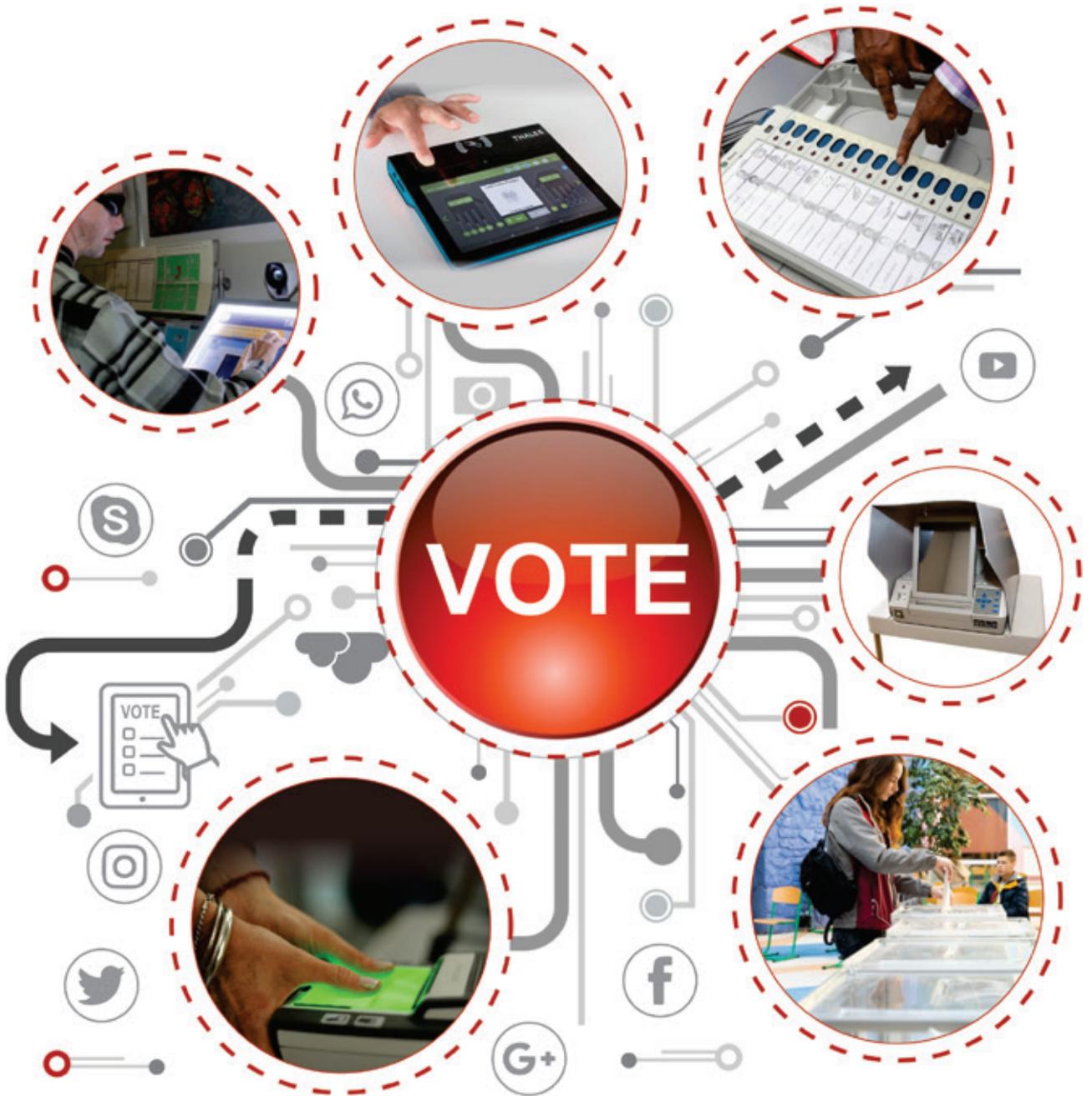


VOICE International

A Quarterly Global Magazine for Voter Information, Communication & Education

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



New Technology Initiatives for
**Voter Friendliness &
Ease of Elections**

Members & Associates: EMBs and International Organisations



Afghanistan



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MESSAGE

I am delighted to present you the next issue of VoICE International, an e-publication of VoICE.NET and India A-WEB Centre on Voter Information, Communication and Education. The magazine has, in its journey of 4 years, covered considerable ground in promoting vibrant exchange of knowledge in the field of election management and has struck a chord with its readers who are spread all across the world.

Each and every issue of this magazine addresses varied challenges that democracies face in our endeavor to conduct credible and participatory elections in our country specific context.

This particular issue of the magazine focuses on 'New technology initiatives for voter friendliness and ease of elections'. It outlines innovation, integration of technology and strategic interventions aimed at delivering free, fair and accessible elections.

A plethora of technological systems have become an inherent part of elections logistics management all over the world. Technology has given us ever new ways of interacting with our stakeholders adopting a new vocabulary that reaches out to them at a much faster pace.

As the frontiers of technology advanced, EMBs adopted a variety of technologies that would address their particular needs that are compatible with their legal requirements and would further enhance voter participation. Adopting a new technology invariably entails a step ahead in the conventional methods and requires the EMBs to engage afresh with their stakeholders. Each EMB has successfully traversed this difficult path. This magazine attempts to share the views and experiences of EMBs and election experts in their deployment of technological solutions.

Field of communication particularly has got revolutionized with the help of technology. International Election Visitors Programme (IEVP) 2021, hosted by ECI in April 2021 witnessed the 'Virtual' presence of Election Management Bodies of twenty-six countries and three International organizations. More than 100 delegates across

the world witnessed live polling process in four states and one Union Territory of India. They even heard, in virtual mode, the views of the voters and election functionaries from the field providing the international delegates an overview of the large canvas of the Indian electoral process.

Electoral Management Bodies all over the world are reaching out to voters using various digital platforms especially through smartphones and apps. Technology has simplified electoral management processes for each stakeholder and brought the Election administration in direct connect with the voters.

I congratulate Mr. Umesh Sinha, Secretary-General, ECI and Editor-in-Chief, VoICE International and his entire team, the Members of Editorial Board, and the Advisory Board for their dedicated efforts towards publication of this issue, despite the constraints imposed by COVID 19.



Sushil Chandra
Chief Election Commissioner of India





EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

VoICE International has been successfully enriching its readers with new endeavors and initiatives of many countries around the world. I'm very proud to present issue 4 (Volume IV) of Voice International. This edition carries valuable experiences of various Election Management Bodies on 'New technology initiatives for voter friendliness and ease of elections.

Technology has altered every aspect of Human Civilization. It has also helped to make the electoral process easier, with its legitimacy intact. Various countries are using technology to simplify their electoral processes. Whether it is voter awareness, registration process, electoral staff training or the actual polling, technology can help us at every stage of elections. In the present COVID scenario, technology has helped us reach out to all stakeholders through different platforms and even organize virtual conferences with Election Management Bodies all over the world.

The present issue of VoICE International showcases the use of technology by EMBs in their electoral processes and procedures as well as spreading awareness. Manitoba has overcome its geographical limitation to train its staff using various technological means. Election Commission of India has developed a cVIGIL app for the citizens to supervise the model code of conduct and to report any indiscretion of law. Recently a 24*7 web radio service on ECI portal was launched by Hon'ble President of India. Moreover, ECI would soon be launching its Web TV with an aim to reach the voters in an innovative and entertaining manner. Centre for Continuous Electoral Training (CICDE) of the Republic of Moldova, has launched innovative approaches for the children - the future voters, which includes electoral comics with gaming elements.

The issue includes global perspective, updates, announcements, events and also a 'Recap' section that takes us through a journey on the technological initiatives adopted by the EMBs in the recent past. The National Electoral Council of Ecuador has been a pioneer in using digital tools to improve the access to electoral information. Fijian Election Office used social media platforms like Facebook in the most productive way to minimize negative publicity and made a direct reach to the voters. The journey of electoral journey in Brazil, using electronic ballot since 1996 and now voting through biometric identification provides great insight. Malawi has successfully developed a biometric solution to counter the errors made by the previously used human input system.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Sushil Chandra who assumed the charge of the 24th Chief Election Commissioner of India. I look forward to his continued guidance and support in all our endeavours. I thank all the members of the Editorial Board and the Advisory Board for their contribution and support in making this issue a success.

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

Umesh Sinha

Editor-in-Chief, VoICE International
& Secretary General, ECI

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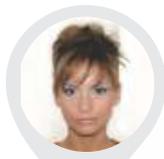
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AUSTRALIA



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Leveraging Technology for Election Management & Voter Facilitation: Indian Experience

India, world's largest democracy is home to more than 922 million voters with such myriad geographical, topographical, ethnic diversities. Working with a premise of 'No Voter to be Left Behind' in its connect, ECI has fulfilled its mandate with perfection, precision and as per timelines set forth under the constitutional prescription for over seven decades of glorious journey of elections in India.

Since its inception, innovation and integration of state of the art technology has been an essential part of journey of elections in the country. The commission has leveraged technology in every stage of election process to enhance the efficiency and efficacy of the service delivery systems.

The decade of 1980s witnessed first major step in introduction of technology in the electoral process. In 1982, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were first introduced on an experimental basis for Bye-Election in an Indian State (Kerala). This started on hand, the process of testing and acceptability of the technological aspects of these machines and how they could make the voting and the counting process efficient and accurate.

The first two decades of the 21st Century have seen progressive integration of IT and ICT enabled systems in Indian Elections. The Commission has leveraged technology options especially the digital technology in its run up to the 17th General Election in a big way. Over last decade, Use of technology has paved a way for new avenues of voter facilitation & making election more inclusive. From preparation of the election to results, technology is embedded in each step.

Spreading Awareness

In the past two years, the pandemic has posed novel challenges. A paradigm shifts in media landscape also redefined several aspect of voter education. The Commission's Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) is a multi-intervention programme that reaches out to various categories of voters to inform, educate and motivate them regarding electoral process. SVEEP Programs utilized the digital technology & modern media & communication tool to reach out to voters.



Use of Digital Technology & Social Media:

SVEEP played a critical role in educating stakeholders aware about the COVID-19 safety protocols of the Commission. ECI is actively reaching out through Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter handles. Keeping in mind, the change in media consumption patterns, SVEEP programs are adapted accordingly. Online modules have been introduced for Electoral Literacy Clubs in Schools. Web Radio Hello Voters was also launched on 11th National Voters' Day on January 25, 2021. The 24x7 online web radio service streams voter awareness programmes. Web TV is also under development.

SVEEP Digital Library: A SVEEP digital library is being designed which would ensure that all content on spreading

awareness on importance of voting and electoral processes available to all officials and stakeholders across the nation.

The new technological tools empower stakeholders especially the voters in user friendly manner and facilitate electoral participation at all steps across the board. On the other hand, the technology initiatives have made the elections more and more free, fair, inclusive, informed, accessible, safe, transparent and participative.

The technology initiatives of the Commission range from awareness generation to registration to facilitation of the voter as well as political parties to ensure a level playing field and declaration of the results besides training and capacity building of the officials.

Electoral Roll Management

Roll is the basic and an essential document for any electoral process. A notification for electing a member of legislature or parliament means calling upon the citizens enrolled as electors in the electoral roll to exercise their suffrage right. An accurate, defect free and healthy roll is a determinant of a free and fair election. The roll delineates inclusion of all eligible electors and exclusion of the ineligible from participation.

Computerisation of Electoral Rolls: Constitutional mandate for Maintenance of electoral rolls flows to the Election Commission of India from Article 324 and further amplified under the Representation of People Act, 1950 and Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is the legal authority for the revision of rolls in every assembly constituency. Polling Station wise rolls are

prepared in all Assembly Constituencies. Only one general electoral roll is maintained and is revised periodically with reference to a qualifying date i.e. 1st January of the year. In the year 1997, Election Commission initiated a country-wide comprehensive programme for computerization of electoral rolls for efficient and accurate maintenance especially in the wake of the scale and size of operations; the largest in the world. IT solutions had to address the challenge of multiple Indian languages in which electoral rolls are maintained.

Photo Electoral Rolls: In the run-up to the 2009 General Elections to the Lok Sabha, computerization along with photographs of the voters was completed on a nationwide basis. Thus, Photo Electoral Rolls were first introduced in General Elections 2009. By now, all the States and UTs have Photo Electoral Rolls (PERs).

ERO-NET: In 2017, a web based system named as ERO-NET was set up as stable platform to all the registration officers to process applications from persons seeking to register as electors and to closely monitor the process throughout the country.

ERONET provides seamless processing of registration forms, structured easy handling of the databases, regular and simpler way of monitoring the ER activities

to maintain ERs in good health.

Electors Photo Identity Cards: Tryst with Electors Photo Identity Card started in 1986 in many states. In 1993 direction was issued for making EPIC essential document for voting only to be rescheduled to ensure that all States follow and ensure providing EPIC for all the voters. By 1997 ECI had introduced EPIC in all the States. All voters have EPIC now. Braille print EPIC were launched in 2018 for PwD's (visually impaired).

●● —————
Today the Electoral Registration System of the ECI handles efficient services to 922.5 Million Voters of the country spread over more than 1 million polling stations, the largest operation in the world.

e-Elector Photo Identity Card: This year ECI has launched the new eElector Photo Identity Card initiative by way of handing over the digital EPIC to new voters on the eve of NVD 2021. This would be very useful for the voters as also it will improve the efficiency at the polling stations.

Photo Voter Slips/ Voter Information Slips: The Commission has ensured that an official voter slip with a photograph of the elector is distributed in time well in advance of the date of the poll as per a time schedule. A close monitoring of the distribution process is done by DEO's and General Observers. Booth Level Officers (BLOs) are entrusted with the responsibility of handing over voter slips to electors. Political parties are also kept apprised of the distribution schedule.

The Voter slips now stand substituted by Voter Information Slips from the last General Elections to the State Assemblies in March, 2021. Accessible Photo Voter Slips with Braille Features Persons with Disabilities (Visually impaired) are provided to facilitate equal access.

Facilitation

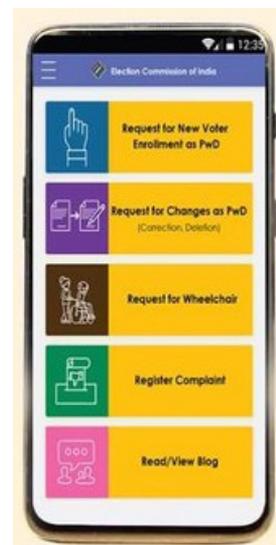
The Commission enhanced use of Information and Communication Technology to strengthen citizen participation and transparency also integrate the functions of election officials. Use of digital technology has been further encouraged to neutralize the impact of COVID- 19 pandemic as it offers contactless operations. A brief discussion on ICT initiatives follows:

National Service Voter's Portal: NVSP – National Voters Service Portal to process the forms received is a Secured online platform with the aim to provide online hassle-free services to the citizens through single window system for all voter related services including new voter registration and with the foremost priority to protect the voter's personal information.

Voter Portal for IT Driven Electoral Services: Election Commission of India has launched a new 'Voter Portal' <https://voterportal.eci.gov.in/> to provide a seamless interface for registration, alteration in entries, deletion, change of the address etc for voters. After logging into the portal, a citizen is now presented with an interactive interface suggesting a selection of choices based upon his previous selection. All websites of the commission are duly accessible for Persons with Disabilities.

Voter Helpline App: Taking forward its continuous efforts of building an active democratic citizenry in the country. The Election Commission of India has undertaken a new initiative by designing a Mobile Application for developing a culture of avid electoral engagement and making informed and ethical ballot decisions among citizens of the country. The app aims to provide a single point of service and information delivery to voters across the country.

PwD App: PwD app helps Person with Disabilities. PwD electors can register requests for marking as PwD's, new registration, migration, correction in EPIC details, wheelchair etc. It utilises the Accessibility features of mobile phones



for voters with blindness and hearing disabilities. The Application is available on the Google Play Store and can be downloaded.

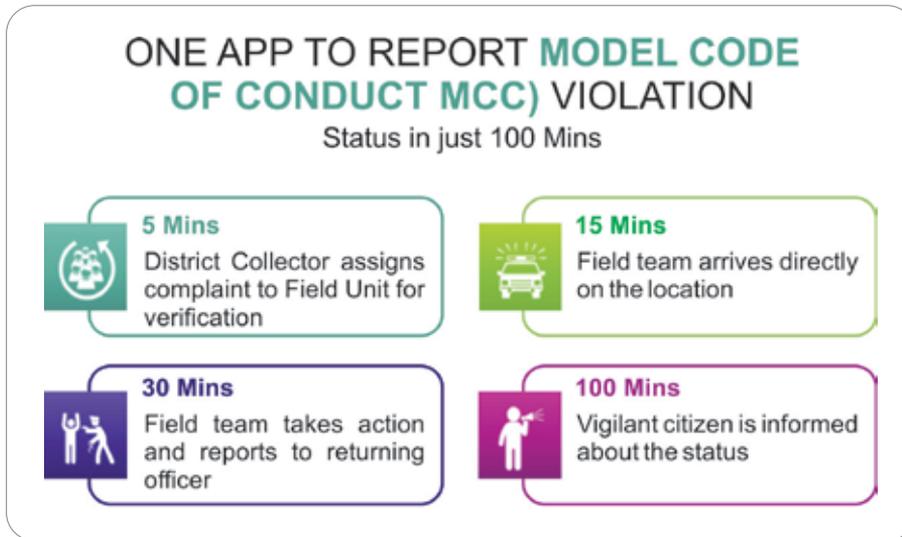
cVIGIL App: cVIGIL provides time-stamped evidentiary proof of the Model Code of Conduct / Expenditure Violation by

voting dates, EPIC, electoral roll, online registration or lodge a complaint.

Facilitating the political parties

Online filing of Nominations: The Nomination process draws a large number of people to the Election Office premises.

Therefore, for public health safety, during General Election to State Assembly in Bihar (2020) additional options were provided to facilitate online mode for filing nominations, uploading of accompanying documents and deposit security



empowering every citizen to click a photo or video using his or her Smartphone. The application is based on GIS technology. A unique feature of auto location provides fairly reliable and correct information for action by flying squads to navigate to the right spot of incidence and take prompt action. This App prioritizes the speedy and effective actions by authorities and promised users status reports within 100 minutes.

Voter Helpline Number: The Commission established Helpline at toll free number 1950 with a view to facilitate voter registration. One can call this number or send a message for any information related to elections,

for the nomination process.

Political Parties Registration Tracking Management system (PPRTMS):

PPRTMS is an online portal to facilitate tracking of the progress status of the application for registration of the political party. Applicants get a status update through SMS and emails.

भारत निर्वाचन आयोग
ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

Registration and verification of name in the Electoral Roll, and other election related matters is just one click away.

Voter Helpline App
An elector centric app

Follow us on:

Facilitating the election officials

Training & Capacity Building: IT base operations are being used by the Commission for training and Capacity building, webinars, web based monitoring of election processes. IT application as such has reduced the impact of COVID-19 in many operational areas.

Garuda App: GARUDA (Geographical Asset Reconnaissance Unified Digital App) integrates all functions of BLOs (Booth Level Officers) and help them to complete field verification in lesser time in the current pandemic situation using this App and Speed up the application form processing.

Observer App: The app is used to manage Observers Deployment.

Observers get a complete deployment schedule in their mobile. Moreover, all notices, meeting invites, constituency details are available on the observer app. It is also used by observers to file their statutory reports.

Casting Vote

Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) for Service Voter: ETPBS facility was extended all Service Voters like it was during last Parliament General Elections in 2019. During Special Summary Revision of the last part of electoral rolls, serious efforts

were made by the Commission to maximize the enrollment of service voters with correct particulars.

Booth App: Booth App facilitates faster identification of voters using encrypted QR code, printed on photo voter slips, from the digital marked copy of the electors. This helps in reducing queue load, helps in faster polling and allows error-free recording of two hourly poll turnouts with minimal intervention. Now, in view of COVID-19 situation wherever possible, Booth App is used at the polling stations.

Electronic Voting Machines: ECI introduced the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in 1982 on an experimental basis

In last two decades, India has witnessed 132 State Assembly Elections and 4 General Elections to the Lok Sabha (2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019) where votes were cast by over 3250 million voters using the EVMs.

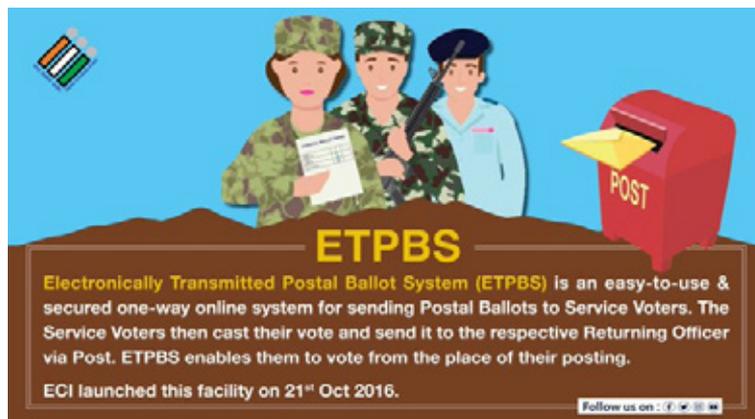
at fifty polling stations under 70-Parur Assembly Constituency (AC) of Kerala. In 2004 General Election to the Lok Sabha, EVMs

were used in all 543 PCs for the elections. A new technologically advanced voting system completely replaced the erstwhile voting method of using ballot papers. Braille enabled' EVM's have also been introduced by the Commission for facilitating the PwD's with visual impairments.

Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT): ECI added the use Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) to enhance and strengthen transparency in

EVM based Voting System. Introduced in 2013, VVPAT emerged as an important measure of transparency in the EVM-based voting system. Every voter can visually confirm choice exercised by him in the ballot unit.

Use of EVM and VVPAT in the elections to the Parliamentary and Legislative Assembly constituencies in



PARTY WITH MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SEATS IN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Andhra Pradesh	2004 INC	2009 INC	2014 TDP	2019 YSRCP	Meghalaya	2008 INC	2013 INC	2018 INC	
Arunachal Pradesh	2004 INC	2009 INC	2014 INC	2019 BJP	Mizoram	2008 INC	2013 INC	2018 MNF	
Assam	2006 INC	2011 INC	2016 BJP		Nagaland	2008 NPF	2013 NPF	2018 NPF	
Bihar	2005 RJD	2010 JD(U)	2015 JD(U)	2020 RJD	Odisha	2004 BJD	2009 BJD	2014 BJD	2019 BJD
Chhattisgarh	2008 BJP	2013 BJP	2018 INC		Punjab	2007 SAD	2012 SAD	2017 INC	
GOA	2007 INC	2012 BJP	2017 INC		Rajasthan	2008 INC	2013 BJP	2018 INC	
Gujarat	2007 BJP	2012 BJP	2017 BJP		Sikkim	2004 SDF	2009 SDF	2014 SDF	2019 SKM
Haryana	2005 INC	2009 INC	2014 BJP	2019 BJP	Tamil Nadu	2006 DMK	2011 AIADMK	2016 AIADMK	
Himachal Pradesh	2007 BJP	2012 INC	2017 BJP		Telangana	2014 TRS	2018 TRS		
Jammu & Kashmir	2008 JKNC	2014 JKPDP			Tripura	2008 CPI (M)	2013 CPI (M)	2018 BJP	
Jharkhand	2005 BJP	2009 BJP & JMM	2014 BJP	2019 JMM	Uttarakhand	2007 BJP	2012 INC	2017 BJP	
Karnataka	2004 BJP	2008 BJP	2013 INC	2018 BJP	Uttar Pradesh	2007 BSP	2012 SP	2017 BJP	
Kerala	2006 CPI(M)	2011 CPI(M)	2016 CPI(M)		West Bengal	2006 CPI (M)	2011 AITC	2016 AITC	
Madhya Pradesh	2008 BJP	2013 BJP	2018 INC		NCT Delhi	2008 INC	2013 BJP	2015 AAP	2020 AAP
Maharashtra	2004 NCP	2009 INC	2014 BJP	2019 BJP	Puducherry	2006 INC	2011 AINRC	2016 INC	
Manipur	2007 INC	2012 INC	2017 INC						

PARTY WITH MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SEATS IN LOK SABHA ELECTIONS*

	2004	2009	2014	2019
Max. Seats	INC 145	INC 206	BJP 282	BJP 303
2nd Max. Seats	BJP 138	BJP 116	INC 44	INC 52

India since have brought about a sea change in our electoral system. Simple, user-friendly, efficient and transparent nature of EVM polling process has been widely accepted as an efficient and accurate means of expression of the will by all sections of electorate.

Election Results

ENCORE Counting: The ENCORE counting application <https://encore.eci.gov.in/officer-login> is an end-to-end application for returning officers to digitize the votes polled, tabulate the round-wise data and then take out various statutory reports of counting.

Voter Turnout App: Voter Turnout App is used to display real-time estimated provisional voter turnout details of each Assembly Constituency/ Parliamentary Constituency entered by Returning officer.

Results Website and Results Trends TV: The timely publication of the round-wise information is vital for establishing a single source of authentic data. The counting data entered by respective Returning Officers is available as 'Trends and Results' for public view through 'ECI Results website'. The results are shown with the Info graphics and displayed with auto-scroll panels through large display screens outside the counting hall or any public place.

During the last 50 years, Technology has become an integral part of all the components of the Indian electoral system from registration to results. It has substantially increased the efficacy and efficiency of the entire election delivery system, its integrity and user friendly nature to the benefit of all categories of voters and as such all other stakeholders. This integration has helped deliver all its elections well on time with high levels of integrity and credibility.

Umesh Sinha
Secretary General, ECI



Using Technology in Training at Elections Manitoba

Elections Manitoba is the office that conducts provincial elections in Manitoba. In Canada, each of the 13 provinces and territories has an election management body to run its own provincial or territorial election. Election Manitoba's role is to ensure that all eligible citizens have the opportunity to vote, help parties and candidates navigate election rules, and provide election information and education to the public. Elections Manitoba operates independently, free of political influence.

Provincial Elections in Manitoba

Approximately every four years, Manitobans head to the polls to elect their provincial representatives. The province is split into 57 ridings, or electoral divisions. One candidate is elected in each riding as Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA).

