

Summary

Voter Registration – Accuracy And Good Practice

Equal and universal suffrage is key to a democratic election process. The fundamental civil and political rights to elect and to be elected are usually exercised through reference to lists and/or registers of the eligible voters in a specific polling station. Thus, a fundamental civil and political right is exercised through an administrative procedure introduced to ensure a sound balance between the protection of the right and the integrity of the process.

The compilation of accurate and inclusive voter registers (and lists) is a cornerstone in building and maintaining public confidence, and a crucial element in ensuring universal and equal suffrage. It is also a safeguard against possible election day fraud. Generally, voter registers and lists are accurate if there is one and only one record and entry for each eligible voter. There are no international standards that provide for a numerical expression of voter list accuracy or the acceptable margin of error.

The routine challenges on accuracy relate to the proper and timely performance of registration officials, institutional communications and the timely and accurate reporting by citizens of changes of address, vital life and civil status events. Intensive migration of the population can pose specific challenges to the accuracy of voter registration or create the perception of a risk. There are no specific international standards for out-of-country voting and modalities for voter registration and enfranchisement vary broadly.

Often, a key perceived challenge to integrity of voter registration is the fact that in communities with high emigration rates, in-country voter lists include the names of a high number of eligible voters who reside out-of-country and only a few of them might vote in country. The concern is that these voter entries maybe abused and this has sometimes been a compounding challenge regardless of whether or not it was justified.

Accurate voter registers are the product of a complicated on-going process of accumulation, updating and processing of voters' personal data. This can only be achieved when officials exercise their duties systematically, conscientiously and in a timely manner, with citizens providing accurate personal data within the legal deadlines. Proper registration requires the cooperative efforts of officials and voters. However, the final responsibility for the compilation of the voter registers rests with the administration/state.

Good practice requires the existence of a link between the voter and his or her location of residence, which is clear, unambiguous, well understood by the population and easy to establish. Personal

identification data should be based on documental evidence and be sufficient to ensure unique personal identification. Geographic locations should be described in a unique manner as well.

Fundamental to public confidence in an election process is the transparency of voter registration. The legal framework should include clear provisions stipulating the rights of all election stakeholders. It should specify the method of establishing voter eligibility so that the process is fully transparent, not subject to arbitrary decision, and can be publicly monitored. Regulations should clearly specify who may inspect the voter registers, how the inspection will occur, during what periods voter registers and voter lists are available for public scrutiny, whether voter registers can be made available to political parties, candidates and observers, and the format in which the information is provided including timelines and rules for its use.