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GUIDE TO ORGANIZING ELECTIONS

DURING A PANDEMIC

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)
SECRETARIAT FOR STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY (SSD)
DEPARTMENT OF ELECTORAL COOPERATION AND OBSERVATION (DECO)



OEAS

GUIDE TO ORGANIZING ELECTIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

"The effects of the pandemic, the significant likelihood of infection from human interaction, the risk of death, and the implementation of restrictions all pose serious difficulties for organizing elections. Democratic alternatives must therefore be considered to ensure that the legitimacy of office-holders, democratic transitions, rotation of power, and duration of governance periods are not impacted."

Luis Almagro

Secretary General



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**GUIDE TO ORGANIZING ELECTIONS DURING A PANDEMIC
DEPARTMENT OF ELECTORAL COOPERATION AND OBSERVATION (DECO)
SECRETARIAT FOR STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY (SSD)**

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INTRODUCTION

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO ORGANIZING ELECTIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

The General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (GS/OAS), through its Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy (SSD), in the framework of its mission to contribute to strengthening the political processes of member states, particularly to supporting democracy as the best option for guaranteeing peace, security, and development, presents this **Guide to organizing elections during a pandemic**.

The pandemic associated with the SARS-CoV-2 virus—the coronavirus that causes COVID-19—has severely impacted the region's population and institutions. Elections are no exception. Several countries have taken measures to protect the health of their residents, including the postponement of elections originally scheduled for the first half of 2020.

This is only one of the many impacts of the spread of the coronavirus in recent months. Thus, the actions taken and decisions made regarding elections in response to the pandemic need the commitment of political systems in order to protect the continuity of democratic processes.

In view of this, the OAS Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO), with the collaboration of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), submit for consideration a series of measures for holding safe, clean, and transparent elections that aim to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection for those participating in organizing and carrying out elections.

Every country and electoral body can use this practical guide to plan and manage electoral activities. The OAS was the first international organization to deploy an Electoral Observation Mission during the pandemic, an experience that is reflected in this document.

The objective of the measures set forth in this guide is to strengthen the capacities of electoral bodies to organize elections and, in particular, to protect electoral officials and civil servants from other State institutions; guarantee citizens' right to cast their votes safely; and provide the conditions needed for political parties to participate under conditions of equity and transparency.

Essentially, the aim is to support member states during this especially difficult and historic moment. With this tool, the Organization hopes to further contribute to its fundamental objective: the strengthening of democratic institutions in the region.



COVID-19 AND ELECTIONS

DEFINITIONS AND IMPACTS ON ELECTORAL PROCESSES

On March 11, 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. COVID-19 is an illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, a highly transmissible coronavirus that has been able to overwhelm even the most resilient health systems. In general, 20% of cases are serious or critical, with a crude clinical case mortality rate exceeding 3%. The rate is higher for older age groups and for those with preexisting conditions.¹

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented social and economic upheaval. The central objective of the global COVID-19 response strategy prepared by the WHO is for all countries to control the pandemic by slowing transmission and reducing mortality.²

Under this strategy, States must aim to protect the population and mitigate the impact, as well as establish mechanisms for returning to normal activities and operations with social distancing measures in place. Mass participation events like elections require rigorous planning that incorporates the sanitary measures issued by national authorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic based on the guidance of relevant international organizations like the WHO and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

1 World Health Organization (WHO), "COVID-19 strategy update," April 14, 2020. Available at: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/covid-strategy-update-14april2020.pdf?sfvrsn=29da3ba0_19

2 Ibid

In the context of the pandemic response, PAHO has issued guidance on nonpharmaceutical measures³ like social distancing and measures related to international travel, with subsequent adjustments.⁴ The strategic objectives are to alleviate stress on services, operate without exceeding maximum capacity and save lives, as well as buy time until specific pharmaceutical measures—currently undergoing research and development—are available.

As of June 25, 2020, more than 60 elections around the world have been postponed due to the pandemic.⁵ In the Americas, countries including Bolivia, Chile, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay have set new dates for their elections. Other elections have proceeded as scheduled, including in Guyana, Suriname, and St. Kitts and Nevis. Other member states are taking the new context into account as they prepare to hold elections next year. Globally, a variety of decisions have been made regarding whether to hold, suspend, or postpone elections.

It must be acknowledged that regardless of the decisions made, risk levels will never fall to zero. Authorities must be aware that the main risk is that an election might speed the spread of COVID-19 in the country. Therefore, States and electoral bodies have an enormous responsibility. The pandemic means all electoral procedures and protocols must be adjusted to address the risk of spreading the virus to electoral officials and citizens. This guide offers proposals and ideas for lowering the risk of this possibility.

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- 3 Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), "Considerations on Social Distancing and Travel-Related Measures in the Context of the Response to COVID-19 Pandemic," April 3, 2020. Available at: https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52409/PAHOPHECPICOVID-19200025_eng.pdf
 - 4 Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), "Considerations on the Adjustments of Social Distancing and Travel-Related Measures," April 27, 2020. Available at: https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52409/PAHOPHECPICOVID-19200025_eng.pdf
 - 5 Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), "Global overview of COVID-19: Impact on elections". Visited on June 27, 2020. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections>

METHODOLOGY

SCOPE AND STRUCTURE

This guide was drafted with the essential purpose of collaborating with OAS member states, including electoral authorities, stakeholders involved in the processes, and citizens in general in ways that contribute to protecting the population's health while supporting elections that are as free, fair, and transparent as possible in the context of this crisis.

It is in no way intended as the only and exclusive response to the challenges that this pandemic poses for electoral processes. Rather, its aim is to put forward proposals and ideas that can help member states and their electoral authorities in their efforts to protect the health of citizens and hold their elections. The proposals are based on the DECO/OAS experience with electoral observation and technical cooperation, and they incorporate international standards, good practices, and research in this area. The proposals also rely on other documents on this topic prepared by other organizations.

The document has three main sections:

- 1** An overview of the sanitary measures recommended by competent international bodies to control and mitigate the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus (hereinafter the “coronavirus”) that causes COVID-19. It is, in our view, indispensable that countries commit to complying with these recommendations when organizing and holding elections. Additionally, these recommendations are the basis for a number of the proposals in this guide, which seek to adapt a variety of electoral procedures to follow them.
- 2** A framework for action that establishes general guidelines for holding elections during the pandemic. These exceptional circumstances mean that dialogue, synergy, coordination, and transparency are needed now more than ever.
- 3** Proposal of specific measures. The measures are divided into six components, with the objective of making them easier to read and teach. Each component is broken down by activities or considerations that correspond either to stages in the electoral cycle or specific areas to be addressed.

Each electoral system has its own unique features, capacity, and institutional context that vary from country to country, and the political processes of each Member State present different challenges. In this regard, certain proposals will work better in some places than others.

Lastly, it must be underscored that the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the coronavirus is in full swing and developing rapidly. In view of this, the DECO team has done everything possible to provide precise and complete information. However, given the potential for changes to policies aimed at preventing and containing COVID-19, this text may need to be updated in the future. Regardless, the OAS urges its member states to follow the guidance of global, national, federal, and local health organizations.



VOTE OR POSTPONE?

THE ELECTIONS DILEMMA

The main dilemma regarding elections that has arisen from the pandemic is whether to hold the vote or postpone it. Leaving the date unchanged can have health implications that pose a risk to individuals, while postponing the vote entails constitutional and legal considerations. In both cases, there are political effects to consider.

