may stoke COVID-19 fears to disrupt voter registration, turnout or welection processes.

Major Findings & Recommendations

Lessons learned from the ways in which misinformation, disinformation and hate speech have played out in previous electoral contexts are used to anticipate how COVID-19 may alter and heighten these harms.

- Implications for the Integrity of the Campaign Period: With limited avenues for campaigning during the pandemic, parties and candidates are likely to move online to reach and mobilize voters. As a result, ongoing efforts to expand social media monitoring and oversight have taken on new urgency.
- Implications for the Integrity of Electoral Administration and Operations: Fundamental changes to established election processes will

In April, it organized a two-part webinar titled, “Disinformation and Pandemic: How to Protect Yourself From Manipulation on the Internet,” for its network of 30 partner universities throughout Ukraine. The webinar provided educators with an understanding of current models of digital content dissemination and consumption, and prepared educators with practical tips to identify false narratives and disinformation during the pandemic.

- Implications for the Post-Electoral Period: Disinformation about heightened infection rates after an election could create perceptions elsewhere that elections cannot be conducted safely. Additionally, misinformation or disinformation that capitalizes on mistakes due to changing procedures to amplify narratives of fraud could lead to politically motivated attempts to undermine electoral integrity, delegitimize results or launch frivolous legal challenges.
- Implications for Democratic Integrity: Governments have passed a number of restrictive laws to curb misinformation, disinformation and hate speech related to COVID-19. These laws are an extension of an existing global trend of heavy-handed legislating, in which

policymakers seek to criminalize problematic content in ways that undermine freedoms of expression and the press. These laws are often applied in a partisan manner that politically advantages incumbent parties and politicians.

In light of these challenges, there are a number of overarching recommendations.

Election management bodies (EMBs) should focus on protecting voter participation and inclusion through proactive communication strategies that publicly share accurate, timely information and increase voters' understanding of new processes and procedures. EMBs should also develop crisis communication plans and consider linking traditional and social media communication channels with public health authorities.

Social media platforms should ensure that content constituting election interference and hate speech, as defined in their community standards and guidelines, is prioritized for review and effective action. They should also continuously integrate diverse feedback into how these violations are defined. Platforms should continue working with EMBs and public health authorities to widely disseminate trusted public health and election information.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) should increase their monitoring activities to enhance transparency and accountability of public officials and institutions and to counter hate-speech messaging and disinformation.

Political parties and candidates should commit to running campaigns free of hate speech and disinformation, proactively comply with disclosure requirements for political advertising on social media and campaign finance rules and build

messaging responsive to COVID-19 into their voter outreach plans.

International donors and technical assistance providers should discourage legislation or regulations that criminalize misinformation, disinformation and hate speech in ways that disproportionately threaten freedoms of

expression and the press, while supporting legal and regulatory reforms that protect marginalized groups and promote inclusion.

Lisa Reppell, Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz & Vasu Mohan, International Foundation for Electoral Systems

Snap Story France



Inclusion & Meaningful Participation amidst COVID-19

With cases of COVID-19 virus confirmed in at least 200 countries and territories worldwide at the time of writing, enormous attention is being paid globally to managing the pandemic's impacts on public health and the economy. Less visible are the implications for the individuals and communities living with deeply entrenched and systemic discrimination who have been impacted the hardest. The pandemic has heightened existing inequalities for all traditionally marginalized groups; Women, people with disabilities, young people, older people, internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, migrant workers, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people, Indigenous people, and ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, are uniquely at risk during the pandemic and in its aftermath, facing economic inequalities, barriers to access to health care and discrimination. All of these outcomes in turn exacerbate existing barriers or create new challenges to equal participation in political life. Further, people who identify with more than one marginalized social group – such as Indigenous women with disabilities, minority youth or LGBTQ refugees – face

additional intersectional barriers and compounded discrimination.

Inclusion and democracy are symbiotic: A government that delivers for all, facilitates meaningful participation in political and public life by those on the margins of society.

Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) explicitly states that, during times of emergency, states may not take measures that involve discrimination solely on the ground of race, colour, sex, language, religion or social origin. Elections during

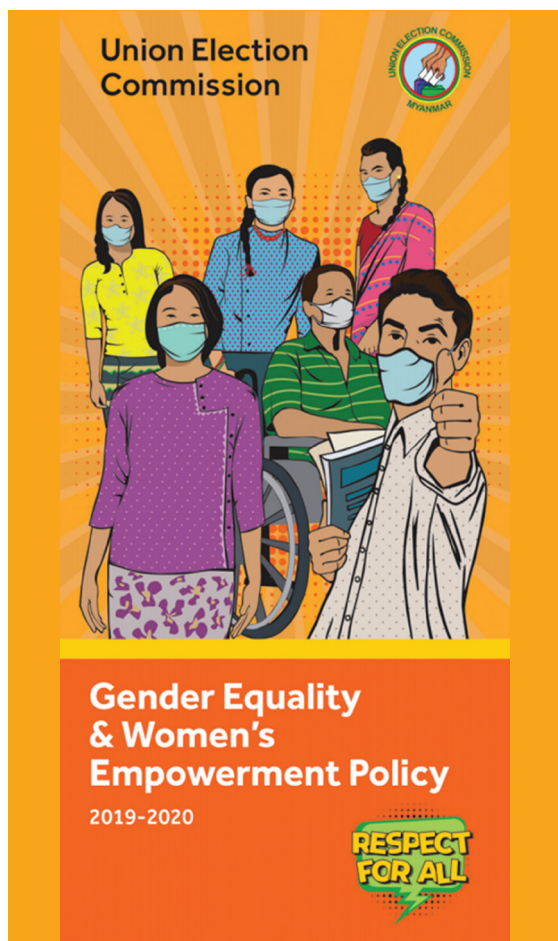
a pandemic present a specific challenge to electoral decision-makers – they require careful planning, risk mitigation and significant operational adjustments. During a crisis such as COVID-19, it is even more essential that electoral and political decision-makers protect the integrity of the democratic process

IFES has partnered with the Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI) to train young Nigerian volunteers to track incidents of human rights violations and gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the 2019 general elections. Through Zoom and a WhatsApp group, KDI trained young volunteers to use a checklist for collating and documenting incidents. KDI leaders intend to use the data collected to bring policymakers' attention to the increased gender-based violence and human rights violations during the pandemic and call on authorities to address these incidents.

by taking steps to increase inclusivity and protect the democratic rights of marginalized communities.

Major Findings & Recommendations

While it is always best practice for electoral decision-makers and political leadership



Gender equality pamphlet, including COVID-19 awareness, developed by the Union Election Commission in Myanmar, with the support of IFES

to closely consult with marginalized communities throughout the electoral process, it is even more essential to do so during pandemics and other crises else that can exacerbate inequalities. While governments and electoral leaders must make every effort to ensure that all electoral actors can participate safely in an election during a health crisis, electoral

“During this time of social distancing and stay-at-home orders, people with disabilities are at the greatest risk of human rights violation, being subjected to violence and hate speech. As we are to stay-at-home, I’m using social media, particularly Facebook, to advocate on behalf of young people with disabilities.” – Nayem Molla, disability rights advocate with IFES’ Students Against Violence Everywhere program in Bangladesh 51

decision-makers must ensure that efforts to keep people safe do not further exclude and infringe upon the political rights of those already facing exclusion and discrimination. They also must make sure that these efforts are well communicated to voters, particularly voters facing marginalization, so that they feel confident going to the polls and trust that the election management body (EMB) is doing everything it can to protect their health while they exercise their right to vote.

These findings are directed at EMBs, other elected and appointed officials, the international community and civil society organizations (CSOs), and include recommendations to:

- Acknowledge and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and other crises on marginalized populations and their ability to exercise their political and electoral rights.
- Recognize the critical role that civil society groups representing marginalized communities play in effective health responses and successful electoral events.
- Consult with representatives of marginalized communities and include a diversity of experiences and voices at all stages of assessment, planning and implementation of electoral processes and modifications during the pandemic.
- Put in place measures that will ensure that people can still participate in elections freely, independently and secretly.

- Design information campaigns to ensure that everyone can receive important electoral and political information in understandable and accessible formats.

While a pandemic undoubtedly creates

To collect information on the unique challenges women with disabilities and youth with disabilities face in the context of COVID-19, IFES, in partnership the Pacific Disability Forum, implemented a short survey to distribute to its regional networks in the Pacific via email and Facebook. Survey results indicated that nearly all participants are relying on technology, particularly smartphones and radio, to access information on COVID-19. The survey also revealed that people with disabilities are more likely to use social media apps to communicate than those without a disability.

obstacles to participation, it also presents opportunities to build back better for more inclusive societies, boost resilience before the next crisis and increase trust in the electoral process.

Virginia Atkinson, Meredith Applegate & Rebecca Aaberg

International Foundation for Electoral System

Snap Story Russia



A woman casts her vote in the 2020 Russian constitutional referendum at a polling station in Amur Oblast in Russia's east.



A man casts his vote at a ballot box in the village of Lugovoye.



A woman voting at a polling station



Legal Considerations when Delaying or Adapting Elections

Periodic elections underpin the legitimacy of governments and ensure that power can be preserved or transferred based explicitly on the will of the governed. This foundational principle for democratic systems of governance is being challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, the primary response of 57 countries and five territories to the pandemic has been to postpone elections, some indefinitely. Such election postponements may not be clearly provided for or even contemplated in the law, making the decision to delay or cancel an election complex. These decisions are also usually beset with political controversy; this does not argue for a political solution to a legal problem, but it does require a consideration of the political and social context and reinforces the importance of transparency and consultation.

In addition, as focus moves globally toward pandemic recovery (versus response), countries are grappling with modifications to allow electoral processes to move forward safely. When such changes are considered, careful thought must be given to the legal framework underpinning elections to ensure that imperative operational changes do not undermine election rules or set negative precedents.

In **New Zealand**, it is possible to postpone elections, but only with a supermajority. As New Zealand does not have a written Constitution, term limits are set out in the electoral legislation, which provides that general elections must take place every three years. Accordingly, the last possible date for an election in 2020 is November 21. However, these legislative provisions could be amended by a 75 percent parliamentary majority, as occurred once during World War I and twice during World War II.

Occasionally, a country's legal framework may provide for continuity of government beyond a mandated term, but in many other cases it is silent. At the same time, international law allows for the derogation of some rights – including the right to vote and stand for election – in emergency situations, albeit with very strict guardrails to prevent abuse. Where emergency measures conflict with constitutional deadlines, pressure to move ahead with an election may imperil public health and limit participation, or risk a constitutional crisis.

Beyond the postponement of elections, many countries are considering modifications to how elections are conducted, including – but not limited to – introducing or expanding postal voting. Discussions around internet voting have also gained momentum. In some cases, only simple modifications may be required: for example, to the calendar for elections or to basic procedural aspects such as queue control. However, more complex alterations to the electoral process may necessitate a variety of legal amendments. Where

modifications are being considered, careful thought must therefore be given to the electoral legal framework underpinning elections, and the integrity of the entire process – both real and perceived.

The responsibility for making these difficult decisions varies by country and can become fraught, especially where the legal basis for postponement or modifications is not entirely clear. Additional constitutional interpretation may be needed by the courts or whichever body has the authority to determine constitutional questions. It is inevitable in some contexts that decisions to postpone or modify elections will become politicized and heavily contested. Partisan actors are likely to challenge these decisions in the courts, with varying motivations. Unfortunately, there is no clear body of law to guide judicial decision-making and support reasonable and fair remedies that protect both democracy and public health.

Major Findings & Recommendations

Legal amendments in a crisis situation present both risks and opportunities. The potential for emergency power to be abused for political gain cannot be understated. To guard against this risk, it is important to understand the different types of electoral integrity vulnerabilities, and ensure these vulnerabilities are not introduced or exacerbated through election postponement or emergency amendments. The table below sets out key international principles, good practice and legal considerations to guide decision-making on election postponements and modifications.

Survey

Innovations for Successful Societies, a research program affiliated with the Princeton School for Public and International Affairs, invites election commission officials and election management body officials to participate in a global survey on national efforts to defend against disinformation in electoral processes.

This survey asks you for several facts about how your electoral management body handles disinformation related to the voting process. It takes around 10 minutes to complete.

The results of the survey will support development of management case studies or other tools aimed at strengthening electoral integrity.

Your participation is an opportunity for your organization to showcase its work, and the results will allow your organization to reference global best practices to better counter disinformation in elections.

Please take the survey at this link: https://princetonsurvey.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9XfJo2RXy1hbVml and please forward this link to colleagues in electoral management bodies.

Thank you from the principal investigators, Professor Jennifer Widner, Senior Visiting Lecturer Jeff Fischer, and Program Associate Gordon LaForge



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Survey Research Center

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this project on addressing election disinformation. This survey asks you for several facts about how your electoral management body handles disinformation about the voting process. It takes about 8 to 10 minutes to complete.

Please write the name of your country and institution.

Country

Institution

Does your country have a law regulating content on social media platforms?

- Definitely yes
- We have draft regulations that have not yet become law.
- Definitely no
- Don't know/not sure



Figure 1: Key International Principles, Good Practice and Legal Considerations

Election Postponements	Election Modifications
<p>International Principles and Good Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any decision to postpone elections should be transparent, consultative and inclusive • Any measures that derogate political and electoral rights in emergency situations must be necessary, proportional, nondiscriminatory, temporary, limited in scope and clearly communicated. • Any postponement to periodic elections should be limited in duration and focus on the minimum time needed to prepare for and ensure safe elections, with broad-based political agreement if possible, to ensure the restoration of rights. 	<p>International Principles and Good Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any amendment process must be consultative and inclusive. • Any measures that derogate political and electoral rights in emergency situations must be necessary, proportional, nondiscriminatory, temporary, limited in scope and clearly communicated. • International standards set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other conventions should be protected. • Legal certainty and stability must be preserved. • Rules must be clear and precise, and amendments clearly communicated.
<p>Key Legal Issues to Consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there rules on term limits and electoral deadlines, where do these reside, and how can these be legally modified or temporarily overridden via use of emergency provisions? • Are there legal or constitutionally mandated deadlines for transfers of power? • Are there legal provisions for continuity of power or for caretaker governments, and are these applicable? • Which body has legal authority for setting and/or moving election dates? • Are there provisions for decision-making if the laws are silent on election postponements? 	<p>Key Legal Issues to Consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there flexibility in the law regarding methods of carrying out election processes? • Are there timelines set in the legal framework for key electoral processes? • What are the specific processes and timelines for legal or regulatory amendment? • Does the election management body (EMB) have statutory authority to develop by-laws, regulations and procedures? • Is there an electoral code of conduct? • Are there provisions in the legal or regulatory framework requiring transparency, inclusion, disability access and consultation?

Katherine Ellena

International Foundation Electoral System



Election Considerations in Pacific during an Infodemic

While COVID-19 has thrown up several challenges the influx of accurate and inaccurate information has created a global ‘infodemic’. Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech have made it difficult to find trustworthy sources. This has created particular challenges for Election Management Bodies (EMBs) adapting election processes to mitigate health risks for both voters and poll workers. As they work to conduct elections safely during the pandemic, their efforts may be undermined if the information space around elections is inadequately defended.

In partnership with the Fijian Elections Office, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) co-hosted a webinar series to inform EMBs, civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders in the Pacific region on best practices for conducting elections during the public health crisis. Moving forward with an election can lead to possible risk of infection for voters and poll workers, low voter turnout and credibility issues. This series aimed at providing local stakeholders with information to mitigate the potential risks involved when conducting an election during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first two webinars covered were ‘*Safeguarding Health and Elections*’ and ‘*Legal Considerations When Delaying or Adapting Elections*’.

For the third webinar, Global Social Media and Disinformation Specialist Lisa Reppell and Regional Director for Asia-Pacific Vasu Mohan presented IFES’ third paper in its COVID-19 briefing series, *Preserving Electoral Integrity During an Infodemic*, co-authored with

Regional Director for Europe and Eurasia Beata Martin-Rozumilowicz. Panelists highlighted how viral misinformation; disinformation and hate speech by domestic and foreign actors can impact COVID-19 information, electoral integrity and trust in democracy. While many tactics predate COVID-19, domestic and foreign actors can now leverage the pandemic to sow confusion, increase polarization and push anti-democratic narratives to further personal or geopolitical agendas.

Due to the inability to gather in person, many campaigns have shifted online, where there are few legal or regulatory frameworks in place to oversee the use of social media in elections and monitor campaign finance. While countries work to establish these frameworks, civil society and journalists can assist the public in identifying malign or malicious actors. Social media platforms are expanding their transparency tools to more regions, which will provide more data on content’s origin and track spending.