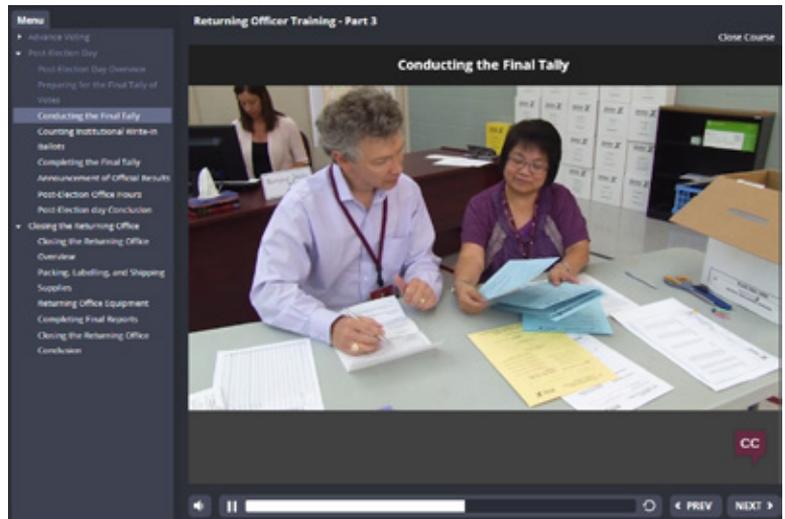
Votes are counted in a “first-past-the-

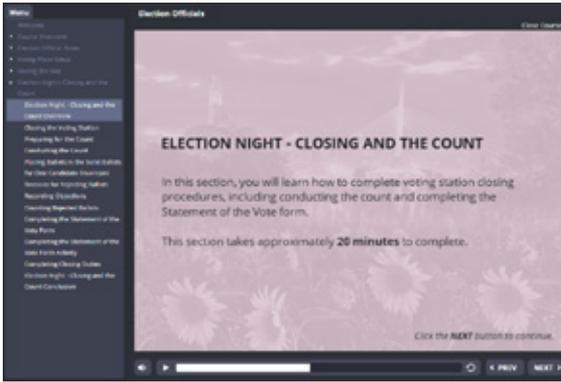
post” system, meaning the candidate who receives the most votes in their electoral division becomes the MLA. The party that wins the majority of seats in the legislature becomes the governing party, and their leader is the premier of the province.

About Manitoba

Located in the geographic centre of Canada, Manitoba has a population of approximately 1.28 million, according to the most recent census (2016). About 80

per cent of the population lives in urban centres, and most call the capital city of Winnipeg home. The rest of the population lives in rural or remote areas. The total area of Manitoba is approximately 650,000 square kilometres. Manitoba's population density is low, especially in the north of the province where a single electoral division spans a huge geographical region.





Using Technology for Training

To address one of the challenges arising from Manitoba's geography, distance, and population density Elections Manitoba has developed a technology-based solution for a key piece of election preparation: staff training.

For the 2019 general election, Elections Manitoba implemented an online learning management system (LMS), to complement in-person training. Elections Manitoba worked with a supplier to develop the course content, customize the training platform, and set up hosting and management.

Elections Manitoba employs about 20 staff members on a permanent basis, and hires up to 7,000 more to conduct an election. Ensuring consistent, high quality training is of the utmost importance. An election is a complex process, and making sure an election is run effectively is a critical part of maintaining the public's confidence in the electoral process.

Two of the most important roles in Manitoba elections are the returning officer (RO) and assistant returning officer (ARO). The RO is responsible for all election activities in their electoral division, under the guidance of Elections Manitoba. An ARO is hired to support the RO. In Manitoba, one RO and one ARO are hired for each electoral division.

Elections Manitoba's LMS contains two learning modules, one tailored specifically for the RO and ARO, and the other for

voting place staff. The ROs and AROs are required to complete both modules.

How the LMS Works

Elections Manitoba designed the training to provide a full overview of each role, plus the roles of other election officials. The course covers the entire election process, from setting up the polling places, to conduct throughout the day, to closing the polls and counting the votes. Because it is a more complex role, the RO course goes into greater detail. RO training also covers topics like setting up and running the returning office (the election headquarters for the electoral division), the nomination process, and additional voting opportunities, like advance voting, mail-in ballots, and institutional voting.

The LMS consists of a mix of narrated text, independent reading, photographs, graphics, and video. Using different types of content means that all users are engaged, whatever their preferred learning style. Each section can be redone multiple times, ensuring learners get a full understanding of a topic before moving on to the next unit. After finishing the course, the learner completes a quiz to demonstrate that they have a good understanding of their role.

In addition to the delivery of the election, the LMS also has a unit on accessible customer service. Elections Manitoba has a mandate to make voting accessible, and is committed to identifying and removing barriers to full participation. Elections Manitoba partnered with a local disability organization to incorporate this topic into the training program.

Benefits of an LMS

Elections Manitoba's LMS has created a number of efficiencies in training. The online model allows learners in remote areas to access training without traveling great distances. It also eliminates the need

to schedule over 100 people from across the province to meet at the same time. There are also cost savings related to travel, meeting space rentals, and printing course material.

This model also helps us see where in-person training can be adapted or improved. For example, Elections Manitoba can see if learners are testing poorly on a topic, and then put some extra focus on that topic during in-person training.

Another benefit is for the learners themselves. Some might feel awkward speaking up in a group setting, or be uncomfortable admitting they don't understand something in front of their peers. Online training allows the learner to go over a topic multiple times at their own pace, or flag topics that they require extra help with.

Election officials have responded positively to the LMS. Over 66 per cent of election officials rated the training as good or excellent.

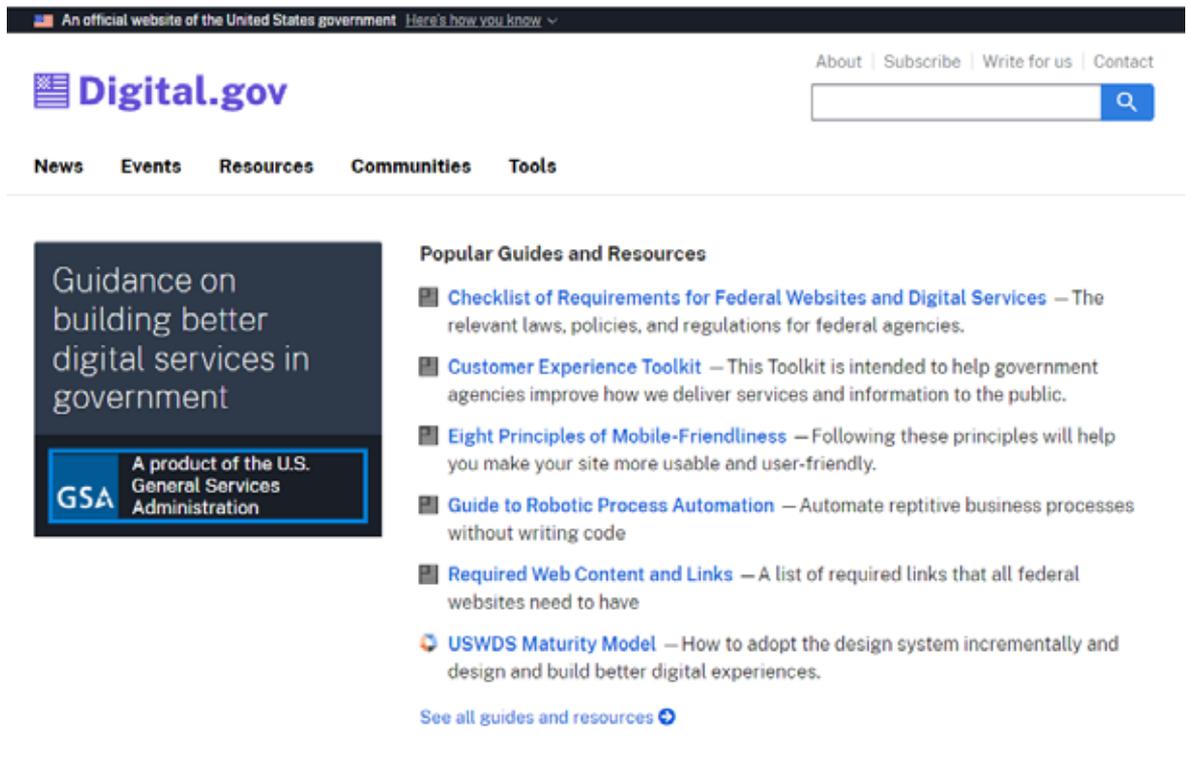
Over time, sometimes over the course of a single election cycle, how an election is delivered can change. This is often the result of technological improvements. By adding an online component to our training, Elections Manitoba can quickly adapt to ensure election officials are able to keep up with these changes.

Elections Manitoba would be pleased to demonstrate its learning management system to anyone that is interested. If you'd like to find out more, please contact us at communications@elections.mb.ca.

Alison Mitchell, Director of Communications and Public Information, Elections Manitoba



Snap Story



Easy & Voter Friendly Elections using New Technology



Already in 1997, International IDEA's Code of Conduct for Ethical and Professional Administration of Elections¹ suggested that 'election administration must be designed to serve the voters:

Election administrators should enable voters to exercise their rights with the least possible inconvenience, given the circumstances and the country's legal framework. In particular, they should:

- (i) Make it as convenient as possible for voters to participate in the election process.
- (ii) Ensure that voters adequately understand the election process.
- (iii) Do everything possible to provide a way to vote for people with special needs, such as blind, physically handicapped, or illiterate voters, or voters living in remote areas.'

Further, International Obligations² require elections and voting to be direct (to be performed by voters themselves), secret, free (to be practiced without pressure,

coercion or influence), transparent, accurate, equal (in the number and weight of votes for every voter) and universal (to enable all citizens to participate).

However, international obligations and electoral principles are almost entirely silent about the need to make elections convenient and easy for voters. Convenient and easy means that waiting times at polling stations are short or non-existent, that ballot papers are simple and immediately understood by every voter, that voter registration takes very little effort, for example by allowing voters to register online. Convenience can even mean that voters are not limited to casting their vote in person, only use at a polling station or only on the election day.

Unfortunately, many of the measures that make elections easier and more voter friendly require trade offs with other electoral principles. Given all the tensions that already need to be resolved for fulfilling well established electoral obligations, voter convenience often ends up low down on an election administration's priority list.

Voting is often inconvenient ...

Ultimately, the very procedures that are designed to protect the transparency, security and integrity of elections often make the act of voting more inconvenient or complicated to voters. Procedures can make it necessary for voters to comply with complex registration and identification requirements, force them wait in long queues for both registration and voting, or require them to handle large, overly complicated ballot papers, or even to risk their lives to cast their votes in conflict areas or during major crises such as the current pandemic.

Currently, 151 countries³ offer to their citizens abroad the opportunity to participate in national elections. Of them, 52 provide postal voting⁴ which requires following procedures that too often lead to votes that are received too late to be counted or that are invalid. Further, 80 countries allow voting from abroad exclusively in polling stations, usually located in few and far-between locations, such as embassies and consulates, which many voters may not be able to reach, due to the long distance or unaffordability of the travel.

In the best case, such difficulties are mere inconveniences that can be overcome, in the worst case, they result in disenfranchisement when the right to vote, while normatively guaranteed, becomes de-facto impossible to be exercised in a meaningful or practical way.

Technology to the rescue!

Here, sometimes new technology – from queue management to online voting systems can come to the rescue and help to make elections more voter friendly and more easily accessible.

Already in 2014, an SMS based ‘Election Queue Management System’ for the Lok Sabha election was piloted in India⁵; by 2020 similar systems were in place from

Singapore to the United States.

Voter registration can be made more accessible by moving it online, not only in the United Kingdom⁶ or Australia⁷, but also in the specific contexts of other countries, such as Libya, where for security reasons in-person voter registration may be a risky undertaking, while registration through mobile phones⁸ is a much safer and more voter friendly solution.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, large, unwieldy ballots that sometimes even contained multiple pages⁹ were replaced with a (highly disputed, but) simpler to use electronic voting system.

Some voters abroad from countries such as France, Estonia, Mexico, Pakistan, or New Zealand, can cast their votes online and are no longer required to visit their embassy in person or risk losing their vote in the mail system.

Why is voting still inconvenient?

Unfortunately, many election technologies can also have the opposite effect and make voting more difficult and inconvenient for voters. Ballot scanners tend to require voters to mark their ballots very accurately to make sure their vote is correctly recognized and captured. Voting machines are expensive tools, and if too few machines are purchased – which happens usually, due to cost saving needs – these machines can become a bottleneck that creates longer queues of voters and slower procedures, instead of improving them.

Election technologies, and especially online voting, are still met with skepticism in most countries of the world, not only for security reasons, but also because it is difficult to understand for most, except for a handful of experts at best.

A final risk that should not be forgotten, is the digital divide and that new “election convenience” tools may create new electoral inequalities. As online voting and voter

registration systems are only accessible by those voters who can afford an internet connection, their adoption may disadvantage those who are instead still offline. Even the queue management systems that were used successfully during the India's State Assembly elections in 2017 were reportedly especially effective in areas with an educated voter base¹⁰, possibly leaving behind those in less 'educated' places.

'Voter friendliness' as a new electoral principle?

For some innovations, such as polling station queue trackers, the reasons that prevent their more widespread adoption are very few. For other innovations, more has still to be done to understand their shortcomings, to improve upon them, and

to address their downsides such that they eventually will become more acceptable and trusted.

However, in times of globally declining voter turnout¹¹ and with new technological opportunities continuously becoming available, it may be time to not only demand that elections are direct, secret, free, transparent, accurate, equal, and universal, but also that elections should be convenient. Maybe 'voter friendliness' should not only be a 'nice-to-have' luxury, but rather an additional electoral principle to be adhered to or at least to be given stronger consideration when planning, designing and managing tomorrow's elections.

Peter Wolf

Senior Expert, Electoral Processes Programme, Int. IDEA

- 1 *International IDEA: Code of Conduct for Ethical and Professional Administration of Elections (1997)*
- 2 *International IDEA: International Obligations for Elections (2014)*
- 3 <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voting-abroad>
- 4 <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/special-voting-arrangements/data-explorer>
- 5 https://www.business-standard.com/article/elections-2014/queue-management-system-a-great-hit-deo-114050200357_1.html
- 6 <https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>
- 7 <http://www.aec.gov.au/enrol/>
- 8 <https://h nec.ly/%d8%aa%d8%b3%d8%ac%d9%8a%d9%84-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d8%a7%d8%ae%d8%a8%d9%8a%d9%86/>
- 9 https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/drc-2006-final-rpt.pdf
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Snap Story



Smart Phone Apps and Fairer Elections: The Potential of cVIGIL

Electoral integrity in a democracy has many facets. Inclusiveness, fairness, and representativeness are the often-quoted qualitative dimensions. Elections must be participative and inclusive for all competent voters. The citizens make a free and informed choice among the candidates and the policies on offer. The aggregation of votes ought to be an accurate convergence of opinion expressed in voting vis-à-vis seats in the legislature as well as policies that underlie future public action. This ideal is difficult to achieve, and all democratic societies and nations have established regulatory and institutional frameworks to strive for this goal. This duty primarily vests with the Election Commission (ECI for short) in India. The ECI has frequently used digital technology to accomplish this task, and EVMs are the best-known example of such initiatives. A lesser known but the most significant new innovation of the ECI is the cVIGIL App.

What is C-VIGIL App? How would it make elections fairer and more transparent? Why is C-VIGIL looked upon as a tool of the future? An answer to these questions requires peeling few layers of the election process. Elections in India are full of din and dash. The ardour and fervour of political parties are matched by leaders' energy and rush. Big rallies are organised; roadshows happen; small street corner gatherings are addressed; neighbourhood leaders are wooed; booth agents are recruited, and door to door canvassing is undertaken. The feverish search is to somehow capture and articulate that narrative, which the voters prioritise this time. The purpose is to engage with the proverbial common man in his avatar as the typical voter. And the objective is to get his vote. These activities require

men and resources, and both cost money.

Who pays for the electoral expenses, and do we need limits on such expenses? Is the democratic process vitiated by misuse of power and money by one or more aspirants? How to stop voter mobilisation on an issue that causes the fissures in the community on caste, class, or faith? These are critical issues for those entrusted with the conduct of the elections. An officer in the Kerala state assembly elections of 1960 suggested a voluntary code of conduct for both candidates and political parties as a possible solution to these vexed issues. His move found resonance with all stakeholders, and over time a rule book of desired practices came to be prescribed by the ECI under the nomenclature of the Model Code of Conduct. The task of implementing the Code is assigned to the local administration and central observers, who the ECI deputes from outside the state boundaries to ensure unbiased supervision that is devoid of local political pressures. Over time, the ECI has realised that local ingenuity often defeats the efforts of the administration and the outsider observers in implementing the Code. The urgent need is to engage the common citizen and the local community to police the fair elections process. cVIGIL aims to spur and rouse the common man to participate in efforts of transparent and fair elections.

cVIGIL is a free app developed by the ECI for use by citizens during electioneering. The aim is to incentivise a mindful and observant citizen to engage in supervision of the Model Code of Conduct and to report any indiscretion of law or desired practices. All that is asked of the citizens is to record such evidence on their smartphones and transmit it to the local regulatory authority entrusted

with the conduct of free and fair elections. The indelible imprint that a complaint under eVIGIL leaves in the records is expected to spur immediate action by the regulatory and administrative authorities. The current mandate is to prepare and submit a first action taken report within 100 minutes of the receipt of the eVIGIL complaint.

The initial response from the public has been very encouraging. More than 1.61 lac eVIGIL grievances were received in Kerala in different districts for the assembly elections in April, 2021. Initial enquiries found 1.58 lacs to be factually correct. The message is loud and clear; if a platform is given to the public, where they have algorithmically assured protection of anonymity, their time and resource engagement is limited to shout and voice and is not protracted or litigative, and their voice elicits immediate response

then the man on the street is willing to collaborate with the state to cleanse the election process. Gandhiji's long march in salt satyagraha did not win us freedom immediately, but it laid out the contours of the future freedom struggle; it would be a peaceful and non-violent public protest against all injustices. By introducing digital innovations like EVMs and eVIGIL, the ECI is also laying out the future of the election reform; it would be a participative and public initiated movement supported by digital technology, where the violators of the best election practices would be laid bare by the power of anonymous and amorphous citizens.

Pushpinder Singh Puniya & H.R. Srinivas
Election Commission of India



Snap Story



IFESAsiaPacific @IFESAsiaPacific · Aug 30

What social media strategies can election commissions use to expand voter education and outreach and disseminate official electoral content? Read author Gabe Morris and Editor @lisarepell's insightful report. @IFES1987



Social Media Strategies for Election Management Bodies
Technology platforms and products continue to transform politics and elections with prominent implications for voter trust and understandin...
[ifes.org](https://www.ifes.org)



New Ways of Reaching out to the Target Groups

The Election Administration (EA) of Georgia has long prioritized youth engagement in electoral matters, and we know why. Youth involvement in the electoral process has been generally low, and reasons vary, ranging from lack of interest to lack of awareness and enthusiasm, and of course, pessimism to some extent.

As we do in such cases, we acknowledged the problem and tried to find the best ways to resolve it. First, we wanted to spark youth's interest in elections and then motivate them to be part of the electoral process. For that very reason, over the years, we have been running different activities. More precisely, our administration approached youth at different times with



various activities, such as informational courses, summer and winter schools, and curricula implemented in public schools and universities. These activities were equally significant for informing young people about electoral issues, raising their awareness, and creating the next pool of well-informed and conscious generation. All these activities had in common – connecting with young people in formal and non-formal gatherings, familiarizing them with lots of information about elections, democracy, different electoral procedures, gender equality, etc.

Despite the implementation of various educational programs and small positive dynamics, the lack of youth participation in elections and the electoral process, in general, remains a challenge.

In July 2020, the CEC solely initiated and launched an innovative educational pilot project – “Electoral Youth Camp”



targeting young people aged 20-29, of suffrage age, from different educational and professional backgrounds. In other words, the CEC this time wanted to connect with young people with a rather developed belief system, vision, and opinions, the youth already with certain knowledge and life experience. By doing so, the CEC wanted to work with the youth who upon completion of study course, would be well-aware of the electoral matters, would turn into responsible and accountable citizens with an incentive to influence political life in the future, and perhaps get employed by the election administration and/or other electoral stakeholders.

In fact, “Electoral Youth Camp” was very informative and of great importance for its participants as we are about to find out. During the 5-day course, conducted outside Tbilisi, namely in Bakuriani, the CEC officials, electoral experts met project participants at camps, provided them with election-related information, taught them

soft skills such as communication and presentation, and increased their interest in the electoral issues. At the meetings, the participants received the information they were interested in through Q&A in a relaxed setting. Along with the formal side of learning, various cultural/intellectual activities were also designed and carried out for youth camps' participants. A training module was conducted in the Georgian language. Notably, the EA encouraged the participation of those persons in "Electoral Youth Camps" who were less involved in public life, including ethnic minority representatives. Further, the gender equality principle was considered in the composition of groups of participants. In total, around 150 participants gained knowledge and additional skills at the youth camps amid the pandemic. Organizers of the study course ensured all epidemiological rules to be strictly adhered to during the learning process.

This project was part of a larger goal of election administration to bring youth to polls and get them involved in the political and public life of the country. As a result, the project managed to increase participants' interest in the electoral processes, raise their awareness of civil rights and universally recognized principles. More precisely, participants of the youth camp deepened their knowledge in democratic principles, electoral systems, electoral procedures, election history, models

of election administration, inclusive electoral environment, transparency principle, gender equality, ethical standards, election security, crisis management, and other important issues.

"Electoral Youth Camp" has been deemed a successful project by project organizers, and most importantly, by its students. Alumni of the camp repeatedly expressed their satisfaction with the project and theoretical and practical knowledge they acquired through this course. Graduates broadened their professional acquaintances and made inquiries about similar

projects and possibilities to be hired by election administration. Some of them even registered for the election administration officials' certification exam and successfully passed the exam.

And some even went even further than that and worked as a poll worker during recent parliamentary elections, namely 46 graduates from "Electoral Youth Camps" were part of 2020 elections and contributed to the electoral process and used their acquired knowledge already in the polling station. In addition to this, the CEC added graduates of "Youth School" to the potential employees' database, which again doubles the chances of former students to work with the EA in the future.

It is our hope and also a goal that with such approaches, interactive study modules, formal and non-formal study activities, young people will be more attracted to the electoral process which in turn would serve to the benefit of our country's democratic development.

Tamar Zhvania

Chairperson, Central Election Commission of Georgia

Archi the Hedgehog – the Electoral Superhero

“Democracy can be learned” is the slogan of the Centre for Continuous Electoral Training (CICDE – acronym in Romanian) of the Republic of Moldova. That is why one of the Centre’s priority areas of work is civic and electoral education. Becoming active citizens should start in the early childhood and continue throughout the entire educational path. In many countries, statistics show a high level of political apathy among young people. This phenomenon has its roots in the lack of trust in the power of their vote or failure to recognise multiple opportunities to get involved and contribute to the development of the society they belong to.

In order to raise the interest of tomorrow’s young people towards the electoral process, CICDE decided to launch innovative and interesting approaches for today’s children. What is voting? Where does it come from? Why all aren’t people the same? Why does a polling station need a ramp and what secrets are behind the electoral process? All these questions, worded in an easy-to-understand manner, develop critical thinking and raise children’s curiosity towards elections. The complexity of questions and approach grows as the children’s age does. CICDE has civic

education programs for children of all ages – from pre-school to university students.

The CICDE has reinvented the principles of civic education to develop child-dedicated programmes. It created dynamic, interactive, attractive products with multiple gaming elements. One of these is the electoral comics.

Electoral comics are meant for children aged 7 to 11 years and their parents; the main character of the comics is Archi the Hedgehog. The Hedgehog is a superhero with extensive knowledge about elections, who informs children about the voting procedure, accessibility of the electoral process, organisation of elections, voting abroad, voting during the pandemic, etc. Their purpose is to provide early education to the future voters, to inform them about electoral procedures, to help them understand the importance of voting.

Generally, we can say that the Centre for Continuous Electoral Training with the support of UNDP project ‘Enhancing democracy in Moldova through inclusive and transparent elections’ created a true brand around Archi: a stuffed toy, which quickly became CICDE mascot, two board games, a puppet show, electoral vlogging contests and mobile information campaigns.





So far 4 issues of the comics have been developed, all of them being available in Romanian, Russian, English, Ukrainian, Gagauz, and Romani (language of Roma people). Moreover, in order to reach every child, including children with impaired vision, the comics were recorded and, also, printed in Braille alphabet.



Over 30,000 children benefited of electoral comics, board games and CICDE mascot during two information campaigns that took place under the title ‘Archi’s road to election’ and included 180 schools from 21 districts.

Another activity, created on the basis of comics is the contest of electoral vlogging. In March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, CICDE, together with Archi,



challenged the children to participate in a contest of electoral vlogging and gave them the opportunity to discover their talent of vlogger and to forget about the pandemic. The contest consisted of recording a video in form of a dialogue, news, simulation of electoral process, discussions with parents,



etc., after reading the comics. CICDE organised and conducted three editions of electoral vlogging in which over 100 children participated together with their parents, brothers and sisters and classmates. The best and the most original videos were rewarded with valuable prizes.

Over the last years, CICDE focused on early electoral training of children and has





helped in their development through different educational activities.

- Activities aimed to train, inform and promote the electoral rights for children



- Organising study visits for children of all ages to CICDE and to the Central Electoral Commission to learn about the electoral process
- Intellectual Games in the electoral field, entitled “What? Where? When?”

CICDE managed to get to the next level of quality of civic education programmes. The success of civic education activities conducted by the Centre for Continuous Electoral Training is already recognised in the country and in the region. Such positive examples inspire specialised organisations to identify new and personalised approaches in educating the young generation in the spirit of participatory democracy.

in preschool education institutions entitled ‘Early Electoral Education’

- Drawing electoral comics
- Electoral board games
- Holding the contest of electoral vlogging for children
- Organising the camp ‘Democracy can be learned. My electoral rights’ for children from boarding schools



The Centre for Continuous Electoral Training is a public institution, established by the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova to train and qualify the electoral officials as well as other subjects involved in the electoral process in the Republic of Moldova. CICDE has three priority areas of work: training of electoral actors, civic education of voters and electoral research.

● ● ● ●
Roșca Maria, Civic Education Specialist, Centre for Continuous Electoral Training (CICDE), Republic of Moldova

Special Voting Arrangements (SVAs): Between the Convenience of Voting and the Integrity of Elections

Polling station voting on election day remains the integrity gold standard. In the controlled environment of an ideal-type polling station, voters from the community can be visibly matched against the voters' register and their identification, and fingers can be marked with ink; there are only a few observable meters between key stations such as receipt of the ballot, the voting act behind the booth, and placement in the ballot box. Key people are present to resolve or record issues on the spot: the voter, the election officials, observers, police. The systems are tried and true – in this civic ritual, each protagonist knows what to expect, and understands their role.

Traditional polling station voting means gathering people under the same roof at the same time – precisely contrary to the advice of health authorities in a pandemic. For this reason, many election authorities are exploring alternative ways of voting that allow voters to spread out – whether in time, through early or extended voting, or location, such as mobile polling, e-voting, postal voting. In electoral management, these 'Special Voting Arrangements' (SVAs) are the hot topic of 2020. Participation has, of course, been the driving force for the introduction of these measures.