Each country will make this choice in the exercise of its sovereignty. Without prejudice to this, suspensions of elections should never be indefinite. Rather, it is crucial to explore the legal options (pursuant to a State's constitution and laws) for scheduling a date based on public health assessments. Democracy cannot slip into uncertainty, but rather must be reaffirmed with clear messaging and concrete actions.

In this regard, the following four factors are crucial when considering and adopting a decision of this nature.



A. HEALTH CONDITIONS

Any decision to delay elections must be based on the prevailing health conditions as a result of the pandemic. In this context, the health of the population is what justifies the application of exceptional measures to the democratic process. Therefore, a decision of this weight must be made based on a rigorous health assessment that incorporates studies, reports, projections, and recommendations from actors involved in the national COVID-19 response strategy.

B. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Countries have a duty and responsibility to guarantee compliance with the Constitution and other laws. Postponement of an election must be accompanied by changes to the law through formal legislative procedures that offer legal certainty and guarantee citizens' exercise of their political rights. Such measures must therefore also take into account the technical considerations offered by the electoral authority when adjusting the legal framework governing how elections are held. They must also take into account the impact on the deadlines set for the electoral justice system, such that any postponement provides for the time needed to weigh and resolve conflicts with due process.

C. POLITICAL AGREEMENTS

Postponing an election will have a political impact. It is crucial to foster dialogue and consensus when making this decision to ensure it comes only after extensive consultation with the country's political actors, while also providing enough time for the electoral oversight body to secure the necessary support. Agreements will avoid conjecture as to whether a decision of this magnitude is being made for political purposes, and serve to strengthen trust in the process.

D. DATE

Once the risk evaluation is complete, conditions are determined to be such that an election must be postponed, and the corresponding political agreements have been reached, it is crucial to set a date or a date range so as to provide certainty and allow for adjusting electoral activities to a new timeline. Indefinite postponements and term extensions should be avoided, and if allowable as emergency measures, any exceptional action must be carried out pursuant to applicable legal provisions.



PREVENT AND MITIGATE

SANITARY MEASURES DURING AN ELECTORAL PROCESS

It is impossible to predict how the COVID-19 pandemic will develop. According to PAHO, it “might involve recurring epidemic waves interspersed with periods of low-level transmission, also including different transmission scenarios simultaneously occurring in non-contiguous areas within the same country.”⁶ As of June 22, 2020, the region had more than 4 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and more than 220,000 deaths.⁷

In view of this situation, electoral processes—including preparation, the day of the vote, and the post-electoral phase—are not exempt from the need for all of their activities to follow the health recommendations on preventing the coronavirus.



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- 6 Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), “Considerations on Social Distancing and Travel-Related Measures in the Context of the Response to COVID-19 Pandemic,” April 27, 2020. Available at: <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/considerations-adjustments-social-distancing-and-travel-related-measures>
 - 7 Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), “COVID-19- PAHO/WHO Response, Report 13”, June 22, 2020. Available at: <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/covid-19-pahowho-response-report-13-22-june-2020>

THE SARS-COV-2 VIRUS AND THE COVID-19 ILLNESS

SARS-CoV-2 is a novel type of coronavirus that affects humans, is transmitted person-to-person, and causes the COVID-19 illness.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. In some cases, patients can experience loss of sense of smell and taste, chills, sore throat, muscle pain, headache, general weakness, diarrhea, or vomiting. Most people with cases of coronavirus infection (80%) experience mild symptoms that do not require hospitalization. In 20% of cases, patients have more serious symptoms, including pneumonia, significant difficulty breathing, renal failure, and even death. The crude mortality rate for cases experiencing symptoms exceeds 3%.

The most serious cases generally present in older persons or individuals suffering from a chronic illness (hypertension, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic pulmonary disease, cancer, immunodeficiencies). Some people infected with the coronavirus do not have symptoms. Currently, there is no specific treatment or vaccine for the virus.

CORONAVIRUS TRANSMISSION

The coronavirus is transmitted in respiratory droplets emitted when a person infected with the coronavirus (including presymptomatic and asymptomatic cases) coughs or sneezes. These droplets can infect another person through the nose, eyes, or mouth directly. One can also become infected by touching one's nose, eyes, or mouth with hands that have touched surfaces contaminated by these droplets. The symptoms can appear 2 to 14 days after exposure to the coronavirus.

- From close personal contact with an infected individual.
- From the sneezing or coughing of infected individuals.
- From touching contaminated surfaces and then touching one's mouth, nose, or eyes.



SANITARY MEASURES FOR AN ELECTORAL PROCESS

Without prejudice to the specific technical recommendations that may be issued for elections during the pandemic, it is crucial to comply with the sanitary measures that contribute to mitigating the risk and impact of the pandemic in all electoral process activities.

The different sections of this document will take the nonpharmaceutical measures recommended by the WHO and PAHO to prevent and slow transmission of the coronavirus and apply them to electoral process activities. For reference, those measures are as follows.

1. PHYSICAL DISTANCING BETWEEN PERSONS

- In all activities of the electoral process, physical distancing between persons must be maintained. This guide recommends distancing of a meter and a half. It also recommends that people avoid shaking hands or hugging in the context of the electoral process. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), recommends to maintain a distance of six feet.

2. PERSONAL PROTECTIVE MEASURES

- **Hand hygiene**
Frequently wash with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer. This measure is very important for electoral officials while preparing for the election and for voters on election day. It is very important not to touch one's face until after washing one's hands.
- **Respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette**
When coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with your inner elbow. Use disposable tissues, dispose of them after use, and then wash your hands immediately.
- **Using a mask**
There are different types of masks. There are medical masks, like respirators (N95, FFP2, FFP3) and surgical masks; and there are nonmedical masks, like cloth masks, tissue masks, bandannas, or other face coverings. This guide recommends that those performing electoral functions (those working polling station tables, logistical staff, support staff, party delegates, electoral observers, and others) use surgical masks. Surgical masks are also recommended for voters over the age of 65 or people with pre-existing conditions. For other voters, a non-medical cloth mask is sufficient.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES

- **Cleaning surfaces and objects**

Disinfection must be done using alcohol- or bleach-based products. During electoral processes, there are many objects and materials that get passed around that should be included in the cleaning protocols. The same goes for surfaces—especially on election day—like the polling station table, voting booths, etc.

- **Good ventilation**

It is recommended that spaces with good ventilation are selected for the different stages of the electoral process, such as logistical operations. Also, on election day, placement of polling stations in small, windowless rooms should be avoided.

4. SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES

- **Individual social distancing measures**

Pursuant to the recommendations of the health bodies, COVID-19 cases or asymptomatic individuals whose coronavirus infections have been confirmed by laboratory must be socially isolated. Additionally, individuals who have come in contact with cases of COVID-19 or with asymptomatic individuals whose coronavirus infections have been confirmed by a laboratory must be identified and quarantined, and their contacts must be traced. The contact is considered close if someone has been in the same place as the sick or asymptotically infected individual and closer than 1.5m (5 feet) for more than 15 minutes without adequate protective measures. The quarantine period is 14 days from last contact.

- **Community social distancing measures**

The electoral bodies and different actors taking part in the process must contribute to a plan for avoiding crowds, both during preparations and on the day of the vote. Precautions and contingencies also must be in place to deal with the impact of other community measures, such as the cancellation of mass events, closures of or changes to workplaces, restrictions on public transportation, and general confinement orders.