Proactive EMB messaging is needed to ensure voters understand what to expect around polling locations, mail-in ballots and eliminate voter suppression. This includes crisis communication planning, which should be able to address and counter problematic narratives swiftly, coordinate with other government agencies and work with social media platforms to report and remove problematic information.

Mohan went on to highlight’ initiatives in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. These programs work closely with CSOs, such as youth and health organizations, to identify, analyse and counter messages that challenge information integrity.



POST-ELECTORAL PERIOD

- Influence perception of election solely in other countries
- Capitalize on mistakes to amplify narratives of fraud
- Results defegitimise Recommendations



Lisa Reppell presents her paper on “Preserving Electoral Integrity During an Infodemic.”

By building capacity, IFES helps CSOs identify the information’s origin and formulate a targeted counter response to address issues key to maintaining electoral integrity.

Fijian Election

Office Public Relations and Engagement Coordinator Neelam Prasad provided more context around COVID-19 and elections. As society tries to understand the erosion of information integrity, it is important to examine the known and unknown. When the pandemic struck, little was known about the virus. This allowed rumors and unverified sources to fill the information void, and social media became a primary source of information for citizens. Prasad shared that Facebook informed the BBC News that it had removed hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 misinformation.

We have to come to terms with the fact that with technological advancements and the surge in the use of handheld devices, social media platforms will continue to be a primary source of information for millions of people.

In March and April alone, Facebook put warning labels on 19 million posts related to COVID-19 globally, preventing 95 percent of viewers from accessing misinformation.

Online citizen journalism thrives in Fiji, where mainstream media is working hard to combat misinformation, disinformation and hate speech by dedicating a daily segment to COVID-19. All information shared is easy to understand and comes from verified sources like the World Health Organization, a model that can be transferred to elections. By using EMBs as verified sources, the mainstream media can relay information on electoral process changes and public health measures to voters and poll workers.

Following the presentations, participants discussed the infodemic’s impact in the Pacific region. Papua New Guinea Electoral

Commissioner Patilias Gamato shared how Papua New Guinea was adapting local elections in rural versus urban environments to ensure voters and poll works remain safe. Another area of concern for participants was preserving freedom of speech while addressing misinformation. Reppell suggested that freedom of speech was different from freedom of reach. Social media platforms are working on algorithms and infrastructure to ensure accurate content can be widely disseminated and inaccurate information cannot. Another area of concern is the platforms’ language

capabilities. Posts written in widely spoken languages are much more likely to be flagged by transparency tools, whereas misinformation, disinformation or hate speech in local dialects can slip through monitoring systems.

Caption of the picture below: During a webinar on Preserving Electoral Integrity During an Infodemic, Papua New Guinea Electoral Commissioner Patilias Gamato provides an update on COVID-19 in his country.



The webinar series is made possible through the support of the United States Agency for International Development, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Snap Story Taiwan



Hillary Hanson, International Foundation for Electoral Systems



Safeguarding Health Elections amidst COVID-19

Elections usually involve large, nationwide gatherings, not only on Election Day but also, for example, during campaign rallies and voter registration drives. Few election management bodies (EMBs) have comprehensive plans in place to manage these activities amid widespread disease outbreaks. This has proven to be the case with COVID-19, which has, to this date, forced the postponement of national and sub national elections in nearly 60 countries and territories. Several EMBs that did decide to move forward with elections amid the crisis largely failed to address public concerns about health, leading to low voter turnouts, credibility issues, poll worker dropouts and even the infection of some electoral officials.

As EMBs have limited time and resources to acquire supplies and incorporate new procedures to their processes, it is essential that risk-mitigation efforts are part of an overarching strategy that ensures optimization of resources and is informed by a contextualized COVID-19 risk assessment. If well executed, these measures can significantly mitigate the risk of virus transmission and reasonably reduce people's fear of infection during electoral processes, which otherwise could drastically reduce voter turnout and undermine the legitimacy of results.

The introduction of new procedures and technologies might engender suspicion, especially in polarized environments where one or more parties might benefit from undermining the legitimacy of the process. Transparency of information and support to the public as they learn the new methods are thus crucial for the acceptance of results.

Decisions regarding whether and how to hold various electoral activities will be more successful if they:

- Are informed by comprehensive risk assessments developed in coordination with competent public health authorities;
- Accommodate the perspectives of political parties and civil society representing the full spectrum of constituencies in the country; and
- Are based on a common understanding of all of the risks involved in holding elections amid the crisis.

Major Findings & Recommendations

According to the current available evidence from the WHO and CDC, the main form of transmission of the COVID-19 virus is person-to-person via viral droplets, but the virus can also be transmitted through indirect contact with fomites, which are objects or surfaces contaminated by the virus. Given these specific methods of transmission of the coronavirus, the following recommendations should apply to all electoral activities:

- Communicate and coordinate with competent public health authorities on risk analysis, decision-making, planning and effective implementation

- of risk-mitigation strategies
- Prevent or mitigate person-to-person interaction: Enforce safe physical distance, respiratory hygiene, use of personal protective equipment (PPE); when possible, adopt secure remote tools and mechanisms
- Prevent or mitigate the contamination of common surfaces and objects: Enforce the use of PPE such as face masks and respiratory hygiene; when possible, adopt touchless mechanisms
- Prevent or mitigate individuals' exposure to contaminated surfaces or objects: Encourage hand sanitization; discourage touching of mouth, nose, and eyes; frequently disinfect surfaces and objects used by multiple people; enforce use of PPE; when possible, adopt touchless mechanisms.

In addition, EMBs would benefit from considering the following recommendations for each electoral activity:

Electoral Activity & Additional Considerations

Electoral and Resource Planning

- When postponing elections, ensure compliance with legal provisions; conduct scenario planning to schedule elections as soon as possible, and make necessary adjustments to the operational calendar and budget; frequently communicate updates to the public
- When scheduling elections, consider disease spread, stage of outbreak, capacity of health care system and structure, weather/season
- Adjust processes and procedures to reduce transmission risks; identify and procure extraordinary or additional material, equipment and supplies; hire extraordinary or additional staff; monitor potential supply chain disruptions
- Secure funds for additional material, equipment, personnel and processes; prioritize needs and optimize resources with the highest mitigating power

Electoral Campaign

- Streamline COVID-19 messaging and instructions with political parties, candidates, civil society and media; develop codes of conduct or incorporate COVID-19 issues in existing codes
- Provide instructions on health precautions for public rallies, debates and other gatherings
- Adopt or expand access fairly to the media and other methods for remote campaigning

Voter Education

- Provide clear, accessible and frequent information to voters about COVID-19, its modes of transmission, and ways of combating it; follow best practices in health literacy (short messages that use active voice, familiar words and culturally relevant visuals)
- Provide clear, accessible and frequent information to citizens about new electoral procedures and how to comply with them
- Address disease-related disinformation and hate speech against at-risk and marginalized groups

Recruitment and Training of Poll Workers and Other Staff

- Where possible, use online platforms to receive and review staff applications; for in-person

- recruitment, use facilities with sufficient space to allow for required physical distance; encourage hand sanitization and use of face masks by recruiters and interviewees
- Release at-risk individuals and health care workers from poll-worker duty
- Incorporate COVID-19 information in training content especially modes of transmission and preventive measures
- Incorporate instructions regarding new procedures adopted due to COVID-19
- Select training locations with sufficient space to allow for sufficient physical distance and ensure hand-sanitization protocols and relevant PPE are available for all participants during training sessions
- Ensure inclusivity and accessibility of new online and remote training options
- For online training, incorporate mechanisms to ensure successful completion

Voter Registration, Candidate Registration, Ballot Casting, Vote Count and Results Management

- Select locations with sufficient space to allow for sufficient physical distance; locations should be far from areas where at-risk groups reside, although alternative measures should be taken to ensure participation of these groups
- Reduce number of individuals at facility at the same time: expand number of days or locations; assign groups to specific slots
- Develop and enforce COVID-19 risk-mitigating protocols for queuing, building entry and exit
- Prominently and publicly display COVID-19 information
- Provide sufficient hand-sanitization stations
- Encourage voters to bring and use their own pens
- Develop protocols for touch less identity verification
- Designate area for filling out forms complying with physical distance requirement
- Organize desks and chairs to comply with required distance for election officials, observers, party agents and media representatives; remove multiperson seating and other unnecessary objects from facilities; install plexiglass or other translucent shields for desks and counters across which voters and election officials interact
- Contact equipment vendors and manufacturers to obtain proper cleaning and disinfecting instructions
- Collect and dispose of waste material safely
- For mail-in forms and ballots, use self-sealing envelopes where possible
- Ensure inclusivity and accessibility of online and remote options
- Domestic and International Election Observation and Party Agents: While no eligible citizen should be deprived of the right to serve in elections as observers, in extraordinary circumstances like a public health crisis, release at-risk individuals and health care workers from being observers or party agents or warn them of all risks involved in participation
- For accreditation process, follow same precautions as Voter Registration, Candidate Registration and Ballot Casting

Fernanda Buriel, Staffan Darnolf, IFES Muluken Aseresa, Management Sciences for Health (MSH)

International Experiences in Conducting Elections during COVID-19

History would remember the year 2020 as the year of COVID-19 in the chronicle of mankind, with a catastrophic invasion by a microbe that disrupted human life, induced a sense of fear, uncertainty and vulnerability of a large scale.

Unveiled towards the closing days of the year 2019, COVID-19 and its fear gripped the world by end of the first quarter, 2020. Fast spread of infection and the related mortality rates evolved into a full blown disaster with a pace which most of the nations did not expect or know well enough, how to respond to infections and deaths are being closely monitored by the WHO.

By the time you read this article the figures would have changed significantly.

Impact on Electoral Democracy

The democratic governance model has long been under stress from factors such as social media, fake news, information technology driven challenges that allegedly influence elections besides, external geopolitical threats from resilient authoritarian actors. But COVID-19 has set up a new kind of stress test. It brought into question globalization, democratic decision making, reliability of science and information and the ability of the democratic model to cope with disaster management.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as such, has presented politicians and election management bodies (EMBs) around the world with complex options that include unprecedented challenges to election

management across the world in the year 2020. It could be in terms of logistics, costs, training and elector confidence, legislative and legal complexities besides issues relating to electoral integrity in many countries. More than a hundred elections have been postponed in different countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has called into question many aspects of electoral and political life beyond the act of voting. Campaigns and conventions, the essence of socio-political action, have been forced to go virtual, limiting the traditional campaigns. These virtual campaigns, at many places, face complaints of misuse by the party in power.

The Successful Players

Yet, there are over 51 elections that have been successfully conducted in different countries as scheduled or with adjustments. For this purpose, they have developed robust COVID-19 safety protocols, well harmonized with their legislative instruments on; public health and safety on one hand and the law relating to elections on the other. Every country has its own socio-political, legal and legislative framework as also the public safety environment and the legal framework on COVID protection. Seamless harmonization of all these aspects along with proper planning and execution of the electoral process leads to the success story.

The International Organizations such as International IDEA, A-WEB and IFES etc have risen to the occasion and played their leadership role right from day one.

Social and Preventive Measures for containing COVID-19

Preventive and safety measures for common man are built around fundamental points comprised of; effective social distancing, avoiding person to person physical contact, frequent sanitization, disinfection, wearing masks, gloves and use of person protection equipment. These measures constitute the core of safety protocols on COVID-19 safe elections of different EMB's across the world.

The paper intends to look at some of the successful global experiences in managing elections during COVID-19.

The United States: The Presidential Primary Elections

The US presidential election is scheduled for 3rd November, 2020. The 2020 presidential primaries and caucuses were a series of electoral contests during February 3 and August 11th, 2020 in the run up to the presidential election 2020. The elections took place in all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, five U.S. territories and the US citizens living abroad. In view of the COVID-19 situation, many states had to postpone primaries, readjust some polling stations for safety of vulnerable populations, enhance mail vote, absentee ballot and early voting options for conduct of poll. Other states continued to hold in-person elections amid the COVID-19 pandemic, with comprehensive safety measures for the voters and election workers.

COVID-19 pandemic has made it essential to explore options to increase vote by mail opportunities. More voters exercised franchise using the option for mail ballots across the country. Voting by Mail/Absentee Voting is also essential

part of the elections process for citizens away from home, such as military and overseas voters. The Election Assistance Commission (EAC), the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) and the United States Postal Service (USPS) have been working in tandem to ensure the entire process of voting by mail/absentee voting operates smoothly and efficiently. The COVID-19 specific resources and other resources have been designed to help election officials identify procedures, strategies and policies for ensuring mail ballots get cast and counted and all election-related materials that help citizens cast these ballots, are delivered in a timely manner. They include

- Preliminary Planning for Increased Voting by Mail/Absentee Voting Capacity - COVID19 Potential Response
- Preliminary Planning for Increased Voting by Mail/Absentee Voting Capacity - COVID19 Potential Response (Is that an intended repetition?)
- Improving Communications for Increased Voting by Mail/Absentee Voting - COVID19 Potential Response
- Handling Increased Absentee and Mail Voting at the County Level - COVID19 Potential Response
- Handling Absentee Ballot Requests for Increased Voting by Mail
- Emergency Election Laws and COVID-19.

COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for Elections

The United States Election Assistance Commission issued comprehensive guidelines for the purpose of COVID-19 protection to the stakeholders in elections.

US Election Assistance Commission Voting Process Guidelines COVID-19

EAC believes in the premise that the Election officials are contingency planners by nature and they have to make sure that elections are accessible, secure accurate, and that voters are safe. EAC offers clearing house facilities in collaboration with their federal partners to the election officials and voters to address their concerns regarding the novel coronavirus and COVID-19.

Federal Resources on safe voting coverage may be listed as follows:

In-Person Voting

- Innovative Practices and New Solutions Guide:

This document is one in a series created as part of the Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Sub-sector Coordinating Council's Joint COVID Working Group. These documents provide guidance for state, local, tribal, and territorial election officials on how to administer and secure election infrastructure in light of the COVID-19 epidemic:

- Finding Voting Locations and Poll Workers
- Considerations for Modifying the Scale of In-Person Voting
- Health and Safety at the Polling Place
- Safeguarding Staff and Work Environment from COVID-19



Voting By Mail/Absentee Voting

- The Importance of Accurate Voter Data When Expanding Absentee or Mail Ballot Voting
- Election Education and Outreach for Increased Absentee or Mail Voting
- Electronic Ballot Delivery and Marking
- Helping Voters to Request a Mail-in Ballot
- Managing an Increase in Outbound Ballots
- Inbound Ballot Process
- Ballot Drop Box
- Signature Verification and Cure Process
- Vote By Mail/ Absentee Voting Timeline



A voter drops off a ballot for the Arizona Democratic presidential preference election Tuesday, March 17, in Phoenix.



People wait in queue to vote in the presidential primary election at the Supervisor of Elections office on Tuesday, March 17, in Delray Beach, Florida.



Social Distancing Sign at polls

The EAC has also developed Vendor and manufacturer guidance on cleaning voting machines and other election paraphernalia. State specific resources have been developed by many of the states such as Arizona, North Carolina, Ohio, North Carolina and South Carolina etc.

Croatia Parliamentary Elections 2020

The Croatian Parliament consists of 151 representatives directly elected for a four-year term. The representatives are chosen from 12 constituencies, 10 of which elect 14 representatives each, while the other two represent Croatian nationals abroad and national minorities with three and eight representatives, respectively. Members of Parliament are elected via a proportional representation and preferential voting process, where a voter may only vote for one candidate list – slate – and mark one candidate with precedence over others within the slate. Seats are awarded to the 14 numerically greatest slates, with seats corresponding to the quantity of individual results within them. Slates must meet a minimum 5 percent threshold within their designated constituency.

The parliamentary elections were held on July 4 and July 5, 2020.

Precautions during the Election

Following the announcement of elections, the State Electoral Commission (SEC)

along with the Croatian Institute for Public Health (CIPH) developed and issued guidelines for stakeholders including election administrators, participants and voters to protect their health throughout the electoral process. The SEC and CIPH issued safety instructions for Election Day with the aim of ensuring the safety of voters, election administrators, observers and other stakeholders such as media representatives. Instructions and recommendations have been established for standard polling stations and special polling stations at social welfare institutions.