Participatory elections are a challenge in the best of times, as we see from declining voter turnout. Reasons can be personal, social, structural: voters may be busy, may choose not to vote, may not know what to do, may not have the formal requirements, may have difficulty accessing polling stations. Elections during Covid-19 accentuate these existing challenges with a new one: people may be afraid for their health. The

foundational principle underpinning special voting arrangements is to accommodate these groups or individuals.

Globally, we see the use of SVA increasing – and in 2020 at a greater pace. In New Zealand, advance voting increased by 60% in the 2020 elections compared to previous elections in 2017. In Vienna's City Council Elections, requests for postal ballots doubled from 200,000 in 2015 to 400,000 in 2020 – representing 40% of the electorate. Remote voting discussions emerged as part of a broader debate on whether to hold elections at all during the pandemic. In our case studies, we are seeing how the urgent need to upscale all types of modalities for voting outside the election day polling booth has mobilised legislative and electoral management bodies at an unprecedented pace. The topic of postal voting has been on the front pages of newspapers from Warsaw to Wisconsin, and what might normally be procedural minutiae of envelope design is – this very month – the object of bitter partisan struggles in the United States. For this reason, International IDEA has put extra focus this year on our ability to provide global lessons on SVAs. We are mid-way on a journey to learn more about everything from good practice in mail-in voting to how building political consensus works.

Certainly, an increase in, and a curiosity about, SVAs was already underway before the pandemic. Alternatives such as postal voting and multi-day voting have co-existed alongside the development of the polling station model from the earliest days of a public franchise. In the past decade, demographic shifts, movements of people and lifestyle changes are making these

alternatives increasingly attractive. In Stockholm, nearly half the voters take advantage of the convenience of early voting whether at railway stations on their daily commute or at shopping malls while running errands.

In a Call to Defend Democracy signed by IDEA and many other organisations and launched in June 2020, we collectively wrote that “The current pandemic represents a formidable global challenge to democracy... and people who care about it must summon the will, the discipline, and the solidarity to defend it.” While these words are lofty - it is in the day-to-day work that they manifest. We see that stable, trusted, and well-resourced electoral institutions have been better able to manage these complex dynamics. Certainly, South Korea set an example early on that became a model for others.

Across Europe, Asia, America(s) and in Africa, the pandemic has placed tremendous pressure on authorities and challenged public trust. Since March, countries have been scrambling to determine whether to postpone or when to hold scheduled elections, and how to do so legally, legitimately, and safely.

In response to these pressures, we see examples of resilient and resourceful authorities – and citizens - adapting to radically new conditions at breakneck speed. We have seen examples of voters turning out, even more than usual – in Rajasthan, Poland [13% increase], South Korea [10% increase], Montenegro [6.5% increase] and local elections in Bavaria [4.2% increase]. We have seen the acceptance of close results despite these strange new circumstances, such as in Poland. And we have seen inspiring examples of how special voting arrangements have helped at-risk citizens vote safely.

We’ve seen drive-through voting in the Czech Republic, and mobile boxes to

take to the sick and elderly such as the ‘hiking urns’ of Switzerland. SVAs became an integral part of this effort, we can think of the example of Bavaria, where they had two weeks to move an all postal election. We have seen legal adjustments to eligibility for SVA, from an extension of rights to conditional relaxing of strict interpretation and enforcement of electoral law and set deadlines as a result of political consensus, such as in Italy and France. New Zealand established several additional voting options for 17 October elections: advance voting started two days earlier than usual, a voter could use a postal vote, voters could ask someone to bring their voting papers, and a special call centre served self-isolated people to help them with these special voting options. In Lithuania (11 and 25 October), infected and self-isolated people could vote at home, and special advance voting places were also arranged. In Singapore (10 July) mobile polling teams brought the ballot box to the hotels where Singaporeans who have recently returned from overseas were in isolation. South Korea (15 April) took several measures: the first of such steps was to encourage voters to take full advantage of early voting provisions. Another important step was to extend home voting provisions (early voting by mail) to Covid-19 patients in hospitals, as well as to citizens in quarantine or self-isolation for having been in contact with infected people. Additionally, early voting was organised at special polling stations established in hospitals and other medical facilities.

Organising regular polling station elections can be difficult enough under ordinary circumstances; with complex logistics, ruthless deadlines, an army of temporary workers, all under intense political scrutiny. With the pandemic came the sudden pressure to introduce untested or scaled-up voting and health measures under very tight timeframes. These pressures

are exposing gaps and weaknesses in legal frameworks, capacity, and infrastructure.

These gaps and weaknesses exposed during Covid-19 elections are creating controversy and confusion that undermines public trust. We are seeing a general decrease in turnout around the world. We saw anger in Poland when the initial plans for an election with all-mail-in-ballots were announced without consultation or due process. We see last-minute court interventions and litigation to overturn electoral decisions. In the United States, changes to SVA rules were caught up in state-by-state litigation. In Croatia, the non-availability of a postal voting option led to the EMB decision – later overturned as unconstitutional - to ban infected and quarantined citizens from voting.

There are several reasons for the contestation or resistance to SVA introduction. One is the very real risks and vulnerabilities as each SVA deviates from the ‘gold standard’ of the polling station-controlled environment. We can ask ourselves how many cases of remote voting in 2020 were preceded by a proper analysis of the risks. Remote voting is always less safe and secret than in-person voting. In countries that could have managed multi-day voting to minimise Covid-19 risk, why did they instead go to postal vote?

Infrastructure, cost and capacity are considerations. Many African countries still require physical presence to vote. For example, in the Ondo elections in Nigeria, there were no provisions for absentee voting; those with Covid-19 symptoms were advised not to come to the polling stations to cast their ballot. We see how the move to mass-scale postal voting from a base of servicing only a few, special, or limited categories of “excuse” voters have seriously tested the operational capacity of electoral and postal authorities. In Wisconsin, the electoral and postal infrastructure struggled to cope as

the use of postal ballot went from 6% in previous elections to over 80% in the March primaries and judicial elections.

Another reason that SVAs can be controversial is that including or excluding these groups can have political or social consequences, as the choice of SVA measures may affect different at-risk or societally vulnerable groups differently. We have seen these dynamics playing out in the endemic, partisan wave of litigation across the United States in the recent elections.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” answer as to how a city or country should accommodate its special needs voters with special voting arrangements. There is no one precise mechanism or regulation that can ensure that voting will be safe from deliberate or unintentional harm. But, we can draw some learnings from a global perspective. SVAs are solutions, but legal bases, political will, robust implementation and sufficient preparation time are essential ingredients for success.

What has been reasonably successful as a short notice response to Covid-19 has been the ‘extension’ of existing arrangements to new groups, or the relaxation of the rules about usage to include those concerned about Covid-19. In examples ranging from India to Bermuda, absentee or early voting options have been extended to Covid-19 patients or those who show symptoms. The extension of e-voting in New Zealand and the extension of postal voting in Germany built on provisions and mechanisms that already existed. In US states such as Michigan, absentee arrangements meant for limited groups have been extended to the general public. The scalability of the absentee voting arrangements such as postal voting has depended on both the robustness of ‘existing’ legal, technical and capacity infrastructure but also their resilience – that is the ability to handle shocks and uncertainties.

While scaling up has been a challenge introducing SVAs at short notice where previously not used at all is even harder. The legislative, procurement and implementation requirements during short time frames for 2020 elections increased risks of mistakes and unintended consequences. And the largest risks are to credibility. The reason political consensus is so important, the reason special voting arrangements are on the front page of newspapers is the inherent tensions which must be navigated between the convenience for voters. The participation dividend and the genuine risks to electoral integrity that come the further voting moves away from the controlled environment of the polling station.

The trade-offs between integrity and participation are difficult to navigate. The appetite for inclusiveness and simplicity in the systems will depend on the degree of political polarisation and the perceived inclination of stakeholders to abuse the system. Increased inclusion may compromise secrecy and safety. But, the more rigorous the protective measures, the more difficult it will be for voters to complete procedures correctly and the greater the risk of invalid votes.

Where societies fall in terms of risk appetite will depend and will change over time. For this reason, integrity measures need to be evaluated and adjusted accordingly – as will the threat picture, such as ballot harvesting or identity theft. Technical choices need to be made – for example, whether postal voting registration/application processes should be simple and voter-friendly (e.g. by email) or include stringent address and ID checks (e.g. in-person applications or via websites with online ID verification); whether simple visual inspections to see if signatures on return envelopes seem credible are sufficient or whether a detailed comparison of the

signatures against those on record is needed; or whether database analysis for unusual registration activities is required. These checks can be a deterrence to potential fraudsters but also risk deterring genuine voters – for example, by requiring voters to follow complicated procedures or if the ‘checking’ is seen as heavy-handed.

To balance the trade-offs between the participation dividends and the integrity risks requires a multipronged approach. Firstly, of course, careful attention to the small but important procedural and operational details can make all the difference between a system that is easy or difficult to access or misuse. Secondly, ensuring that the rules and reasoning are both accepted and clearly understood. And thirdly, the fostering of a sense of shared purpose through political consensus and consultation. As we have followed the real-time negotiations to accommodate Covid-19 elections we have seen both the advantages of a conducive political environment and the dangers of a ‘weaponising’ of SVAs decisions for partisan purposes. Political agreement - where political parties put aside their ideological differences and entrenched positions to compromise and cooperate - has been key in putting in place measures that meet both participation and integrity needs. Conversely, we have seen the effect of bitter partisan confrontations in the elections in Poland or the primary elections in the U.S. State of Wisconsin. As in the State of Kentucky, the elections in South Korea have demonstrated that reaching a bipartisan agreement well in advance of the election is key in securing its success.

Another success factor for those who have navigated Covid-19 and other crises such as cybersecurity threats has been the ability to cooperate with appropriate agencies quickly – whether it be security agencies during a security crisis, or health authorities during a pandemic. Few election authorities have the

resources to handle all emergencies on their own. A risk management mind-set allows for exercises that foreshadow potential trouble spots, and that forge appropriate relationships with societal authorities and groups to pre-emptively deal with those trouble spots.

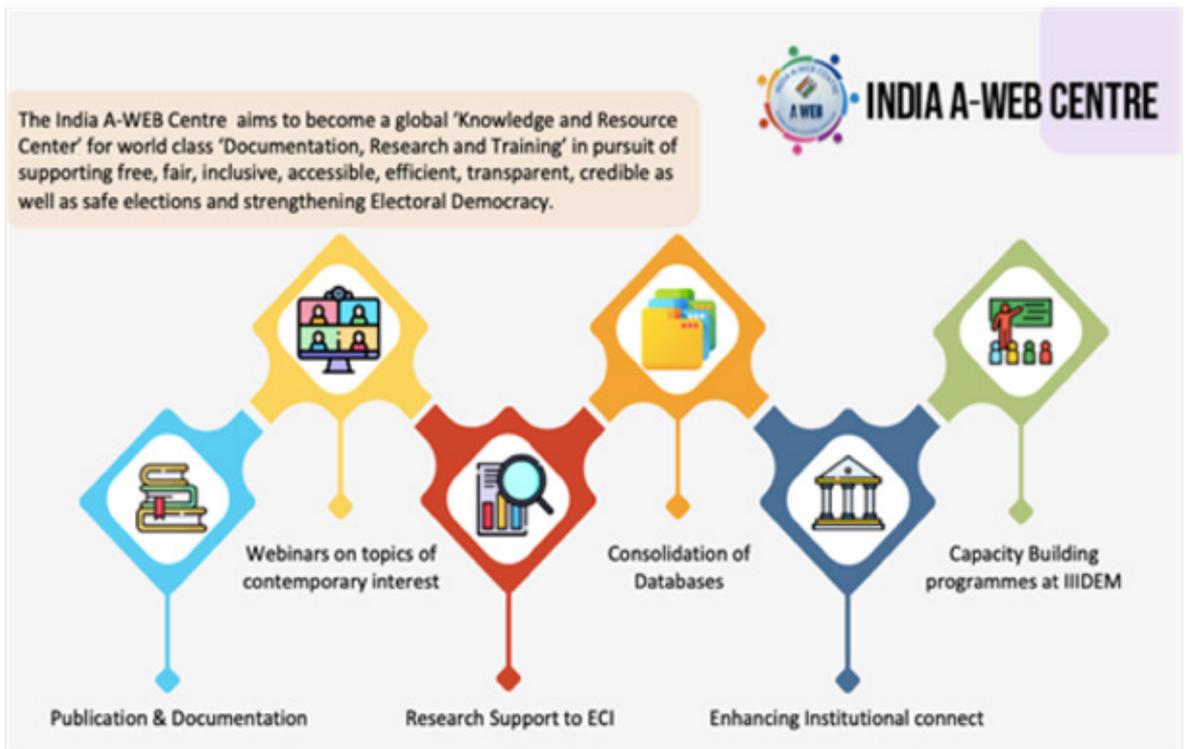
These lessons are important beyond 2020. Beyond this pandemic, crisis lurk many others; malicious interference, natural disasters, terrorist threats, perhaps even apathy. And beyond this pandemic remains the growing demand of voters for more convenient ways of participating in elections that correspond to their increasingly mobile lifestyle. Once new voting channels have been offered, it is difficult to roll them back. Each voting channel brings additional and lasting cost burdens to the public purse.

A highly positive trend is an increased understanding of the need for a periodic

and systematic review of rules that govern the organisation of elections, including mechanisms such as user-testing of new channels and also research into public views on the news channels. Until very recently, well-established democracies took pride in the fact that they are working with voting arrangements that are decades and centuries-old and with unquestioned integrity. Nowadays, these arrangements are seen as anachronistic; requiring review and adjustment to modern contexts. Participating in global engagements in peer exchange, responding timely and constructively to election observer recommendations, examining and learning from international comparative examples, and the purposeful inclusion of opposition and civil society voices in the reform process are now all elements of standard electoral management practice.

Therese Pearce Laanela

Head of Electoral Processes, International IDEA



Conducting State Legislative Assembly Elections 2021 in India

Upholding the sanctity of our democracy, the Election Commission of India resolved to conduct elections in the country amid a pandemic with strict adherence to health and safety guidelines. Starting with the Rajya Sabha Elections in 2020, the Commission went on to conduct elections to the Legislative Assembly in Bihar and recorded a major feat in voter participation. This was followed by the recent elections in 4 states and 1 UT following all safety protocols for COVID-19 and these elections too witnessed tremendous voter turnout.

The Election Commission of India is mandated by the Constitution of India to conduct elections inter alia to the State legislatures in different States of the country. The five-year term of the Legislative Assembly in the States of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and UT of Puducherry was coming to an end in May/ June 2021.

The announcement of elections in these, set in motion the electoral process in the 824 assembly constituencies calling upon an electorate of 187 million electors for electing their representatives. Model Code of Conduct came in force with immediate effect. Conducting elections in with 266 thousand polling stations of 824 constituencies spread over 27th March 2021 to 29th April 2021 was one of the biggest electoral exercise in the world amidst pandemic.

Committed to conduct world free, fair, participative, accessible, inclusive and safe election to the aforesaid Legislative Assemblies, The Election Commission of India had issued broad guidelines to conduct elections with COVID safety measures and ensure facilitation for the senior citizens and



● *Facilitating sanitisation during polling*

PwDs. in consultation with all stakeholders & health authorities.

Strict COVID Protocols

The COVID safety protocols were required to be followed as strictly as in the previous year. The Commission on August 21, 2020 had issued guidelines that were followed during the General Election to Legislative Assembly of Bihar. It was then stipulated that these guidelines would be followed during the conduct of Elections to Legislative Assemblies of the five States/ UT. Nodal Officers for COVID-19 were designated for each State, District and Constituency to oversee COVID related measures. The Chief Electoral Officers of the five States/UT were directed to make comprehensive State Election Plans following the guidelines relating to

arrangement and preventive measures, in consultation with Nodal Officer for COVID-19.

The basic protocols included:

- Every person to wear a face mask during all election related activities.
- Earmarking circles for 15-20 persons of 2 yards (6 feet) for standing in queue.
- As far as practicable, large halls to be identified for election related activities i.e. trainings / polling / counting etc.
- At the entry of hall / room / premises used for election purposes- (a) Social distancing to be maintained (b) Thermal Scanning of all persons to be carried out (c) Sanitizer to be made available at all locations.
- Hand gloves to be provided to the voter for signing on the voter register and pressing button of EVM for voting.
- Electors with above normal temperature in two consecutive testing to vote at the last hour of poll with strict COVID-19 preventive measures.
- Polling time increased for one more hour so that COVID-19 patients who are quarantined are 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.
- Anybody violating instructions on COVID-19 measures liable to proceedings as per the provisions of Section 51 to 60 of the Disaster



● *Model polling station*

Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 188 of the IPC, and other legal provisions as applicable.

It was imperative to increase the number of polling stations and counting halls, to enforce the social distancing norms. Thus every single booth, where the number of electors was found exceeding one thousand, was compulsorily split into two. Hence the number of polling stations were increased from 190,738 in 2016 to 266,000 in these five states/UT. Hours of polling were increased too. The increase meant larger number of polling personnel, materials and funding of the election process.

One of the unique features of the polling was that the voters were voluntarily following the safety guidelines issued by the Commission. Then, COVID-19 guidelines were issued for safety and security of election officials too. Thus an adequate number of vehicles were mobilized for movement of polling personnel, security personnel etc. to ensure compliance of COVID-19 guidelines. Also as a precautionary measure, the Commission sought the vaccination of all polling officials beforehand. Moreover, nomination process, campaign by the political parties / contesting candidates as well as distribution and collection of election material adhered to COVID safety protocols at each step.

All these measures required efficacious logistic support in terms of men, materials and infrastructure and with this, the election machinery was prepared for conducting not only free, fair, inclusive and transparent election but also a 'safe' election.

Facilitating senior citizens and PwD voters

The senior citizens are the sentinels of our democracy. Besides arrangements of transportation and facilities like a ramp, wheelchair, volunteer and separate queue at the polling station, now Postal Ballot facility is also provided to senior citizens



● *Electors Maintaining Social Distancing at Polling Station*

who are above 80 years and PwD voters. As a special provision for the recent Assembly elections and By-elections conducted amidst the pandemic, a COVID suspected/infected person too could avail the Postal Ballot facility after certification from the approved health authority.

Every senior citizen above 80 years of age and all PwD voters have the option to cast their vote at the polling booth or opt to cast their vote from home by informing the BLO. On being registered as a postal ballot voter, a team of election officials arrives on the scheduled notified day and time before the poll day. The voter is provided with a ballot paper, that is marked by him as per his choice and sealed before handing it back to the election team. To ensure the transparency and the secrecy of vote, the entire process is video-graphed.

Extending the Postal Ballot facility as well as ensuring facilities at the polling booth has led to a tremendous increase in polling by the PwD voters and senior citizens above 80 years of age.

Appointing Observers

The Commission deployed Election Observers of different categories to

ensure compliance of the directions of the Commission for free, fair, peaceful, inclusive and transparent and safe conduct of elections. During these general elections (including by e-elections) the Commission appointed in all 1005 Election Observers that included 610 General Observers, 395 Extra Observers for Counting of votes. Besides this 188 Police Observers and 16 Special Observers were also appointed by the Commission.

A close vigil was also maintained by the Commission of election expenditure. The Commission also deployed in all 306 Election Expenditure Observers and 6 Special Expenditure Observers to ensure compliance to the extant directions of the Commission on election expenses.

Confidence Building Measures

In wake of the pandemic, biggest challenge was to reach out to voters to inform, educate & motivate them to come out & voter. Following SVEEP endeavours were undertaken to build the confidence of voters 'to come out and vote':

- Voter Guide showcasing polling procedure and facilitation with all safety measures provided to each family for

information and confidence building

- Guidelines issued to Election Going States (EGS) to follow safety guidelines during Voter Awareness Activities on the field
- Reach out through Social Platforms across various Social Media Channels of ECI – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and websites of ECI, CEOs and DEOs
- Reaching out through Hello Voters, WEB Radio platform through inspirational/Motivations stories in addition to the interaction with officials.
- Special focus on the following topics across print advertisement in major newspapers as also through hoardings, posters, banners and pamphlets:
 - o COVID Safety Measures at Polling Stations
 - o Facilitation on Polling Stations for Person with Disabilities
 - o Postal Ballot
 - o Ethical Voting
 - o EVM & VVPAT
 - o COVID Safety Measures During Counting
 - o Inspirational & Motivational stories from Bihar Assembly Elections 2020, conducted successfully amidst pandemic
- Popularisation of apps like Voter Helpline, PwD App & Voter Helpline Number (for all election related queries) across all platforms
- Engagement through District & State Icons
- EVM & VVPAT demonstration conducted with Safety Measures
- Community Radio programs on COVID safety Measures, Election procedures and facilitation
- 360 degree-Multi Media Campaign launched at regional Level

Technology Options

Numerous measures were adopted to ensure 'Contactless Elections'. They are:

- **Training:** Training, webinars, web based monitoring of election processes through IT applications has reduced the impact of COVID-19 in many operational areas.
- **Use of ICT and Mobile Applications:** Enhanced use of Information and Communication Technology has strengthened citizen participation and transparency and also neutralized the impact of COVID- 19 pandemic. Apps such as Voter Helpline App, PwD App, Booth App and portals such as Voter Portal, Turnout App, Results Website as well as cVIGIL App for complaints on violation of Model Code of Conduct have empowered citizens.

EVM and VVPAT

In all 395 thousand Ballot Units, 360 thousand Control Units and 383 thousand VVPAT machines were deployed for these elections. Directions were issued for randomization of the EVM machines at two levels, Mock Poll on the poll day and strict security in handling as well as to ensure COVID safety guidelines throughout the polling process.

Voter Turnout

Despite the numerous challenges, polling in each state/ U.T witnessed high voter turnout. This was a great achievement by Election Commission of India and possible only because of the initiatives that built confidence of the voter to come out and vote fearlessly.

While the Union Territory of Puducherry recorded a turnout of 83.42%, West Bengal followed with 82.06% voter turnout. The northeastern state of Assam was close



behind with 82.03% turnout. Moreover, Kerala recorded 74.06% turnout and Tamil Nadu witnessed 73.51% turnout.

Charting the Way Forward

Election Commission of India, in furtherance for continuing the process of reforms has set up a Core Committee to identify learning experiences, shortcomings and best practices from recently poll-gone States of Assam, Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and UT of Puducherry.

The committee, comprising of Deputy Election Commissioners, Election Commission of India and the Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) of recent poll-gone States and few select Special Observers and Observers, is tasked to identify shortcomings or gaps in ECI regulatory regime, if any and the gaps in implementation and enforcement at the level of CEOs/District officials. In addition to this, the Committee is evaluating measures to further strengthen the expenditure management regulation for inducement free election, as well as

strengthen the offices of electoral machinery at the State level namely the offices of CEOs, DEOs and ROs.

The Committee is also taking inputs from State Nodal Officers of different divisions like Police, Expenditure, Health Authorities as well as from numerous officials identified by CEOs which include District Election Officers (DEOs), Superintendent of Police (SPs) Officers, Returning Officers (ROs), Polling officials and BLOs about the issues and challenges faced at the grass root levels.

Additionally, the Committee is also examining the recommendations of the nine Working Groups that were set up post Lok Sabha Elections 2019 in light of experiences in the Poll gone States. The Commission continues to strive for free, fair, accessible, ethical and safe elections based on its motto, 'No Voter is Left Behind'. It is expected that several valuable inputs or recommendations will emerge out of these deliberations and the forthcoming elections will benefit from the recommendations of the Core Committee.

Dr. Aarti Aggarwal
Senior Consultant, ECI



Technology in Elections: Global Perspective

The way we vote has changed significantly with the advent of 21st century. Ballot papers and pencils used hitherto have given way to electronic voting machines and e-voting. Online voter registration and biometric voter registration has substituted the conventional methods of registration. Internet and web based voter awareness and educational resources facilitate dissemination of information in a far more efficient manner and even enable a dialogue with the stakeholders including feedback, surveys etc. Citizen engagement, especially the youth through new media and social media has become an integral part of the electoral process. It is said that the voter education connects citizens with the electoral process. Technology integration has improved this connect and made it more efficient and engaging.

All over the world, Election Management Bodies (EMBs) deploy new technologies with the aim of improving efficiency and effectiveness of the electoral process. Technology offers multiple solutions at all the stages of elections; from registration of voters, identification of voters at the polling station, polling and counting of ballots or votes compared to traditional paper-based procedures. Technology has brought in both efficiency and efficacy in the electoral processes as also improved the quality of public service delivery.

Technology may include biometrics, web based operations, digital technology and stand-alone electronic devices in different components of electoral operations. The article proposes to briefly visit technologies used by EMBs and intends to familiarise the reader with the transformation of electoral

processes be it voter registration, voter education, voting, counting up to declaration of results. The article also brings to you an illustrative list of important points which different countries have used while integrating technology in electoral processes.

Technology in Voter Registration

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights prescribes “*Voting is a right and taking part in the government of his country is the cornerstone of democracy*”. In absence of an exhaustive, credible, and reliable electoral roll, the exercise of this right is eroded.

Voter Registers or the electoral rolls determine the health of a democracy. Accurate voter registers are vital to enable eligible persons to exercise their right to vote and eliminating fraud. Integration of Technology options considerably facilitates the process of maintaining healthy electoral rolls. While many of the countries in the Americas and Europe extract data from population registers or other government data sources to generate electoral Rolls, many other countries use technology driven online portals for facilitating voter registration and maintenance of electoral rolls.

Machine Readable Forms

In many countries such as Tanzania, people fill up a machine-readable paper form that is then fed into a scanner. The difficulty of updating and cross-checking paper-based electoral rolls enhances the risk of including deceased voters or multiple records of the same person, leading to higher chances of electoral fraud.

Digital Technologies

By contrast, digital registers are more efficient, efficacious and healthy. Lack of appropriate identification documents may further retard the maintenance of the rolls in such cases. The lack of a reliable method of checking identity may also result in many people to register more than once. In order to obviate such complexities, over 50 countries, mostly in Africa, use biometrics based on fingerprints by scanning. Yet others like Somaliland use iris scanning. Biometrics for elections help in ensuring the 'One person, One vote' principle effectively.

Biometric Voter Registration

Biometric voter registration includes capturing unique physical features of each individual through technology in addition to the demographics of the voter. The data is used for the maintenance of the electoral roll as well as voter identification. The enrollment infrastructure allows collecting and maintaining a database of the biometric templates for all voters.

A biometric initiative comprises use of biometric registration kits for enrolment of voters; using electronic voter identification devices before and on Election Day; issue of biometric identification voter cards etc. The chronological stages for adopting a biometric voting registration project usually include assessment; feasibility studies; securing funding; reviewing legislation; running pilot projects and mock registration exercises; procurement; distribution of equipment, installation, and testing; recruitment and training of staff voter information; deployment and post-election audits. The adoption of biometric technology is prevalent in Africa and South America. The number of countries adopting biometric registration has steadily increased and gone beyond 50.

Let us look at use of the Biometric technology in some of the countries.