To comply with these measures, electoral bodies must make a significant effort, in coordination with the corresponding health authorities, to publicize the measures, as well as educate with regard to their application. Elections officials, members of political parties, voters, and other actors taking part in the electoral process must be adequately made aware of the proper standards for handwashing, using masks, cough etiquette, surface cleaning, etc. Both the WHO and PAHO offer online educational material that we recommend consulting in order to adequately prepare and educate in this area.



FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN AN EXCEPTIONAL CONTEXT: A GROUP EFFORT

Below are some general considerations for helping countries and electoral bodies plan and conduct electoral processes under the current circumstances.

It is simply a reality that electoral processes in this exceptional context come with enhanced requirements. Therefore, electoral bodies, political actors, and voters themselves must work together. In this regard, certain considerations play a fundamental role in each process's success.

ELECTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF A NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, States have been required to quickly implement health and safety measures to reduce the spread of the illness and protect the health and lives of their citizens.

In the framework of a national health strategy, States must concentrate their efforts on guaranteeing enough resources and tools to strengthen the electoral institutional framework by supporting electoral bodies and their authorities in the organization of safe elections. This means extra financial resources to implement the exceptional measures necessitated by COVID-19.

At the same time, the decisions made by electoral authorities in organizing and holding electoral processes must take sanitary recommendations into account and constantly monitor the virus's course in each country.

2 INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

The myriad challenges posed by organizing elections during a pandemic go beyond the competencies and capacities of electoral authorities. Commitment and support from other actors is needed. Coordination with other government agencies is essential for holding safe elections. Electoral authorities need to quickly assess institutional capacities to design and execute a national elections plan within the overall national strategy for protecting the lives and health of citizens. Therefore, in order to work more effectively, coordination among government agencies is crucial for fulfilling the requirements for holding elections; however, without affecting their autonomy or competencies.

The institutional efforts of other State bodies are essential for ensuring security at the various stages of the electoral cycle and for citizens to be able to safely exercise their right to suffrage.

Although each country has its own system for tracking, evaluating, and monitoring the pandemic, and interagency collaboration will depend on domestic characteristics, it will be important to involve the State bodies that play an essential role in the COVID-19 pandemic response. Cross-sector support broadens the State's experiences and capacity to execute a national pandemic response strategy and better prepare for elections.



3 PARTICIPATION OF THE ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS

The actors involved in the electoral process must be provided with active spaces for participation. They must be aware of the measures to be taken; informed of the progress of the process; and able to ask questions, make suggestions, and submit requests as needed as a result of this extraordinary situation. This will enhance trust in the process.

In this regard, a permanent forum must be established for discussions with representatives of political organizations. Political parties must have an understanding of decisions made by the electoral authority pursuant to health and safety policies intended to protect voters. Responsibility for safe and trustworthy elections is a shared one. The participation and inclusion of political parties must adhere to the law and appeal to their good faith during the different stages of the electoral cycle, both nationally and regionally.

Additionally, organized civil society plays several vital roles in elections. However, because there are limits on how civil society can do its work due to the pandemic, its participation in the process must be facilitated. Fostering synergies between institutions and organizations that work to defend voting, transparency, inclusion, and participation will lead to better elections.

Lastly, voters must be provided the conditions that enable them to vote freely, and with the confidence that every effort has been made to reduce the risk of contagion. Thus, they must understand and be aware that the sanitary measures adopted are necessary, and they must act responsibly to comply with them. Likewise, an effort must be made to ensure that voters are aware—sufficiently ahead of time—of party platforms, candidates, and changes to procedures to guarantee a safe and trustworthy election.

4 ONGOING TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION

It is crucial to keep citizens, political actors, civil society organizations, national and international observers, and the media informed, along with all the other actors involved in the process.

The media's role is particularly important in order for the information to reach the entire population. New forms of communication (social networks, virtual communities) must be utilized to instantly provide information on the status of the election organization process.

Now more than ever, it is crucial for electoral bodies to provide adequate information, especially on the measures being taken to protect health and allow the electoral process to move forward, as well as changes to procedures and to the rules governing the election.

If voters are to go to the polls, they must trust the body organizing the elections. As such, communication between the electoral authority and voters is vital. It will prevent any social panic in response to the mobility involved in organizing elections and inform citizens of the sanitary precautions being taken at voting centers, possible logistical changes, and organizational decisions. Uncertainty and lack of information can be our worst enemies when trying to encourage people to turn out and vote.



5 RESPECTING THE RULE OF LAW

The pandemic can impact the execution of different stages of the electoral process. This is a reality that must be recognized. Measures must be adopted or solutions found to guarantee the continuity of the electoral organization process.

A number of proposals will require changes to the law. It is crucial that each one of them be carried out pursuant to the corresponding legislative processes. To do so, legislative bodies must engage in the debates necessary to enact changes to electoral laws.