Guidelines for COVID Safe Elections

- Poll workers and observers must wear face masks while at polling stations, and voters are advised to wear them as well.
- Gloves are required for poll workers performing voter identification and recommended for all poll workers. Gloves should be disinfected and changed regularly.
- Soap, paper towels and hand sanitizer for hand disinfecting to be provided.
- Polling station windows must be open to provide regular ventilation.
- A distance of 1.5 meters must be maintained between voting screens, poll workers, observers and voters waiting in queues or walking through the polling station.
- VH(?) and sanitizer should be placed at the entrance of rooms and a designated poll worker must apply it to voters and others entering and exiting the room.
- Commonly trafficked surfaces should be disinfected regularly.
- Poll workers traveling to voters' residence due to illness, disability or self-isolation must wear masks as well as gloves, which must be disinfected before and after each visit and changed after 10 visits.

- During vote counting, observers must maintain a distance of two meters from the vote counting location and polling station committee members performing this function must be 1.5 meters apart and disinfect their hands at each stage of the process.

The Electoral Commission (DIP) made arrangements for people infected with the novel corona virus to be allowed to vote by proxy in Sunday's parliamentary election.

“Anyone who has been diagnosed with corona virus infection will be able to vote with the help of another person of their confidence, who will fill in the ballot as instructed by the infected person.”

The arrangements provided that after a call from a COVID-19 positive person, a member of the polling committee will come in front of their house or apartment, without coming into direct contact with the infected person. Person of confidence then fill in the ballot, put it in an envelope and return it to the member of the polling committee outside the apartment.

The infected persons were not allowed to come into direct contact either with the member of the polling committee or with the ballot. The person of confidence is usually a member of the infected person's household.



Croatia Votes at Parliamentary Election 2020

Benin Local Elections – May 17, 2020

Municipal and communal elections took place across Benin to elect new local leaders on May 17. The official campaign period was fixed as May 1 to 15, 2020. Ahead of the vote, several groups called for the elections to be postponed due to the spread of COVID-19 in the country. Instead, authorities held that campaign messages that were disseminated mostly by media platforms as opposed to usual large campaign events to limit exposure to the disease.

Benin held its local elections on May 17 – a date that had been set since January 2019. These local elections on Sunday were held in absence of some opposition parties amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. The West African nation had brought in a number of restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the disease. CENA, the National Election Authority (CENA) made face masks mandatory for voters and enforced social distancing at the polling stations for COVID-19 safe elections.

Measures for safety against COVID-19 around following fundamental principles, were observed during the election:

- Social distancing: The autonomous national election commission made



Miroslav Skoro, leader of the coalition “Homeland Movement”, shows his Identity card for casting ballot at a polling station on July 5, 2020 in Zagreb.

face masks mandatory for voters and enforced physical-distancing measures at polling stations.

- Health protection equipment for voters (masks, hand washing gel and soap);
- Electoral agents provided with protective equipment;
- Election campaign conducted solely through media, with no rallies or gatherings, and carried out with vehicles equipped with megaphones;
- Media campaign supervised by the High Authority for Audio-visual and Communication; and
- Political parties were subsidized by the state for this media campaign.

Campaigns leading to the vote were limited to posters and media appearances as candidates were forced to cancel their rallies due to a ban on gatherings of more than 50 people.

- Reports indicate a low voter turnout.
- Campaigning was limited to posters and media appearances as candidates were forced to call off rallies due to a ban on gatherings of more than 50 people.



Electoral agents and party observers at a polling station in Cotonou where voter turnout was low



President Patrice Talon casts his ballot at a public school in Cotonou

Taiwan-National Level Elections in January, 2020

Taiwan conducted its 15th presidential and vice-presidential election on 11 January 2020 along with the election for 10th Legislative Yuan of 113 members. The national election with about 19.3 million voters witnessed a voter turnout at 74.9%, the highest among nationwide elections since 2008.

Taiwan's overall Strategy

Taiwan has been in a state of constant readiness to the threat of emerging infectious disease for the last seventeen years since it was hit hard by the SARS outbreak. Accordingly, when information concerning a novel pneumonia outbreak was first confirmed on December 31, 2019, Taiwan began implementing onboard quarantine of direct flights from specific locations, the same day. On January 2, 2020, Taiwan established a response team for the disease and activated the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC). Taiwan has demonstrated aggressive strategy and sustained efforts to control the epidemic right from beginning

Harnessing Technology

Disease knows no borders. In response to the threat of the COVID-19 epidemic, Taiwan has implemented dynamic plans concerning border quarantine measures, including onboard quarantine, thermal scanning, health declarations and a 14-day home quarantine for passengers arriving from nations it listed under the 'Level 3 Warning'. An electronic system was established for entry quarantine which enables passengers with a local mobile phone number to fill in health information. A health declaration pass was then sent to them as a text message.

This was connected to the community care support management system, which allowed government agencies to provide care services and medical assistance. The travel history of individuals was stored on the National Health Insurance (NHI) card to alert physicians about possible cases and prevent community transmission. For those undergoing home quarantine or isolation, the government worked with telecom operators to allow GPS tracking of their locations. Quarantine offenders were subject to fines or mandatory placement according to relevant laws and regulations, so as to prevent transmission.

Deepening COVID-19 Safety Measures

Taiwan increased its laboratory testing capacity, expanded the scope of its surveillance and inspections based on trends of the COVID-19 epidemic and re-tested people with higher risk who had already tested negative, including patients with symptoms of severe influenza, community cases with upper respiratory tract infections who were already being monitored and cluster cases of upper respiratory tract infections, to identify suspected cases and perform treatment in isolation wards.

It designated 50 regional hospitals and medical centres and 167 community hospitals and clinics to create a tiered system for testing. Taiwan banned export of surgical masks since January 24, requisitioned masks and expanded domestic mask production to more effectively allocate masks.

Local Government Elections

The Central Election Commission (CEC), Taiwan implemented various preventive measures for COVID-19 safe, local by-elections in February, 2020. The measures

also aimed at easing voters' mind, build up elector confidence to participate in the vote process.

To prevent spread of the disease, the CEC adopted various prevention measures in the local by-elections. The measures included:

- Disinfection of polling sites.
- Polling workers pre-health assessment. Only staffs who had no fever or illness case were allowed to execute their duties.
- Poll workers were required to wear surgical masks throughout the polling day.
- Quarantine stations were set up outside to take voters' temperature and hand sanitizers were provided at the entrance and the exit for voters' use.
- In accordance with Taiwan Communicable Disease Control Act, people who are under home isolation and home quarantine were prohibited to go out to vote. Voters who had temperature were required to wear masks to enter the polling stations.
- Masks were also provided for expectant mothers and individuals with temperature or respiratory symptoms in polling stations.
- Also, the CEC promoted essential concepts of COVID-19 prevention among voters to strengthen their safety.

The CEC maintained a high level of vigilance and took strict prevention measures while conducting elections. The CEC has successfully accomplished the local by-election and made considerable efforts to prevent the spread of virus to better ensure the health and safety of voters and the poll workers. The CEC's prevention measures in local by-elections were provided to the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) and the article was published in the Newsletter February

2020 for the A-WEB 115 member election management bodies' reference.

Role of International Institutions

The international institutions of excellence such as IFES, International IDEA, A-WEB etc have played a pioneering role in closely monitoring the global electoral calendar, the electoral processes and much more. In this process they have tracked, studied, identified the problem areas, provided valuable guidance and support and as such rendered remarkably valuable assistance to the democratic countries in conduct of their elections. Together with this

entire literature, was a vast resource of knowledge on the subject that defines as to how these institutions have risen to support the cause of electoral democracy across the world and stood as a fortification of defense against challenges posed by COVID-19.

India A-WEB Centre Tracks the Impact

We at India A-WEB Centre, Election Commission of India, started tracking the impact of this virus especially on elections and related matters right from the very beginning despite 'lockdowns'. The in-house research focused on twin strategies

of international experience sharing, best practices on one hand and identification of best practices and developing a COVID-19 safe code for Elections in India. India A-WEB Centre at the ECI prepared a document on 'International Experiences in Conducting Elections during COVID-19' and also organized a webinar on the subject on 21st November, 2021. A-WEB Community of 106 countries and 16 Partner Organizations were invited for the webinar. Further details including details of country experiences and presentations are available at <https://indiaawebcentre.org/>

Show of Electoral Democracy Goes on

We have taken only a few examples for brief discussion in the article. There are a number of countries such as Republic of South Korea, Mongolia, Australia, France, Germany, North Macedonia and Dominican



CEC Chairperson Lee, outside the polling station inspected prevention measures on the COVID-19 during by-elections.



Poll workers were required to wear masks.



Glimpses of the proceedings

Republic to name a few who have conducted elections successfully during COVID-19. Every country experience offers 'Take Aways' and learning to cope with the challenge called COVID-19. Centrality of success lies in developing COVID-19 safe protocols through harmonization

of extant public health guidelines of the Government on one hand and election code on the other; political consensus building, elector confidence and above all a careful and discreet implementation of the of the guidelines with the intent of 'No Voter to be Left Behind'.

SD Sharma, Advisor
Election Commission of India

Source: indiaawebsite.org/, covid19.who.int/, www.who.int/, www.eac.gov/election-officials/coronavirus-covid-19-resources, www.ifes.org/, www.idea.int/, edition.cnn.com/, www.newscenter1.tv/, www.idea.int/, www.croatiaweek.com/, www.croatiaweek.com/, aweb.org/

Risk Mitigation measures for National Elections during COVID-19

More than 90 countries and territories across all the continents had to decide whether to hold or postpone national and sub-national elections and referendums since the end of February, when the COVID-19 crisis became global, according to the Global overview of the impact of COVID-19 on elections developed by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA).

At least 63 countries had national elections or referendums scheduled for the first part of 2020 and the decisions ranged from holding elections as initially planned to postponing, and more recently to holding elections that had been initially postponed.

The presidential elections in Poland, the parliamentary elections in Singapore, and the presidential and legislative elections in the Dominican Republic, are three recent examples of the more than 30 featured case studies that were developed as part of International IDEA’s initiative to track and analyse the impact of the novel coronavirus disease on elections worldwide.

Risk mitigation measures were introduced by many of the countries that held elections amid the novel coronavirus disease outbreak, with different outcomes in terms of both the turnout, as well

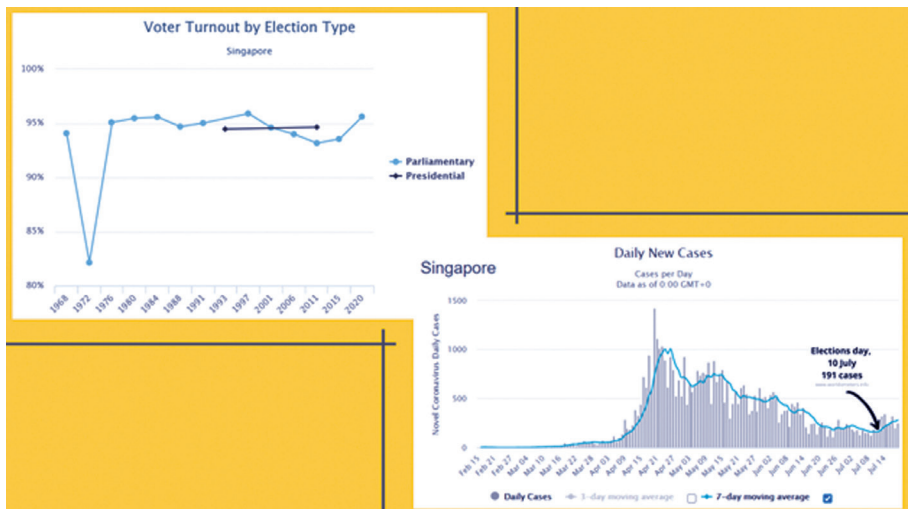
as the posterior evolution of COVID-19 cases.

Voter Turnout And The Evolution Of Covid-19 Cases Post-Election Day

The presidential elections in Poland saw a nearly all-time high turnout for the first round – with both postal and in-person voting options available.

For both rounds of the presidential elections in Poland (June 28 and July 12, 2020), a range of health protection measures were implemented at the polling stations. Although the COVID-19 cases increased, that didn’t lead to a significant spike. The voter turnout for the second round (July 12, 2020) was even higher, and the voters were requested to wear masks and gloves, maintain distance, use hand sanitizer and bring their own pens.

Voting is compulsory in Singapore. For the parliamentary elections (July 10, 2020), preventive safety measures at polling stations were implemented,

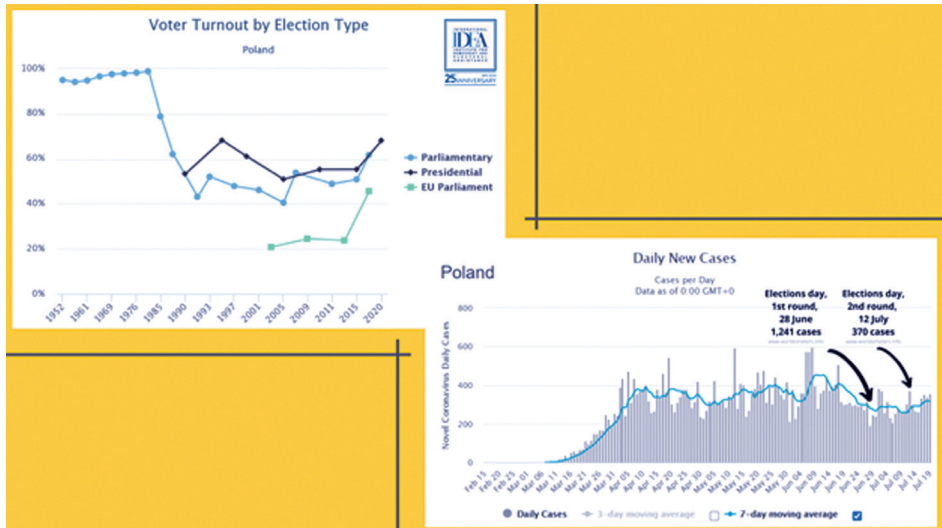


such as temperature screening, social distancing, masks and gloves, staggered voting times, based on the South Korean electoral experience during COVID-19, as well as mobile polling teams. Long queues in several polling stations resulted as a consequence of implementing the safety measures and due to the fact that voters did not respect their allotted times.

In the case of the presidential and legislative elections in the Dominican Republic (July 5, 2020), the safety measures for the voting day called for mandatory use of face masks, disinfection of voting materials, and social distancing. Despite these efforts, the Organization of American States (OAS) reported long lines in front of polling centers and a lack of compliance with the

protocols in place. The Dominican Republic was one of the first countries in Latin America and the Caribbean region to hold elections during the COVID-19 pandemic and although lower than in previous elections, the turnout was considered high given the health context.

The presidential elections in Poland, the parliamentary elections in Singapore,



the presidential and legislative elections in the Dominican Republic and the Malawi presidential rerun, are four recent examples of the more than 30 featured case studies.

Snap Story Bangladesh



Source: International IDEA

Communication Guidelines for EMBs during COVID-19



The decision to hold or postpone scheduled elections during the novel corona virus disease (COVID-19) outbreak can be the equivalent to choosing between life and death, for people but also for democracies. When it comes to priorities, the health of the population should indisputably come first, closely followed by the health of democracy.

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the capacity of state institutions to utilize rapid mechanisms for collecting, processing and analysing information as the foundation of the decision-making process is as vital as the timely implementation of the appropriate communication strategies. In the absence of proper communication, the restrictive measures imposed by many states to contain the spread of the virus do nothing but stoke public fear, now increasingly related to the (risk of permanent) loss of fundamental rights and liberties.

Disease and Disinformation

Only a few months ago we were talking about disinformation at an unprecedented level when referring to the various online manipulation campaigns that targeted elections worldwide from 2016 onwards. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, what was previously diagnosed as information disorder evolved into an infodemic, making the mission of state institutions even harder while escalating individual fear into mass panic. The issue reached the most dangerous point, when false information was disseminated from state leadership structures, generating confusion and distrust.

Citizens were in the position of having to distinguish between a high variety of data and information, often conflicting, under the pressure of time and fear. The concerted efforts made by social media and popular ICT platforms to fight both the virus and the surge of disinformation

have not been able to fit the dimension of the problems so far, therefore free, independent and reliable media play an essential role in COVID-19 response effectiveness, as well as in maintaining a healthy democratic environment in times of crisis.

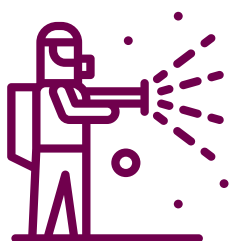
Proper Communication Builds Trust and Reduces Fear of Abuse

- Trust is most valuable asset for a state institution, and it is highly correlated with the previous fulfillment of citizen's expectations.
- It invests the authorities with the power to rapidly adopt and smoothly implement the necessary decisions.
- It helps make their voice heard above the (virtual) crowds, thus reducing the spread of false information and its potentially devastating consequences.
- It makes people accept the limitations to their rights more easily based on the certainty of gaining them back once the danger has been overcome.