Argentina: System of Voter Registration

In Argentina, the names of eligible citizens are taken from the civil registries to constitute the voter lists. The voter lists contain each eligible voter's name, address, date of birth, profession, national ID number, and designated polling place.



There are many civil registries. In addition to a national population register called the National Registry of People (Registro Nacional de Personas), which primarily contains vital statistics and addresses for all citizens, each of the 24 electoral districts maintains a separate, more detailed civil registry (Registro Civil). Every Argentine citizen is registered with the civil registry at birth and given a national ID card (Documento Nacional de Identidad).

Adding New Voters

Eligible citizens are added automatically to the voter rolls, without having to take any independent action. At ages 8 and 16, Argentine citizens are required to interface with the government and renew their national identity cards. To ensure that voters are registered soon after their 18th birthdays, 16 year olds are placed on provisional voter lists that feed into the permanent voter lists. Similarly, citizenship authorities notify the National Registry of People of newly eligible naturalized citizens, whose information is then sent to electoral secretaries to be added to the voter lists.



Kenya: Biometric Voter Registration System (BVR)

The BVR system is used for registering voters in Kenya. It involves the use of a laptop, a fingerprint scanner and a camera. BVR captures a voter's visage (facial image), finger prints and civil data or Personally Identifiable Information (PII)-Name, gender, identity card/passport number, telephone number etc. The registration takes place at the registration centres where polling also takes place later. The BVR method of registration was the only system deployed by IEBC to register voters just before the 2013 general elections.

Electronic registration of voters in Kenya began in 2009 with a pilot project in 18 constituencies spread over the country. The pilot program was a grand success. Some voters, who had registered manually in constituencies adjacent to the BVR constituencies opted for technology based registration using biometric features. In this backdrop, IEBC initiated a fresh, biometric voter registration, in all the 290 constituencies of the country in 2012. A total of 15,000 BVR kits were deployed to 24,614 registration centres. The Commission recruited 30,000 registration clerks to conduct the exercise for thirty days. 1,450

Voter Registration Assistants (VRAs) were recruited to assist in the supervision of registration clerks and coordination of registration at the county assembly ward level. It was ensured that the registration personnel had the required skills in the use of the technology. IEBC registered about 14 million voters in the given short duration. The machines were found to be fast, efficient and reliable.

Data from the BVR machines are transferred to a centralized storage server from which hard copy registers are printed. The physical register, with thumbnail photographs of the voters, is distributed to the polling centres for people to check and verify their registration details. IEBC also provides for the online register verification and via SMS. The printed registers are also used as back-ups during voting. BVR ensures that:

There are multiple means of voter unique identification (other than names and IDs, there are fingerprint and facial features)

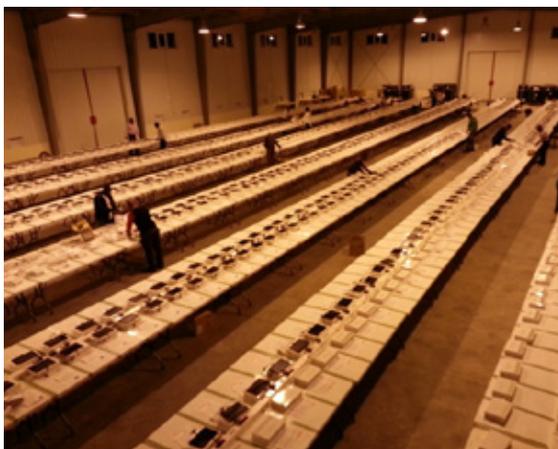
- The capture of voters' records is fast, efficient and direct.
- Security and privacy of information is enhanced
- Integrity and reliability of information is improved e.g. elimination of duplicates



Angola: Technology in Voter Registration

All Angolan citizens eligible to vote are registered. The focus has been to create a database with voters' information according to the rules from elector legislation from Angola.

The advanced technology guaranteed credibility and security during the whole process. In order to facilitate the operators' management, the Quatenus Launcher was utilized to configure functions in the tablets. The Quatenus Tracker was used to realize the telemetry in equipments, recording the variables like battery level, GPS signal, wifi



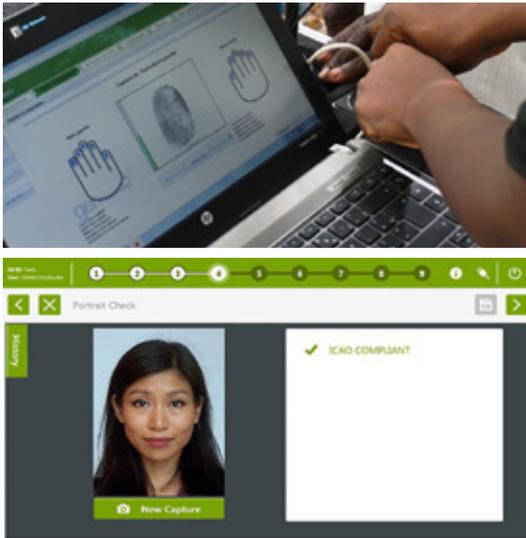
problems of each device.

The operators had to work in specific regions. This region definition was done in the Quatenus Core Team. Operations' zone alarms were also set up inside the same platform. Analysing the events and alarms repetitions, the Quatenus' Central Core Team could know what was happening outside and act rapidly.

Tablets were used to register the citizens' information. Besides them, motorcycles and cars also were used to make the logistics' operation easier. There were huge distances between some regions. Both tablets and vehicles were tracked by Quatenus Central. The project logistics was facilitated with routes and distances mapped. The tracking ensured the efficient and security of information.

Uzbekistan: Electronic Voter Register

Voter registration in Uzbekistan is passive. For the first time in a national election, the lists of voters will be developed through the Single Electronic Voter Register (SEVR), which is managed by the Central Election Commission (CEC). SEVR is



designed to improve voter registration procedures, streamline voter list logistics in polling stations and combat electoral fraud. The process of compiling the SEVR began in 2017. The CEC reports that there are approximately 20.5 million voters in Uzbekistan. Information for SEVR is transferred from the Information System on Electoral Process Management (ISEPM), which is compiled from information provided by various government authorities. While the SEVR is overseen by the CEC, the Ministry for Development of Information Technologies and Communications maintains the ISEPM. SEVR is updated during the election period by a special schedule as determined by the CEC; during non-national election years SEVR is updated annually.

While voter registration ceases 72 hours prior to Election Day, voters may register on Election Day only for this election as a temporary safeguard measure. They must provide proof of residency and proper identification to the local Precinct Election Commission (PEC), which will then be used to subsequently update SEVR. The reason for this is that SEVR was completed very close to Election Day, and it is possible that some voters were excluded from the system who are eligible to vote. Voter

lists are extracted from the SEVR and compiled separately for each polling station. Voters residing abroad can cast ballots in the 55 out-of-country polling stations, predominantly at diplomatic locations. All votes cast abroad will be counted toward a specific constituency in Tashkent, as determined by the CEC. Voters may confirm their registration information over a two-week period at polling locations or on the CEC website.

Kenya: Electronic Voter Identification System (EVID)

There are two types of EVID technology, the laptop with attached finger print reader and the handheld device with in-built finger print reader. EVIDs were used for the first time during the March 4th General Elections (29,000 laptops and 4,600 handhelds). The EVIDs verify and confirm voters electronically as registered by BVR. They are used to "check-in" voters at polling station on polling day and is helpful in streamlining. EVID curbs impersonation and ensures that only those who registered to vote are allowed to vote. However, it may pose a problem if the machine fails on the poll day then alternate mechanisms have to be brought in without delay. In such cases, the polling officials carried out verification of voters using the voter register printouts.

There are discreet advantages in using the system as it suitably addresses issues relating to the identification of voters. It guarantees elimination of multiple entries on electoral rolls. Addition of a photograph of specific quality helps in to visually authentication of the voters as: the photo on the voter's card is matched with the holder's face and the picture in the voting office's voter lists.

Optical scanners

Optical scan technology, in elections, was first used in California in the year 1962. In

the USA, over 50% of the voters exercise their franchise by filling out a paper ballot with pan on a machine-readable form that is inserted into a secure ballot box. The vote is read by an optical scanner, either before the paper is fed into the ballot box, or at a pre-decided later date for the purpose of counting, when the box is opened as per procedure for counting purposes.

Optical scanning has several advantages. For voters, the procedure is very similar to the conventional method of filling out a paper ballot and depositing it in a secure box. In this view of the things, it is a very user friendly system and ex facie, also seems more trustworthy. The polled Ballot Papers are kept in safe and secure custody for possible recounts in case the electronically recorded result is questioned.

Direct Recorded Electronic (DRE)

DRE system of voting was first used in 1975 in the USA. In this, the voting machines have an interface – typically a touch screen, or physical buttons – on which voters record their votes. The absence of paper ballots simplifies the conduct of election, as there is no need to print, transport and distribute the ballot papers in advance. The interface may also offer options (such as different languages or font sizes) making it easier to use for certain voters.

DRE machines are globally the most widespread option, used in the United States, India, Brazil, France and Belgium etc. Addition of an auditable hard-copy record output has further re-enforced the credibility of DRE machines. This also helps in subsequent maintenance of records for court procedures as may be necessary at times.

India: Electronic Voting Machines

In India Election Commission of India (ECI) conducts the largest elections in the world

with the help of Electronic Voting Machine (EVMs). ECI deployed over 2.5 million EVMs for taking the poll for over 900 million voters in the last general election. These machines are state-of-the-art stand alone voting machines and have an ‘Audit Trail’ in the form of an attached Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) machine which prints a paper slip visible for 7 seconds to the voter. Thereafter the paper slip falls into a secure box is retained for record. The control units of the EVM are operated at the time of counting as per laid down protocols. Secure, safe, sturdy and user friendly in nature, the EVMs have become an integral part of the Indian electoral system. The machines enjoy full stakeholder confidence. Training and voter education are also important features of the EVM operations.

Brazil

Brazil’s tryst with technology in elections started with computerized election database development in 1985 by the Superior Electoral Court. The computerization of the Electoral Justice began in 1986 with the electronic re-registration of approximately 70 million voters. In 1994, conduct of the general elections through the data bases of central computer was completed.

In 1995 the work of informatization of voting began when a prototype of the ‘Electronic Ballot Box’ was presented by a technical team of the Court. A Working Group with specialists in information technology, electronics and communications of the Electoral Justice, Armed Forces, Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Communications was constituted. Concerned agencies, as stakeholders, were also sensitized to the ongoing transformation

The electronic voting machine (EVM) was developed in 1995 and first used in municipal elections the following year.

The EVM was Originally termed as an ‘electronic collector of votes’ (CEV), the EVM was deployed during elections in over 50 municipalities in the country 1996. In the 1998 elections, two-thirds of voters voted electronically. Finally, in the year 2000 all the electorate voted electronically. This was followed by the 2002, 2004 and 2006 elections. In 2006, about 125 million Brazilians voted electronically.

The entire process of informatization of electoral processes was supported by in-depth studies and strict arrangements aimed at security and transparency of the process, admitting only a reliable record of the will of Brazilian voters and strengthening the country’s democracy. The TSE received a technology award for its contribution in the development of EVM in 2009.

Integration with Biometric System

The EVM is characterized by the following special features:

- Tough, with small dimensions, lightweight, with energy independence and security features.
- Two terminals constitute the electronic voting machine: the terminal for the poll officer who identifies the voters and authorizes them to vote at the other terminal. In some models of the EVM, identity is verified through biometrics.
- The poll officer’s terminal is equipped with a numeric keypad. The identity number of voter is fed into the machine by keypad and/or through the biometric identification. An LCD reflects name of the voter and as such eliminates any chances of impersonation.
- The voting machine only records the indication that the voter has already voted. In built security features in the EVM ensure secrecy of vote and there is no chance, whatsoever for any leakage. This is consonance with the mandate of the laws of the land.

Mandatory Review of biometrics

TSE uses Bio Kits for the purpose of biometric identification. The kit comprises of devices that capture photos, digital scanner to capture finger prints and other equipments. A high-resolution scanner allows a reading of fingerprints, and a computer program makes the quality control automatically. Special training is also organized for capacity building of the operating teams.

Mandatory reviews of the biometric identification system have been carried out in a phased manner from time to time to serve the users in a better, effective, efficient manner as also for strengthening the system. The preliminary overview developed by the Electoral Justice reveals that over 120 million Brazilian voters were identified through fingerprints in municipal elections by 2020. It is expected that almost 100% of the electorate will be able to vote with biometric identification by the 2026 elections.

Important Features

- **Adherence to current legislation:** With the possibility of adaptation to ensure that changes in electoral legislation do not require changes to the electronic ballot box;
- **User-friendly process:** Easy to use by the voter, with on-screen visualization of the candidate’s data before confirmation of the vote;
- **Reduced cost:** The project should be economically viable due to the high number of polling stations;
- **Durability:** Possibility of use in several elections, reducing the cost of voting;
- **Security:** Elimination of the possibility of fraud in the registration of the vote and in the calculation of the result;
- **Ease of logistics:** Small, rustic, light-weight electronics, easy to store and transport;
- **Autonomy:** Use of battery in places where there is no electricity.

Guiding Principles in Use of Technology in Elections

EMBs use technology in elections with the aim to facilitate and strengthen the electoral process. Several



guiding principles have been identified over the years that may be helpful to establish and sustain the projects as also the stakeholder confidence in the electoral process. These broad guiding principles are:

- Take a holistic view of the new technology.
- Consider the impact of introducing new technologies.
- Maintain transparency and ensure ethical behaviour while adopting new technology.
- Consider the security issues related to the new technology.
- Test the accuracy of results produced by the use of technology.
- Ensure privacy, secrecy of vote, user friendliness, Elector Confidence.

●● —————
Brazil celebrated 25 years of EVM experience with the world in May 2021. The machine has emerged as a symbol of democracy during these years.

- Efficient replacement in case of malfunction.
- Consider the technology cost-effectiveness.
- Evaluate efficiency and efficacy.
- Evaluate sustainability
- Legislative Framework and the Nature of Electoral System; Evaluate the flexibility of the technology to adapt to new election regulations
- Consider the service provided to the users and their trust in the new technology. Stakeholder Consultations.
- Planned Training, voter education and stakeholder sensitization.
- A system for proper maintenance of records for electoral disputes cases.
- Degree of obsolescence and matching resources for up gradation.

The list is only illustrative in nature and criteria may vary for each country.

Despite issues and challenges, integration of technology has significant potential to improve and strengthen electoral processes. There are no short cuts. The approach has to be carefully worked out, carefully planned, strategically implemented in a phased manner. Stakeholder consultation, elector confidence help in long-term sustainable solutions.

●●●●●
S. D. Sharma
Senior Fellow, ECI

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MEC Reviews Implementation of its Strategic Plan

Three years after launching its strategic plan, the Malawi Electoral Commission has organised a two-day workshop to review how the blueprint has been implemented and realign the priorities for the remaining two years.

Speaking during the opening of the review workshop MEC Chairman, Justice Dr. Chifundo Kachale said the Strategic Plan was a prerequisite for the effective running of the institution.

“A strategic plan plays an important role in any organization because it guides where the organization should go and what should be implemented.

“It creates benchmarks against which our success can be measured and also a beacon that shows us whether we are taking the right direction,” he said.

The MEC Chairman said that it was very important to have a strategic plan that is updated and relevant for the efficient functioning of an electoral management body.

“We have had this document for three years and it is a good time for us to review it. How have we implemented it and how relevant is it to us as we stand today, but also look forward to the future.

“We need to look into this document and see if the issues we raised three years ago are still relevant today, if not then we can drop them and replace with new ideas so that our strategy should be a relevant document to our business today and the near future,” he said.

Justice Kachale observed that the election field is very dynamic with new knowledge and information coming up every time.

“The election cases have brought to light some issues on our roles and certain way we do things and whether need to be



reflected in the strategic action we take from here moving forward. New knowledge and technologies are always coming up and we need to be adaptive to the changing circumstances” he said.

In the life span of the current strategic plan, the Commission has implemented the Tripartite Elections in 2019, the Fresh Presidential Elections in 2020 and several sets of by-elections in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

The Commission has always touted that our partners should embrace the electoral cycle approach in running of electoral programmes.

“So, what we are doing now is to reflect on our strategic document is no less significance than when we are trying to implement a national election, and so, the support that you are providing for us is very significant. Elections are no longer an event that we can afford to have dry seasons in between,” he explained.

In his remarks during the opening of the workshop, Country Director, Rudolf Elbling said his organisation was committed to helping the Commission achieve its strategic goals.

The review workshop was facilitated by Dr. Augustine Magolowondo.

Participants at the workshop included MEC Commissioners, Senior Managers and staff.

Source: Malawi Election Commission

Elections and Covid-19: How Special Voting

Arrangements were Expanded in 2020

There is considerable variation in how citizens cast their ballot around the world during ‘normal times’. The traditional vision of an election is that citizens vote at polling stations using a paper ballot. However, modern technology has enabled voting at electronic kiosks and even remote internet voting. Elections have increasingly been made more convenient by allowing citizens to cast their vote ahead of election day, via the post or even by bringing the ballot box to the voter’s home. These have often been found to promote voter turnout.

The Covid-19 pandemic opened a lively debate about the extension of these special voting arrangements (SVAs). Because citizens might

be reluctant to travel and vote in person at polling stations for fear of catching the virus, voter turnout could decline. But while there was a pressing need to ensure safe voting methods that would provide confidence among voters, making late changes to legislation and operations caused havoc to election preparations.

So how did countries eventually respond? This article helps to address this question by presenting information on the SVAs that were introduced around the world to help mitigate against Covid-19 transmission. Data was collected from electoral management bodies (EMBs), state institutions, media, and election observation reports from 52 national elections (in 51 countries) in 2020. This analysis forms part



of a series that has covered other parts of the electoral cycle, including campaign limitations, health and safety in polling

stations, and international election observation.

It forms part of an ongoing study between International IDEA and the Electoral

Integrity Project on Covid-19 and elections.

We found that many countries have adopted new SVAs or modified existing voting practices to reduce crowds and implement social distancing on election day, thereby reducing the risk of infection. Other reasons SVAs have been expanded include ensuring access for vulnerable groups and allowing people already with Covid-19 or in quarantine to vote.

In total, 32 out of 51 countries (63 per cent) that have held national elections or referendums in 2020 made use of at least one SVA. Furthermore, 23 countries extended existing SVAs for people with Covid-19 or under quarantine (see Table 1). Five types of SVAs can be identified: early voting, postal voting, proxy voting, home

SVAs can be defined as arrangements that allow voters to exercise their right to vote by alternative means other than casting a ballot in person at their respective polling station on election day.

and institutional-based voting by the mobile ballot box, and Covid-19 arrangements in polling stations. A sixth; voting for overseas citizens, was also affected. We discuss each in turn.

Early Voting

Early voting, or advance voting, allows voters to cast their ballot before election day. The period for early voting varies per country and can be available for all voters or a specific category of voters. There are usually a limited number of polling stations that offer this option during the early voting period.

In total, 15 countries that held elections in 2020 used early voting arrangements, which were already available before the pandemic. Many countries expanded these early voting arrangements to reduce crowding on election day. For example, in South Korea, the EMB extended the period of voting to regulate voter flows. As a result, 26.7 per cent (11,742,677 ballots cast) of voters voted early compared to 12.2 per cent (5,131,721 ballots cast) in the 2016 Parliamentary election. Similarly, New Zealand, which also expanded early voting, saw an increase in early voting by 37.2 per cent (1,976,996 ballots cast) compared to the 2017 election (1,240,740 ballots cast) and by 63.7 per cent compared to the 2014 elections (717,579 ballots cast).

Some countries altered existing early voting arrangements for people in quarantine or infected by Covid-19. In Myanmar, voters who were unable to return to their place of residency because of restrictions could vote at temporary locations before election day. Early voting arrangements were made in North Macedonia to accommodate Covid-19 infected voters and those in self-isolation at their home. Applications could be made

through an authorized representative in person or electronically, via email, or through an online application. In Bermuda, advance voting provision had already been made available to voters under the Bermuda Parliamentary Election Act 1978. However, this year it was also extended to voters with Covid-19. Similar provisions had been made in Trinidad and Tobago. Early voting was also facilitated by so-called drive-by voting (a method of voting whereby completed ballot papers are submitted into a ballot box at a drive-in polling station), made available for people with Covid-19 or self-isolating in Lithuania.

Postal Voting

Postal voting, correspondence voting, or vote by mail is an SVA where a ballot is delivered to the voter, usually to their place of residence. The completed ballot is usually returned by mail before a specific deadline, but the voter is allowed or required to return the ballot in person in some situations. Postal voting can be accessible to particular categories of voters or all.

In total, eight countries that held elections in 2020 made use of postal voting. Countries such as India, the USA and Poland expanded postal votes during the pandemic. However, postal voting in the USA saw a dramatic increase from just over 17 per cent in 2016, or around 23m votes, to over 41 per cent, or just under 36m, in 2020.

In all of these situations, postal voting required a prior application to be provided to citizens. Very few elections were all-postal, where everyone was sent a postal vote irrespective of whether they wished to vote through this medium. All-postal elections were held in regional elections in Bavaria during the pandemic and in some US states—but not nationally.

Proxy Voting

Proxy voting is a SVA where a voter authorizes another person to cast their vote for them. The reasons and requirements for the use of proxy voting vary per country. In total, four countries, namely Belize, Croatia, Poland and Switzerland, used proxy voting arrangements during national elections in 2020. In Croatia, proxy voting was made available for people with Covid-19 after a constitutional court decision.

Home and Institutional-based Voting by Mobile Ballot Box

Home and institutional-based voting is a SVA where a voter can cast the ballot from their home or current place of residence. This way of voting is designed for voters who cannot visit a polling station on election day for a variety of reasons. The manner by which a ballot is often cast is by mobile ballot boxes.

Home and institutional-based voting arrangements were widely used in twenty-one countries for homebound and people in quarantine or infected by Covid-19. Many countries, such as Croatia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Myanmar, North Macedonia, Romania and South Korea, extended existing provisions to accommodate those affected by Covid-19. For example, In Montenegro, the EMB granted hospitalized patients the right to vote through mobile ballot box teams. In general, requests could be made to authorities before a set deadline. Members of EMBs, that used protective equipment and were trained to follow protocols, visited voters. Physical distance was to be maintained, and voters were required to wear masks, remove them briefly during the identification process, and disinfect their hands before and after voting.

For the referendum in Italy, people

infected by Covid-19 and in isolation could vote from home if the request was made five days before election day to the authorities. The collection of the votes would take place under maximum health safety conditions. In Seychelles, the EMB set up five special polling stations for voters working in essential services, hospital patients, residents in elderly homes, and those in quarantine facilities and were open at designated days and times. In Singapore ahead of the July 2020 Parliamentary elections, mobile ballot teams brought ballot boxes to citizens isolating in hotel rooms who recently returned from overseas.

Covid-19 Related Arrangements in Polling Stations

Arrangements in polling stations can include arrangements for in-person voting on election day in and around polling premises as a result of concerns regarding public health or other emergencies.

In total, 11 countries implemented arrangements in polling stations for national elections. In Jamaica, Jordan, Sri Lanka, South Korea and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, voters who got infected with Covid-19 or were in isolation or quarantine were able to cast their vote during specially designated times on election day. The voters needed to apply and receive permission from the authorities. Drive-thru/curbside voting was a new SVA made available for people with Covid-19 or self-isolating in the Czech Republic and Lithuania. In the Czech Republic, new legislation on drive-thru/curbside voting was passed two months ahead of the October regional and Senate elections. During the March 2020 legislative election in Israel, the EMB established 16 polling booths for 5,630 voters who were under precautionary home quarantine after

returning home from abroad. Kuwait and the USA (Idaho) made similar arrangements by creating special polling stations on election day to avoid contact with other voters.

Covid-19 Impact on Arrangements in Polling Stations Abroad

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, many countries limited or even restricted Out-of-Country Voting (OCV) or voting from abroad, making this the only SVA that was reduced rather than expanded. South Korea’s Electoral Commission (NEC) cancelled the planned OCV arrangements, disenfranchising about 87,000 (51 per cent) potential voters living abroad as there was no opportunity to vote by mail. Similarly, mainly due to the pandemic, the Constitutional Court of Niger decided that there would be no OCV for the presidential election, even though the Electoral Code provides for OCV arrangements. Similar constraints were

adopted in Guinea and the Central African Republic. The out-of-country registration process of North Macedonia did not reach the established threshold of voters, and OCV did therefore not take place.

Further, voters trying to cast their ballot abroad for the Moldovan elections ran into problems. At some polling stations abroad, Azerbaijan and France, for example, the polling stations’ opening hours were shortened due to local Covid-19 restrictions. It was reported that people could not vote at the polling station in Frankfurt (Germany) due to the limited number of ballots sent. Moldovan citizens living in Frankfurt were urged to go to other polling stations in different cities.

Deliverability of Changes

Although there is a need to adjust elections to the pandemic environment, there also needs to be consideration of the deliverability

Table 1. Special Voting Arrangements used in 2020 national elections and referendums by country

Type of SVA	Country
Early voting (15)	Belarus, Bermuda, Ghana, Iceland, Israel, Jamaica, Lithuania, Myanmar, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Russia, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Trinidad and Tobago, USA
Postal voting (8)	India, Romania (only from abroad), Poland, Lithuania, Iceland, New Zealand (only from abroad), South Korea, Switzerland, USA,
Proxy voting (4)	Belarus, Bermuda, Croatia, Czech Belize, Croatia, Poland, Switzerland,
Home and institutional-based voting by mobile ballot box (21)	Belarus, Bermuda, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Iceland, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Mongolia, Myanmar, North Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Suriname, Seychelles, Switzerland
Covid-19 related arrangements in polling stations (11)	Czech Republic, Iceland, Israel, Jamaica, Jordan, Kuwait, Lithuania, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, USA (Idaho)
None of the above / No SVAs (19)	Algeria, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chile, Côte d’Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Egypt Guinea, Iran, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Serbia, Syria, Tanzania, Venezuela

of any proposed changes. Poland provides a case study of where the late expansion of postal voting proved logistically difficult and the election had to be postponed as a result. Late changes can cause problems where administrators don't have the prior experience of running elections through new methods, may not have the necessary infrastructure or there are difficulties in unpicking longstanding arrangements. For example, moving an election from one day to several days could require the booking of polling stations for longer—and such venues may not be available. If logistical problems occur in the delivery of elections, then trust can be undermined in both the process and outcome.

Late changes can also bring legal disputes. In Sri Lanka, several weeks before election day, the national election commission made a special decision to allow persons in quarantine centers and self-isolation to cast their ballots in advance of election day by way of a mobile voting arrangement. However, this decision was subsequently reversed following complaints from multiple political factions on grounds that the legislation requires voters to cast votes in-person at ordinary polling stations on election day. The principle of the electoral law stability should be observed when possible and this may come into conflict steps to make the elections covid-safe.