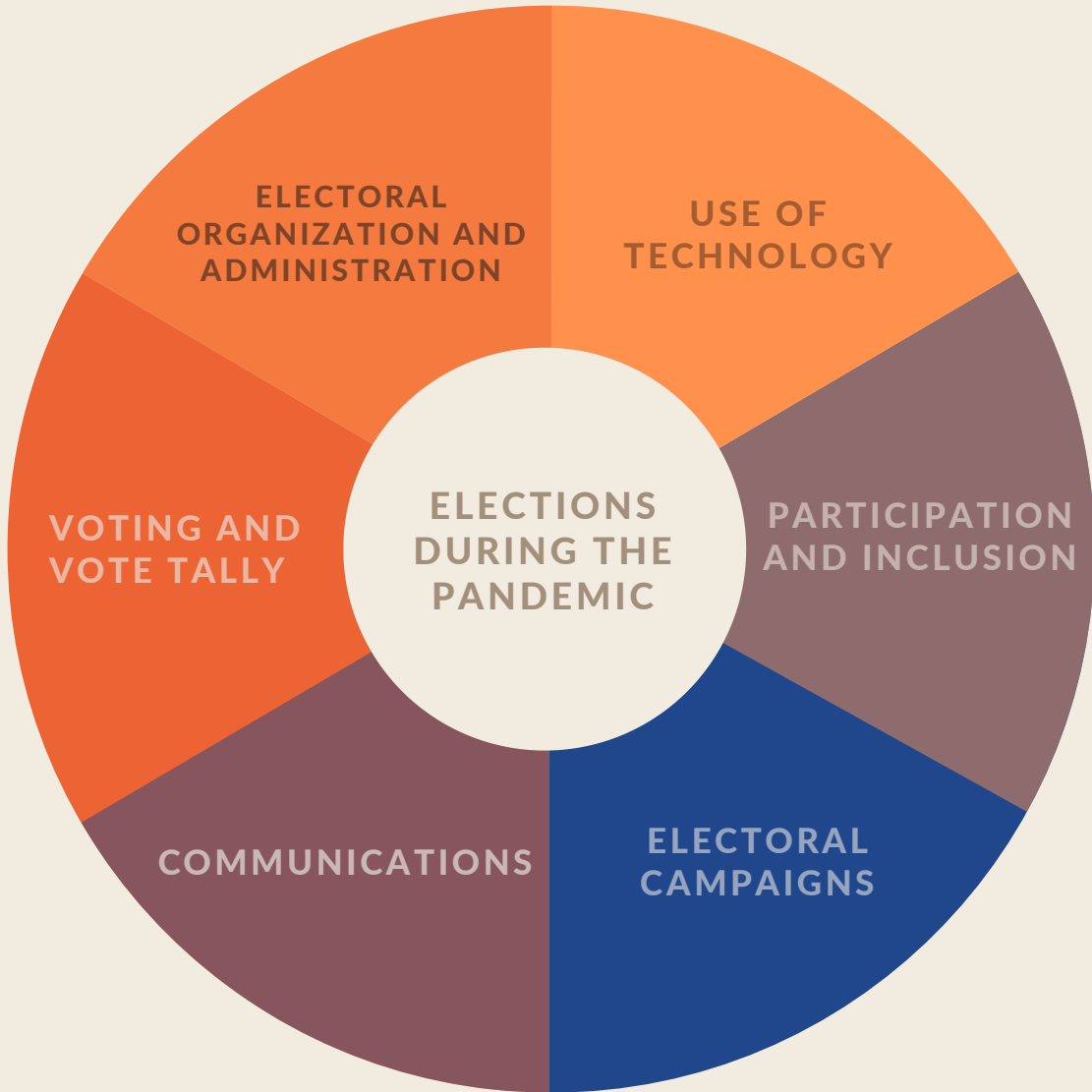


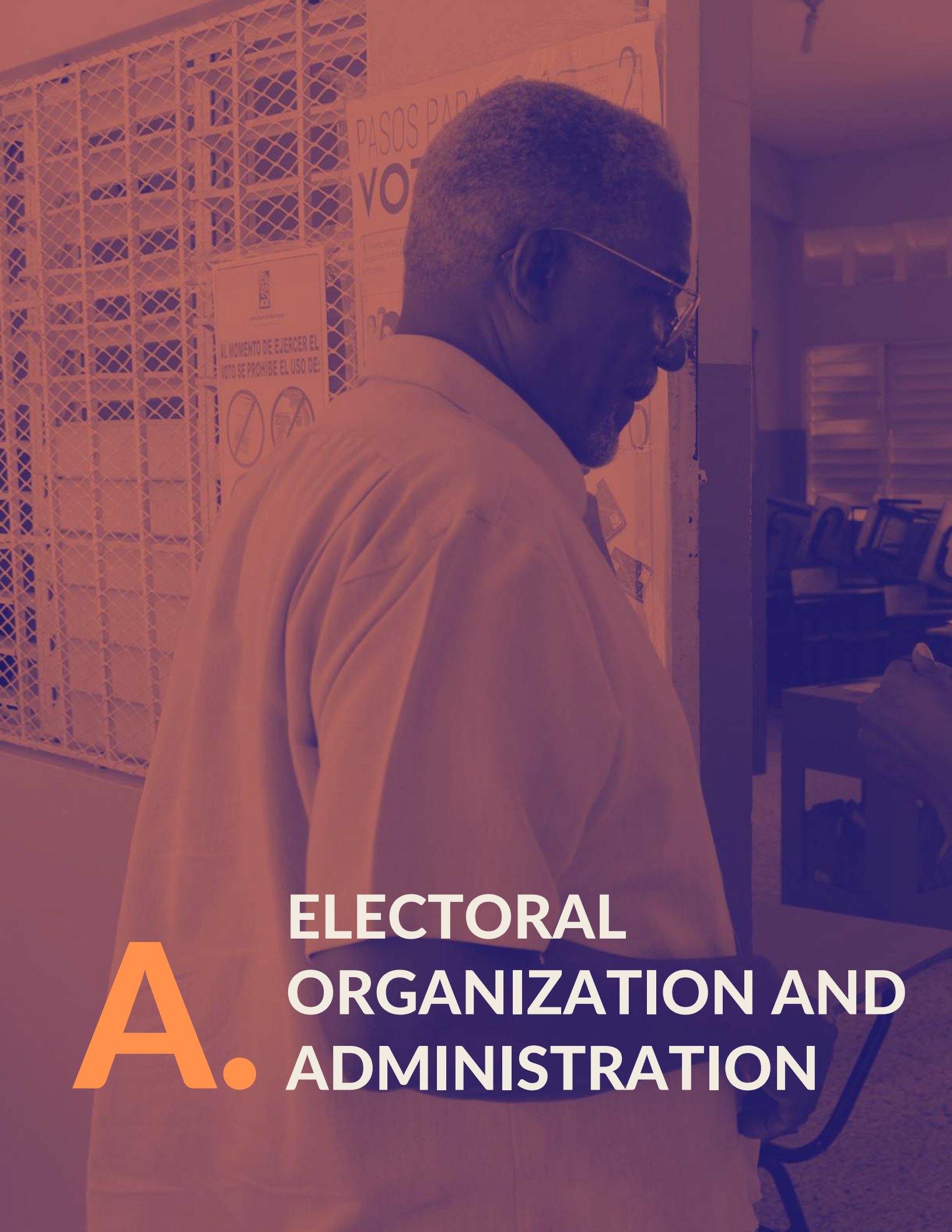
MEASURES

HOLDING ELECTIONS, PROTECTING HEALTH, AND PREVENTING INFECTION

The measures set forth in this document are intended to strengthen the capacities of electoral bodies to organize elections and foster the conditions for free, fair, and transparent elections in the context of the pandemic. The proposals and recommendations impacting different areas of the electoral process are divided among six components for ease of reference.

Without prejudice to how countries or electoral bodies address each one, these measures also aim to serve as an incentive for exploring and thinking about other elements that may help facilitate electoral processes with the precautions made necessary by the COVID-19 pandemic.





A. ELECTORAL ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION



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ELECTORAL ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION


The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on all activities involving mass participation of people. This unprecedented context poses additional institutional challenges to electoral bodies as they try to establish conditions appropriate for holding elections. Enormous efforts must be made to organize, manage, and administer the electoral process to strengthen all components of the election cycle.

The strategies must include preventative measures to minimize the spread of coronavirus and protect the health of voters. This will require a comprehensive review of how elections are planned to include the technical perspective of national health authorities.

Local electoral bodies also play important roles in offering electoral services at different levels throughout a country. In order to be consistent and effective, sanitary measures must be implemented at all levels of the institutional electoral structure. It is therefore important to issue clear guidelines on the authorities, functions, and responsibilities of the actors participating in the various stages of the electoral process.



1. PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS



The planning strategy is important for ensuring that human, financial, and material resources are applied effectively. In defining the activities, procedures, and objectives conducive to holding elections, elements must be included that are related to addressing and preventing the transmission of COVID-19 in the context of pandemic response.

The aim is to provide electoral services with the appropriate sanitary conditions in order to reduce the risk of contagion and of spreading the coronavirus. In view of this, coordination between the electoral body and the various State institutions is crucially important, particularly in regards to the agencies managing and coordinating the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technical knowledge and experience with the pandemic and information on how it is developing are crucial for the electoral body to be able to make the best decisions. This interrelation will help the different State bodies work together to coordinate their efforts in the same direction.

REDESIGN THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL PLAN

Redesign electoral planning with the objective of slowing and reducing the spread of the coronavirus at the different stages of the electoral process, with special attention to election day. The plan should take into account the technical perspective of the health sector and scientific evidence, as well as the experience and knowledge of the national COVID-19 pandemic response team to adopt the necessary measures.

ESTABLISH AN INTERAGENCY SPACE

Establish an interagency workspace that includes the electoral body and the State institutions playing crucial roles in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will provide the electoral authority with updated information and technical support for adopting measures to respond to the development of the pandemic over the course of the electoral process. It will also help coordinate the efforts of the various bodies involved in holding elections. At no time should the autonomy or powers of the highest electoral authority be affected.