Preliminary Action Points

Whether a country held elections amid the COVID-19 crisis, decided to postpone them, opted for special voting arrangements, or has yet to decide, from a communication perspective, the EMBs should continue to function in crisis mode until normal electoral routines are reinstated.

Adjust the processes to fit the new context



If an EMB does not have a designated structure to deal with crises, it should establish a cell or core group where representatives of the relevant departments within the organization can

fulfil the needed functions and collaborate closely with the decision-making structure to inform its measures and adjust the communication strategy accordingly.

Due to the novelty of the disease, the crisis it generated is characterized by a very unpredictable dynamic. In such a context, it is not unusual for an EMB/ institution to find itself in the position of contradicting in the morning the declarations made the evening before. Therefore, a rapid reaction mechanism should be put in place and include approval process, a clear chain of command, permanent access to the decision-making structure within the electoral management body, designated spokesperson.

Ensure interagency communication and collaboration mechanisms

An external mechanism of collaboration and communication with the relevant state agencies, including public health authorities, should be integrated and operationalized to ensure a scrupulous analysis of the implications of each of the possible scenarios on health and security, as well as on democracy.

Collaboration with online platforms and media is an essential element for tackling the attempts of manipulation and the spread of disinformation related to electoral processes (either domestic or as part of external information operations) in the context of COVID-19 crisis and should be developed in parallel.

Address the internal communication needs

Internal communication is as important as the external one to prevent panic and the spread of rumours and false information. The technical apparatus of the EMB needs to be timely and transparently informed on

the decisions that are being made and how its activity will be impacted by the crisis measures.

The Crisis Communication Strategy

- When elections are held amid COVID-19, the decision could be perceived as irresponsible and in case of low turnout, the legitimacy of elections questioned.
- When elections are postponed due to the pandemic, the political rights of the citizens are suspended.
- When the rules are changed in the middle of the game (special voting measures), especially in a low trust context, it could be associated with an attempt of fraud. Also, an inadequate voter information campaign may prevent the electorate from properly casting their ballots, which in turn could lead to a high number of invalidated votes.
- The limitations to in-person campaigning and fundraising following the anti-COVID-19 measures raise concerns over the capacity of the voters in making informed decisions
- The international observation missions initially planned, may no longer be deployed, also raising concerns about the legitimacy of elections.

Although in many cases the decision might not even belong to the EMBs, they do have the responsibility of clearly and transparently informing the electorate on the implications of each measure.

What do you communicate? Key message(s)

Assuming the decisions were a result of a collaborative work between the relevant state institutions that include electoral and public health authorities, the consistency

of the messages conveyed by all the actors involved is key in maintaining the trust and decrease the level of uncertainty among the population.

The main messages should align to the ones of the international bodies and focus on public health and safety of people and democracy.

Who communicates?

According to their mandates, EMBs are responsible for making sure people have access to correct information. EMBs have a central role in presenting the arguments for the decisions made related to elections, the expected outcomes, the risks as well as the measures that will be put in place as a guarantee for safeguarding democracy. They should be perceived as the primary source of information on electoral matters thus discouraging any attempts of manipulation or disinformation, but this depends largely on their transparent approach and the level of trust they enjoy among population. Joint voter-information campaigns between the EMB and the relevant health authority can be considered.

Through what means?

The consumption of digital content has increased significantly due to the lockdown/working from home measures. However, a tendency towards traditional media, especially TV and radio, has been noticed as well, with press conferences attracting very high audience levels. Therefore, it is important that fact-based information and messages are conveyed through all the available means to reach out to the audiences. Once again, an emphasis should be on inclusivity.

Social media plays a central role in achieving the communication objectives, especially for countering disinformation and

dispelling rumours. The online platforms provide the appropriate environment for organic and direct interaction with the citizens. The EMBs can use them to answer people's questions, inform the voters on the latest measures, and promote general health and safety measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Visual materials usually get higher reach and prove very useful, especially when seeking to convey difficult or complex topics. Webinars, live transmissions, Q&A sessions are also good additions to traditional mass communication approaches because of their people-centric approach.

When and how frequent?

A routine should be established to answer the acute need of predictability people feel during these unpredictable times. Exceptional situations require exceptional measures, so the authorities should have no hesitation in communicating with the public multiple times per day to clarify situations and inform the citizens on the latest evolutions and decisions.

How do you react to criticism?

It is important to keep in mind that the state institutions are not the only communicator in the landscape. While reliable media and strong civil society organizations help substantively, there are

situations when, depending on the public response, the communication strategy, and sometimes even the decisions might need to change, based on the feedback analysis. Monitor the media and the public reaction and adjust the strategy accordingly. Having a quick reaction can be as useful as having no reaction, depending on the context. Again, transparency is key.

In the case of valid criticism, take responsibility and address the legitimate concerns.

When reports based on incorrect or false information are disseminated, the correct, fact-based information must get visible as quick as possible (without reiterating the false/incorrect reports).

When social media firestorms ignite, it is particularly important not to fuel them and take the time to assess the situation. If the position of the institution related to the matter is public and clear, it might be the time and the dynamic of social media itself who will extinguish the fire.

Return to (new) normal. Learn from mistakes and prepare for the next crisis. Once a crisis has subsided, the impact of the measures implemented as a response to the crisis should be assessed. Depending on the result, permanentizing the successful approaches should be considered, but only after carefully analysing their feasibility within the post-crisis context and always mindful of the democratic values.

Ingrid Bicu, Expert
International IDEA

S nap Story Croatia



Co-operation with Civil Society during the Pandemic



Working with CSOs and IT experts on Technology in Elections at NETGRIT office in Jakarta, Indonesia.

and academic institutions multiple times in a week since April, featuring civil society activists, election officials, politicians, academics and government officials. With physical distancing in place, quite naturally, technological solutions are being studied as potential solutions to the need to keep distance in electoral processes. Indonesia is no exception.

The adoption of voting technology has been part of the electoral reform debate in Indonesia for many years. A recent draft election law has

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in furthering sustainable democratic development in any country. The CSOs have for decades been important partners for International IDEA at global, regional and country levels.

In the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, CSOs in Indonesia have been very outspoken in both mainstream and social media to ensure public health and safety are managed in any electoral process happening in the country. They are currently campaigning for a petition to postpone this December's Head of Region elections involving more than 100 million voters in almost half of the country's provinces to 2021. Dialogue between them and the election management body (EMB) has been occurring daily. Webinars have been organized by various CSOs

been put in stronger language to allow the use of electronic voting machines for Head of Region Elections. While certain government and election officials are receptive to the idea of voting machines, it must be said that political parties and civil society are divided. Over time, the debates have grown more and more prominent. The necessity for certain guidelines in adopting voting technology was becoming more and more apparent.

In recent years, the Indonesian EMB has already made continuous progress with using a range of other election technologies and the provision of publicly accessible data. This includes the decision to enhance the transparency of election results by publishing all scanned result sheets in 2014, which triggered a massive civil society-lead crowd sourcing effort to tabulate and sum the results. Going

forward, there is continued interest in Indonesia to expand the use of technology in elections, building on previous experience in Indonesia and worldwide.

Capturing these experiences was one objective for International IDEA when embarking on the project of drafting the **‘Adoption of Voting Technology a Guide for Electoral Stakeholders in Indonesia’** in late 2018. Equally or even more important was the creation a project that is largely owned and driven by local CSOs that further strengthens domestic voting technology expertise in Indonesia.

International IDEA’s long time partner organization, Association for Elections and Democracy (Perludem), who cooperated intensively with Indonesian academics, journalists and other partner CSOs such as NETGRIT, which consists of former election commissioners. International IDEA supported this process with additional input and suggestions from a global perspective. International IDEA also hopes that this effort will inspire CSOs elsewhere to follow their Indonesian counterparts’ path.

As a result, the Bahasa Indonesia version of the guide was jointly launched in December 2019 with Perludem in the forefront. While there were guest speakers from the EMBs and also NETGRIT, the two Perludem authors played a pivotal role by providing in-depth explanations about the contents of the Guide to event participants: journalists, academics, election officials as well as international assistance providers such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

The publication was initially intended and launched for an Indonesian audience in Bahasa Indonesia only, but over time

International IDEA received several requests for an English version. This was not least due to an increased discussion about how far election technology can provide solutions for holding elections during the COVID-19 crisis. For example, the advanced voter registration and vote counting technologies that the Republic of Korea used in their elections last April have proven effective, but their usability in other countries’ contexts must be assessed very carefully.

Responding to these requests, we continued our cooperation with Perludem in 2020, due to the lockdown now entirely online. This allows us now to present the English language version of the **‘Adoption of Voting Technology A Guide for Electoral Stakeholders in Indonesia’**. A guide that covers the breadth of technical innovations in Indonesian elections and puts them in a global context and perspective.

The Guide covers the full range of systems used in Indonesia, including the voter data information system, the systems for political party registration, candidate nominations, campaign funding reporting, election results recapitulation and electronic voting trials. It discusses a range of issues from introducing those systems to cyber security challenges and puts them in the in context of the six Indonesian Election Principles with a specific focus on fairness, honesty, confidentiality and directness. All of this is complemented by global examples, experiences, best practices and principles.

We hope this guide can now also be a tool for other countries that consider adopting more election technology to overcome some challenges brought by COVID-19.

Adhy Aman & Peter Wolf, Senior Programme Manager, International IDEA

Lessons from Elections during COVID-19: Republic of Poland

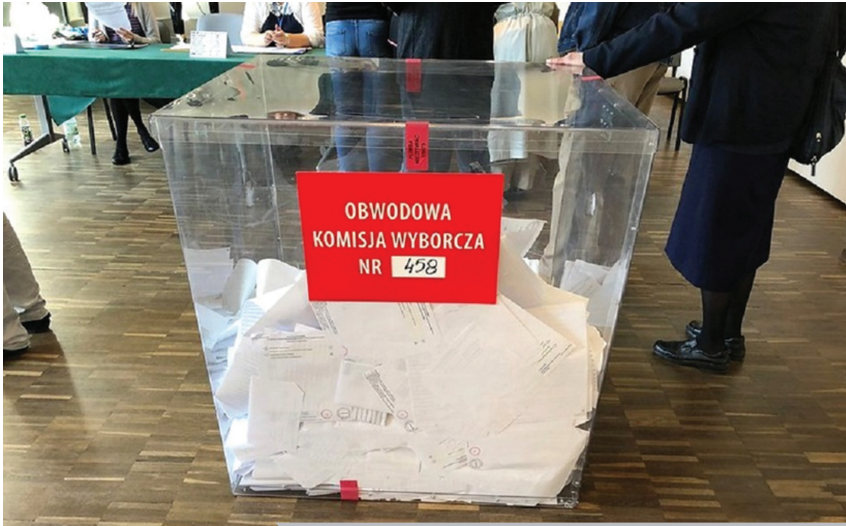


Image credit Maria Bninska@flickr.

It was postal voting in the country that attracted much attention from election practitioners in early April, when Poland's government announced its intention to hold the election only by mail. While PiS opponents urged the government to introduce a state of emergency and postpone the election until autumn, the ruling party sought to counter the COVID-19

The second round of voting in Poland's presidential election on July 12 brought to a conclusion a remarkable electoral process, which saw a nearly all-time high turnout of voters during the first round on 28 June, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the incumbent President Andrzej Duda of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) and his challenger Rafał Trzaskowski of the Civic Platform (PO) hoped for a high turnout of their supporters, as polls put them neck and neck. Every vote will matter, and voters overseas who had registered in high numbers for the first round (over 374,000 out of some 30,2 million eligible voters) set a new record for the second round, expecting to make a difference. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that its consulates sent out around 480,000 postal voting packets to voters abroad by 5 July, responding to earlier criticisms that some voters did not receive their ballots in time for the first round.

threat by switching to voting by post. In the following weeks, a government ministry proceeded with preparations for the election scheduled for 10 May, without waiting for the respective legislation to be adopted by the parliament, and bypassing the National Election Commission (NEC).

The government's determination to proceed with the May postal election brought Poland to the brink of a political and institutional crisis. In the face of growing criticism at home and abroad, presidential candidates threatening boycott, and local governments refusing to cooperate, a compromise was brokered by dissenting voices from the ruling parliamentary majority. The election scheduled for 10 May did not take place and the NEC handed a legal 'lifeline' to the government, enabling the scheduling of a new election date of 28 June.

New legislation was adopted on 2 June, which provided for continuity of the electoral process. Registered

candidates were able to stand for the 28 June election and preparations for polling were led by the NEC. Election commissions at the regional and polling station levels were formed, although their composition was altered, reflecting the lower rates of applications. Campaign financing rules were adjusted to cover both the first campaign and the newly scheduled date.

In contrast to the first postal voting bill, the new law gave voters a choice to apply for a postal ballot or cast their vote in polling stations. Voting was held over one day and voting hours were the same as in previous elections: from 07:00 to 21:00. What did make voting different on 28 June was a range of health protection measures implemented at polling stations. These included disposable gloves for Precinct Election Commission (PEC) members, hand sanitizer at the entrance to each polling station, face masks and visors for PEC members, social distancing, not covering tables with absorbent material, regular airing of polling stations and disinfection of surfaces touched by voters.

Turnout on 28 June was 64.5%, the highest in the first round of presidential elections since 1995. It showed not

only the importance of this election in Poland but also that voters were not put off by the COVID-19 epidemic. As to postal voting, which attracted so much attention, this option was chosen by around 185,000 voters in Poland in the first round (compared to 42,800 in the first round of the 2015 presidential election). Concerns that counting high numbers of postal ballots in the country and abroad may delay voting results have not materialized.

The second round on 12 July will be closely watched by public health professionals. New COVID-19 infections rose somewhat after the first round but did not appear to lead to a significant spike. Election practitioners in other countries were also keen to see whether the health precautions undertaken were sufficient to ensure a safe election day. The second round concluded a fascinating story of an electoral process during the coronavirus epidemic. For a detailed and in-depth analysis of Poland's case, please see International IDEA and Electoral Management Network case study, 'Political maneuvers and legal conundrums amid the COVID-19 pandemic: the 2020 Presidential Election in Poland'.

Snap Story Bangladesh



Source: *Idea.int*



Educating Youth via Winter School in Georgia

Education particularly civic and voter education has long been the priority for the Election Administration (EA) of Georgia. Informing voters and other stakeholders through efficient and innovative educational programs that will strengthen electoral culture, increase the possibility of making informed choices for voters – are the exact words outlined by Action and Strategic Goals of the EA. In this article, we will share with you how these plain words are being translated into practice.

As youth disengagement in elections remains an issue, the EA decided to approach it with the best tool at hand – teaching. And the Central Election Commission (CEC) together with its Training Centre opened up a center solely focused on elections by bringing together many young people from every corner of Georgia. After launching an innovative project – Electoral Development Schools in 2015, the project has been expanding and gradually occupying all regions of the country. So what exactly this school is about and why it turned out to be successful? First of all, it targets



young people aged 18-25 including first-time voters and familiarizes them with key topics in the field of elections. During selection criteria, gender equality is considered to have a balanced representation of different sexes. Then its scale covering the whole country and the involvement of ethnic minorities in Pankisi Gorge, speaking Georgian and internally displaced persons (IDPs) along with the rest of the people are worth underlining. Further, it not only raises youth awareness about the elections but also helps successful graduates to be hired at the CEC and District Election Commission (DEC). By doing so, CEC motivates young people to become active citizens, possibly get hired by the EA or other electoral stakeholders, or simply make an informed choice. For nearly five years, EA was launching this project every year in summer attracting more and more young people. Over 3100 youngsters have been educated, motivated, and connected around core democratic principles. The overwhelming success of the Electoral Development School held





in summer led to the CEC's decision to launch it in winter. The goal of the project was to expand and involve those young people who were unable to attend the course in summer while winter holidays gave a perfect opportunity for students to attend the course. Also, this time the focus was to open up schools in university cities enabling more students to participate in the study course.

The above paragraph was one sentence. Hence broke it down in smaller ones.

The curriculum of the Electoral Development School covers key topics one would agree necessary for every citizen of this country to know. At the school students learn about establishment of the Republic of Georgia, how progressive our electoral system was back in the early twentieth century and why citizens need to know which electoral system means more inclusion and diversity/representation.