Even if new legislation can be adopted quickly in response to Covid-19, it may not be possible to deliver the new SVA in time. For example, in Lithuania, the government adopted new legislation to provide for online voting three months ahead of the 2020 general elections. Nevertheless, the time needed to develop and test such a system was estimated to be around 18-24 months and therefore, it was decided that online voting would not be available for the 2020 election but for future elections.

Conclusion

The pandemic created an urgent need to consider whether the traditional methods of voting were fit for purpose. Many countries in Europe and Asia-Pacific quickly adapted their procedures through the expanded provision of SVAs. Adaptation of pre-existing SVAs was, therefore the predominant approach. In contrast, instances of countries adopting entirely new SVA procedures beyond Covid-19 related arrangements in polling stations were difficult to locate. This may be because making such dramatic changes close to polling day can be logistically and financially challenging and conflict with the principle of the stability of electoral law. Nonetheless, lessons on SVA from country experiences in 2020 will be significant both during the pandemic and beyond.

Source: www.idea.int

Picture Source: Republic of Korea National Election Commission

Voter registration in the time of Covid-19:

Suggestions for safe registration practices in Timor-Leste

E lectoral management bodies (EMBs) around the world are currently faced with operational challenges and requirements for adaptations due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While many voters look towards election day and their safety at the polls, EMBs have already begun work to ensure safe practices are implemented in pre-election day activities, including voter registration.

Voter registration is arguably one of the most important pre-election period activities, as an accurate voter roll ensures equitable participation in elections, can enhance voter turnout, and can support the smooth functioning of polling station operations. Despite the possible challenges that voter registration can bring in the face of Covid-19, according to Michael Maley, International IDEA's Principal International Expert advising Timor-Leste, the country can also use this process as a great "opportunity to build public confidence in the Technical Secretariat of Electoral Administration's (STAE) commitment and ability to run a Covid-resilient operation."

International IDEA is currently providing suggestions on Covid-19-safe voter registration to the EMBs of Timor-Leste under the project "Covid-Resilient Elections in Timor-Leste". Implemented

in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), STAE and the National Commission on Elections (CNE) and funded by the Governments of



● Miguel Pereira de Carvalho, Minister for State Administration, hands over the first electoral ID card to Lola de Vasconcelos Ferreira Ruak as the Technical Secretariat of Electoral Administration (STAE) and National Election Commission (CNE) launch Timor-Leste's national voter registration campaign in Dili. Voter registration will take place across the country's 12 municipalities and one Special Administrative Region over the course of the next six months

Japan and Timor-Leste, the project will advise the country’s EMBs on the conduct of safe and credible 2022 elections in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Suggestions proposed by International IDEA include ensuring that registration centers are well ventilated, using outside spaces where possible; the maintenance of social distancing through effective queue control; the full vaccination of registration staff to the greatest degree possible; and the use of widely accepted personal protection and sanitisation measures.

Key to the successful implementation of these proposed measures is strong capacity building and knowledge raising for registration staff, as well as capturing lessons that might be used in further operations and training across the electoral process.

Timor-Leste launches voter registration today, 1 July 2021, in a ceremony with political parties, media, civil society organizations, observers and the general public. As noted by Acilino Manuel Branco, Director General of STAE, “it is very important that everyone spreads information about voter registration to ensure high rates of participation in the coming general elections; voter registration is a very important step in the readiness of the upcoming elections.”

Learn more on Covid-19 considerations across Timor-Leste’s electoral process, and stay tuned for updates on future International IDEA activities including the development of a Covid-resilient election plan and manual and the development of materials and capacity building training for election staff.

Source: www.idea.int

Snap Story

Election Asst. Comm. @EACgov

Last week, @EACgov released the #2020EAVS bit.ly/2Wonfv5. Check out a few EAVS stats and read the full report for more information on election administration in the 2020 general election.

2020 Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) by the Numbers*

- More than 209 million - active registered voters
- More than 161 million - ballots that were counted
- 775,101 - total number of poll workers who assisted voters with early in-person and Election Day voting
- 176,933 - precincts
- 107,457 - polling places used on Election Day
- 25,099 - polling places used during early voting
- 6,460 - EAVS jurisdictions

*EAVS data is for the 2020 general election

www.eac.gov

On Global Elections Day, Youth Voices

are More Important than Ever

Every February, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) joins its longtime partner, the Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO), in celebrating Global Elections Day, celebrated on February 3. Thanks to a group of election officials in Central and Eastern Europe who sought to strengthen democracy. One of the day's goals is to acknowledge and promote young people's participation. Global Elections Day, IFES recognizes young people's contributions to democracy and proudly commits to democracy for all.

Young people continue to be an increasingly active and engaged constituent group, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. For over 20 years, IFES' Democracy Camps in Kyrgyzstan – part of the youth-led campaign “Men Ozum Chechem” (“I Decide Myself”) – have empowered young people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to become leaders of today and tomorrow. In 2020, the camps continued to serve Kyrgyzstan's growing youth population during what was a particularly trying year for democracy.

In response to COVID-19, IFES and the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening adapted the camp methodology for virtual engagement and shortened it from ten to six days. The first-ever online Democracy Camps launched in July and August, followed by a four-day version targeting first-time voters between the ages of 17 and 19. The program included pre-recorded lessons, support for student projects and both



● At Democracy Camps, students embrace the principles of inclusion and accessibility for all voters, understanding voting rights as a part of every person's human rights

group and one-on-one discussions with university instructors across Kyrgyzstan. Each day's activities focused on topics such as human rights, the state, elections, gender equality, media literacy and project management. Interactive studio time provided an opportunity for participants to practice their digital skills and utilize what they learned to create multimedia and marketing materials for social media and practice public speaking.

These camps were well-received by students and trainers, who recognized the significant accomplishment of adapting the Democracy Camps for the pandemic. The camps were then followed by Media Laboratories, which promoted youth engagement on social media and media literacy before and in between Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary and snap presidential elections.

As IFES celebrates Global Elections Day, it hopes in 2021 all young and first-time voters can continue to exemplify the spirit of “Men Ozum Chechem” in their countries.

Originally published on IFES Website

Leveraging New Technologies to make Civic and Electoral Information Accessible

In the last 10 years, Tunisia has undergone major political and institutional transformations, most notably the adoption of the 2014 Constitution, which established a new system

of government and decentralized power. Simultaneously, however, Tunisians have limited opportunities to learn about the



“Before [the Democracy Exhibit], hard-of-hearing persons did not understand elections, but through this experience, electoral information became accessible. I understood a lot of new concepts.” – Ahmed, exhibit visitor who is hard-of-hearing

new system, public institutions and broader political and electoral topics, leaving many struggling to understand the changes.

This is especially true among marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities and young people. Persons with disabilities are often among the most excluded from public life due to a lack of formal and informal education and a lack of civic information in accessible formats. Young people are increasingly disillusioned with the democratic transition as an already weak economy, made weaker by the COVID-19 pandemic, continues to limit employment opportunities. Overall, Tunisia is facing a growing loss of confidence in democracy’s ability to deliver improved

social and economic outcomes, resulting in increased public apathy and decreased participation in civic and electoral life.

New Tech Inclusive Democracy Exhibit was developed with support from the United States Agency for International Development through the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening. The Democracy Exhibit uses new technologies to teach visitors about democracy and elections in an accessible manner.

Initially launched during Tunisia’s International Day of Democracy celebrations in 2020, the Democracy Exhibit provides visitors with information about Tunisia’s political history, the concept of democracy

“The VR experience was simply magnificent. I felt so delighted to be included in the polling station through virtual reality. The fact that sign language interpretation was assisting me all the way through the voting simulation made me understand the process from A to Z. The technology was very useful and enriching that I didn’t feel marginalized or had any communication issue.” – Aymen, Deaf activist who visited the exhibit

and the role of public institutions, civic engagement, and elections, and incorporates new technologies, including augmented reality, virtual reality (VR) and interactive videos. Exhibit was designed to be accessible to all through the creation of three versions: a full audio-visual version, a sign language version for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, and an audio version with a screen reader for persons who are blind or have low vision.

The exhibit particularly appeals to young people, given its use of new technologies. Young Tunisians, many of whom have turned 18 since 2011, have felt excluded from political processes and side-lined from decision-making. The Democracy Exhibit presents young people with opportunities to learn more about democracy and provides them and other first-time voters with resources to further their civic and political engagement.

“I mostly enjoyed the virtual reality experience. I loved the moment. I have never voted before and the VR simulation explained all the details of how to vote. It really encouraged me to vote!” – Ayoub, 18-year-old visitor to the exhibit

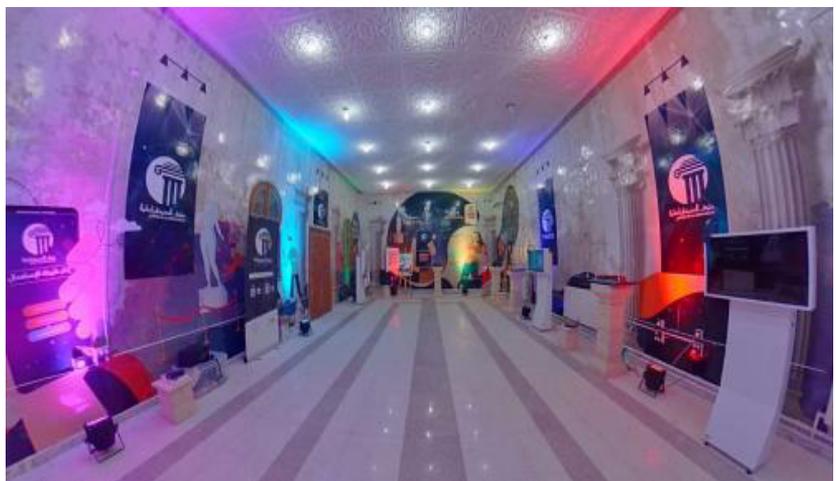
Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on in-person gatherings, the physical exhibit was complemented with an online platform and mobile application, through which users can access a 360-degree virtual

“It was my first time trying a virtual exhibit and it’s the most innovative exhibit ever. I was very attracted and interested by the stations, I didn’t feel bored or overloaded by information, the approach was great and super smooth and simple just like a game.” – Chayma, 19-year-old law student who visited the exhibit

tour of the physical exhibit. The online platform and mobile application, available for download on the Apple Store and Google Play Store, contain the same features as the physical exhibit, including new technologies and the same interactive experience.

Since the Democracy Exhibit’s inception, over 1,000 visitors have accessed the online platform.

The Democracy Exhibit provides Tunisians with a greater understanding of political and electoral processes and their rights and responsibilities as citizens in accessible formats to encourage them to participate more fully in democratic processes, both during and between elections. The future of Tunisia depends on all Tunisians, and, as such, civic education must be inclusive and accessible to all.



● The New Tech Inclusive Democracy Exhibit

Originally published on IFES Website

Preliminary Report on social media monitoring in Moldova

highlights the need to regulate online political campaigning

In Moldova's recent parliamentary elections, social media formed a prominent environment for election campaigning. To promote transparency and ultimately the integrity of the electoral process, International IDEA supported a Moldovan democracy watchdog MediaPoint and its partner, a Slovenian non-profit media monitoring agency MEMO98 in monitoring social media during the early parliamentary elections in July 2021.

The monitoring aimed to shed more light on how electoral contestants used social media networks and their diverse tools, how did Moldova's electorate interact with them, what was the volume of sponsored content, and what sentiments were most popular across a variety of groups and channels. The monitoring focused on pages of 23 parties and blocs and 17 political leaders on Facebook, Instagram, Odnoklassniki, Telegram and YouTube. In addition, the monitoring followed and dissected key sentiments on 152 public groups and channels on Facebook, Odnoklassniki and Telegram.

The presence of Moldovan citizens on social networks has gradually increased in recent years, with some notable changes, such as the migration of users from Russian-language platforms Odnoklassniki and Vkontakte to Facebook and Instagram, with the latter now having about 1.6 million users. While television remains the main source of political information, in the past several years, the use of social media for political and electoral campaigning has increased significantly.

Facebook was the most popular social media platform during the recent campaign, hosting about 4,943 posts from all political

parties and their leaders and 2,91 million total interactions. Odnoklassniki, in contrast, was used by only four parties and nine political leaders, with 957 total posts and 70,542 interactions. The narratives promoted in groups and channels on Facebook, Odnoklassniki and Telegram channels reflected the existing polarisation of Moldovan society between pro-and anti-Western sentiments. The most commonly echoed concerns in public groups were about Moldova's largely stagnating socio-economic conditions and who is responsible for the country's current state of development. The monitoring identified several cases of disinformation and dissemination of manipulative content through anonymous public groups and channels. Especially Odnoklassniki and Telegram proved to be a place, where spreading false information and hate speech is relatively easy, given a lack of oversight by these platforms.

These findings highlight that as the use of social media networks continues to grow, the risks it carries for electoral integrity and democratic politics is growing too. Implementing necessary monitoring and oversight of electoral campaigns on social media networks is a complex and difficult undertaking, with often insufficient mandates and capacities among both, state and civil society oversight bodies. To improve the integrity of online electoral campaigns and enhance public resilience to disinformation, currently existing campaign regulations should be continuously reviewed and adjusted to emerging new forms of online social networking. For this aim, dialogue between state oversight bodies, political parties, civil society and online platforms is vital and urgently needed.

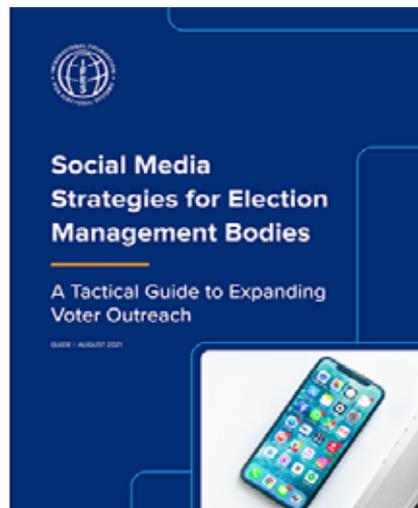
Source: <https://www.idea.int/>

Social Media Strategies for Election Management Bodies

Technology platforms and products continue to transform politics and elections with prominent implications for voter trust and understanding. As social media increasingly becomes a space where disinformation and conspiracy about elections flourish, it is essential that democratic actors communicate effectively to share credible information that builds trust and brings transparency to the administration of elections. In keeping with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems' (IFES) strategic commitment to ensuring that technology, information and data positively serve democracy and elections, we continue to provide tools and resources to help our partners around the world stay abreast of the evolving technological landscape.

Despite the proliferation of challenges stemming from the evolution of social media and digital communication, IFES and its election management body (EMB) partners recognize the value of social media in reaching voters, enhancing transparency and countering disinformation and hate speech with credible, authoritative content.

Image: report cover | Text: How can EMBs further leverage social media to expand voter education and outreach?



Social Media Strategies for Election Management Bodies: A Tactical Guide to Expanding Voter Outreach provides platform-specific tip sheets containing new ideas on how EMBs can make the most of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and messaging applications like WhatsApp. The guide also includes strategies to use across platforms, guidance on hosting live video events, suggestions on how to use social media partnerships to expand the reach of content and a special section on messaging strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. This guide will be particularly useful to communications and public relations staff within an EMB who are looking to deepen and diversify their social media strategy to increase public understanding of elections, build trust in their institutions and strengthen voters' confidence in the safety and integrity of voting.

Social Media Strategies for Election Management Bodies: A Tactical Guide to Expanding Voter Outreach

Gabriel Morris
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E-Elections in Brazil

Electoral Justice started its path towards informatization almost thirty years ago when in 1986 an electronic registration of more than 7 million voters took place. In 1994 the results of the general elections were established through a central computer at Superior Electoral Court (TSE, in Portuguese abbreviation)¹. Once enlisting voters and establishing the results were informatized, next step would be to informatize vote itself, so that the whole hardcore of the elections would be completely modernized.

In 1995, the first version of the electronic ballot was developed to be used in the 1996 elections, when a third of the electorate voted electronically. In 1998 elections two-thirds of the electorate voted in electronic ballots and in 2000 elections every single vote was electronically captured.

Such an electoral digital scenario brings numerous benefits, namely the logistic gains and the speed in which the results can be established and published. Nevertheless, Electoral Justice maintains its efforts to improve the security of the electronic voting system.

At the public security tests TSE welcomes external specialists to encourage them to search for vulnerabilities of vote capturing and result establishing system. The tests became so important that it is now formally a part of Brazilian electoral process according to TSE Resolution no. 23.444/2015.

Through Biometric registration, since 2008, Electoral Justice aims to reduce duplicated records in voter registry,

ensuring that each vote is personal, unique and non-transferable. In the 2016 elections almost 50 million people were able to vote through biometric identification, corresponding roughly to 30% of the Brazilian total electorate.

Despite this, people have some doubt about the electoral system: although we live the longest time of institutional normality, ensured by the Federal Constitution of 1988, a part of the people express distrust in our institutions. Thus, beyond the concern about improving the system, maybe Electoral Justice's biggest challenge nowadays is to get credibility, namely to show that E-elections are trustworthy, in other words, that it provides a reliable voting system.

Seeking to confer reliability to the ballots, the Legislative enacts Law no. 13.165 of 2015, which included in Elections Act (Law no. 9.504 of 1997) the requirement of printed vote along with the electronic voting process. In general terms, from the 2018 elections on, a gradual implementation of built-in printers on electronic ballots will take place, so that the vote can be stored in both electronic and physical forms. In Article 59-A the above-mentioned Act establishes that "in electronic voting process the ballot will print each vote, which will be stored automatically and with no manual contact to the voter in a previously sealed slot".

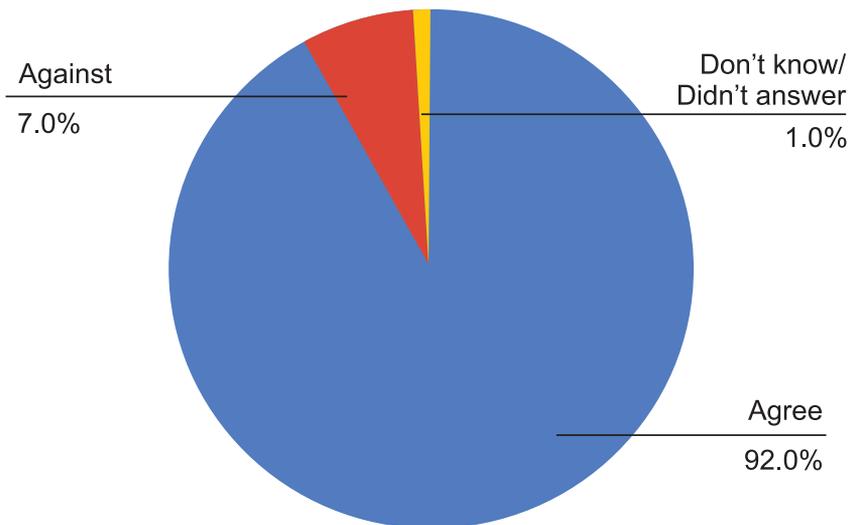
To get an idea of the distrust level of population on electronic voting system and of the popular support for printed vote, here is a survey held by Federal Senate in 2015 when the mentioned law was being considered in Congress³:

¹Superior Electoral Court. Vote informatization. Available at: <<http://www.tse.jus.br/eleitor-e-eleicoes/eleicoes/urna-eletronica/seguranca-da-urna/eleicoes>>

²"Carta garantiu estabilidade institucional, diz Gilmar". *Conjur*: <https://www.conjur.com.br/2013-set-09/gilmar-mendes-constituicao-garantiu-estabilidade-institucional>

³Fonte: Senado Federal. Disponível em: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/institucional/datasenado/materias/enquetes/impressao-de-votos-nas-eleicoes>

Regarding printed vote



However, despite of the popular support and the above-mentioned law, printed code remains uncertain. In February Federal Public Prosecution filed Direct Unconstitutionality Action n. 5889 contesting aforementioned article 59-A, under the argument that it would threaten vote secrecy and therefore a democratic setback. In this lawsuit, providing information to Brazilian Supreme Court, TSE (Electoral Court) argued that printed vote would be a setback on the result establishing process. Furthermore, Electoral Justice carried out an expenditure projection of 2.5 Million reais within the next ten

years to put printed vote system gradually in place. Finally, despite of the mentioned “analogic relapse”, Brazilian electoral system became reference of technology application and there are no evidences of change of course. Thus, Brazil is building its recent democratic history with the eyes on a increasingly more digital horizon.



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Snap Story

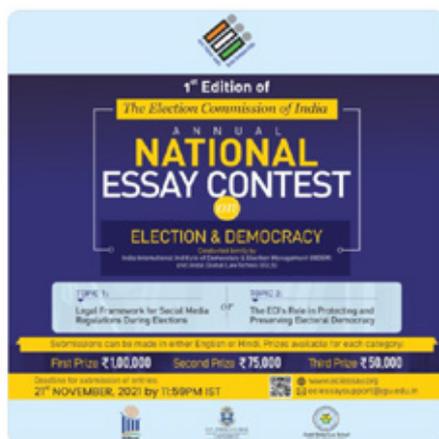


Election Commission of India #SVEEP @ECISVEEP

ECI launches inaugural edition of “The ECI Annual National Essay Contest on Election & Democracy” org jointly by @ECIIIDEM & @JindalLaw

The online competition opens from 2nd Oct to 21st Nov 2021. Entries allowed in both English & Hindi.

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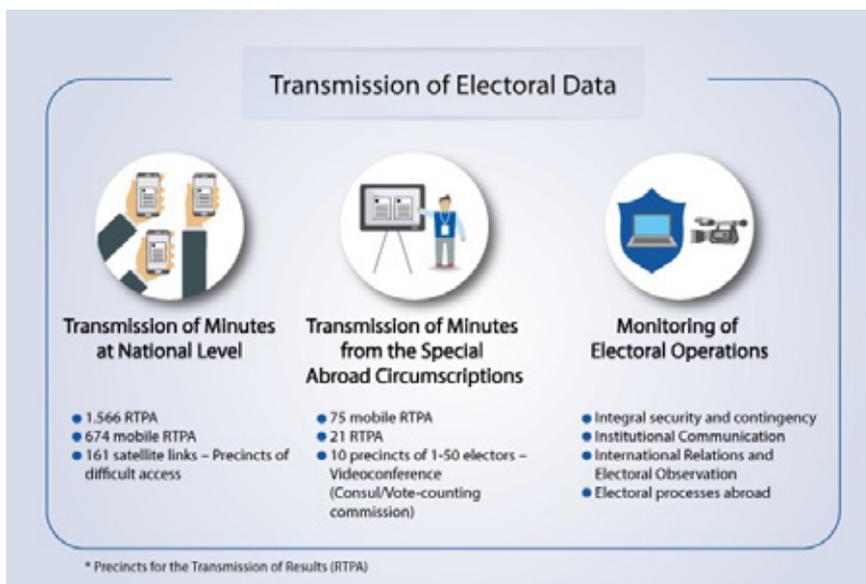
A Digital Tool for Tracking and Monitoring in the Popular Consultation

Technological changes keep a close relation with the different generations of individuals that play the leading role in them. Focusing on the new generational groups is key in the democratization of information and in the citizenshipization¹ of communication, which entails a necessary instantaneity of answers and immediacy for decision making at the service of society.

The new generations of citizens informed in democracy have had vertiginous experiences in relation to the communication they receive. But, who are they? Who are the Millennials? And what do they want? Let's begin by stating that 'Millennials' or 'Generation Y' is the denomination given to those born between 1980 and 2000 (15-35 years of age), and, according to

several studies, they have a strong way of interacting with Consejo Nacional Electoral social problems, they are capable of developing empathy towards certain topics and filtering the information they consume with a critical thinking. Regarding information transfer, Millennials communicate through cell phones; in Ecuador, over 60% of them use a smartphone.

From this social interaction arises the need of playing a more active role in the use of technologies as the main tools to inform the citizens. The study 'New Kids on the Block' determines that, as of today, there are more than 2 million Millennials, which represents 32% of the world's population. With these premises in mind, and considering the facts described in a



¹Citizenshipization (*ciudadanización*), a new word meaning that institutions are formed by citizens without a political membership background in order to avoid bias (GALINDO, D. and CABRAL, S., 2015, p. 33, retrieved from: http://www.roaep.ro/prezentare/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Expert-electoral-3_2015.pdf).

general way, we, as members of the National Electoral Council (CNE), must adequate our administrative and operational practices, not only to organize electoral processes, but also to conjugate the new technologies with the practices demanded by the active generations of information in a democracy. In the process of Referendum and Popular Consultation 2018, the National Electoral Council, for the first time in the history of the country, as an innovative and unprecedented event, bet on technology through a mobile application specialized in-tracking and monitoring of institutional activities; which, at the same time, serves for reducing time and even costs during the electoral process.

Citizens are connected in real time 24 hours a day; taking this into consideration, the CNE implemented an uninterrupted service for the transmission of data among electoral officials during every phase of the Election Day. Thanks to this, it could be known in real time the details of every electoral precinct in the country, including those of 'difficult access', where immediate transmission of electoral data was guaranteed through any mobile device, as well as assistance to electoral officials, set-up of polling stations and training to the members of the polling stations.

In this way, by immediately sending videos, audios and photographs, the operational activities of the National Electoral Council can be controlled

between its National Directions and the 24 Provincial Commissions. At the same time, the official data of national vote-counting gets transmitted, giving fast access to information of the minutes already scanned and uploaded to the system. For instance, the coordinators of the different electoral precincts nationwide can notify any possible unexpected circumstance, in order to immediately make a decision.

Furthermore, the inputs received to allow us to feed the dashboard, a graphic representation of the map of the entire Ecuadorian territory and our Special Boards Abroad, with the main indicators that allow the optimization, tracking, monitoring, analysis and effective compliance of the process.

The National Electoral Council of Ecuador is a pioneer in the implementation of this digital tool and in the use of ICT aiming to substantially improve the access to information, strengthening the credibility in the electoral processes, optimizing celerity, efficiency and quality in the provision of services to the citizens, having regard to their demands and, more than anything, embracing the example that the technological day-to-day puts at our service.