For effective implementation of the actions ordered by central authorities, this interagency workspace can be replicated regionally or locally to help coordinate local implementation of the decisions and measures taken.



ESTABLISH A FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE

Consider establishing a follow-up committee to verify, on an ongoing basis, compliance with the electoral measures adopted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This technical body will be able to continuously analyze and evaluate how the measures adopted are being implemented and report on the progress or problems that arise so as to facilitate decision-making and make the necessary changes.

ESTABLISH A MONITORING STRATEGY

To verify compliance with the above measures (either through a follow-up committee or other means), we recommend establishing the corresponding monitoring mechanisms. This will require applying a methodology to collect data and information on the execution status of the measures to be applied or developed for the various activities of the electoral process: training, communications, infrastructure, materials, protocols, procurement and distribution of cleaning and disinfection supplies, etc.

In addition to measuring the implementation progress of the measures, the information collected will also make it possible to focus or prioritize attention to places where there are delays or difficulties.

ANTICIPATE DIFFERENT SCENARIOS

The COVID-19 pandemic develops differently in different countries, as well as in a country's different regions. Electoral bodies must anticipate the various situations that may play out over the course of the process using a risk evaluation prepared by national health authorities.


Outbreaks in more or less isolated areas, community transmission, and the use of emergency measures to restrict mobility are some of the situations that may arise in the middle of organizing the elections. Such situations could also arise months or weeks prior to the vote, or even on election day.

Evaluating these situations will help prepare to execute actions or make decisions to mitigate their impact, avoid errors that affect people's health, reduce improvisation, and narrow margins for political discretion.

We recommend that this evaluation process incorporate technical analysis from those in charge of the COVID-19 pandemic response, as well as from the various institutions with electoral responsibilities.



2. ELECTORAL CALENDAR



Some countries have already suspended or postponed elections in the context of their pandemic responses. Depending on the course of the pandemic, other countries could be faced with the same decision. However, the outlook associated with the course of the COVID-19 pandemic should not give rise to uncertainty and a floating electoral calendar.

Any change to the date of the election will impact legal and regulatory deadlines and procedures, and requiring that activities be rescheduled. Likewise, conditions under the pandemic may mean certain deadlines need to be extended or new items added to the calendar.

The process to update the electoral calendar is crucial for providing certainty and security and enabling the different electoral stages or procedures to be carried forth pursuant to the law, guaranteeing citizens the exercise of their political rights. A clear electoral calendar contributes to the fairness of the vote and all actors' trust in it. It is therefore important to stay in continual contact with political actors to evaluate the impact of the pandemic and the sanitary measures on the electoral calendar.

INCORPORATE A HEALTH-BASED APPROACH

A health-based approach will make it possible to adjust the activities and procedures included on the electoral calendar to the conditions imposed as the pandemic develops. In some cases, it may be necessary to extend or change deadlines. In others, new activities may need to be added as a result of the sanitary measures required. Whatever the case, any actions must strictly follow the law.

AVOID UNCERTAINTY

Whether or not the date of the election is changed, the electoral calendar must be set and disseminated sufficiently ahead of time for all political actors and citizens to become aware of the stages and the deadline set for each, especially in the event of changes from previous electoral processes.



GUARANTEE CITIZEN RIGHTS

Measures adopted in response to the course of the pandemic may impact electoral process activities. Electoral bodies should consider making changes to the electoral calendar in response to situations that prevent or limit citizen access to electoral services, particularly when it may impact the exercise of the right to elect and be elected. Registering to vote, changing residence on the electoral registry and registering candidates are some examples.

DISCLOSE AND PUBLICIZE


Use institutional channels and the media to publicize and disclose the electoral calendar and any changes made to it during the course of the electoral process.

JUSTIFY CHANGES TO THE CALENDAR

Changes to the electoral calendar must have both legal and technical justification to avoid leaving them open to political interpretation.



3. FINANCIAL RESOURCES



Elections held during this pandemic will require more financial resources to implement the various measures intended to protect the health of electoral officials and voters, and prevent electoral activities from spreading the coronavirus. This situation requires a financial commitment from States to provide electoral bodies with enough resources, as well as a budget from the electoral bodies to ensure efficient use of public funds.

The political will of all actors is therefore needed to mobilize sufficient funds to implement the sanitary measures under the elections plan and protect the rights to life, health, and the vote.

DEVELOP A FINANCIAL PLAN

Along with redesigning the plan for the elections, we recommend a financial plan to cover the sanitary needs and operating costs.

The plan will make it possible to document and transmit the electoral body's budgetary needs to the competent authorities of the executive and legislative branch in a clear and orderly fashion.

IDENTIFY THE NECESSARY INPUTS

For this, the electoral authority must identify the human, material, and sanitary resources needed to organize and hold an election during the pandemic. The corresponding health authorities should be consulted to verify whether sanitary supplies are available in the country, and the necessary measures must be taken to stock them.

CREATE A CONTINGENCY FUND

Consider creating a contingency fund for situations resulting from the uncertain course of the pandemic and its impact on the electoral process.




PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The economic effects of the pandemic are serious and countries need significant resources to mitigate their social impact. In this regard, in addition to making efficient use of the resources available for the electoral process, electoral bodies must provide transparency and accountability, especially regarding the special funding allocated to them.

Therefore, in addition to following the law, we suggest establishing or strengthening internal controls and auditing mechanisms; maintaining a public record of expenditures for the process, with special emphasis on expenditures made to execute sanitary measures (purchasing protection and prevention equipment, etc.); and provide public accountability for how the funding is executed. These mechanisms enable proper oversight and help prevent the funding from being used for other purposes.



4. ELECTORAL MATERIALS



The characteristics of the various electoral materials to be used in elections should be considered to reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus. Some things the electoral authority should include or consider including when holding an election during a pandemic are sanitary kits with appropriate supplies for polling station officials; designing and producing furniture to enable physical distancing and facilitate disinfection; the use of indelible ink; and the educational material on health issues.

It is crucial for the application of sanitary measures during elections to provide electoral officials and those working the polling station tables with all the equipment and supplies they need to work on election day.

EVALUATE THE DESIGN OF THE MATERIALS AND FURNITURE USED AT POLLING STATIONS

Review the design of electoral materials to find ways to reduce the possibility of physical contact or of passing objects between citizens.

Also, review the design of the furniture used for polling station members, electoral materials, and voting booths to ensure physical distancing. The electoral body must establish guidelines and templates for the placement of polling station components so the stations can be standardized throughout the country.

EVALUATE THE RISKS OF INDELIBLE INK IN THE COUNTRIES THAT USE IT

Electoral bodies must check with manufacturers and with health experts and authorities regarding the risks of indelible ink.⁸ Alternatives or methods can be explored with them to reduce the chance of contagion or making it so individuals do not have to put their fingers directly in the ink. One option is to use cotton balls that are disposed of after each use, or an eyedropper to stain the finger without touching the skin.

8 International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), "Indelible Ink in Elections: Mitigating Risks of COVID-19 Transmission While Maintaining Effectiveness", Visited on June 20, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ifes.org/news/indelible-ink-elections-mitigating-risks-covid-19-transmission-while-maintaining-effectiveness>

CONSIDER SETTING UP PLASTIC SCREENS

Consider setting up plastic screens at polling station tables in order to reduce as much as possible contact between polling station members and voters.