They are also taught how pivotal is gender equality for any EMB and country is to prosper and build just and fair public institutions: where the sex is no barrier to anyone: why inclusion and accessibility matters and access to elections is a fundamental right of every citizen regardless of ethnicity or disability. What's also critically

important, the Electoral Development School is not limited to topics noted above and is constantly evolving and working on renewing its curriculum by including the most pressing issues prevailing in the field of elections. In 2019, the EA added a few more new topics to its winter school's curriculum namely electronic voting technology, elections and surveys, disinformation and spreading false information during the election period. Disinformation and fake news is a challenge for every institution. But when it comes to elections and EMB, it may have a detrimental effect on the reputation of EMB and even on the outcome of the elections to some degree. Teaching young people these modern day challenges is not only timely but also very important for our democracy.

All in all, similar to summer school, the winter school has been simply a success; the success that has been achieved with the support of CEC's long-term partners – the Council of Europe (CoE) and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). No training is good without its superb trainers and here mentioning of DEC and Training Centre's trainers is important, as precisely they were on the ground tirelessly working with young people and teaching them key electoral issues.

The collaboration of the EA with its international partners always proves to be successful. Giving an international touch to local context/project is a win-win for both, us and them. We all benefit when the common goal is achieved and more educated and informed citizens roam the streets of Tbilisi and 25 municipalities throughout regions of Georgia, where it has already made a difference.

Kristina Tolordava

Central Election Commission, Georgia

NEC shares Election Disinfection Experience with Kyrgyz Republic



NEC officials explaining Korea’s COVID-19 response measures in voting and counting management to election officials from the CEC of the Kyrgyz Republic at KOICA

The National Election Commission (NEC) of the Republic of Korea participated in a web seminar hosted by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) on July 16 to share Korea’s successful election disinfection experience. This seminar was held at the request of the Kyrgyz Republic,

where parliamentary elections were held in October amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Ten officials participated in the web seminar, including the Vice Chairperson of the Central Election Commission of Kyrgyz Republic and representatives from the NEC. They were centered on practical content to support the election management of the Kyrgyz Republic under the topics of ‘COVID-19 response measures, in voting and counting management’

and ‘an election where nobody is left out.’

The NEC said that ‘we are responding to requests from the international community, such as providing webinars and voting and counting management material, and we will actively share our successful K-election disinfection experience in the future.’



Left: NEC Chief Elections Policy Officer Park Chan-jin gives welcoming remarks Right: Q&A session (screenshot from the webinar)

Malawi holds BRIDGE Course for New Commissioners

Newly appointed Commissioners of the Malawi Electoral Commission and management members gathered for a weeklong Building Resource in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) course from July 5-10, 2020. The Commission was appointed on June 7, 2020 and went straight into preparations for the fresh Presidential Election on June 23, 2020 following a court order that nullified the 2019 presidential elections.

The workshop, held with support from UNDP Malawi was opened by MEC chairman, Justice Dr Chifundo Kachale. All Covid-19 measures were put in place to protect the participants from spreading the virus. ‘Since the Commission is new, this training is very important as there are four parliamentary by-elections coming ahead of us. That will be a fertile opportunity to put into use the knowledge gained from this course,’ he said.

The MEC chairman observed that the Commission is responsible to sustain the freedom and democracy during the elections. “Elections management is a crucial component in the measurement of the maturity and quality of democracy of a

country. Well-managed elections will speak volumes of the maturity of democracy, rule of law and good governance existing in a country. We are blessed that the Fresh Presidential Election has earned praise of all electoral stakeholders. It now remains our responsibility to maintain the good ratings and performance that we are currently enjoying,” he said.

On the choice of the module, the MEC chairman observed that the Introduction to Election Administration Module is a very fundamental module that covers essential aspects on management and administration of elections.

“The module to be covered in this training is a fundamental one and it will give you a bit of everything you need to know about elections administration and management. BRIDGE is a comprehensive professional electoral curriculum based on adult-learning and is participatory in nature.

The current cohort of the Commission has seven members including the chairman. Among them, three members have previously served as Electoral Commissioners.



IIIDEM conducts training amidst the ‘new normal’ in Pandemic

The COVID19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges for the world. The stringent lockdowns imposed in many countries and subsequent cautious re-opening of the economies with the ‘new normal’ of social distancing has pushed us to adopt and adapt much faster with the changing rules, regulations and situations. Electoral processes in democracies around the world have also undergone a major shift with an added responsibility of safeguarding the health of the stakeholders involved in the process and prevention of spread of the virus among them while maintaining the integral standards of credibility, inclusion and fairness.

In India, the nationwide lockdown was imposed from the end of March 2020 till end of May 2020. Since then, there has been a graded unlocking of all activities keeping a close tab on the spread of the virus. The concerned Government Departments and Ministries have been issuing rules and guidelines for phased re-opening of the economic and non-economic activities in the country.

Keeping in view the rules and guidelines issued by various Ministries and Departments for prevention of the spread of COVID19, views/suggestions received from various Political Parties, Chief Electoral Officers of States/UTs on election campaign and public meetings, the ECI issued *Broad Guidelines for, “Conduct of General Elections/Bye-Elections During Covid-19”*, in the month of August 2020.

This document covers all stages and aspects related to conduct of elections during the time of COVID19 and prescribes extensive guidelines to be followed by the

field officials for each aspect to tackle the threat of spread of COVID19 during the upcoming General Elections and bye-elections in various States/UT.

Guidelines for Training and Capacity Building

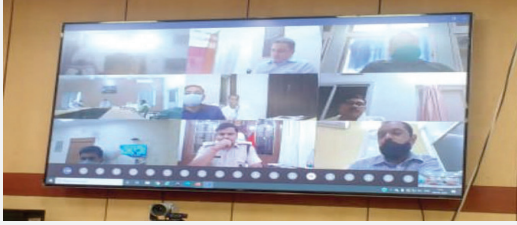
Commission’s guidelines for Training and Capacity Building include the following aspects:

- Emphasis on Training through online mode
- Decentralised trainings in larger halls
- Online availability and easy access of Training Material on app/portal.
- Sufficient Polling Staff to be available in reserve to replace in case any polling personnel displays COVID-19 symptoms.

In view of these guidelines, the training function now holds ever more significance as awareness of these guidelines, has to percolate down to the grass root level, through training, for it to have the desired effect. In addition to this, as there has to be a buffer of trained staff ready to takeover in the unfortunate situation of any election staff contracting the virus, more officials than the previous precedents have to be trained.

Trainings conducted by IIIDEM post COVID19 lockdown

IIIDEM immediately took up the task of arranging online trainings for the election officials who were to be involved in the upcoming General Election to the State Legislative Assembly of Bihar, 2020 as a priority. The COVID19 guidelines formed



a major part of these trainings. A brief on the trainings conducted post COVID19 lockdown is mentioned below:

State Level Master Trainers

A total of 114 State Level Master Trainers were trained through Video Conferencing in the month of June and July 2020 on various process of Electoral importance.

Training on Election Related Matters

Around 319 Election Officials such as District Election Officer (DEO), Returning Officers (ROs), Superintendent of Police (SPs) were trained on 20th July 2020 on important election related matters like Election Planning, Security Planning, Nomination process, Model Code of Conduct, SVEEP, Expenditure Monitoring, Paid news, EVM-VVPAT, Electoral Roll etc.

Considering the importance of IT applications, especially in the times of COVID19, training on arrangements related to IT applications including counting application was also imparted to the trainees.

Orientation on Electoral Roll Matter

An orientation programme for the DEOs and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) was conducted on 31st July 2020 for 35 participants to acquaint them on the significant aspects of Electoral Roll management.

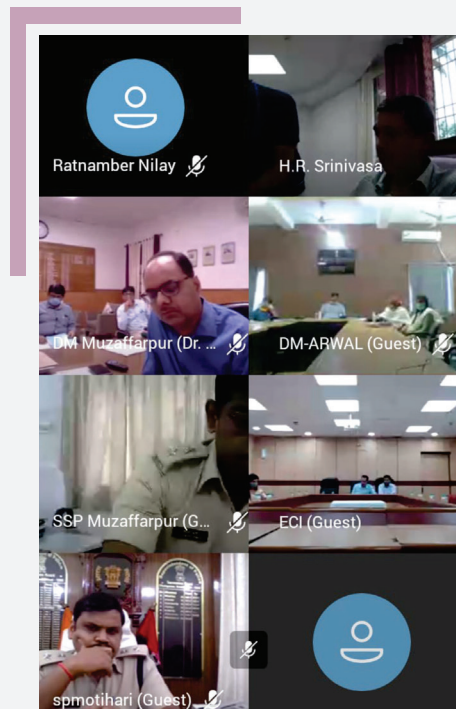
Training for Election officials

A training programme for 300 Nodal officers, DEOs, ROs, SPs etc. was held from 7th to 9th September 2020 which touched upon the important aspects of: Model Code of Conduct, Vulnerability Mapping, Law & Order, MCMC and Paid News and COVID-19 Guidelines.

IIIDEM has so far trained 850 election officials post COVID19 lockdown and more such trainings are scheduled to be held in the near future. The training material has been provided to the participants through online mediums for easy access.

Proposed Trainings at IIIDEM

The training programmes for forthcoming bye-elections to a total of sixteen states have been scheduled in the month of October 2020 and more such programmes are being scheduled to cater to the domestic election requirements.



Mahima Mathur

Programme Officer, IIIDEM

Sharing Experiences on Issues, Challenges and Protocols for Conducting Elections during COVID-19

On completion of one year of Chairmanship of the Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB), the Election Commission of India hosted an International Webinar on, “Issues, Challenges and Protocols for Conducting Elections during COVID-19 : Sharing Country Experiences’ through its India A-WEB Centre. It was an occasion for democracies across the world to come together to share experiences of conducting elections during COVID-19 .Last year on September 3, 2019 India had taken over as Chair of A-WEB for 2019-2021 term during the 4th General Assembly of A-WEB held at Bengaluru.

Inaugurating the Webinar, Chief Election Commissioner of India and Chairperson, A-WEB Sunil Arora spoke of the “tough predicament” faced by Election Management Bodies across the world - whether and how to hold scheduled elections in a state of public health emergency.

On this occasion, India A-WEB Centre released publications namely, ‘A Ready Reckoner: Brief Profiles of Countries, Election Management Bodies and Partner Organizations of A-WEB’, ‘ International Experiences of Conducting Elections During COVID-19’ besides release of the ‘Brochure’ for launch of ‘A-WEB India Journal of Elections’.

“The contextual framework of every country was different, the extent and trajectory of the disease varied and so was the capacity of each country to respond to the novel corona virus and its catastrophic impact. Countries such as South Korea, Australia, Malawi, Taiwan, Mongolia and many others who went ahead with scheduled elections even as they put in place the enormous arrangements, required to ensure the health and safety of people while conducting election,” he said.

Elections in India pose formidable challenges on account of large electorate, geographical and linguistic diversity and differing climatic conditions. Elaborating on the scale of the upcoming elections to the Legislative Assembly of Bihar, Arora mentioned that the total number of electors is 72.9 million. Further, explaining the impact of COVID-19 on the election, he highlighted how Corona virus disease exigencies and social distancing measures necessitated



a revisit of ECI's extant instructions. The maximum number of electors at a polling station has been reduced from 1500 to 1000 so consequently, the number of polling stations have shot up by 40 per cent, from 65,000 to over 100,000. The changes would have huge logistics and manpower implications.

The Chief Election Commissioner also mentioned that ECI has placed a lot of emphasis on extending facilitation to senior citizens, women, persons with disabilities and in current circumstances, ensuring franchise to COVID-19 positive



voters and those in quarantine. In this context, the CEC mentioned how, beginning with the elections to the Legislative Assembly of Jharkhand in November-December 2019 and elections to the Legislative Assembly of Delhi in February 2020, the postal ballot facility was extended to voters who are aged more than 80 years, persons with disability and those who engaged in specified essential services. This facility of postal ballot has also been extended to COVID-19 positive electors who are in quarantine/hospitalized.

He added the specific and detailed

guidelines that have been drawn up on conducting election during the time of COVID-19. He also mentioned the successful conduct of elections to 18 seats of the Rajya Sabha in the month of June, 2020. Further elections are due in the states of West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu in the first half of the year, 2021.

Mentioning the two publications being released on the occasion viz. 'Brief Profiles of the Countries, Member EMBs and Partner Organisations of A-WEB' and 'International Experiences of Conducting

Elections during COVID-19', he said these would be a useful tool for researchers and practitioners alike. He said that A-WEB India Centre has also progressed considerably towards publishing a world class journal called 'A-WEB India Journal of Elections'. The first issue of this journal will be released in March 2021. He hoped

that A-WEB India emerges as the 'nerve centre' for intellectual and other activities and requested all other members to contribute and participate.

Session I

The session started with opening remarks by K M Nurul Huda, CEC, Bangladesh who focused on 'fightback' by the EMB's with whatever resources. "The Webinar is an effort in imparting success stories of courage and determinations of EMBs who have not compromised elections with the threat of COVID-19 pandemic. It would also provide an opportunity to know which

EMBs have taken what precautions under what circumstances. It would benefit all EMBs under the banner of A-Web to share as to how they have encountered corona while undertaking health protective measures while managing elections,” said Huda.

Sushil Chandra, Election Commissioner, India shared with the audience the special measures being taken by ECI to ensure conduct of elections under COVID- 19 challenge. He emphasized on the need for coordination with all stakeholders including political parties, effective communication with voters to convince & ensure that the ‘Polling Booths are safe’ & the need for comprehensive new protocols, to be designed to synchronize with Health Guidelines.

A Senimoli, Director Operations, Fiji Elections Office, spoke on advance planning for General Elections 2022 with COVID Safety protocols. Seung Ryeol Kim Advisor, A-WEB Secretariat, spoke on massive efforts made by A-WEB Secretariat to conduct elections during COVID-19 through a series of interactions by way of webinars etc.

Antonio Spinelli Senior Advisor, International IDEA spoke on special voting arrangements and managing elections during the pandemic. On the occasion, he spoke of the ‘theoretical, analytical’ framework by which all of us could situate our individual efforts in comparison to worldwide practices. He categorized the ongoing efforts of EMBs into three parallel dimensions for the COVID-19 threat i.e. Physical, Spatial and Temporal.

Kin Su-yeon, Professor, KCEID Election Commission of Republic of Korea spoke on, “Election Management in Response to COVID-19” and the 21st National Assembly Elections in the Republic of Korea.

Dr Chih-Cheng Meng, Commissioner, CEC Taiwan spoke of Taiwan’s successful

experiences in conducting elections during COVID-19 pandemic.

P Delgernaran, Chairperson, GEC Mongolia spoke on conduct of Parliamentary Elections in Mongolia with well-defined safety protocols. Experience sharing by each of the speakers along with the presentation, walked through the Mongolian experience of conducting the Parliamentary election in June, 2020 within the mandate of ‘Regulation’ on Corona May 2020. It acknowledged, its prior study of global experiences including Korea’s. The measures taken, ensured a 73.6% voter turnout with no adverse health impact reported.

Session II

In his opening remarks Rajiv Kumar, EC, quoting Mahatma Gandhi, characterized the challenge as to ensure that the underprivileged have the same opportunity as the strong. He suggested an additional test, “Focus on polling percentage with respect to the vulnerable sections”. Containment measures by governments have and are having “constitutional and technology implications on timing and conduct of elections,” he said.

He further briefed the delegates on the Rajya Sabha elections conducted by ECI in June 2020. Mentioning the forthcoming elections of Bihar, he highlighted the framework of SOPs – steps/ guidelines being worked upon by India and placed them in the context of other shared experiences. In context of high expectations of services by EMBs, the “Shared experience” was crucial – and offered to share further experience of India, post Bihar elections.

Glen Machinini, Chairperson of the electoral commission of South Africa and Vice Chairperson of A-WEB shared his experience on the impact of covid-19 on democracy and Electoral Cycle. Speaking of ‘Reflections on the South African

experience on Elections during COVID-19', he said that the short term impacts relate to postponement of elections but the defining characteristic of democracy, is the holding of regular elections.

In South Africa, the Electoral Commission took the decision in March this year to approach the Electoral Court to suspend all scheduled by-elections. The application to court was granted and continues currently. The reasoning behind the postponement in South Africa was twofold: Firstly to ensure the safety of voters, election staff, candidates and observers, secondly, the imposition of strict government regulations restricting the movement and gathering of people, had a direct and negative effect on the ability for all parties and candidates to campaign freely and effectively. The Commission's view was that under such conditions, elections could not be free, fair and credible. To date, 72 by-elections have been postponed since March.