Nubia Villacís Carreño

President National Electoral Council, Ecuador

Paúl Salazar Vargas

Councilor National Electoral Council, Ecuador

Snap Story



● Tweeted on September 21, 2021

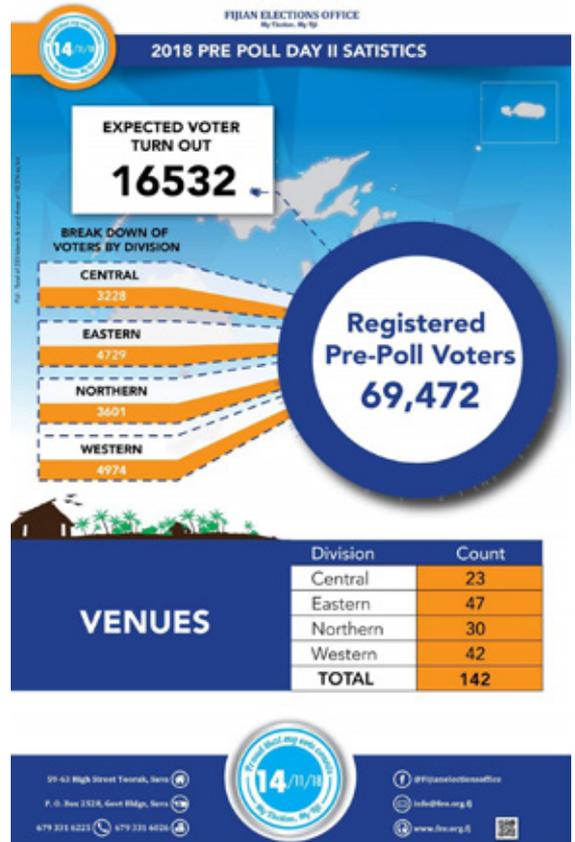


Facebook As a Tool for Election Awareness and Education

With the 2018 General Election scheduled to be held any time between April and November, the Fijian Elections Office [FEO] aims to maximize its awareness platform to inform and educate as many voters from across the country, as well as regional and overseas registered voters. Community mobilization through social media is an empowering and engaging platform that the FEO has invested into since the 2014 General Election. Already, more than 12 percent of Facebook users in the

This way negative publicity is minimized as followers are only given positive stories that are relevant for upcoming elections. The impact of this strategy is evident through the increasing popularity of the FEO Facebook platform. An example is the Fiji Elects 2018 Facebook page, which has only been active for less than a year and has already reached over 34,000 followers. Live Streaming of Events The FEO shares live feeds of all important electoral events on its social media pages. This eliminates inhibition in terms of being confined in front of a television set to see the event happening live. Through sharing live feeds, the voters that have access to smart phones and internet, are able to view the electoral events live where ever they may be at that point in time—in school, at a restaurant, in a bus, etc. country are engaging with the FEO through this platform. The Fijian Elections Office has two Facebook pages, one for the Fijian Elections Office (@Fijianelectionsoffice) and the other for the upcoming 2018 General Elections known as Fiji Elects 2018 (@FijiVotes2018). The popularity of social media in Fiji has steadily

increased since 2014, with 2017 statistics revealing more than 421,000 internet users in the country, of which over 380,000 were Facebook users. As of January y 2018, the Fijian Elections Office page had over 50,000 likes and followers while the Fiji Elects 2018 page had over 34,000 likes and followers. Statistics also revealed that over 82,000 people had in some way seen or read posts through both pages. The number of pages likes and followers for the Fijian Elections Office compared to the number of Facebook users in the country converts to around 12.9 percent. The strategy of the FEO for social media is to post positive posts and critical election updates.



Facebook as a Medium of Advertisement

All vacancies and tenders are advertised on the FEO official FB pages. There is visible interest from the public for wanting to work for the FEO. This is evident from the high number of likes and comments on these posts.

This interest is amplified when users share the post amongst their networks and encourage them to apply as well. This is evident from the high number of shares and tags on each of these posts.

Case Study 1: Recruitment Drive

The FEO utilized a number of mediums, through both traditional media as well as contemporary media, to inform the interested individuals who wanted to apply to become Election Officials in the 2018 General Election. However, the only medium of advertisement used by the FEO to inform these people to register to be able to sit the online test on day 1 of the Recruitment Drive, was Facebook. In just two days, all 70 slots for the test in the Central Division were full.

This exemplifies the effectiveness of Facebook as a vital tool and platform for election related advertisements.

Schedules of Activities and Events

The FEO shares schedules of upcoming activities and major events on its Facebook page. The users are able to identify the events that will take place at a venue nearest to them in order to maximize participation. Users from a particular area that are interested in an event can also flag their interest, if they are unable to attend the sessions that are currently planned. Whilst the FEO might not be able to address all the needs flagged, it is certainly important baseline information when planning future activities and events. These posts are also boosted for relevant

areas to increase awareness and maximize participation.

Case Study 2: Overseas Voter Registration Drive

Overseas Voter Registration Drive schedules were shared and boosted in areas where the FEO teams had planned to visit. This helped in boosting the turnout of Fijian citizens to participate in the Overseas Voter Registration Drive. As a result, the FEO managed to provide voter election services to up to 2900 Fijians living overseas out of which, 696 were new registrations.

Personal Engagement with Followers

During festive seasons, the FEO posts personal messages and well wishes on the FB page. These messages are from the FEO staff and addressed to the Fijian citizens and FEO FB followers. The personal messages give a platform for the FEO staff to be seen as approachable and caring individuals who have customer service skills and community engagement at the heart of the work that they do. This helps build the organizational image as well instills confidence of the people in the FEO and the FEO staff.

Case Study 3: Christmas Greetings

The FEO posted Christmas and New Year messages from various directorates and staff for a period of three weeks. This allowed members of the public and followers on social media to see the faces of the staff working behind the scenes to prepare for the 2018 General Election. This interaction was an opportunity for the FEO staff to send followers festive greetings during the holiday period.

Encourage Participation Through Polls and Quizzes

Feedback from Facebook users and members of the public has been positive with regards

to the Fijian Elections Office response rate, open conversations and interactions on social media.

In a bid to further increase the interaction on social media, the FEO ran polls online to gauge the knowledge of social media followers regarding electoral process. It gained huge popularity as many members of the public proved they are well versed with some of the processes while some social media followers even requested for information in areas which they were not sure of.

Fijian Election Office Facebook Posts

Conclusion

Feedback from Facebook users and members of the public has been positive with regards to the Fijian Elections Office response rate, open conversations and interactions on social media. Overall the Fijian Election Office brand viewership has increased significantly with more members of the public logging in to view live feeds, events and updates.

Facebook has also proven to be an efficient tool to effectively reach and disseminate key election information with the youths, which form a large portion of the electorate in Fiji.



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Using Digital Technology and Social Media for Voter Education



Voter Education is an important and necessary stage in any electoral process. In transitional democracies wherever a complex electoral system exists, or using new procedures or modern technology and whenever they call to simplify the concepts and clarify procedures and explain the details of the operation polling day, dissemination of information and voter education becomes a priority. After accumulating extensive experience in numerous electoral processes and in electoral education over a decade the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) has established a new Institute specializing in electoral education to promote a culture of sustainable electoral voters.

Since the next parliamentary elections is bound to happen during the month of May 2018, IHEC will use new sorting and counting machines (electronic ballot box) for the first time, after successfully using

electronic voter cards and verification devices during the previous election in 2014. The Iraqi Electoral Commission found it necessary to broaden the definition of advertising and promotional campaign. Election mechanism will be using modern equipment in the future, Voter cards will be received by voters who tag their data. The message on elections was spread through the following methods:

- Programs which were broadcast via satellite channels (these channels were hired for the duration of the campaigns).
- Seminars, programs and interactive sessions to educate voters in all the aspects.
- Use of social networking sites by launching a special hashtag Office of the Iraqi elections, and posting pictures, posters and videos to explain procedures for polling day.
- Coordination with international

organizations such as the Organization of NDI through participatory programs to educate candidates for elections in Electoral Education Institute.

- Displaying large advertisements on highways using giant screens, on high roofs in cities and crowded places as also at intersections within cities.





The importance of these methods is to use community media, big screens, plus satellite TV as it is an effective medium to

reach out to maximum number of voters.

Electronic ballot box facilitates voting and counting electronically. In addition to that, use of updated card for voters, as well as using electronic sealed checks paper ballots instead of the pen, is a fruitful exercise. IHEC found that using an easy and effective manner and reaching the largest number of voters, special sites on social media platforms can be useful. Pictures and graphics can be included for the purpose of delivering clear information to voters.

Online technology has been used by allowing online registration of Iraqis outside of Iraq and in all countries where this program was put on the official website. Iraqi voter can register his name as an elector entitled to vote in an election abroad. After registering online, one should keep the paper mentioning QR code and take the same at the polling station as a proof of his registration.

Other uses of electronic technology are to create a virtual library on the website with a wide range of sources, research papers and surveys on elections and democracy. Electoral Education Institute has another electronic library which is bigger and more diverse. It is useful for researchers and IHEC staff as well as all partners of the electoral process.

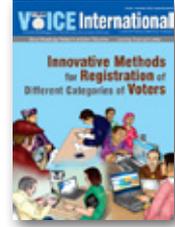
Finally, with the use of new devices for sorting and counting in the next elections, the results also will go directly by vesat from the polling centers to the tally-center in Baghdad. Then the results can be announced on big screens to the people so that everyone can see the results directly by using this advanced technology. Hence, the use of modern technology in electoral



education contributes to significantly reduce the time and effort required to sensitize and educate the broad categories and different sectors of the electorate, which no doubt will have a positive impact on the transparency and integrity of the electoral process.

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Commissioner, IHEC, Iraq





Malawi Successfully Migrates to Biometric Voter Registration System



oter registration remains one of the most complex and contested parts of the electoral process. Electoral Management Bodies all over the world are consistently searching for new means and technologies to provide a credible voter register.

In most cases introduction of a biometric technology has always come in as panacea. However, Malawi has had a successful case of migrating successfully to a biometric voter registration system. This article reflects on the challenges necessitating the change and the process followed by Malawi.



Challenges with the Old System

For years Malawi used the Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) system which is largely paper-based and involved a lot of human input. Candidate’s details were captured manually and this created room for human errors like misspelling of names, date of births, age and all other text details. This made the process expensive as more people had to be employed. Registering could take time. Starting with taking of photographs. Taking pictures and printing also exhausted sometime and in the end, there were long queues during registration.

The paper-based method of registering voters did not have adequate in-built mechanism for detecting multiple registrations and therefore there were instances where some individuals could register more than once resulting in a bloated voter register. The thumb prints were captured on a paper and later scanned into the system. The quality was too poor

that it could be used for eliminating multiple registrations in the system.

All this could culminate into a voters register with deficiencies like misspelled, missing or misallocated names on the polling day with potential of undermining credibility of the election. With these changes the Commission started searching for alternatives and the introduction of a biometric voter registration system became the feasible option.

The Biometric solution was designed to counter all the shortfalls faced with the OMR. Biometric technology makes the detection and removal of multiple registrations from the system possible. The voters’ role becomes more accurate and reliable for election purposes. Processing of transfers for voters who have relocated is also easy and can be done within a very short time.

Getting Stakeholder Buy-in and Confidence

The introduction of new technology in elections will always be treated with suspicions and contempt, no matter how good the intentions might be. The electoral management body needs an elaborate strategy of stakeholder engagement to harness their energies to support the innovation.

For MEC, although stakeholders agreed to introduce biometric system, they needed to be sensitized and motivated to support the process. The Commission conducted meetings with stakeholders starting with party leaders, civil society groups, Members of Parliament, Development Partners among others. During the meetings the Commission made presentations on how the system would work, the benefits and not leaving out security figures. The stakeholders were allowed to ask questions and even participate in mock voter registration so that they can go out and be vanguards of the new system.

Since political parties supported the system, they went out and educated and mobilized the people to register. They helped demystify some of the myths associated with the computerization of the voter registration process.

Biometric System is Vast, Choose What You Want

The biometric system is wide and has many facilities. A country needs to choose what it wants and adapt the system to that. Introduction of new system comes with heavy once-off costs on equipment and in order to implement the process cost-effectively and effectively, MEC collaborated with the National Registration Bureau (NRB). The NRB had conducted national wide registration for citizens which involved capturing their fingerprints, photos and other text details. Citizens were given a National ID that had a chip and a QR code.

The MEC signed a memorandum of understanding with the NRB that allowed MEC to use the bureau's equipment and benefit from its data.

During voter registration, the National ID was the sole identification document. To cater for those that had not registered for national ID, MEC and NRB made an arrangement whereby at every voter

registration centre there was also NRB staff. People with no national ID could first register with the NRB and be given a slip as proof of registration which they could use to register as voters. The slip had a machine readable QR code and it worked in place of national ID.

During the voter registration drive, registration staff was just scanning details of the registrant for purposes of allocating an appropriate registration centre. The voter certificate was printed immediately and it contained only the text details of the registrant and a QR code. This process was very efficient and for the first time in the history of elections, people did not queue to register. It took an average of a minute to process one registrant.

After voter registration in the field, MEC consolidated the data into one server and also using the national registration numbers, they obtained biometric voter registration details from the NRB to build the voters register.

Using the biometric details, it was simple to run a de-duplication process after all data was pulled to a central place and a total of 13,244 records were deleted. The end result was a clean voters register.

During voters' register inspection, the process run smoothly as the voters' roll was clean from deficiencies noticed in past elections. No names were missing, no misspellings or misallocation of names or misplacement of pictures.

The use of the national ID card also eliminated the challenge of determining age and citizenship. In the past, with a good percentage of the population having no proper birth certificates, the testimony of parents and guardians weighed heavily. This was prone to error and manipulation. But with the biometric system, minors were automatically rejected during voter registration.

Also since the national registration followed a rigorous and credible process on determining citizens, the national ID eliminated the challenges faced in the border districts whereby some foreigners in the past would want to register also.

Conclusion and Some Tips

Malawi successfully migrated to a biometric

voter registration system with the praise of all electoral stakeholders. With the collaboration of NRB, the process was cost effective as the MEC never bought registration equipment but borrowed the equipment used by the NRB during the national civil registration exercise. Because MEC was not capturing biometric details, the process was fast and cost-effective.

Sangwani Mwafulirwa

Director, Media and Public Relations - Malawi Electoral Commission

Other Initiatives

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

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 Moderated by Max Honggyo Ahn, Program Officer, External Relations Department, A-Web Secretariat

Speakers & Topics	
Brenda Santamaria Chief of the Electoral Observation Section, OAS/SECI	Planning and Executing an International Observation Mission during COVID-19: The Experience of the 2020 Dominican Republic Elections • Pre-recorded presentation
Amal Vior Program Officer, International Election Observation and Capacity Building, AMREL	Strategies for International and Domestic Election Observation in Asia during COVID-19
Pablo Lim Program Officer, Training Department, A-Web Secretariat	Election Observation during COVID-19: Future Plans and Considerations

- 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%.



Assistive Digital Technologies in Russian Elections: Application Practices and Development Prospect



According to the Pension Fund of the Russian Federation, about 11 percent (11.3 million) of citizens with active suffrage have a disability. More than a million of them require special facilities to exercise their voting rights. Attitude towards people with disabilities is the most important indicator of the maturity of a society, its consolidation, and vitality. I note that for many people with disabilities, participation in the election campaign is, unfortunately, one of the rarest opportunities so far to demonstrate not only their attitude to the political life of society but also to take an immediate part in the formation of public authorities.

In this regard, the CEC of Russia is focused on the integrated complex development of assistive technologies in the electoral process as the basis of the electoral future. Over many years, only the problem of accessibility for disabled persons to the surrounding physical environment was considered relevant. But today, the problem of the accessibility of the information environment is no less significant.

In recent years, the CEC of Russia has made great efforts to ensure the electoral rights of citizens with disabilities. It was an extremely difficult, but at the same time, a very useful experience for us. Its social significance is substantiated by statistics, according to which in the Russian Federation, in addition to citizens with disabilities, almost 30 million elderly citizens have hearing and vision impairments. Moreover, more than 2.5 million people with disabilities do not speak Russian.



In view of this, our electoral system is facing the challenge of finding new effective solutions to ensure the electoral rights of citizens with disabilities and to improve the quality of the electoral process as a whole, including within the framework of the key tendency of the modern world development - the widespread use of digital technologies in all social areas. The practice of using modern assistive digital technologies in the elections was no exception. I can say that today in Russia these technologies are already actively used in the electoral process within the framework of a number of projects (Mobile Voter, Environment without Borders, Accessible Environment, Road to the Polling Station), which are aimed at solving urgent implementation of the electoral rights of citizens with disabilities.

In 2017, in 20 constituent entities of the Russian Federation, the Mobile Voter project was tested, which for the first time provided citizens with the opportunity to choose the most convenient polling station for voting within their region. In 2018, in the election of the President of Russia, the voter got the opportunity to choose a convenient polling station already throughout the country and even abroad. This mechanism was used by



7 million citizens. No doubt, Mobile Voter project was a significant step in creating a publicly accessible barrier-free space and allowed citizens with disabilities to choose the most convenient and accessible polling station to exercise their voting rights in a comfortable manner.

In the spring of the current year, the State Duma of the Russian Federation approved a bill on conducting an experiment on the organization and implementation of remote electronic voting, which will be implemented on September 8, 2019 at the elections of deputies of the Moscow City Duma. According to the bill, the experiment is aimed at “expanding the possibilities of using active suffrage, increasing the degree of citizens’ interest in participating in elections, as well as creating the most effective remote voting mechanisms.” From a practical point of view, the experiment on organizing remote voting will allow the voter to vote remotely using a special online service created at the regional portal MOS.RU, without using a paper ballot. Such a vote will be held in 3 out of 45 constituencies in Moscow.

At the same time, the traditional procedure in these voting districts during the experiment will also be preserved. I think that electronic voting can become an effective tool for the implementation of suffrage for citizens with disabilities, and the results of the experiment will help to identify prospects for further work on improving the electoral law and further development of digital technologies in

the electoral process. This innovation is especially important for such a vast country as the Russian Federation. Thanks to the development of an accessible digital environment in elections, we have a unique opportunity to take into account the needs of various categories of voters - especially people with limited mobility and those with disabilities. Speaking specifically about assistive digital technologies, it is worth noting that we have developed a whole line of specialized equipment and software, which is currently already used to build a digital electoral environment in elections. I would like to mention just a few examples of the development of assistive digital technologies in elections in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation:



- At the elections in the Novosibirsk region, an interactive information stand is used at polling stations, that are designed for citizens with hearing and vision impairment and wheelchair users. This device is unique in that it is adapted for three categories of people with disabilities. Information is available for deaf citizens in Russian sign language - a computer translation is carried out by an animated doll, and it is duplicated with subtitles; for blind and visually impaired persons - with the help of text read out loudly and of overlays made in Braille. A deaf-and-blind person can connect to a Braille display, and those who use hearing aids will receive information through

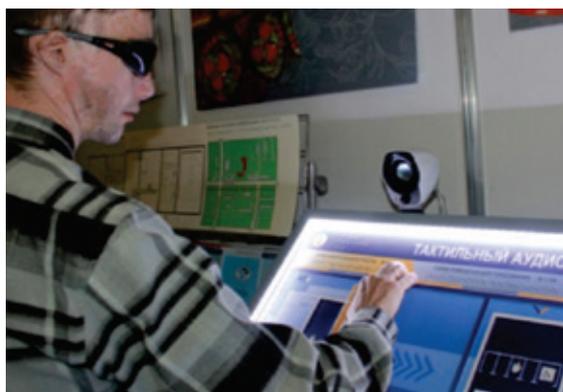
an induction loop, which can also be connected to the device. The module is also suitable for wheelchair users - the height of the monitor and the angle of the screen are adjustable.

- In addition, tactile audio-visual modules are used at a number of polling stations in the Novosibirsk Region, in which two functional schemes are combined (a polling station and a special stencil for filling out the ballot paper by voters with visual impairment); and relief-graphic, large-font formats (with elements of full-color flat and 3D printing). The module is equipped with an induction loop (for voters with hearing impairment). A source of constant light is laid around the perimeter of the module, providing additional diffused lighting.
- In a number of election commissions (for example, in the Volgograd region, Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug - Ugra), polling stations used online sign language services, which were provided remotely using mobile communications and Internet technologies. In the Kaliningrad region, online hearing services were used by people with hearing impairments who visited Multifunctional Centers for the Provision of State and Municipal Services to submit applications for voting at the location (as part of the Mobile Voter project). This practice

demonstrated its effectiveness and was highly appreciated by deaf voters.

- At elections in the Yaroslavl region, in St. Petersburg, and in a number of other constituent entities of the Russian Federation, the Talking Polling Station project was implemented. The voting room was provided with special equipment for the blind. During their stay at the polling station, a visually impaired or blind person received a special device - a radio informant, which provided sound accompaniment that helps to navigate to the location of members of the election commission, booths and ballot boxes. Due to this assistive technology, the visually impaired persons obtained the opportunity not only to reach the polling station, but also to correctly find the entrance to the building, navigate inside the building, and receive a ballot using voice prompts on the radio informant. Thanks to the tactile marking, the visually impaired persons could independently find the voting booth, while the audiovisual devices and Braille tactile means allowed themselves to vote for the candidate and then leave the premises.

In the future, we plan to develop specialized digital services not only for voters with disabilities but also people with limited mobility. The digital environment of the future will be able to combine individual information platforms designed for each of the groups of participants in the electoral process - for voters, election commission staff, candidates, observers, volunteers - through the developed multimodal cloud platform. In particular, with the use of a dynamic QR code to encrypt information, it is already possible to produce appropriate posters, invitations, video clips about elections, taking into account needs of our voters.



Equally urgent is the work on equipping polling stations with specialized multifunctional information terminals for people with disabilities, equipped with a tactile keyboard for audio and sign- navigation through digital content about the elections, as well as with the possibility of video communication with dispatch centers, a built-in induction loop, secure WiFi space and dynamic QR codes.

It is worth re-stating that the electoral sphere seems no less important and significant than other spheres of the life of our voters, especially those with health restrictions. Moreover, these areas should be considered comprehensively, purposefully developing them not in isolation, but the whole rehabilitation industry on the basis of assistive digital technologies. For example, it is necessary to think through in detail the functionalities that may be useful to voters with disabilities in the elections, as well as to look for technological possibilities to combine them with those functionalities that will be useful to them in their daily life.

Each person with a disability should be able to take advantage of a number of tools: to directly vote at a polling station, outside



the polling station, or using new information technologies.

A multifunctional voting system will expand the capabilities of citizens with disabilities in the exercise of their voting rights. Thus, the electoral system of the Russian Federation continues to be in constant technological search for new effective solutions that should ensure inclusive voting and availability of digital environment in the era of the progressive development of information technologies.

Nikolay Levichev

Central Election Commission Russian Federation

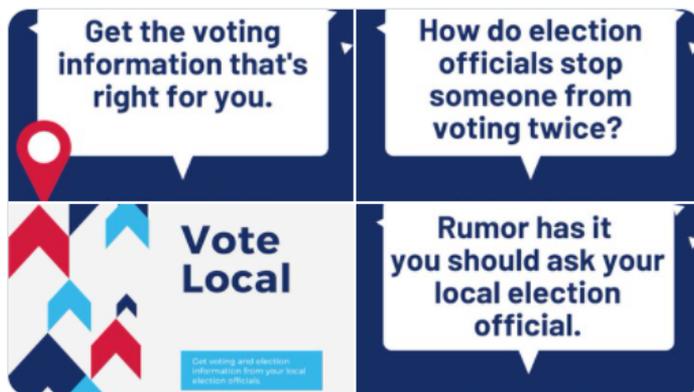


Snap Story



Election Asst. Comm. @EACgov · Sep 29

Need to freshen up your social media messages to voters? ✨ Check out our NEW Best Practices Toolkit for Voter FAQs! Find these graphics and more at go.usa.gov/xM8Ur



Sushil Chandra takes over as the 24th CEC of India

Sushil Chandra assumed the charge of the 24th Chief Election Commissioner of India, succeeding Sunil Arora who demitted the office on April 12, 2021 after completing his tenure.

Sushil Chandra has been serving in the Commission as Election Commissioner since February 15, 2019. He is also Member of Delimitation Commission since February 18, 2020 looking after Delimitation of Jammu Kashmir UT. Having held several posts in the Income-Tax Department for nearly 39 years, Sushil Chandra had also been CBDT Chairman from November 1, 2016 – February 14, 2019.

Since his tenure as Chairman, CBDT itself, Sushil Chandra has played an active role in unearthing illegal money often used during Assembly Elections. With his continuous monitoring the seizures of cash, liquor, freebies, narcotics have increased substantially in recent elections. He has constantly emphasized the concept of “Inducement-Free” elections and it has become an important aspect of monitoring the electoral process in all ongoing and forthcoming elections. Process of focused and comprehensive monitoring through deployment of Special Expenditure Observers, activating the role of many more enforcement agencies in the process of Election Expenditure monitoring, more exhaustive and frequent reviews of observers and other agencies are few of the aspects of electoral management encouraged by him. His contributions are also reflective in systemic changes like the Form 26 that has now become an integral part of essential paperwork. Sushil Chandra as Chairman CBDT took special efforts in the area of verification of affidavits filed by the candidates before elections. In 2018 in his



● Sushil Chandra takes over as the Chief Election Commissioner of India



● (L to R) Rajiv Kumar, Election Commissioner of India; Sushil Chandra, Chief Election Election Commissioner of India; Anup Chandra Pandey, Election Commissioner of India, conduct an election meeting

role as Chairman CBDT, Sushil Chandra was instrumental in evolving a uniform format of sharing details of all assets and liabilities not mentioned in the affidavits of the candidates. Facilitation through innovative IT applications in Election systems have been a unique contribution of Sushil Chandra to the 2019 17th Lok Sabha Elections and the Legislative Assembly Elections held since in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim, Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Delhi.

Holding of elections to State Assemblies of Bihar, Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal amidst Covid concerns and making processes

such as nomination and filing of papers online, extending option of postal ballot to the specific categories of senior citizens, Persons with Disabilities, essential services personnel as also Covid patients/suspects, has seen Sushil Chandra lead from the front with an iron will to work despite challenges.

The ECI family bid a warm farewell to outgoing Chief Election Commissioner, Sunil Arora on April 12, 2021. After a fulfilling tenure of nearly 43 months in Commission and nearly 29 months as CEC, Arora demitted office having successfully steered the 17th Lok Sabha election in 2019 and elections to 25 State Assemblies since joining ECI in September 2017.

Bidding farewell to Arora, Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar recalled various initiatives taken up by the Commission during the tenure of Arora like providing optional postal ballot facility to senior citizen and PwD electors, setting up of India A-WEB Centre, and Voluntary Code of Ethics. He said that Arora has laid special emphasis on ensuring inclusive and accessible elections during the term. He also

Source: www.eci.gov.in

Covid-19 Vaccination drive taken up by the ECI

Election Commission of India held COVID-19 vaccination drive for its officers and staff working at Nirvachan Sadan, Delhi. Former Chief Election Commissioner M.S. Gill took the first shot of the vaccine, to mark the beginning of the vaccination drive. Also the former Chief Election Commissioner of India Sunil Arora and the then Election Commissioners Sushil Chandra and Rajiv Kumar got vaccinated once all the officials and staff at the Election Commission were benefited from the vaccination program.

Source: www.eci.gov.in



● *Bidding farewell to Sunil Arora, former Chief Election Commissioner of India*

added that Arora would continue to be a source of strength to the entire ECI family.