VOTING BOOTHS THAT ARE EASY TO DISINFECT

Consider voting booths or voting screens made from materials that are easy to properly disinfect.

HAVE ENOUGH PENCILS/PENS AVAILABLE FOR THE TABLES

Although it is suggested that voters be urged to bring their own pencils/pens to sign the voter roll and mark their votes, we recommend including enough pencils/pens in the elections materials so they can be regularly disinfected.



PROVIDE THE POLLING STATIONS AND VOTING CENTERS WITH SANITARY KITS

Have sanitary kits available for members of the polling stations. We recommend that they be provided at the start of their work, prior to coming in contact with any people or surfaces. Also, provide sanitary kits to each center so supplies are available for voters.

At a minimum, the kit must contain masks, alcohol gel, alcohol- or bleach-based disinfectants or cleaning, soap, paper towels, a bag for waste, etc.

Regarding masks, for the entire electoral process, we recommend that workers involved in electoral operations and those performing supervision and observation functions use surgical masks (electoral logistics, polling station members, technicians and alternates, political party delegates, electoral observers, etc.). This should also apply to voters over the age of 65 or voters with pre-existing health conditions.

For other voters, non-medical face masks are sufficient, unless they prefer to use a medical mask. In any case, health authority guidance must be followed in the event that specific guidelines are in place or different measures have been adopted.

DEVELOP MATERIALS ON SANITARY ORDERS

Develop educational and informative materials on sanitary orders and the procedures established for mitigating the impact of the coronavirus. They must be provided in a variety of languages, as well as in formats accessible to persons with disabilities. They must also provide information on the correct way to use items such as face coverings and procedures for proper handwashing.

PREPARE AN INFOGRAPHIC SHOWING SANITARY MEASURES FOR POLLING STATIONS AND VOTING CENTERS

One thing that the educational and informative materials should particularly include is appropriately-sized infographics that can be placed at every polling station table and outside and inside polling centers. They must show the measures to be taken inside polling centers (physical distancing, mask use, washing hands, respiratory hygiene, etc.) and explain the process for voting at the table, along with the precautions voters must take (wait your turn, do not touch your face, wash your hands after voting, etc.).

INCLUDE APPROPRIATE SIGNAGE FOR USE IN VOTING CENTERS

To direct the flow of voters and ensure physical distancing in the lines, we suggest making materials available for each center to set up appropriate signage in the corresponding locations.



5. ELECTORAL LOGISTICS

Electoral logistics is central to organizing an election. It includes planning, manufacturing, distributing, and taking custody of electoral materials to be used at polling stations throughout a country. These logistics are complex for any event involving a mass gathering of citizens, and in the context of the sanitary measures adopted for the COVID-19 pandemic, operating requirements are even more extensive. The chance of the virus spreading as a result of this crowding⁹ and environmental contamination¹⁰ must be reduced by using measures adopted to protect the health of those participating in this process. The opportunity for the virus to spread as a result of the movements of citizens and physical materials must also be reduced. In general, electoral bodies already have monitoring systems that include controls for setting up, collecting, and distributing electoral materials. They also must follow security requirements in view of the sensitivity, indispensability, and singular nature of elections. However, protocols must be added to respond to the pandemic, and solid planning and training is required to carry out these tasks responsibly.

Specialized health bodies like the WHO indicate that so far, it has been found that the coronavirus can survive for up 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel surfaces; less than 4 hours on copper surfaces; and less than 24 hours on cardboard surfaces, all of which should be taken into account when personnel and materials are interacting.¹¹

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- 9 Citizen mobility is more common during an election, including electoral officials, polling station members, voting center coordinators, cleaning and custodial staff, IT support, members of public security forces, political party delegates, overseers, electoral observers, and media workers, among others.
- 10 Mobility of the most common physical materials during an election: electoral materials like ballots, electoral rolls, computer equipment, ballot boxes, signage, instruction sheets, etc.
- 11 World Health Organization (WHO), "Frequently Asked Questions: How long does the virus survive on surfaces?" Visited on June 20, 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/coronavirus-disease-answers?query=how+long+does+it+stay+on+surfaces>

REDESIGN LOGISTICS ACTIVITIES TO INCLUDE A HEALTH-BASED APPROACH

Incorporate a health-based approach in all logistical activities so as to fully comply with the corresponding measures.

ADOPT SANITARY MEASURES FOR THE OPERATIONS CENTER AND OTHER LOGISTICS CENTERS

The facilities where the electoral operations center and other logistics centers operate must have the right infrastructure to provide a spacious work environment and safe mobility for the staff involved in preparing, putting together, and distributing elections materials.

- Enclosed spaces or spaces with little ventilation should be avoided.
- Signage and barrier tape should be used to mark off spaces for passage and ensure physical distancing between persons.



PREPARE PROTOCOLS FOR THE STAFF PARTICIPATING IN ELECTORAL LOGISTICS OR WORKING IN OPERATIONS CENTERS

Establish a sanitary protocol for the staff participating in logistics activities: electoral staff, custodians, service officials, technical support, suppliers, companies, visitors, and others. This protocol should include, at a minimum:

- Using surgical masks. Avoid the reuse of disposable masks.
- Handwashing prior to beginning the workday, at multiple points throughout the day, and before and after handling materials.
- Promoting respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Making alcohol gel available for everyone involved in logistics work.

PUT UP POSTERS AND CAUTIONARY SIGNAGE IN LOGISTICS CENTERS

Make cautionary posters, infographics, and signage available to staff to help them understand, remember, and comply with sanitary measures.

DISINFECT PHYSICAL SPACES, SURFACES, AND MATERIALS

We recommend properly disinfecting storage spaces, as well as the various surfaces and materials used. Disinfection kits should be provided for this.

TRAINING FOR THE PEOPLE DOING LOGISTICS WORK

Before beginning work at the operations center and other logistics facilities, individuals must be properly informed and trained with regard to the sanitary procedures there. The same goes for those who will be working on assembling and distributing electoral materials.

PREPARE GUIDES OR MANUALS FOR LOGISTICS STAFF

Complementary to the previous item, we suggest preparing audiovisual manuals and materials on logistics activities that include information on sanitary measures to reinforce training with online content.

ESTABLISH STAGGERED WORKDAYS

Consider establishing workdays staggered by group and time to prevent staff from crowding operations centers and storage areas. Also, keeping the operations split up into multiple groups can help reduce the impact of one person with COVID-19 diagnosis or symptoms in view of the social distancing (quarantine) that those who come in contact with this individual must undergo.



EXTEND DEADLINES FOR PUTTING TOGETHER AND DISTRIBUTING MATERIALS

Consider extending deadlines for manufacturing and distributing electoral materials, in view of the burden on operations imposed by the sanitary measures required.

PROVIDE A SANITARY KIT TO THOSE WORKING IN THE OPERATIONS CENTER AND IN ALL LOGISTICS PHASES

Make sure everyone working in the operations center and serving different roles throughout the electoral logistics stages are aware of the protocol and have sanitary kits. Install multiple alcohol gel stations to promote hand hygiene.

MONITORING COMPLIANCE WITH SANITARY MEASURES DURING THE STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION STAGE

Establish a method for consistent monitoring and evaluation to verify compliance with the sanitary measures at different stages. Technology can play a decisive role in quick and orderly verification reporting.

PREPARE A DISTRIBUTION CALENDAR AHEAD OF TIME

Prepare a timeline for distributing electoral materials sufficiently in advance and provide information about it to outlying areas in a timely fashion. This will help coordinate collection and storage with sanitary measures fully implemented and in force.