Nuruzzaman Talukdar, DG EC Bangladesh informed of the by elections already conducted & the preparation for the 2023 Parliament Elections. He spoke of BEC's resolve to deal with COVID-19, within its extant legal regime which excluded proxy voting/ online voting and telephone voting. The key point he shared would be,- strategic gradation of election for prioritization. However the key challenge would be- 'difficult to predict what proper measure would be applicable for an unpredictable problem,' – so empower official to respond appropriately, he said.

That BEC is working on the presumption that it would not be "normal" soon/ or in near future & re-directed its commitment to ensuring the 'election cycle'

– a cycle which is the lifeline of people's representation, guarantee, accountability & transparency. BEC would be fully exploiting the advantages of data based voting list & online instant voter system to deal with COVID-19 challenges, he emphasised.

Mona A Srinivas Director, IC, ECI made a presentation and shared the sheer numerical (both COVID infections and voters involved), geographical complexity in the Indian scenario, on-going challenge of conducting elections under COVID-19 circumstances. She briefed the delegates on the RS elections conducted on June 19, strategies invoked and the journey of ECI from an initial deferment in March, 2020 upto its conduct in June, 2020.

The value of decentralized response - probably relevant for big jurisdictions and its balance with a centralized framework was a key take away of the prevention. It familiarized the Webinar with the steps in process for the Bihar elections and use of technology and innovative procedures to deal with the challenge of 'numbers' – in particular the extension of postal ballot facility. The presentation ended with one of the ECI's focused outcomes i.e. 'No Voter to be Left Behind'.

Sammy Alfandka, CEO, Malawi made a presentation as to how, through the court mandated elections of June



2020, Commission had a twin challenge of meeting not only COVID-19 special circumstances but the Supreme Court mandate as well. He made a presentation on “Conducting Elections in a Scenario of Increasing Infections”. The presentation highlighted the role of international cooperation and support to Malawi for equipment & resources. He highlighted a major challenge to balance the competition between ‘financial and human resources.’ The success of the effort was a 64.81% turnout, though lesser than the previous one, but nonetheless an “undisputed” election.

Closing Session

Dharmendra Sharma, DG IIIDEM summarized the presentation for the audience.

Kevin Casas-Zamora, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (Intl. IDEA) referring to the trends and figures he said that at the beginning of the pandemic, in March and April, the electoral calendar was dominated by postponed elections, many uncertainties and questions such as: Can elections be held safely for voters and without leading to further spreading of the virus? Will incumbents abuse the difficulty of holding elections to extend their mandates? Will the increasing number of postponed elections lead to longer term legitimacy deficits? How long will it take to recover from this deficit? If elections can be held, will they be credible? Will turnout suffer? He said that International IDEA has been very closely monitoring the global developments pertaining to all facets.

“The first lesson is the importance of political consensus in sustaining decisions made on the electoral calendar and procedures. The second lesson has to do with Special Voting Arrangements and the need to enable various modalities to cast the vote. The third lesson concerns

the enormous impact of communication by the electoral authority. In the Korean case, once again, the authorities made a splendid effort to communicate not only the availability of expanded voting mechanisms, but also the strict sanitary protocols that would be applied to minimize the possibility of contagion in the voting centres,” said Mr Zamora.

The latter contributed to creating the perception that voters were not confronted with the harrowing decision between exercising their most basic civic right and protecting their health. The fourth point: resources.

“The pandemic forces us to adopt measures that reduce the risks of contagion, which range from the availability of masks and other protective materials, to the opening of more voting centres and the extension of voting period. If you want proper elections, you have to be willing to give more financial and human resources to the electoral authorities,” he said.

Fifth, crucial factor: Like so many other things, successful elections ultimately depend on controlling the pandemic. Holding elections under quarantine conditions is inherently impossible.

Mr. Anthony Banbury President & CEO, International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES) mentioned that democracies depend upon public assembly, transparency, confidence, legitimacy in elections and government institutions – all of which are put at risk by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

“I believe that every challenge carries with it the potential for positive breakthroughs – and the COVID-19 crisis has generated critical new opportunities to strengthen democratic institutions and electoral processes. Election management bodies, together with partner institutions and organizations like International IDEA, A-Web and IFES, are re-thinking election

fundamentals in ways that could reap long-term benefits for democratic inclusion,” said Banbury.

Secretary General, Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) Jonghyun Choe, expressed his appreciation to the Election Commission of India for the invitation to attend this meaningful seminar. He said that this seminar was quite symbolic, for India is the largest electoral democracy in the world. He also congratulated the India A-WEB Centre on excellent achievements since its establishment in September last year.

He said that the entire world has been suffering as a result of this pandemic. And this unprecedented crisis has greatly impacted the field of election as well. As the Secretary General of the Association of World Election Bodies, he said he has gained a sense of the challenges faced by

election management bodies all over the world.

Over 120 delegates from 45 countries across the world, international organizations (viz. International IDEA, International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES), Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) and European Centre for Elections) participated in the Webinar.

The Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) is the largest association of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) worldwide. At present A-WEB has 115 EMBs as Members & 16 Regional Associations/Organisations as Associate Members. ECI has been very closely associated with the process of formation of A-WEB since 2011-12.

The webinar concluded with a vote of thanks.

Neha, Soniya & Heineken Saumpi
Executives, India A-WEB Centre

Snap Story USA



Poll Station Management during a Pandemic

International Centre for Parliamentary Studies' (ICPS) Electoral Stakeholders Network organized a webinar on 'Poll Station Management during a Pandemic' on August 12, 2020. The webinar was hosted by Alberto Guevara, Director General of International Relations, The Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary in Mexico. Following are the list of the panelists:

Ingrid Bicu, Expert on Strategic Communications & Elections, International Institute for Democracy & Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)

Hernan Penagos, President, National Electoral Council Colombia

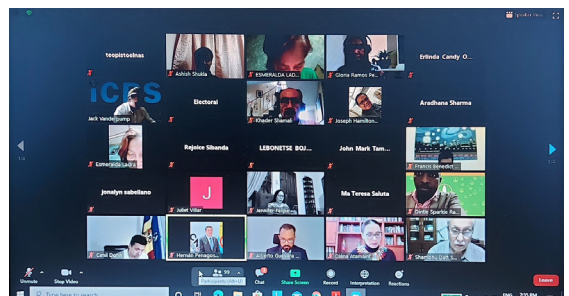
Diana Atamaint, President, National Electoral Council Ecuador

Simon Verdon, CEO, Democracy Counts, United Kingdom

Mentioned below are the takeaways:

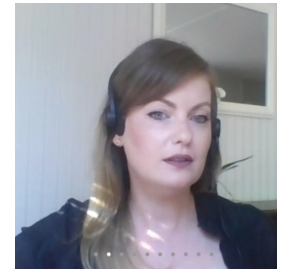
- COVID-19 has affected elections across the globe. More than 90 countries and territories across all the continents decided to hold or postpone national and sub-national elections and referendums since the end of February, when the COVID-19 crisis became global. (Global overview of the impact of COVID-19 on elections developed by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, International IDEA).
- 31% elections were conducted on scheduled time while nearly 43% elections were postponed due to pandemic. Not only has it led to the postponement of elections, it has also resulted in lower turnout in elections that have continued throughout the pandemic.

- Low turnout in the elections conducted amidst pandemic is also a challenge. France's municipal elections that were carried out between March and June, recorded a historically low turnout of 40%, compared with 63.5% in 2014. If the pandemic leads to low turnout in elections over the next year, then there is a serious risk that it would damage the legitimacy of the winning party and by extension the electoral democracy itself.
- The use of e-learning tools is important to ensure that staff is well-trained in best practice both from a safety and operational perspective as well a public relations standpoint. Online training courses can deliver training that is consistent in its quality as well.
- Misinformation has been spread widely due to the incessant flow of the information across the world. In such a scenario, EMBs should be the main source of information for everything related to elections, inform and educate citizens, develop mechanisms to dispel rumours and false information, facilitate two-way communication, collaboration and cooperation and lastly, develop and implement informed decision-making mechanisms.
- Voter Awareness and other election campaign should move online to enhance their reach. Hence, a department has to be in place for



social media monitoring. They should continuously integrate diverse feedback into how these violations are defined. Platforms should continue working with EMBs and public health authorities to widely disseminate trusted public health and election information.

- Election management bodies (EMBs) should focus on protecting voter participation and inclusion through proactive communication strategies that publicly share accurate, timely information and increase voters' understanding of new processes and procedures. EMBs should also develop crisis communication plans and consider linking traditional and social media communication channels with public health authorities
- Safety measures such as masks, sanitizers and others would tend to increase the budget of elections which needs to be taken in account while election planning. Budgetary issues and high global demand for PPE will therefore be big obstacles for many EMBs in their efforts to make polling stations safe.



- Use of technology in the sphere of elections like citizen, staff and candidate online portals, polling station management, centralised electoral registers, e-voting and online learning for polling station staff.

REC EN English

What Technology Is Available?

- Citizen, Staff and Candidate Online Portals
- Polling Station Management
- Centralised electoral registers
- E-voting
- Online learning for polling station staff

Each of these has a part to play to increase assurance and reduce risk.

Simon Verdon's screen

The webinar was concluded with a Q & A session.

Snap Story Belarus



How can EMBs Manage Turnout during a Pandemic?

Global politics has been defined in 2020 by its attempt to deal with a deadly virus. This is no different for the work carried out by electoral management bodies (EMBs) across the globe, as they deal with the challenge of how to manage their respective elections in the middle of a pandemic. The ongoing public health crisis has impacted elections across the globe in a variety of ways. Not only has it led to the postponement of elections in over 70 countries, it has also resulted in lower turnout in elections that have continued throughout the pandemic.

In examining the topic of electoral turnout during pandemics, this article will reflect on a recent virtual roundtable held by the International Centre of Parliamentary Studies (ICPS) of the same title, as well as interviews we have had with our members and members of dozens of EMBs. Throughout these conversations and events, the consensus has been that EMBs need to be able to give voters the confidence to go out and vote, and staff the confidence to do their jobs. This can be seen in three challenges in particular.

Firstly, EMBs need to ensure that polling stations are safe places for voters to cast their ballots. This will be in large part achieved by the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) to all staff, and, if possible, to voters as well. In the

Kentucky Democratic presidential primary (where around 500,000 cast their vote), the state provided 5,000 masks, 4,000 gallons of hand sanitiser, 5,800 face shields and



20,000 gloves for poll workers. However, this won't be simple for many EMBs. Kentucky still required support from the state government to procure the necessary amounts of PPE, and that was the case even as it cut its usual number of 3,700 polling stations down to 170. Budgetary issues and high global demand for PPE will therefore be big obstacles for many EMBs in their efforts to make polling stations safe.

Secondly, there is the issue of how will those who are confirmed as having, or suspect they have, Covid-19 vote in upcoming elections. It is unlikely that the virus will disappear in the near future, and so provisions will have to be put in place by EMBs to enable those with the virus to vote. The creation of separate spaces for such voters to cast their ballots will have to be set up, while testing temperatures and carrying out medical assessments will also have to be considered.

Thirdly, provisions need to be put in place to ensure that electoral staff feel safe to work. This isn't just a hypothetical concern, and EMBs have to realise that it won't just be voters who are scared. In March, the Ohio primary was postponed as hundreds of workers dropped out at short notice with concerns about catching the virus, despite the Ohio Election Commission's efforts to send protective gear and cleaning equipment. In a warning to all EMBs, this was a clear illustration that simply providing PPE will be insufficient to alleviate poll workers' fears of getting infected. Other electoral commissions have subsequently taken a more employee-centric approach to dealing with the pandemic. This has

included testing of thousands of members of staff, and investing in the infrastructure to allow staff to work from home, whether that includes the purchase of new laptops, setting up VPNs, or utilising technologies like Zoom.

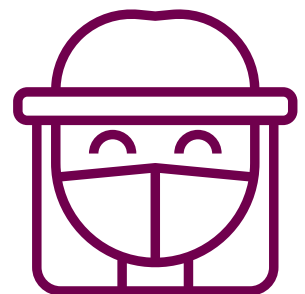
Electoral commissions and their respective states will need to establish safe practice in polling stations as a public safety issue, treating it in the same way as seatbelts. With this issue, and like most of the issues raised above, effective communication will be key to making sure both voters and staff feel safe, and that turnout isn't too greatly affected by the pandemic. EMBs will need to constantly communicate their responses ahead of the election, explain how they will ensure safety during the election, make voters familiar and comfortable with the measures being implemented. In the Dominican Republic, for example, these efforts appear to have worked. Among people who stated they were very likely to vote, 69% had been exposed to the EMB's public safety campaigns, whereas only half of those who were unlikely to vote were aware of them.

The use of e-learning tools could provide an effective way to ensure that staff are well trained in best practice both from a safety and operational perspective as well as a public relations standpoint. Online training courses have inevitably become far more popular during the pandemic, but their value will probably extend beyond contingency planning. Simon Verdon, CEO of Democracy Counts, highlighted how such courses can quickly deliver training that is consistent in its quality and that is more agile than traditional training courses. Both facets could be vital as the pandemic throws up previously unknown issues.

EMBs and governments do have a number of options at their disposal which

could help to address the issues mentioned and improve turnout. The option that has been picked by several states, has been to postpone the election until the pandemic has subdued. This, however, raises constitutional issues, and the public are far from unanimous in their support or opposition for this option. According to Professor Michael Bruter from the London School of Economics, about 73% of the voting population in the US are against postponing November's election, and President Trump's recent comments suggesting that he is considering postponing have further polarised the matter. Yet, such attitudes are not homogenous across demographics or even countries. Professor Bruter's research has shown that in the US, a majority of 18-24 year olds are in favour of postponement, as are those considered particularly vulnerable to the virus. In the UK, a swift decision to postpone the May 2020 local election for a year was met with little fanfare.

EMBs also have the option of trying to increase the use of postal voting. In the Kentucky primary, where they closed the majority of poll stations, they actually had more votes cast in 2020 than they did in 2016 – an achievement that has largely been attributed to its greater encouragement of postal voting. However, EMBs – especially those with only a limited experience in this field – will have to take care. Commissioner Thomas Hicks, from the US Election Assistance Commission, noted during our virtual roundtable that EMBs will be in a race against the clock to ensure that postal ballots are sent out on time, that the public are given information to be able to fill them out correctly, and



that the ballots get sent back, received and counted quickly and as the voter intended.

The expansion of early voting has also been discussed as a way to better manage turnout. In the US, for states that allow early voting many polls open two to three weeks early, but some go as far as opening 30 days before the polls close. Opening the polls for such a length of time would help poll stations to enforce safe social distancing as they spread out the electorate across weeks rather than hours. Plus, giving the electorate a better chance of accessing the polls at off-peak times could bolster confidence that poll stations are safe.

Nevertheless, it will be impossible to entirely remove safety concerns about poll stations for as long as this pandemic continues, and that is why there has been a resurgence in interest in electronic voting and registration methods. While some



countries like Estonia have embraced e-voting for over a decade now, the vast majority of electoral

democracies have not moved online. In Estonia, online voting is the most common way of voting and has been

shown to be more cost effective as well. Such democracies will be well suited to managing turnout, but for many countries this won't be possible. Such options require time to set up. Sy Mamabolo, the Chief Electoral Officer of the South African Electoral Commission, has commented that while he hopes that South Africa could adopt such methods in 2024, 2021 will probably come too soon. Online voting also brings with it a degree of risk associated with the use of technology, which takes time to protect against. E-registration methods are less liable to be misused or interfered with, but time would be an issue.

Whatever actions EMBs take in response to the pandemic, it is unlikely to please all voters. As Professor Bruter said during our most recent event, “There will be no such thing as a good EMB” during this pandemic.

The lack of a one-size fits all solution to the issues brought up by the pandemic is also heightened by the fact that electorates tend to be skeptical of change and prefer traditional methods of voting. Many within the electorate, especially in an era of disinformation and anti-establishmentarianism, suspect that when politicians make changes to electoral procedures self-interest is driving the change rather than public health.

Snap Story Malawi



Source: ICPS



Strategies for International and Domestic Election Observation in Asia during COVID-19

Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) COVID-19 Risk

Mitigation Strategy Prior to deployment in the host country:

- Observers are selected on priority from lower-risk countries with little or no local transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- Direct flight routes are preferred when available.
- Coordination with local authorities is critical, as our observers and staff need to comply with applicable travel restrictions (e.g. mandatory quarantine or COVID-19 PCR testing).

ANFREL COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Strategy Once in the host country:

- Strong emphasis on social distancing and hand washing.
- All observers and staff are required to wear face masks in public.
- All should also maintain a detailed journal of their daily activities for contact tracing purposes.
- We monitor closely the health of our observers and staff in cooperation with healthcare professionals.