Sunil Arora in his remarks thanked all the members of the Commission and wished for the successful conduct of all future elections. Arora recalled every election presents unique challenges but conducting elections to the 17th Lok Sabha and the decision to conduct Bihar assembly elections during a pandemic was the most difficult. He congratulated all the officials involved in the exercise for their meticulous planning and hard work to ensure the smooth and successful conduct of these elections.

The then Chief Election Commissioner, Sunil Arora declared that all staff on poll duty for the recently held assembly elections as the frontline workers and should get vaccinated before assuming their election duties. This encouraged the poll duty officers to perform their duty without any COVID fear. Special camps were set up at ECI with the provision of doctors, ambulances, etc. Similar special vaccination drives were set up for lakhs of polling officials across five states and UTs. They were mandated to take the vaccination shots before proceeding on election duty for the assembly elections.

ELECTION CALENDAR

Flags	Country	Election for	Date	Status
	Haiti	President	2021-11-07	Date not confirmed
	Nicaragua	President	2021-11-07	Confirmed
	Nicaragua	Nicaraguan National Assembly	2021-11-07	Confirmed
	Nepal	House of Representatives of Nepal	2021-11-12	Snap
	Argentina	Argentinian Chamber of Deputies	2021-11-14	Confirmed
	Argentina	Argentinian Senate	2021-11-14	Confirmed
	Chile	Chilean Senate	2021-11-21	Confirmed
	Chile	President	2021-11-21	Confirmed
	Chile	Chilean Chamber of Deputies	2021-11-21	Confirmed
	Honduras	Honduran National Congress	2021-11-28	Confirmed
	Honduras	President	2021-11-28	Confirmed
	Tonga	Tongan Legislative Assembly	2021-11-30	Date not confirmed
	Bulgaria	President	2021-11-30	Date not confirmed
	Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)	Falkland Legislative Assembly	2021-11-30	Date not confirmed
	Gambia, The	President	2021-12-04	Confirmed
	Taiwan	Referendum	2021-12-18	Postponed
	Hong Kong	Hong Kong Legislative Council	2021-12-19	Postponed
	Libya	President	2021-12-24	Confirmed
	Libya	Referendum	2021-12-24	Confirmed
	Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyz Supreme Council	2021-12-31	Date not confirmed
	Côte d'Ivoire	Ivoirian National Assembly	2021-12-31	Postponed
	Palestine	Palestinian Legislative Council	2021-12-31	Postponed

Election Commission of India organizes

International Election Visitor Programme (IEVP)

Global knowledge sharing is an important aspect of effective election administration and management. Apart from providing the opportunity to understand and adopt good practices, it allows Election Management Bodies (EMBs) across the world to learn the nuances of cross-cultural challenges and devise efficient solutions for the same.

As the EMB that conducts the world's largest democratic election in terms of scale and magnitude, the Election Commission of India has always sought to expand the scope of knowledge sharing through initiatives such as the International Election Visitors Programme.

In the past, ECI has organized International Election Visitor Programmes (IEVP) for EMBs / Organizations in 2014 Lok Sabha elections; elections for a few State Assemblies in Feb / March 2017; Lok Sabha Elections in May 2019 and International Virtual Election Visitors Programme 2020 during Bihar Assembly elections. The purpose of IEVP is to familiarize fellow EMBs / Organisations across the world with Indian electoral system and good practices adopted in the world's largest democracy.

On April 05 and 06, 2021, the International Election Visitors Programme (IEVP) 2021 was hosted by the Election Commission of India for Election Management Bodies from 26 countries and three International Organisations during the elections to Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. These elections, conducted in the months of April and May 2021 collectively had an electorate of over

187.2 million spread over 824 Assembly constituencies - one of the largest in the world to vote amid the pandemic which poses formidable challenges and necessitates intensive preparations in addition to unique initiatives taken to conduct a COVID safe election.

With more than 100 delegates from 26 countries in attendance, the two day event, hosted virtually, presented a good opportunity to share Indian practices and experience of conduct of good poll process as well as steps taken to mitigate the effect of pandemic.

The delegates included members from 3 international organizations namely International IDEA, International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES) and Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB) along with representatives from EMBs of Afghanistan, Australia,



● Sushil Chandra, Chief Election Commissioner of India addressing participants at IEVP 2021



● Release of the inaugural issue of A-WEB India Journal of Election at IEVP 2021

Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Cambodia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nepal, Panama, Philippines, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Suriname, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Zambia. Besides these, the Ambassadors of Georgia and Uzbekistan, Acting High Commissioner of Sri Lanka and other members of Diplomatic Corps were also in attendance to witness the poll preparedness and conduct of elections to the Legislative Assemblies in these states.

The Programme for IEVP 2021 comprised of a comprehensive set of sessions online that provided the participants an overview of the large canvas of Indian electoral process. Umesh Sinha, Secretary General, ECI headed the session with an outline of the most important aspect of conducting elections in current times – preparations and protocols for COVID-19 safety and large scale voter awareness and education taken up amid COVID-19 under SVEEP.

The programme also included a session by CEO Bihar, H.R. Srinivas who provided his insights on recently conducted the Bihar Legislative Assembly Election in 2020. This

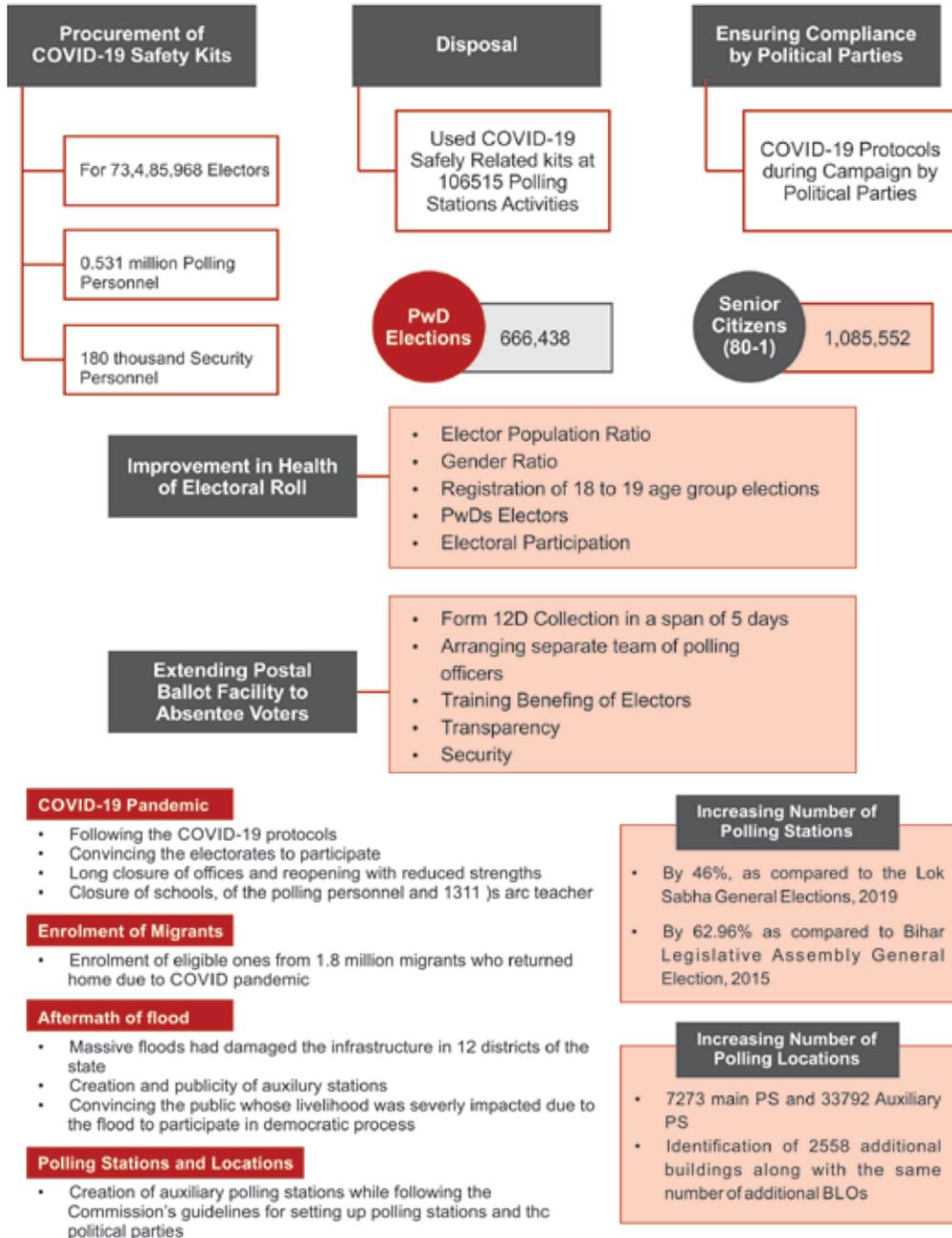
election served as a pioneer in conducting elections amid COVID-19 as it was the first major election held amid a pandemic. This, coupled with the situation of aftermath of floods and extremist groups had made the election an extremely challenging one.

The numerous challenges were effectively mitigated with stringent COVID-19 guidelines

for political parties and candidates, polling stations, and election related activities. Furthermore, strengthening of infrastructure and manpower, intensive capacity building measures, postal ballot facility for absentee voters, purification of electoral roll, ICT interventions and inclusion of migrant labourers led to encouraging outcomes such as increase in polling percentage in 10 out of 14 flood hit districts despite all odds and a higher voter turnout of 57.34% as compared to 56.88% in Bihar Legislative Assembly of 2015.

Deputy Election Commissioner, ECI Sudeep Jain highlighted the security measures such as randomisation and multiple mock polls that ensured transparency and strengthened voter's faith in EVM-VVPAT machines. In addition to this, the development of IT applications by ECI had facilitated easier access to information for voters, candidates, political parties and civil society organisations alike. Apps such as ERONET, ENCORE, Voter Helpline app, as well as the National Helpline Number 1950 have gone a long way in empowering citizens to access information about the electoral process at their fingertips.

Challenges faced during Bihar legislative assembly election 2020



Sushil Chandra, the present Chief Election Commissioner, in his address to the attendees present virtually - spoke of the importance of ensuring voting rights to all and the multifarious measures taken

up by the Commission to ensure free, fair, safe, and ethical elections. The new initiatives taken by ECI on voter facilitation, transparency and accessibility of electoral system; enhanced use of Information and

Communication Technology to strengthen citizen participation and transparency as well as ECIs response to the changing needs of training and capacity building and the new formats necessitated by COVID 19 were paramount in further developing the strategy for conducting elections to Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. Through a global knowledge-sharing programme such as IEVP, it is hoped that these measures and interventions may be of assistance to democracies worldwide.

Sunil Arora, the then Chief Election Commissioner, spoke of how the pandemic had led to an unprecedented disruption in election schedules all over the world and while the challenges for conducting elections were numerous, it has presented an opportunity that has brought Election Management Bodies together to share and learn from each other's good practices. Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar highlighted the technological interventions that were undertaken to ensure that the pandemic did not disrupt the election schedule and that the elections process could

be made smoother and more accessible to all voters.

On the sidelines of IEVP 2021, the erstwhile CEC also released the maiden issue of A-WEB India Journal of Elections. This academic journal aims to bridge the gap between academics and practice in electoral landscape and carries research papers, articles, book reviews etc. from eminent writers, experts, researchers and practitioners from the A-WEB Community and from across democracies of the world in the area of elections and electoral democracy.

On April 6, 2021, the delegates of IEVP were given a live snapshot of how elections are conducted at selected polling stations through a virtual tour that included familiarization with the electoral process, polling station arrangements, facilitation of Persons with Disabilities and senior citizens.

The attendees were first taken virtually to the North Eastern State of Assam at a polling station Gauhati East. At Polling Station Number 84, General Observer Suparna took the virtual visitors through an overview of the COVID safety precautions and protocols undertaken to ensure safety of voters. As they were taken around the polling station to see arrangements made - a voter, Vishvajet remarked an excellent

sanitization protocols and how no voter was allowed to touch the EVM and VVPAT machines without gloves. Such stringent measures were put in place across all Assembly



Virtual Tour Showcasing Polling in Process



Constituencies and were paramount to ensuring voter safety.

The next polling station visited was in South 24 Parganas in West Bengal where the virtual attendees were explained the polling process in detail. Given the guidelines issued by the Commission, the polling process included thermal temperature checks, mask and sanitization protocols, and extension of poll timings as well as last hour polling for COVID positive voters.

Kerala had deployed three lakh polling officials. The attendees were taken through the process of waste disposal at the polling station in Kottayam since biomedical waste disposal after casting of votes is a matter of utmost importance to avoid spread of possible infection. The polling officials showcased the manner in which all biomedical waste was discarded by votes & officials and then disposed off by election machinery.



General Observer, Panthari Yadav gave a comprehensive overview of Postal Ballot facility made available to PwDs, senior citizens, and COVID positive voters and the IEC

measures that were implemented under SVEEP to promote safe and secure voting. John, a voter present at the polling station remarked, “The voter guide was really helpful. Even though I was skeptical of coming forward to cast my vote – it explained the polling process and all the arrangements made in detail. And of course, seeing the safety measures on

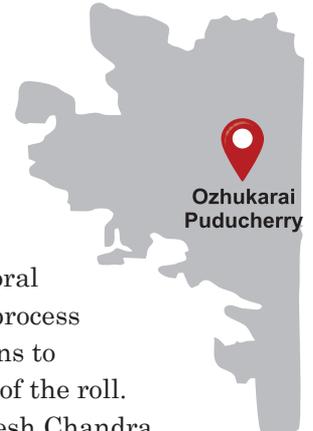


ground gave me further confidence to come forth and celebrate democracy.”

The attendees were then taken to a tour of a polling station in Satgacchia, West Bengal. A unique initiative for PwDs in this district was the ‘Ability Express’. A van that was designed to give Persons with Disabilities a virtual tour of the polling station as well as understand how to cast their vote on Braille enabled EVM-VVPATs.

It is the constant endeavor of the Commission to make the voting process more inclusive to include women voters. To ensure this, all women polling stations were instituted. This, coupled with safe travel to and from polling station, a dedicated helpline, voter assistance booth, and crèche facility were highly instrumental in encouraging a high women voter turnout.

At Ozhukarai Assembly Constituency in Puducherry, the District Magistrate Poorva Garg showcased the electoral roll, explaining the process of Summary Revisions to maintain the purity of the roll. Police Observer Umesh Chandra Datta highlighted the intricacy of the security plan drawn up and other measures to prevent vulnerability in district. General Observer Krishna Gupta toured the Polling Station and the EVM Dispatch Centre to showcase the security arrangements put into motion.



At Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu, the local PwD icon visited the PwD Manned Polling Station to encourage Persons with Disabilities to come forth and



● Umesh Sinha, Secretary General ECI, at IEVP 2021

cast their vote. A Special Helpline, Braille enabled voter guides, sign language boards, as well as transport arrangements made polling stations accessible and barrier free for PwDs.

As they traversed the great expanse of India virtually, the attendees witnessed in detail the COVID-19 safety protocols put into place such as social distancing, thermal screening, mask and sanitization, Assured Minimum Facilities, disposal of biomedical waste, last hour polling for COVID positive voters, and more. The virtual tour arranged for them allowed them to interact with Polling Officials, all of who had been vaccinated prior to being enrolled for poll duty, and witness first hand the large scale and magnitude of the Indian election management system.

A short film on the glimpse of ongoing elections in the states of Assam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala and UT Puducherry and also on the A-WEB India Journal was showcased to the delegates.

In the current world scenario, with drastic socio-political changes and challenges to global health – Election Management Bodies are bound to face constraints in effective electoral management and administration in terms of human resource, logistics, bureaucratic reforms, and more. It is therefore, our collective prerogative to strive forward and devise sustainable solutions for unpredictable constraints to fulfill the democratic mandate vested with us. As the world's largest Election Management Body, the Election Commission of India has, since its inception, led the way in effective electoral management practices. Through knowledge-management platforms such as IIDEM, India AWEB Centre and International Election Visitors Programme (IEVP), ECI aims to share good practices from the ground with EMBs and organisations working for the fulfillment of democracy for all.

Source: Election Commission of India

Election Commission of India celebrates

11th National Voters' Day

National Voters' Day, which marks the Foundation Day of Election Commission of India, is celebrated on January 25 every year. The celebrations take place at over ten lakh locations across the country, including polling stations, sub divisions, divisions, district and state headquarters. National Voters' Day was started in 2011 and since then, NVD has been institutionalised as an annual feature to celebrate democracy and electoral participation in the country. The theme for the NVD sets the tone for a stream of activities during the year. The decadal journey of NVD and Systematic Voter's Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) - the flagship voter education



Each year awards for innovation, excellence and proficiency in election processes and procedures are conferred on National Voters' Day. These awards recognise contributions by electoral machinery, government department/agency/PSU/CSO and media. While state awards are presented in the NVD functions at state headquarters, the national awards were presented at the main event in New Delhi,

India. This year too National Awards and State Awards were presented.

This year too National Two unique digital initiatives were



● *Ram Nath Kovind, President of India addressing virtually during NVD 2021*

programme of ECI, has focused on inclusion, strategies and action plans for enhancing participation from all categories of voters under ECI's premise of 'No Voter to be Left Behind'.

The theme for NVD 2021 was 'Making Our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed.' This was a reiteration of the commitment of Election Commission of India (ECI) to conduct COVID-safe elections, as well as to ensure that each voter is informed, ethical and vigilant. This year, due to COVID-19, the NVD celebrations all over the country were be a combination of both physical and virtual events.

unveiled on National Voters' Day 2021. The Commission rolled out digital voter identity cards or e-EPICs which will be downloadable on mobile phone or in a self-printable forecast on the computer.

Moreover, the Hon'ble President of India launched 'Radio Hello Voters' - a 24x7 online digital radio service that will stream voter awareness programmes accessible on the Election Commission of India website. Radio Hello Voters provides information on electoral processes through songs, drama, discussions, podcasts, spots, parodies etc. in hindi, english and different regional languages from all over the country.

Source: Election Commission of India

Webinar Series: Democratic Resilience in Europe During a Pandemic

With most in-person events and activities canceled or postponed due to restrictions on travel and large gatherings of people, IFES swiftly embraced this challenge and opportunity within its “Regional Elections Administration and Political Processes

Strengthening” (REAPPS) program. In response to the new environment, IFES’ Regional Europe Office in Prague, Czech Republic, quickly adapted in-person events to online webinars and meetings to continue programming and ensure continued engagement of key electoral stakeholders across the Europe and Eurasia region.

At the onset of the pandemic, the REAPPS team developed and launched a dedicated webinar series for international election practitioners, observers and donors. To date, Democratic Resilience in Europe During a Pandemic (formerly Administering Elections in Europe During a Pandemic) has held multiple dedicated webinars, each focusing on salient issues, such as:

- Slovak Parliamentary Elections in an Era of Disinformation: Post-Election Debrief
- Administering Elections in Europe During a Pandemic
- Preserving Electoral Integrity During an Infodemic
- Promoting Digital Youth Civic Engagement



● Participants take part in an Election Day simulation exercise to identify potential problems during Ukraine’s 2020 local elections

- How to Build a Democracy that’s Designed for All?: Promoting Access and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities
- Safeguarding Electoral Integrity Through Better Cybersecurity

The webinar series has received broad interest and high-level participation from more than 35 countries, due in part to its revolving relevant topics and expert panelists who address key issues developing across electoral environments during the pandemic. This feature is complemented by the webinar’s greater engagement of non-English speakers as each webinar is simultaneously translated into multiple languages. The webinar series has delivered an array of international good practices and recommendations from experts on protecting electoral integrity during the pandemic. These insights have provided integral input to the actions of election management bodies, observers and advocacy groups, especially those poised to conduct elections in the period following webinar participation.

Originally published on IFES Website

Improving Voting Procedures

from Postal Voting to Online Voting

I CPS organised a webinar April 28, 2021 on Improving Voting Procedures: From Postal Voting to Online Voting.

This webinar brought both those in the public and private sector together to discuss how EMBs can effectively transform their electoral processes and voting procedures without damaging trust, security and transparency in their elections. Following were the key topics:

- Examine different voting methods including postal, absentee, proxy, in person and online voting
- Discuss the various methods and their susceptibility to fraud, miscounting and other forms of malpractice
- Develop recommendations for legislators and election administrators to address challenges related to distance voting

COVID 19 pandemic has given a renewed focus and led many electoral management bodies (EMBs) to reconsider their voting processes. Within person voting being pregnant with difficulties during a pandemic, a number of EMBs have embraced or extended existing forms of distanced voting. This can take a number of forms including postal voting and online voting.

While the leaders in this field are those who have been gradually upscaling their remote voting operations over a series of elections, the new demand for this service has led a number of EMBs to push through the process at a speed previously thought inadvisable. With this in mind, it is important for EMBs to not only consider how they change their electoral processes but ensure that they are not unintentionally exposing themselves to a new wave of integrity risks.

Following were the speakers & Snippets from there presentation.

AVM-2
Electronic Transmission of Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)

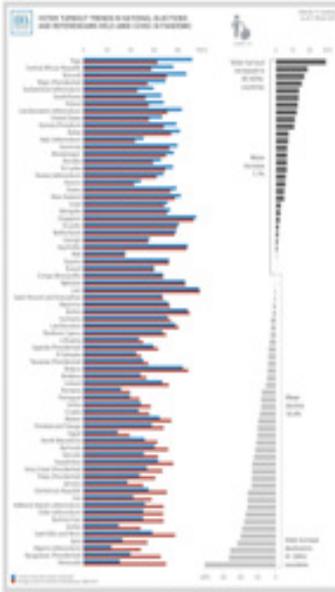
- One way electronic transmission of Secured PB to defense members.
- Defense officer concerned to download and had over to the member.
- Voter marks PB in secrecy without any influence.
- Return by dedicated fast track postal system as per the procedure.
- Has cut delay in transmission and increase possibility of return in time for counting.
- Voting of defense members increased exponentially- 2014 vs2019.
- In 2019, 1.8 m PB transmitted, downloaded 1.6m (92%), received 1.08m,(60%) counted 1.08 m(100%), 2014- about 54000

AVM-6 **Absentee Voting (AV) System**

- Absentee voter is one who cannot visit PS physically on Poll Day for one or the other reason/s.
- India has provided three 'Notified Categories' of Absentee voters.
 - Employed on Essential Services(AVES)
 - 80 years plus senior citizens(AVSC)
 - disabled persons(AVDP)
- ECI sets up Postal Voting Center(PVC) for AVES voters
- used in Delhi election in 2020
- ECI send polling teams to homes of AVSC and AVDP with PB
- deployed in couple state election in 2020 and 2021
- AV system worked well- No malpractice reported and generally acceptable.

● Presentation by Dr. Nasim Zaidi, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India

IDEA's entry points to "Special Voting Arrangements"

Voter turnout and participation



More terminology and typology variations ...



"Early voting" and "Advanced voting"

- sometimes same, different e.g. in Estonia ... 

"Postal voting" and "By-mail voting", but then:

- "Postal voting" in Sri Lanka (= early voting) 
- "Voting by letter" in Montenegro (= mobile ballot box) 

"Mobile voting"

- mobile ballot box, visiting selected voters away from polling station
- "mobile voting teams" in Australia 
- and "mobile voter" (voting away from home constituency in Russia) 
- sometimes: "mobile voting" = "online voting"

"Proxy voting"

- ... is "voting by messenger" in Sweden 

Many hybrids and combinations

- Postal/early voting (e.g. Iceland) 
- Postal/early/out of constituency/out of country (e.g. Austria) 
- Online/postal (e.g. Egypt) 

Museum of Democracy inaugurated in Tunis

The Museum of Democracy is a mobile museum which provides civic and electoral information to citizens using new technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), ISIE President Nabil Baffoun said in a statement to the press.

The museum also offer a better insight into confusing terminologies such as the principles of democracy, elections and the transfer of power process, Baffoun added.

The mobile museum, inaugurated at the headquarters of ISIE Tunis has been open for the public since February 23. It offers citizens a better understanding of the concept of State institutions, deepens their knowledge about their political and civil rights and encourages participation in public

life and elections through the simulation of a 3D electoral operation.

The museum is also accessible to deaf and hearing-impaired people. During their visit, they are provided with a sign language interpretation. The museum is also open to the visually impaired or blind people, the illiterate and those with learning disabilities by offering them reading technology screens.

The ISIE is also planning to hold organised visits to the museum in collaboration with the ministries of culture, education and higher education, Baffoun underscored, stressing that a calendar of museum trips across the country has already been made.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by the Governor of Tunis, the Mayor of Tunis and a number of civil society activists.

Source: www.tap.info.tn/

Snap Story

#Tunisia: @ISIETN and @IFESTunisia, on Tuesday, inaugurated the Museum of Democracy in #Tunisia, a mobile museum that provides civic and electoral information to citizens using new technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR).

bit.ly/3dRRCAr



● Tweeted on Feb. 23, 2021

Webinar | Recent European Elections During The Pandemic: Georgia, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine

When the COVID-19 pandemic started in early 2020, many countries in Europe and Eurasia postponed scheduled elections to later in the year when it was believed the effects of the pandemic would be less prevalent.

Several elections were conducted in the region in late 2020, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. These elections were held at a time when the spread of the virus in many countries was notably worse than it was during the spring of 2020.

To facilitate information and experience sharing between countries in the region, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems' Regional Europe Office organized the seventh webinar in its Democratic Resilience in Europe During a Pandemic series, dedicated to the lessons learned from holding elections in Georgia, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine in recent months. The webinar took place on January 28, 2021, with a record of 204 participants, and featured simultaneous interpretation into seven languages (Albanian, Armenian, Georgian, Macedonian, Russian, South Slavic language and Ukrainian).

The webinar was opened by Anya Cumberland, IFES' deputy director for Europe and Eurasia, who introduced the webinar topic and discussed the various activities of IFES' field offices in Georgia and Ukraine, both of which work closely with



● *A Ukrainian voter casts a ballot during the 2020 elections*

the election management bodies in their respective countries.

The next presenter, Tamar Zhvania, chairperson of the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Georgia, spoke about the challenges that the institution faced during their election process, mainly “adjusting of operations and plans at every stage of the electoral cycle, reviewing regulations and procedures, enhancing coordination with health, security and other authorities and increasing public outreach. Accordingly, we had to prioritize which health and safety measures to implement, find solutions for new logistical challenges and make tough choices regarding the conduct of elections at that time.” The Georgian CEC created a working group with representatives from election administration, civil society organizations, parliamentary political party representatives and international organizations to discuss key safety measures to adhere to on Election Day.

Following Zhvania's presentation, participants heard from Vajda Zsombor, the vice president of Romania's Permanent Election Authority. Zsombor spoke about the Romanian experience of holding

parliamentary and presidential elections in 2020. Participants learned how Romania had to adapt its electoral procedures during the pandemic, from electoral reform to implementing new internet and communication solutions and introducing new ways of reaching voters and other stakeholders.