SELECT STORAGE SITES IN A TIMELY MANNER

Select the storage sites for electoral materials throughout the country ahead of time, ensuring the sites comply with sanitary protocols for the ingress and egress of persons and for the handling of materials.

SET THE SANITARY REQUIREMENTS FOR SUPPLIER COMPANIES

Set sanitary requirements for supplier companies, whether they are providing inputs for protecting health, manufacturing and handling electoral materials for which they have been contracted, or delivering contracted materials and services. This must include sanitary requirements for visitors from supplier companies to the logistics centers of the electoral body or other spaces, as mentioned previously.



INDIVIDUALS AUTHORIZED TO DO LOGISTICS WORK SO AS NOT TO ENDANGER THE POPULATION

Establish profiles for individuals authorized to do logistics work, as follows:

- Do not have COVID-19 and/or a coronavirus infection, pursuant to the definition established by national authorities.
- Do not have symptoms compatible with COVID-19.
- Have not had contact with COVID-19 cases, pursuant to the definition established by national authorities.
- Do not belong to groups at higher risk of developing serious complications from a coronavirus infection (pre-existing conditions, older than 65).¹²

ESTABLISH A PROTOCOL AND CONTINGENCY PLAN IN CASE INDIVIDUALS HAVE SYMPTOMS COMPATIBLE WITH COVID-19

Work together with local health authorities to establish a protocol to provide rapid care to officials who have symptoms compatible with COVID-19. Also, establish a contingency plan to ensure operational continuity in the event of such cases and be able to proceed with the logistical activities as scheduled.

12 Ibid.

KEEP CHAIN OF CUSTODY RECORDS

Follow chain of custody procedures to keep a record of everyone's contact with each other and everyone who has participated in each of the manufacture, storage, and distribution stages. Should someone have symptoms that are compatible with COVID-19, it will then be possible to determine who has been in contact with them and take the necessary measures.

SET UP A SPECIAL HUMAN RESOURCES TEAM TO PROVIDE COVID-19 SUPPORT

Electoral bodies are institutions that, in many countries, have a large staff and expand by hiring support workers during elections. It is important for its human resources or other area to be able to monitor the health status of its workers.

One strategy is to keep track of who has COVID-19 and/or a coronavirus infection and who may have been in contact with these individuals, so as to provide the necessary support (professional, emotional, and health) and monitor their condition. Workers must feel like they have support and not blame themselves for being absent during a time of significant pressure on people who perform electoral work.



CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF SANITARY MEASURES AT ALL LEVELS

Sanitary measures should be applied rigorously at all levels (national, regional, departmental, municipal, local) and to all citizens involved in distributing, collecting, and storing electoral materials.

ADAPT LOGISTICAL OPERATIONS TO THE EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SITUATION

Based on countrywide risk evaluations, adapt the logistics operational calendar to the epidemiological situation.

INSTALL DISINFECTION POINTS AT ALL LOCATIONS THAT RECEIVE MATERIALS


Consider installing disinfection centers at all locations that receive electoral materials throughout the country (from storerooms to voting centers).

REPLICATE SANITARY MEASURES DURING THE PROCESS TO RECOLLECT PERSONNEL AND MATERIALS ONCE THE ELECTION IS OVER

Review the process of recollecting personnel and materials after the elections. Sanitary measures must be applied while electoral materials are being returned, especially for official documentation that is sensitive and indispensable.



6. ELECTORAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION



Electoral training and education are key for all electoral processes. In the specific context of the pandemic, they are even more important, in view of the importance of communicating and providing the right knowledge on the coronavirus's impact on the election and the measures being taken to protect against it. Special efforts should be made to raise awareness among the various actors on protecting health, and toward this, it will be fundamental to develop accessible pedagogical content and instructions.

Good practices show that well-planned training that takes into account the principles of uniformity and universality can more effectively raise awareness. Training materials prepared for specific roles, functions, and obligations can provide more precise guidance and narrow the margins for arbitrariness.

Also, training provides a valuable opportunity for preparing citizens to live with the current circumstances, as citizen responsibility and institutional commitment are needed to take preventative actions and reduce the chance of spreading the pandemic. It is important to make these educational tools easy to use, to make their access fast and easy, and to make sure they are compatible with a number of different platforms.

INCLUDE SANITARY PROVISIONS IN TRAINING SESSIONS

Plan for all training sessions to include the sanitary provisions issued by national health authorities.

DEVELOP TRAINING MATERIALS THAT SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS SANITARY MEASURES

Develop training materials on the measures, protocols, and guidelines that electoral officials must follow to prevent transmission of the coronavirus, ideally broken down by roles, functions, and obligations. Do the same for political parties with regard to the electoral campaign and for voters on sanitary measures to take when voting.

ADD COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES TO THE ELECTORAL EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

Add the measures adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to the educational campaign that the electoral body carries out in preparation for the election and voting.



DEVELOP INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Create inclusive training materials and audiovisual content for older adults, the illiterate population, underrepresented groups, persons with disabilities, new voters, and persons with limited access to technology or the Internet. Consider including content in different languages and a multicultural approach to show the importance of protecting health and of measures that can prevent infection.

CREATE CONTENT FOR DIFFERENT PLATFORMS

Create content with relevant information using different platforms: websites, audiovisual materials, printed text, online magazines, TV programs, and radio.

PROMOTE THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Along with the previous recommendation, this is an opportunity to promote the use of social media tools and content to educate citizens on voting and on the new sanitary security regulations. The ability of social media platforms to share information must be taken advantage of by the electoral body to ensure that citizens can learn about the sanitary and safety measures for the election from platforms including YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and others.

DEVELOP AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS THAT SIMULATE VOTING WITH SANITARY MEASURES IN PLACE

Election day is the most sensitive electoral moment during the pandemic. The dynamic at polling stations and the act of actually voting will be different from what so many voters and electoral officials are used to as a result of the sanitary measures to be implemented.

One way of training voters and giving them the confidence to go vote is by showing a voting simulation. This will enable them to visualize how the polling stations will operate during the elections, what the sanitary measures are and how to follow them, and what behaviors must be avoided to minimize the spread of the coronavirus (do not shake hands, do not touch your face, etc.).

This simulation can then be broadcast on TV news programs and spread over the Internet and over social networks.

CREATE A WEBPAGE TO MANAGE THE DOWNLOAD OF MATERIALS AND PROVIDE A SPACE FOR QUESTIONS

Provide digital space where political organizations, electoral observers, and citizens can download any documentation they need, guides for representatives of political parties, health and safety guidelines, and any information that would be useful for the process. This space could also offer a means to interact with the electoral body and answer questions online.



INCORPORATE TECHNOLOGY INTO THE TRAINING OF ELECTORAL OFFICIALS AND POLLING STATION MEMBERS

Encourage the use of technology to carry out training that is uniform, accessible, and on a mass scale, so as to reduce the need to be physically present at training sessions for electoral officials and polling station members. The hands-on component provided in person is difficult to replace. However, a combination of in-person and remote training can be explored.

MAKE THE TRAINING FOR ELECTORAL OFFICIALS OBLIGATORY

Consider offering incentives or making training required for sworn polling station members and others serving in senior roles during the election. It is crucial for everyone to have the right training on the technical aspects of the process, but they also must have training on the protocols, guidelines, and measures that must be followed to protect people's health.