In practice: Example of Sri Lanka

- After two postponements, the country held its parliamentary elections on August 5 (originally scheduled for April 25).
- ANFREL initially intended to send a full-fledged international election observation mission but had to revise its plans in light of the challenges.
- We then prepared for a downsized mission, with observers who would go through quarantine upon arrival. Despite collaboration with the Election Commission and MFA, the absence of flights was an obstacle.
- ANFREL is now conducting an election assessment with experts conducting remote interviews, as well as volunteers based in Sri Lanka who will collect data in polling stations and counting centers.

The Sri Lanka COVID-19 Code of Conduct

- This document was initiated by and endorsed by 6 domestic observer groups and ANFREL.
- It assists organizations in making appropriate preparations for the



2020 Sri Lankan Parliamentary Elections
COVID-19 Code of Conduct for Election Observers

deployment of their staff and volunteers (PPE, social distancing, contact tracing, etc.), and comes together with a pledge.

An example of domestic observation: People’s Action for Free and Fair Elections, PAFFREL



- The oldest and largest election observation group in Sri Lanka, it has developed this year a mobile application for collecting data.
- Current deployment plan: - 320 long-term observers (LTOs) - 1,000 observers for postal voting (advance voting) - 3,000 mobile observers in 260 vehicles for Election Day
- PAFFREL’s risk mitigation plans include enforcing the Code of Conduct mentioned previously; preparing a booklet of COVID-19 guidelines for their observers, providing face masks, hand sanitizer and thermometers, practicing social distancing, arranging health insurance for staff, etc.

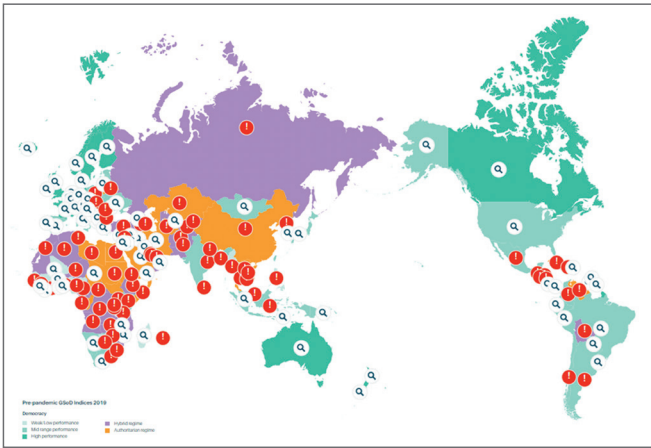
A second example: Centre for Monitoring Election Violence, CMEV

- Current deployment plan: - 100 long-term observers (LTOs) - 1,125 field coordinators - 3,000 static observers in polling stations on Election Day - 100 PWD mobile observers to promote inclusiveness
- CMEV’s risk mitigation plans are similar to PAFFREL’s. Overall, the budget for the observation mission had to be increased by almost 50% to implement precautionary measures and prepare for contingencies (e.g. allotting budget for possible quarantine, etc.)



Source: aweb.org

International IDEA's **Global Monitor** tracks impact of COVID-19



Governments around the world have assembled emergency powers to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Global Monitor of COVID-19's, 'Impact on Democracy and Human Rights', launched by European Union and International IDEA, gathers updated information on 162 countries. This will harness global expertise of think-tanks and other organizations to offer a one-stop shop' measures taken globally. Further it will analyse how they affect democracy and human rights, from media freedoms to constitutional checks and balances.

"The COVID-19 pandemic threatens not just our public health but the state of our democracies around the world. The Global Monitor gives journalists, policymakers and civil society activists the ability to hold governments to account by tracking their policy responses and identifying where our basic rights are backsliding, whether because regular elections, civic action or independent media are being trampled upon," said International IDEA Secretary-General Kevin Casas-Zamora.

"Trustworthy, accurate and clearly presented information is more important than ever in this crisis. This tracker provides the tool," added Casas-Zamora.

The Global Monitor platform is produced in the form of an online world map with links to country and regional profiles containing detailed data, analysis and an assessment of which measures and actions should be watched or represent a concern from a democracy and human rights perspective.

This map shows the pre-pandemic regime types in the world in 2019 based on the Global State of Democracy Indices. It does not yet show the impacts of COVID-19

measures on democracy and human rights.

Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen said, "We can't let the response to this crisis stand in the way of pluralism, political participation, dissent and transparency. That is why having this global monitoring platform is so fundamental. Information is the first step to understanding any negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on democracy and human rights."

Many governments are restricting human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the freedoms of assembly and of movement. While certain restrictions can be justified under international law, notably if they are lawful, necessary, and proportionate, subject to review and of limited duration, it is paramount that they are lifted once the COVID-19 outbreak is over.

In April 2020, the EU launched the "Team Europe" package to support EU partner countries in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. The Global Monitor of COVID-19's, "Impact on Democracy and Human Rights", is an important part of this package.

Source: www.idea.int

Guidelines for Electoral Activities during COVID-19



As the world reacts to a new pandemic (COVID-19), it is essential that Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and public authorities around the world make sensible and well-informed decisions regarding whether and how to hold scheduled electoral activities (e.g., voter registration, political campaigning, poll worker training, and ballot casting). These decisions should be informed by health authorities and might vary depending on each country's public health capabilities, level of spread of the disease, and other contextual factors. Holding elections in the time of pandemic will not be easy but should not be viewed as impossible without considering reasonable measures that could protect both health and democratic rights. Where elections are not feasible in the short term, careful consideration must be given to measures that ensure the continuity of governance, protection of institutions and fundamental rights of individuals. Any delays should be agreed to on the basis of sound risk assessment and involve set milestones agreed across the political

divide and based on public health evidence.

IFES has gathered a series of recommendations to guide EMB planning and implementation of electoral events during this period that

is informed by general guidance issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and best practices issued by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) or implemented by EMBs around the world who have conducted electoral processes during public health crises. These recommendations were developed to the best of IFES' knowledge as of March 19, 2020. As research on COVID-19 is ongoing and new information is made available every day,* please refer to the relevant health authorities for the most up-to-date guidance.

Alternatives to Holding In-Person Electoral Activities:

Postponements

To avoid crowds and the risk of person-to-person contagion, EMBs might postpone electoral events (e.g., in-person voter registration, political rallies, in-person ballot casting) until a later date, respecting the country's legal provisions.

Holding Electoral Activities Online/Remotely

Crowding can also be avoided by holding some electoral events online or remotely, where legal provisions allow.

- Electoral campaign: Candidates and political parties might suspend in-person rallies and conduct campaigns solely online or via traditional media.
- Voter registration: EMBs might facilitate and encourage online or mail-in voter registration.
- Poll worker training: EMBs might develop and encourage virtual trainings for poll workers.
- Vote casting: EMBs might encourage online, mail-in, drop-off, or absentee ballots.
- Electoral dispute resolution: EMBs might encourage the filing of complaints regarding the electoral process online.

Mitigating Risks of Holding in-Person Electoral Activities

Situation to consider: Avoiding or reducing the risks of crowding and human-to-human contact

Electoral Events Affected

- Political rallies
- In-person voter registration
- Poll worker trainings
- Packing of polling station kits
- Ballot casting

Risk Factors

- High rate of transmission of respiratory droplets from person to person

Mitigation Actions

- Mark (with tape on the floor, for example) and enforce required social distancing (6 feet) between voters in line and during procedures
- Rearrange polling stations to maintain required social distance and to allow for sufficient space between voters, poll workers, party agents, and observers during all procedures
- Develop building entry and exit protocol to avoid large number of people in closed spaces
- Prominently display posters promoting hand washing, social distancing, and reminding citizens to avoid touching their faces
- Display posters promoting respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette

Situation to consider: Avoiding or reducing risks of contact with contaminated surfaces or objects (e.g., voter IDs, ballots, ballot boxes, pens, fingerprint scanners)

Electoral Events Affected

- Voter registration
- Poll worker trainings
- Packing of polling station kits
- Ballot casting
- Vote tallying

Risk Factors

- Potential transmission of the virus via fomites (surfaces and objects likely to be contaminated) through touching of mouth, nose, and possibly eyes

Mitigation Actions

- Provide hand-washing stations with soap and water, or hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol)
- Rearrange polling station layout to minimize contact between voters and curtains, doorknobs, desks and other surfaces
- Clean surfaces and objects in polling station (desks, tables, dividers, scanners, voting machines, pens, ballot boxes) touched by people frequently with alcohol-based solution (at least 60% alcohol)
- Provide gloves and masks (with appropriate training for correct usage) for poll workers
- Consider encouraging citizens to bring and use their own pens
- Issue guidance for voters and poll workers to avoid all unnecessary handling of material (e.g., verifying ID cards without touching them)

Situation to consider: Mitigating risks to highly vulnerable populations

Electoral Events Affected

- In-person voter registration
- Poll worker trainings
- Packing of polling station kits
- Ballot casting

Risk Factors

- Older adults and people with serious chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease are at higher risk of dying from the disease

Mitigation Actions

- Consider sending mail-in ballots for voters in independent or assisted living facilities, retirement communities, and care centers
- Consider relocating polling stations from areas close to independent or assisted living facilities, retirement communities, and care centers
- Consider releasing vulnerable populations from all poll worker service
- Consider proxy voting, taking needed precautions to avoid voter intimidation

Situation to consider: Releasing healthcare workers from poll worker service

Electoral Events Affected

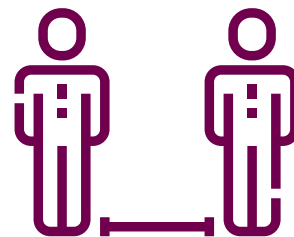
- Voter registration
- Poll worker trainings
- Ballot casting

Risk Factors

- Healthcare workers must be available to support the potentially high number of patients

Mitigation Actions

- Consider releasing health workers from all poll worker service



Source: www.ifes.org

Parliamentary Elections held in Kyrgyz Republic

The Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER) of the Kyrgyz Republic conducted parliamentary elections on October 4, 2020, which were monitored by international observers from around the

world. According to the CCER, the election will be held with high standards of sanitary and epidemiological safety, and public health measures in order to ensure the safety of voters, candidates and election officials.

Dominican Republic conducts Extraordinary General Elections

The Dominican Republic held the extraordinary general elections which included presidential, senatorial and parliamentary elections on July 5, 2020. The elections were originally scheduled to take place on May 17 according to the constitutional mandate. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the elections were postponed to July 5 by the Central Electoral Board (JCE, by its Spanish initial) upon the agreement with political parties and electoral stakeholders. The electoral system of the Dominican Republic stipulates that if none of the presidential candidates receives more than 50% of the valid votes, a runoff election will be held with the two most voted candidates. Under the system, the runoff was scheduled to take place on July 26. With the preliminary result of the 1st round of the voting, the presidential candidate from the main opposition party obtained 52.52% of the valid votes, so there was no presidential runoff election. The JCE also conducted elections for overseas constituencies, through which

seven deputies were elected on behalf of the Dominican diaspora. Despite the pandemic condition the elections took place because the Constitution of the Dominican Republic establishes August 16 as an invariable date on which new authorities including president, vice president, senators and deputies shall assume their duties.

The elections were carried out under the health protocol developed by the JCE. This protocol served as health guidelines for both the electoral staff and voters. Even though voting is not compulsory in the Dominican Republic, the voter turnout recorded 55.29% amid the ongoing pandemic.



Source: www.aweb.org

Mongolia Conducts Parliamentary Elections



The Parliamentary (State Great Hural) elections of Mongolia were held on June 24 in multi-mandated constituencies within the frame of newly adopted, 'Law on Parliamentary Elections'. The polling took place from 7am to 10pm across the country. A total of 1,475,780 out of 2,003,969 registered voters cast their votes. The voter turnout was 73.65%. There were 2,070 election precincts established where 35,772 civil servants worked to conduct the election using an automated election system.

The General Election Commission (GEC) of Mongolia prepared and conducted the elections following the 'Recommendations and the Regulation on coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak prevention' set by the State Emergency Commission of Mongolia.

The GEC has set rules on the procedure of candidate registration that allows a party representative to be accompanied by only one person. The GEC asked visitors to fill out the questionnaire form (COVID-19 visitor questionnaire) at the entrance of the GEC and requested them to wear masks and use sanitizer upon

entering the building. The time schedule for candidate registration allocated for each party, coalition, and candidate was informed along with notices delivered to them prior to candidate registration. The GEC distributed several videos that explained the voting procedure during the pandemic.



Source: www.aweb.org

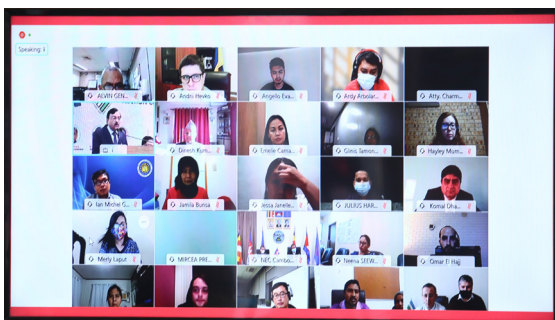
ECI hosts **International Election Visitors Programme**

The Election Commission of India organized a Virtual International Election Visitors Programme 2020 (IEVP) for foreign Election Management Bodies (EMBs)/Organisations from November 5-7, 2020, in the context of the Bihar Legislative Assembly Elections.

In the past, ECI has organized International Election Visitor Programmes (IEVPs) for foreign EMBs/Organizations in 2014 Lok Sabha elections; elections for a few State Assemblies in Feb/March 2017 and Lok Sabha Elections in May 2019.

Bihar has an electorate of over 72 million, one of the largest in the world to vote so far amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This provided us with an opportunity to share our best practices and experience of the conduct of our poll process during the pandemic period.

Delegates from over 40 countries across the world including Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malawi, Maldives, Moldova, Mongolia, Mauritius, Nepal, Philippines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Zambia etc. and 3 international organizations (viz. International IDEA, International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES) and Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) was invited to participate in the IEVP 2020.



The IEVP 2020 Programme included an online briefing session on November 5, 2020 where participants were given an overview of the large canvas of Indian electoral process, the new initiatives taken by ECI on voter facilitation, transparency and accessibility of electoral system; and ECI's response to the changing needs of training and capacity building.

The keynote address at the inaugural session was delivered by Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora.

On the second day, an overview of the Commission's flagship programme for voter awareness – SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) was presented. The Chief Electoral Officer of Bihar also shared the state's experiences of conducting an election amidst pandemic with the global audience. Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar along with other officials of the Commission addressed the audience.

The participants were given virtual tour of polling stations in Bihar with a walkthrough of the electoral process. The visit was amplified by exclusive footage, a walkthrough of the electoral process, and various arrangements at the polling station for a free, fair, participative and safe election. The concluding remarks was given by Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra.

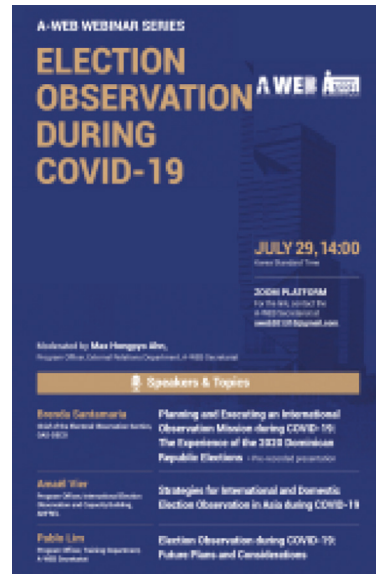
Cambodia

launches online name search service for voters

Online Name Search Service for Voters in Cambodia - Spokesman of the NEC Cambodia

In a major step forward in serving the electorate, the National Election Committee of Cambodia (NEC) has launched an application called 'Voterlist KH' and its official website (www.voterlist.nec.gov.kh) which allows Cambodian voters to easily confirm their registration online. Every year the NEC updates the voter lists to ensure that they are complete and accurate. Citizens' names must be registered in the voter lists for them to be eligible to vote. This new App is another fruitful outcome of Cambodia's electoral reform that has been implemented since 2015. Once the reform bill was passed the NEC Cambodia conducted voter lists revision and voter registration. The voter list preparation in Cambodia was computerized in 2016. The benefits of the computerized voter lists preparation are as follows:

- Ensuring the identification of voters;
- Ensuring a voter has a single name on the voter list at a single polling station;
- Ensuring that the quality of voter lists is complete, accurate and up-to-date, and



The Upcoming Webinar on July 29: Election Observation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Ensuring secure storage of voter lists on the server.