The next speaker was Dorin Cimil, chairperson of the CEC of Moldova, who spoke about the special measures the institution introduced during the election, such as having voters bring their own pens, checking voters' temperatures at polling station entrances and regularly sanitizing polling stations throughout the day. The CEC introduced voting from home for voters in quarantine and special polling places for people voting from abroad. Cimil also touched upon some of the challenges they faced while preparing for the election, such

as securing mobile ballot boxes for voters in the country and making sure the polling stations were not overcrowded.

The final speaker, Vitalii Plukar, from Ukraine's CEC, dove into challenges the country faced when organizing their election. Plukar mentioned the adoption of the new electoral law; the reform of the administrative and territorial system; the right to vote for people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; informing members of election commissions about the organization of work in a pandemic; and ensuring the health and safety of voters on Election Day. Plukar also spoke about positive aspects that occurred on Election Day — mainly the high number of citizens in compliance with the mask mandate and social distancing during the election process and very tolerant attitudes toward other voters and polling staff, including members of the CEC.

Originally published on IFES Website

Online Training Programs Proposed for A-WEB partner countries by Election Commission of India's IIIDEM

The programs to be conducted in different time interval as per the time zone of the participation



Almedalen Democracy Summit 2021

Bridging the Divide

International IDEA, in collaboration with Athens Democracy Forum, International Youth Think Tank and Stockholm Philanthropy Symposium, hosted the Almedalen Democracy Summit on July 7, 2021. The inaugural Summit was arranged as part of Sweden's Almedalen week, a democratic tradition going back to 1968, gathering policymakers, civil society, academia, media and the private sector.

The Almedalen Democracy Summit, centred around democracy's challenges and opportunities, sought to exchange ideas on renewing and revitalising democracy for future generations. The event was moderated by Dr Kevin Casas-Zamora, International IDEA's Secretary-General. He highlighted the symbolic value that Almedalen holds for democracy in Sweden and noted that the event is a prime example of the kind of open dialogue that democracy requires.

In her introductory remarks, Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde



stressed that democracy cannot be taken for granted and mentioned Sweden's Drive for Democracy and Democracy Talks as examples of Swedish initiatives to strengthen and nurture democracy. Minister Linde also emphasized the central role that gender equality, as well as access to information, have for a functioning democracy.

The keynote address was given by the Madeleine Albright, who served as the 64th Secretary of State of the United States. Madam Albright noted that there is reason for optimism despite the shrinking space for freedom and attacks on the rule of law, describing herself as an "optimist who worries a lot." Inspired by the youth



● From left: Dr Kevin Casas-Zamora, Secretary-General of International IDEA, Madeleine Albright, Former Secretary of State, and Ann Linde, Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs



● *Dr Annika Silva-Leander, Senior Programme Manager at International IDEA, presenting the key challenges and opportunities from the forthcoming Global State of Democracy 2021 Report*

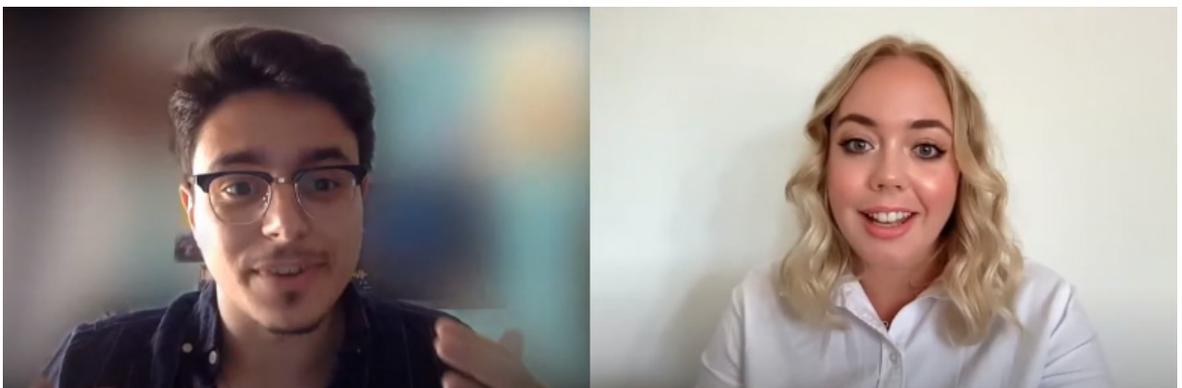
and women she has encountered over the years, Madam Albright emphasized that while democracy might be fragile, it is also resilient. In her remarks, Madam Albright also highlighted the role of cooperation, the importance of taking an inclusive approach with youth at its core and the need to push back against authoritarian forces.

Dr Annika Silva-Leander, Senior Programme Manager at International IDEA, presented some of the key highlights of the Institute's upcoming Global State of Democracy (GSoD) 2021 Report. She started off with the observation that while the world is becoming less democratic, it is also becoming more authoritarian. 70% of the population live in backsliding democracies or non-democratic regimes and even old democracies are challenged by the rising authoritarianism and its new forms.

Nevertheless, the forthcoming GSoD report also finds opportunities amidst the challenges accelerated by Covid-19. Dr Silva-Leander pointed out the high levels of social mobilization taking place despite the pandemic and the myriad of innovations designed to ensure that people can continue to exercise their democratic rights. In addition, she noted the increasing evidence suggesting that democracies outplay authoritarian regimes when it comes to sustainable development and handling crises. In the final part of the presentation, Dr Silva-Leander shared some of the main conclusions of the report and presented a 3-point agenda for democratic recovery.

The event also featured Youth Fellows from the Gothenburg based International Youth Think Tank (IYTT). Julia Strandquist and Daniel H. Urquijo presented two of IYTT's policy briefs, which focus on community assemblies and journalistic immunity. They argued that deliberative community assemblies can function as a complement to representative democracy and called for the implementation of journalistic immunity in order to protect the increasingly threatened journalistic integrity.

The Summit was concluded by a panel discussion on democracy's challenges and the possible solutions between Ivan Krastev, Chairman of the Centre for Liberal



● *From left: Daniel H. Urquijo and Julia Strandquist, Youth Fellows from International Youth Think Tank. Their presentations were the last step of the policy advice loop presented above*



● From left: Ivan Krastev, Chairman, Centre for Liberal Strategies, Liz Alderman, Chief European business correspondent for The New York Times, Heather Grabbe, Director, Open Society European Policy Institute, and Alberto Alemanno, Professor, EU Law and Policy, HEC Paris

Strategies, Heather Grabbe, Director of the Open Society European Policy Institute and Alberto Alemanno, Professor of EU Law and Policy at HEC Paris. The conversation was moderated by Liz Alderman, the chief European business correspondent for The New York Times. Ivan Krastev noted that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to these challenges, underlining the need to be mindful of the context. The issue of instant gratification and the major challenges posed by climate change were brought up

by Heather Grabbe who also proposed that different ways of deliberative democracy could be part of the solution. Along these lines, Alberto Alemanno pointed out that the political will to experiment seems to be greater than ever and that we will soon see how the governments' attempt to position themselves in relation to embracing democratic innovations unfolds.

● ● ● ●
Iida Hyyryläinen
 Research Assistant, International IDEA

2021 Democracy Week - Stronger together:

Partnerships for supporting democracy



To mark the importance of democracy, International IDEA celebrated democracy week, on the occasion of the International day of democracy, celebrated each year on September 15. It was involved in various activities and dialogues on strengthening the democratic world. The annual celebration this year consisted of series of events from September 15 to 17, 2021.

Europe's leading democracy support organizations brought together the prominent voices in the field of politics and democracy, to discuss how Global Partnerships could reinvigorate democracy after the health crisis. It was expressed that only through democracy the multilateral system, of mutual dependence and solidarity, can make the pandemic

recovery a truly global one. It is through democratic collaboration that future crises, from pandemics to climate change, can be averted.

About one year ago, a Global Call to Defend democracy was launched, supported by more than 70 organizations and nearly 500 prominent personalities from 119 countries, including 62 former heads of state and government, 13 Nobel laureates, distinguished scholars, journalists and activists. Since then, democracy has been challenged but has not faltered. Although some states introduced excessive pandemic measures that eroded democracy, many governments exercised self-restraint. However, vigilance remains crucial, as the greatest test to democracy may be yet to come.

Source: <https://ecisveep.nic.in/>

Sixth Annual Melbourne Forum on Constitution- building in Asia and the Pacific

International IDEA and the Constitution Transformation Network at Melbourne Law School will jointly organize The Melbourne Forum on Constitution-Building in Asia and the Pacific—an annual event that brings together practitioners and scholars to explore constitution-building themes of global importance from a regional perspective. The 2021 Melbourne Forum explores the theme of “Democracy, Constitutions and Dealing with the World”. This is the sixth such annual event.

Melbourne Forum 2021 will explore the ‘external face’ of constitutions, vis-à-vis the rest of the world. The outward-looking or external face of a constitution manifests

itself in many ways. Most obviously, constitutions typically provide the means for identifying the citizens of the state and sometimes also the territory of the state. Some constitutions commit the state to particular international policy positions, such as peace or multilateralism. All constitutions, expressly or by implication, identify the national institutions that have primary responsibility for conducting international relations on behalf of the state. Many constitutions specifically provide for the status of international in domestic law.

The external face of national constitutions has always been important, but its significance is greater than ever in the current age of globalization, with

implications for democracy. One way to better understand and hopefully respond to the impact of globalization on democracy is to consider ways in which constitutions support and establish democratic practices, and ensure that these apply also to a state’s dealings with the outside world.

INTERNATIONAL
IDEA
INSTITUTE FOR
DEMOCRACY AND
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ASSISTANCE

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

CONSTITUTION
TRANSFORMATION
NETWORK

**DEMOCRACY, CONSTITUTIONS
AND DEALING WITH THE WORLD**

Melbourne Forum on Constitution-Building

November 2021

#MelbForum21 | #MF6

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Source: - www.idea.int

Taking Stock of Regional Democratic Trends in Europe

Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This Gsod in focus aims at providing a brief overview of the state of democracy in Europe at the end of 2019, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, and then assesses some of the preliminary impacts that the pandemic has had on democracy in the region in the last 10 months.

Key Facts And Findings Include:

The COVID-19 pandemic arrived in a largely democratic Europe. Only 4 countries in the region (10 per cent) are not democracies, while many of the democracies are high performing.

Democracy in Europe, however, has in recent years experienced erosion and backsliding. More than half of European democracies have eroded in the last 5 years. In particular, 3 countries—Hungary, Poland and Serbia—have registered a more severe form of erosion, called democratic backsliding, with Hungary regressing on its democratic standards for the past 14 years.

The pandemic has intensified these pre-existing concerns. The 3 backsliding countries in Europe have implemented a number of measures to curb the pandemic that are concerning from a democracy standpoint.

The main democratic challenges caused by the pandemic in Europe pertain to the disruption of electoral cycles, curtailment of civil liberties, the use of contact tracing apps, the increase in gender inequality and domestic violence, risks to vulnerable groups, executive aggrandizement, protest waves, corruption cases and challenges in the relationship between local and national governance.

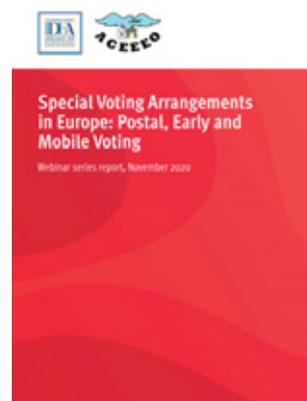
Europe's democracies have mostly showed resilience, and opportunities for furthering the integrity of elections, for digitalization and for innovative social protests have arisen.



Special Voting Arrangements in Europe: Postal, Early and Mobile Voting

Special voting arrangements (SVAS) are designed to expand voting opportunities to individuals who are otherwise not able to vote. Safeguards that protect the equality, secrecy and transparency of the vote are vital for successful implementation of SVAS. Over the past few decades, countries across Europe have been increasingly adopting SVAS—particularly postal, early and mobile forms of voting. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated their use throughout the year 2020.

International IDEA and the Association of European Election Officials (ACEEEO) convened a series of online webinars in October and November 2020 on SVAS. This report summarizes key insights and reflections from each of the three webinars.



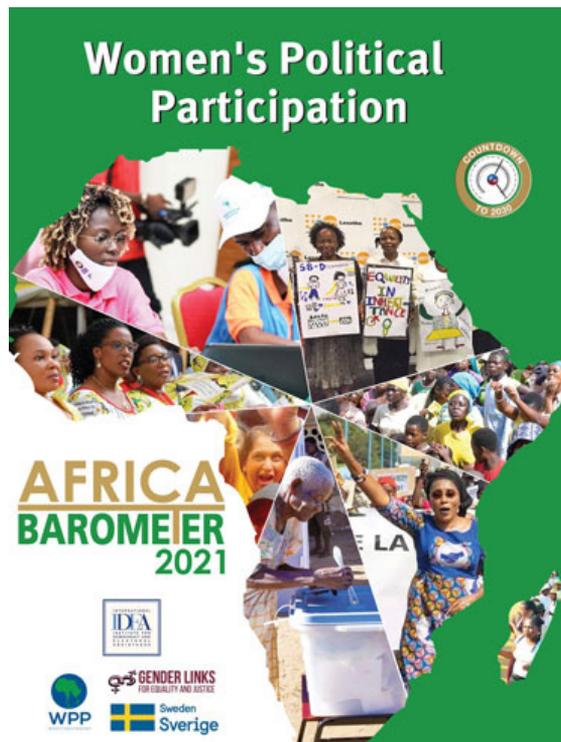
Source: www.idea.int

Women's Political Participation: Africa Barometer 2021

African countries are still far from achieving women's equal and effective participation in political decision-making.

Women constitute only 24 per cent of the 12,113 parliamentarians in Africa, 25 per cent in the lower houses, and 20 per cent in the upper houses of parliament. While local government is often hailed as a training ground for women in politics, women constitute a mere 21 per cent of councillors in the 19 countries for which complete data could be obtained.

The Barometer is a key resource of the consortium Enhancing the Inclusion of Women in Political Participation in Africa (WPP) which aims to provide legislators and policymakers with data to assess progress in women's political participation over time.



Conducting Elections During Pandemic - A Photo Journey



This photo book encapsulates the challenging journey of conducting elections amidst COVID 19 pandemic. The Election Commission of India successfully conducted several elections in the country, beginning with the Biennial Election to the Rajya Sabha. This was followed by Legislative Assembly Elections in Bihar, one of the biggest such exercises throughout the world during the pandemic. Bye-Elections were also conducted for 60 assembly constituencies during pandemic. The book was launched do on the occasion of 11th National Voters' Day in New Delhi, India.

Source: ecisveep.nic.in

A-Web India Journal of Elections



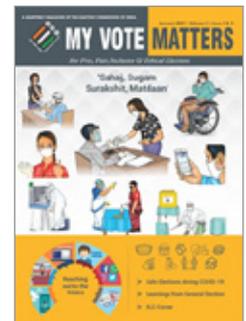
The Election Commission of India presents the maiden issue of the A - WEB India Journal of Elections. This is a historic moment in the journey of India A-Web Center.

This journey began with the decision of setting up of India A-Web Centre during the A-WEB General Assembly meeting in September 2019. Subsequently, In-house discussions led to the conceptualization of this academic journal on the electoral landscape, bridging the gap between academics and practice.

A-WEB India Journal of Elections (AWI-JOE) is one stop source of knowledge sharing on peer reviewed Research Papers, Articles, and Opinions from renowned writers, scholars, practitioners and experts of the A-WEB Community. The Journal will also carry news and views, information on latest initiatives and trends, challenges and developments in electoral practices and processes.

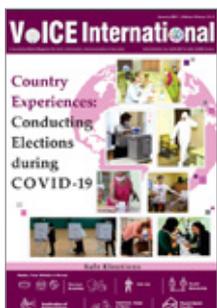
My Vote Matters – Special Issue 2&3

This issue showcases the preparation for and conduct of elections amidst a global pandemic with array of articles, stories and images of vibrant electoral participation from across the country, starting with the Rajya Sabha elections in June 2020. This was followed by an overview of the Bihar Legislative Assembly election, which was one of the largest elections ever conducted amidst a global pandemic. An exhaustive analysis of the KAP surveys conducted post General Election 2019, with emphasis on pertinent information on Voter Awareness and Experience from each region of the country is also an interesting read included in the magazine. The issue also carries several stories from the field and a new section called 'Voters Speak' which includes personal experiences of voters in form of stories, poems and cartoons.



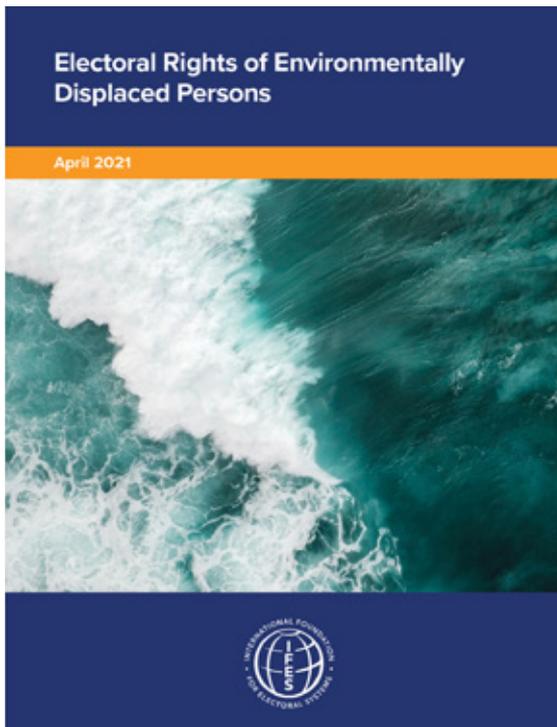
As you go through the magazine, you will be gripped by the commitment of the Commission towards conduct of free and fair elections despite the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the dedication of the voters to exercise their right to franchise.

VoICE International



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.

Electoral Rights of Environmentally Displaced Persons



Environmental disasters such as fires, droughts, floods, hurricanes and rising sea levels displace more and more people each year. According to the University of Oxford, the scale of displacement related to climate change is difficult to forecast but has been “estimated at between 50 and 200 million people by 2050, mostly in developing countries.” Climate change, other environmental crises and migration resulting from environmental displacement increase the likelihood of insecurity and conflict – and put democratic rights at risk.

How can key stakeholders plan for climate-related risks to democracy? How can environmentally displaced persons participate safely and equally in political life?

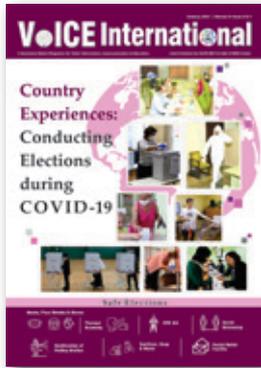
A new paper from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, *Electoral Rights of Environmentally Displaced Persons*, examines these questions and provides recommendations for election management bodies, governments, international organizations, political parties, the media, civil society organizations and displaced persons.

Environmental challenges can exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities, including marginalization due to race, gender, disability and other identity factors. Widely ratified international treaties and resolutions obligate the state to provide accessible electoral processes, including special measures for women, persons with disabilities, youth, Indigenous peoples and racial and other minorities who may be at increased risk of marginalization. They also are critical agents to address the consequences of climate change.

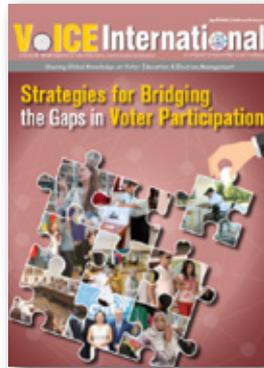
Electoral Rights of Environmentally Displaced Persons emphasizes how environmental challenges can exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities, including marginalization due to race, gender, disability and other identity factors. Displaced persons are key stakeholders. Those most affected by environmental problems need to be able to vote, run for office and engage with candidates and elected representatives to influence agendas, challenge policies and hold governments accountable. Political participation is particularly important in integrating them into their new environments to avoid conflict with host communities. Displaced persons can also bring skills, insights and talents that benefit their new communities.

Vasu Mohan, Regional Director, Asia-Pacific &
Hannah Roberts, Senior Elections Specialist, IFES

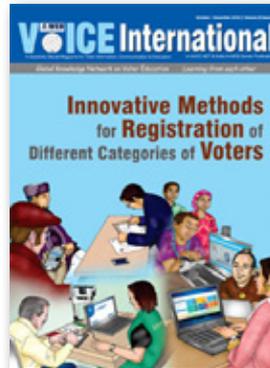
PREVIOUS ISSUES OF VoICE INTERNATIONAL



JAN 2021



JAN - APR 2020



OCT-DEC 2019



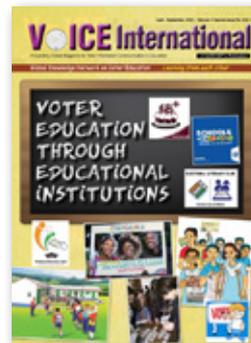
JULY-SEPT 2019



JAN-JUNE 2019



OCT-DEC 2018



APR-SEPT 2018



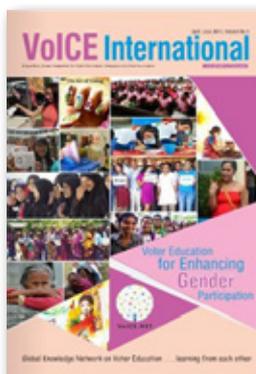
JAN-MAR 2018



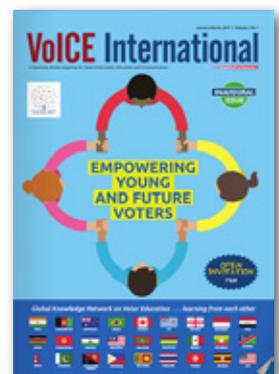
OCT-DEC 2017



JUL-SEP 2017



APR-JUN 2017



JAN- MAR 2017



Glossary

Number 10: The official residence in Downing Street of the British prime minister since the 18th Century. Number 10 and Downing Street both serve as terms to describe the prime minister and his or her inner circle, as in “Number 10 has said that”.

Impeachment: Impeachment, in common law, a proceeding instituted by a legislative body to address serious misconduct by a public official.

Push polling: A public-opinion polling technique that is used to test possible campaign themes by asking very specific questions about an issue or a candidate is call push polling.

Front-runner: A candidate in any election or nomination process who is considered most popular or most likely to win is called the front-runner.

Delimitation: Delimitation is the allocation of the number of seats and their demarcation into electoral constituencies. The delimitation exercise is undertaken to ensure the number of seats allocated to each state is based on the principle of each state having the same number of voters per constituency.



Quiz Time

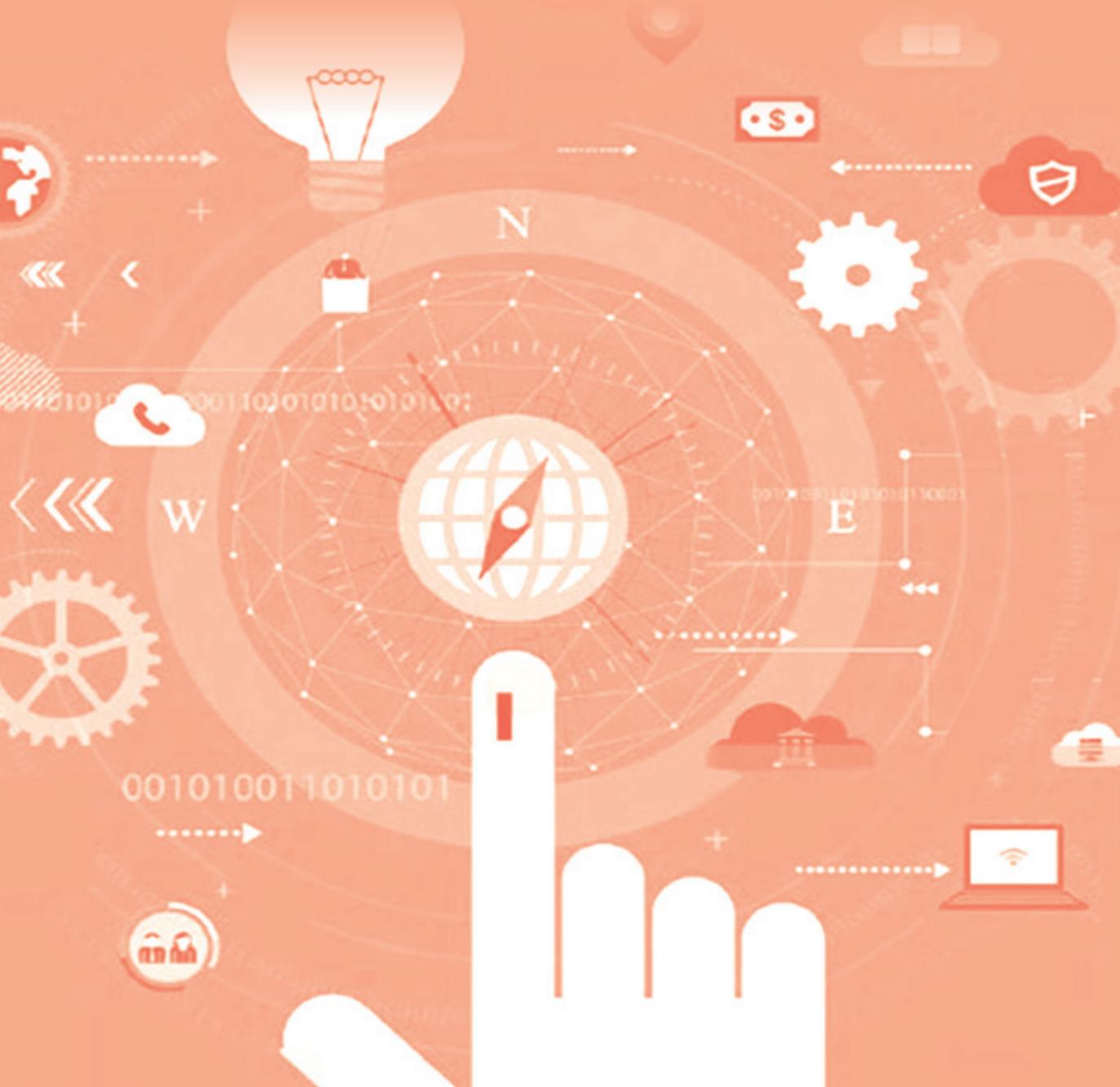
1 In order to be as objective and neutral as possible, who (a set of people), despite not being prohibited from doing so, usually refrain from casting their vote in elections in England?

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?



Voter Information, Communication & Education Network

VoICE.NET (Voter Information, Communication, Education Network) is an online knowledge network <http://voicenet.in/> for sharing knowledge, resources & 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, India.

At present, VoICE.NET has 32 active members and numerous associates which include Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and reputed international organizations across the world. VoICE.NET content is provided by the member EMBs/ Organizations and the portal is maintained by the Election Commission of India. VoICE International is a quarterly publication of VoICE.NET and India A-WEB Centre.