The quality of the voter lists has been applauded by the stakeholders, citizens, political parties, national and international communities, embassy representatives and civil society organizations. The Committee for 'Free and Fair Elections' in Cambodia underlined that the accuracy of the 2019 voter lists has improved up to 99.7%.

Rapid response protects Serbian

Voters in National Elections

On June 21, 2020, more than six million Serbians cast their ballots in parliamentary, provincial

and local elections. These were the first national elections to take place in Europe following a series of postponements as a



result of the COVID-19 pandemic. With a partial opposition boycott and the threat of the COVID-19 virus looming over the elections – initially scheduled for April 26 until the national state of emergency came into effect on March 11. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) provided key, targeted assistance to election administration authorities as part of the USAID-funded two-year ‘Political Processes Strengthening Activity’. Additional funds were obtained from USAID’s ‘Electoral and Political Processes Fund’ to enable IFES to grant additional support to the Republic Election Commission (RIK) to execute national elections with an effective COVID-19 response.

After the postponement of elections by more than 70 countries and territories due to COVID-19, it is important to develop adaptations and implement preventive measures to reduce the risks of transmission and allow for the safe conduct of elections. Public authorities, candidates, voters, poll workers and observers all play an important role in making sure these measures are respected and can yield

positive results for which we expect and hope. IFES will continue to work with its partners around the world to help ensure the safety of citizens and democratic processes.

IFES’ programming in Serbia was made possible with support from the United States Agency for International Development partly through the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS). Established in 1995, CEPPS pools the expertise of three premier international organizations dedicated to democratic development: IFES, the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute.

CEPPS has a 25-year track record of collaboration and leadership in democracy, human rights and governance support, learning from experience, and adopting new approaches and tools based on the ever-evolving technological landscape.



Fernanda Burić & Andrew Rogan
International Foundation for Electoral Systems

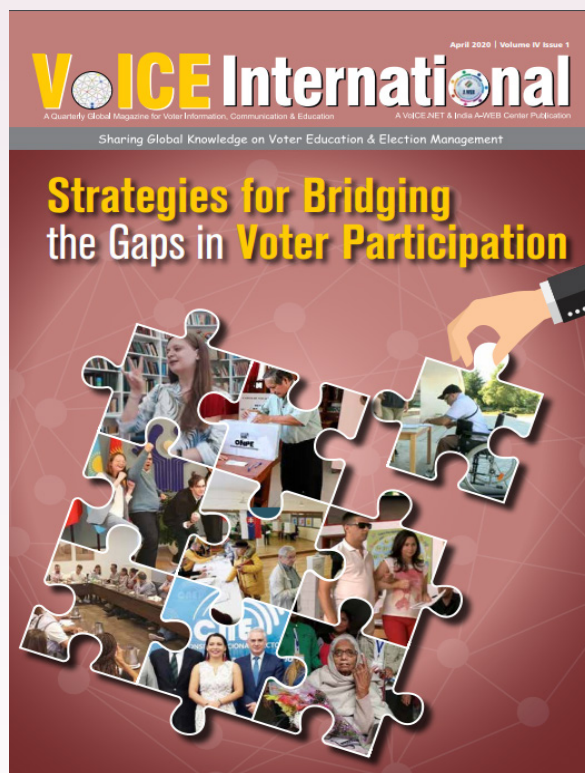
Source: ifes.org

VoICE International launches Volume IV Issue I

This issue of the quarterly publication of ECI marks the fourth year in its quest for global knowledge sharing in election management. International perspective on ‘Strategies for Bridging the Gaps in Voter Participation’ was the theme of this issue which aims to enrich readers on concepts and practices related to voter education and participation. There are interesting articles, stories and experiences from Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, India, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Nepal, Ukraine, International IDEA, IFES, etc. Topics like enhanced electoral participation through accessibility initiatives and the experience of compulsory voting towards the same objective are also focused upon in the magazine.

Celebration of National Voter’s Day, which completed a decade this year on January 25, is another prime event covered in this issue. On the occasion, an Annual Lecture Series

was instituted to celebrate the seminal contribution of Sukumar Sen, the architect of Indian Electoral System and the first Chief Election Commissioner, India.



Report on COVID-19 & Democracy Calls for urgent measures

A new report, ‘Global Democracy and COVID-19: Upgrading International Support’, was published on July 15, 2020. The report highlights how some governments are using public health crisis to further curtail democratic activities and provide

recommendations for policymakers and civil society to counteract the negative impacts of COVID-19 on democracy.

The report, endorsed by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and ten other pro-democracy institutions,



is aligned with a recent, ‘Call to Defend Democracy’. The letter, initiated by International IDEA, was signed by almost 100 organizations from all over the world, as well as nearly 500 prominent individuals from 119 countries, including 13 Nobel Laureates and 62 former Heads of State or Government.

“The post-COVID environment will look different and require new ideas and approaches to safeguard democratic practices and combat authoritarian abuses,” highlights the report. “Those concerned with democracy need to help governments’, international organizations and civil society reformers lift their heads from the immediate tragedy of the pandemic and factor in these longer-term political issues.”

Five report recommendations include:

- 1) Establishing a comprehensive monitoring mechanism to track restrictive emergency measures, and guide potential international responses
- 2) Incorporating democracy support into COVID-19 emergency and recovery aid
- 3) Investing in multilateral cooperation to safeguard democratic norms and practices
- 4) Providing support to new civic participation initiatives that have emerged because of the pandemic
- 5) Harnessing emergent innovations in democratic participation

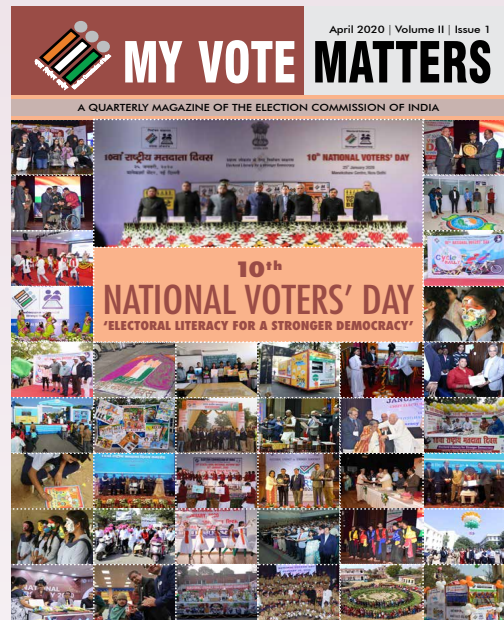
Source: www.idea.int

My Vote Matters Vol II Issue 1 released

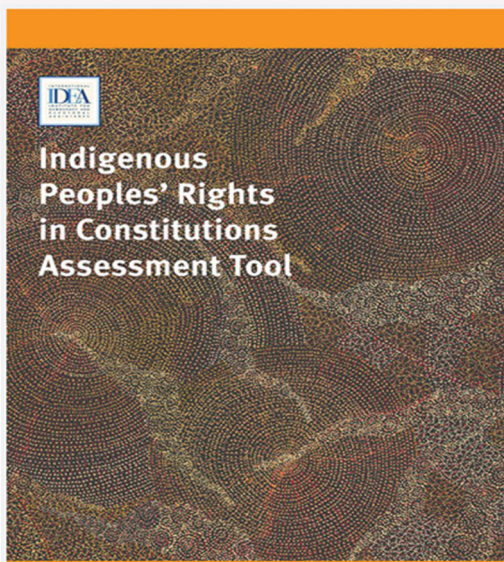
In the second year of its publication, the magazine primarily focused on the celebration of the 10th National Voter’s Day across the country.

This year was the tenth of this annual celebration which was first marked in the year 2010. The theme of this issue of MVM is ‘Electoral Literacy for Stronger Democracy’.

This issue carries a series of interesting articles from senior officers of the Commission on ‘Advance Planning in Indian Elections’, ‘ECI’s International Outreach’, ‘Towards Paperless Polling’, ‘New Benchmarking in Accessibility’ and ‘Journey of Indian Elections since Independence’. Offering a glimpse on ground level reality of the country, the magazine also includes inspiring stories of Indian elections from the States. A brief account of the first Annual Lecture Series, as a tribute to the architect of Indian Electoral System, Sukumar Sen is also included in this issue.



Indigenous Peoples’ Rights In Constitutions Assessment Tool



The Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Constitutions Assessment Tool helps users to analyse a constitution from the perspective of indigenous peoples’ rights. Using a series of questions, short explanations and example provisions from constitutions around the world, the Assessment Tool

guides its users through the text of a constitution. It allows for systematic analysis of the language and provisions of a constitutional text to assess how robustly indigenous peoples’ rights are reflected in it.

A constitution articulates a vision that reflects the state’s values and history, as well as its aspirational objectives for the future. As the supreme law of a state, the constitution defines its structure and institutions, distributes political power, and recognizes and protects fundamental rights, critically determining the relationship between citizens and governments.

Embedding in constitution, recognition of and rights-based protections for specific groups, such as indigenous peoples, can give these groups and their rights, enhanced protection. This can be furthered by providing for specialized institutions and processes to deepen the realization of those rights in practice.

Maintaining Safety and Trust in Elections during the Pandemic

NEC Releases ‘Maintaining Safety and Trust in Elections during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Paper on Election Management Based on the 21st National Assembly Elections in the Republic of Korea’

The NEC has published an in-depth report entitled *Maintaining Safety and Trust in Elections during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Paper on Election Management Based on the 21st National Assembly Elections in the Republic of Korea*.

The paper outlines the measures put in place and the various ways the NEC adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic in the run-up to the elections held on April 15. Our partners and colleagues are welcome to download and use the information



freely and we hope this will provide some support for those holding elections in the near future. The report is available on our website.

Source: www.idea.int/

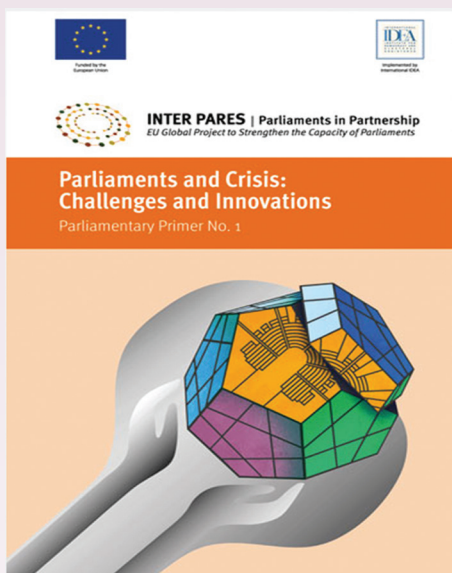
IDEA-Parliaments and Crisis: Challenges and Innovations

Parliaments and Crisis: Challenges and Innovations is the new Parliamentary Primer produced by the INTER PARES project, funded by the European Union and delivered by International IDEA. Written in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the Primer looks at how democratic parliaments play a crucial role in making good decisions and protecting citizens' rights during a crisis.

The coronavirus pandemic has

deeply impacted how we are governed. Democracies have had to adapt to operating under extreme time pressure, without losing the advantages of transparency, citizen voice and effective policy feedback loops, that make democracy the most effective and just governance system.

This Primer focuses on particularly two aspects of parliaments' responses. First, it looks at how parliaments ensured that emergency measures considered



the needs of all sections of the population and also that any emergency government powers were both limited in time and scope and subject to parliamentary oversight. Second, the Primer examines how parliaments implemented innovative solutions to enable virtual functioning. The Primer concludes by exploring how parliaments can play a key role in reviewing how effectively government responded to the crisis, identifying lessons to be implemented in improved crisis and disaster planning.

Source: www.idea.int

Political Parties during Lockdown and Social Distancing

In several countries, political parties are stepping up their digital presence in the online world. This creates opportunities for political parties to reach a wider potential audience or membership base. Digitalization has been an ongoing process in political parties across the globe, and the current pandemic is likely to accelerate this process.

This Primer highlights some of the mechanisms that are being widely used and can be adopted by political parties to allow them to continue to function or operate in times of social distancing and other contexts where restrictions on social gatherings are being enforced. It also presents practical options for digitalization and developing an online presence that parties

in different contexts can adapt and optimize to respond to such restrictions, and ideas to support the transformation efforts that parties are undertaking.



Source: www.idea.int



Glossary

Social Distancing - Social distancing, also called “physical distancing,” means keeping a safe space between yourself and other people who are not from your household. To practice social or physical distancing, stay at least 6 feet (about two arms’ length) from other people who are not from your household in both indoor and outdoor spaces.

Super Tuesday - In USA, this day is when the most states and territories hold presidential primary elections or caucuses. The candidates who win on Super Tuesday are more likely to win their party’s nomination.

Tellers - Representatives of parties who wait outside polling stations and ask people for their number on the electoral roll. This is to help the parties ensure all their supporters have voted. Tellers have no official status and no-one is obliged to give them any information.

Donkey Vote - A ballot paper marked with preferences for candidates without consideration of their policies or abilities. A classic donkey vote is one which records preferences straight down the ballot paper in the same order as the names printed. This term is used specifically within the Australian electoral system.

Hanging Chad - A chad that did not completely detach from the ballot. When there is a hanging chad, that vote may not be counted correctly.

? Quiz Time

1

In order to be as objective and neutral as possible, who (a set of people), despite not being prohibited from doing so, usually refrain from casting their vote in elections in England?

2

The ‘Althing’ was founded in 930AD, and is considered to be the longest running parliament in the world. It is a unicameral body with 63 members, elected every four years. Where can you find the ‘Althing’?

3

She joined politics in 1960 and became the Prime Minister of her country – and the first female Prime Minister in the world. Her daughter became President of the country in 1994. Who is this lady?

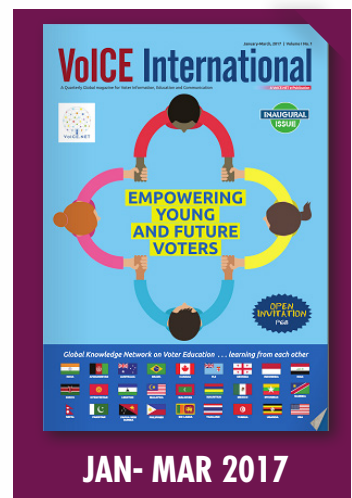
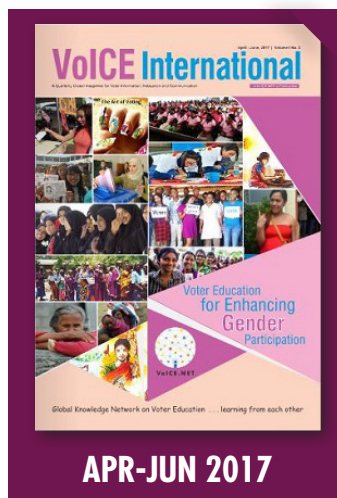
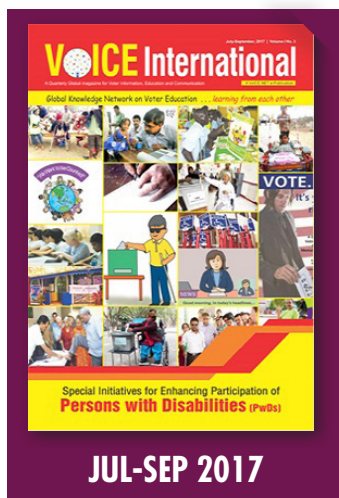
4

Sukumar Sen was the first Chief Election Commissioner of India, and he successfully administered independent India’s first two general elections. However, he also served as a Chief Election Commissioner of an African country. Name this country.

5

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 overturned existing Jim Crow laws in the United States to guarantee which group of people the right to vote freely and openly?

PREVIOUS ISSUES OF VoICE INTERNATIONAL



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Bangladesh



Bhutan



Bosnia and Herzegovina



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Canada



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India



Indonesia



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Kenya



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Kyrgyzstan



Lesotho



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Malawi



Maldives



Mauritius



Mexico



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Philippines



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South Africa



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U.S.A



IIIDEM



IFES



INTERNATIONAL IDEA

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Voter Information, Communication & Education Network

Voter Information, Communication & Education Network (VoICE.NET) is a Global Knowledge Network for sharing knowledge, resources and expertise on Voter Education.

VoICE.NET was launched on October 20, 2016 at the International Conference on Voter Education for Inclusive, Informed and Ethical participation held at New Delhi. The Global Knowledge Network is a part of the New Delhi Declaration adopted at the Conference by the 25 Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and representatives from UNDP, International IDEA, IFES and Malaysian Commonwealth Studies Centre. VoICE.NET contents are provided by the member EMBs/Organizations and the portal is maintained by Election Commission of India.