CONSIDER THOSE WITH LIMITED ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

Technology is a communications channel that allows access to many people. However, not everyone has access to such tools. Therefore, consider creating other types of content accessible to everyone.

SET UP A CITIZEN RESPONSE CENTER

Consider setting up a citizen response center (online, by phone, through digital platforms) to provide information on decisions having to do with the elections and the sanitary measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

ENSURE THE PROPER INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONDITIONS FOR IN-PERSON ACTIVITIES

Consider holding training in rooms with enough space to guarantee physical distancing between persons. Also, push for these activities to be conducted in places with ventilation. It is recommended to keep at least one and a half meters between each attendee.

ADOPT A SANITARY PROTOCOL FOR IN-PERSON TRAINING SESSIONS

Establish a sanitary protocol for in-person training sessions. The staff in charge of the activity must have the right resources and preparation to conduct the activity safely, as well as adequate knowledge to prevent transmission of the coronavirus and comply with sanitary measures at each activity.

Attendees must be made aware ahead of time of the requirements they must follow at the different sessions in which they participate.



INCLUDE HEALTH EXPERTS IN THE TRAINING SESSIONS

Have health professionals present at the training sessions to provide timely and technical information on the sanitary measures and the health protocols established, as well as to answer questions on the subject.

It is crucial for all electoral officials to not only be aware of the measures but also know how to implement them and how to use the safety materials (for example, masks).

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF TRAINING STAFF

Increase the number of staff members involved in conducting training and providing support, not only because of the extra training related to the pandemic that must be provided, but also to make sure the sanitary measures are followed.

SPLIT THE TRAINING SESSIONS UP INTO MULTIPLE GROUPS TO AVOID A LARGE MASS OF PEOPLE

We suggest dividing training sessions into smaller groups (set aside dates and time slots that are established based on some type of criteria, like surname, identification document, or area).

SET UP HYGIENE STATIONS AT THE ENTRANCE AND REQUIRE THE USE OF FACEMASKS


Set up disinfection points at the entrance to training sessions so all attendees can sanitize with alcohol gel. Also, ensure that facemasks are used, or provide them to people who do not have one.

DISINFECTING MEETING ROOMS AND SURFACES

Have a plan in place for disinfecting the meeting rooms and surfaces where the training sessions are held every time a new group comes for a session.



7. ELECTORAL REGISTRY



The electoral registry is the database used to prepare the electoral roll of citizens with a right to vote. The main challenge of the pandemic in this area is ensuring that all citizens have the ability to register to vote or update their electoral information and make sure the present situation does not present obstacles that limit the right to vote.

The methods for putting together the electoral registry, the processes involved, the institutions responsible, whether or not registering is obligatory or voluntary, the infrastructure and technology used, registration requirements, and other aspects can all change from country to country in the region. Nevertheless, there are aspects they have in common, which are addressed in this section to offer proposals on promoting citizen inclusion and participation in elections, protecting their health, and considering the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on this process.

Of course, because many electoral registration procedures require the voter to be present, appropriate sanitary precautions must be taken in countries' electoral offices. Physical interaction between electoral officials and citizens—and the interaction between citizens and materials, equipment, and surfaces when visiting these locations—increase the risk of contagion. The corresponding preventative measures must therefore be adopted.

GUARANTEE THE FUNCTIONING OF THE ELECTORAL REGISTRY

The pandemic has made it difficult to keep electoral services operating, including the electoral registry. Institutions must ensure electoral registries continue to function to guarantee citizens the exercise of their political rights. Should their operation be suspended to implement sanitary measures, strategies must be adopted to mitigate the time spent closed or to somehow replace it, especially during an election year.



ESTABLISH SANITARY MEASURES FOR REGISTRY AND IDENTIFICATION OFFICES

The proper sanitary measures must be in place to provide services to the public in registry offices. This includes establishing a protocol and instructions on how to provide services.

- Use of surgical masks must be required for electoral officials, and citizens must be required to wear facemasks.
- Everyone who enters to carry out a bureaucratic procedure must sanitize with alcohol gel.
- Physical distancing measures must be applied in offices, both between officials and between the people they are attending to.
- Measures must be taken to disinfect the furniture and areas of contact.
- We suggest assigning each official equipment and materials for their exclusive use so as to avoid sharing. Otherwise, it should be disinfected after every time an official finishes using it.
- Writing implements and computer equipment should be disinfected after every use. We suggest recommending that people bring their own pencils or pens.
- Signage should be used, along with physical barriers if necessary, to guide and organize the flow of persons within facilities.
- If possible, encourage the delivery of receipts and certifications digitally, via email or some other method. Install plastic screens in areas serving the public to provide a protective barrier.
- Install plastic screens in areas serving the public to provide a protective barrier.
- If there is more than one entryway, set up one as an entry and the other as an exit.

TRAIN OFFICIALS TO PROVIDE SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC WHILE FOLLOWING SANITARY PROTOCOLS

It is important for electoral officials and officials from other institutions who handle the electoral roll to be properly trained on the protocols for providing service to the public, on the sanitary measures they must follow, and on applying the procedures as they have been established in response to the pandemic.

ESTABLISH A MECHANISM FOR PROVIDING SERVICE USING AN APPOINTMENT SYSTEM

If possible, and if merited by demand, establish a mechanism for offering reservations to prevent crowding in the registry offices. This will make it possible to offer timeslots based on the office's response time to ensure a manageable flow of persons. A call center, a website, or an email account can be set up to handle the reservations.

ADOPT MEASURES TO PROTECT OFFICIALS CONSIDERED HIGH RISK

The electoral body and/or institution that manages the registry and identification document offices must review the public-facing office staff to determine which officials are at greater risk of developing serious complications from COVID-19 (older adults and people with underlying conditions) and which ones are pregnant. This information will make it possible to adopt measures to reduce the possibility of these officials becoming infected. The measures must be considered for all officials in any public-facing area, while always protecting their right to privacy.



SET ASIDE A TIMESLOT FOR PROVIDING PREFERENTIAL SERVICE TO OLDER ADULTS, PREGNANT WOMEN, AND OTHER AT-RISK INDIVIDUALS

We recommend setting aside a timeslot for providing preferential service to older adults, pregnant women, and persons with underlying conditions to reduce their risk of exposure to the coronavirus.

EXTEND REGISTRATION DEADLINES AND UPDATE THE ELECTORAL REGISTRY

In cases where citizens face deadlines to register and update their information, we suggest extending them to make it easier to undertake the corresponding procedures with less crowding.

REOPEN THE REGISTRY PROCESS SHOULD THE ELECTIONS BE POSTPONED

Because elections can be postponed for several months, we suggest reopening the voter registration process so anyone who turns 18 by the new date of the election is able to vote. The same goes for people who wish to update their electoral residency.

CONDUCT A CAMPAIGN ON UPDATING ELECTORAL RESIDENCY AIMED AT INDIVIDUALS WHO LIVE IN ONE CITY AND VOTE IN ANOTHER

In several countries in the region, a high percentage of citizens have not updated their electoral residency. In many cases, they live in one place, but are still registered in their city of origin, or they live in the same city but are registered under their previous domicile. Thus, during elections, they travel considerable distances to exercise their right to vote.

It is therefore recommended that the electoral authority execute a campaign to encourage particularly those individuals in the first situation (living in one city but voting in another) to update their electoral residency so they do not have to travel during the week of the elections. Such mobility helps spread the coronavirus throughout the country, especially when different areas are in different epidemiological situations. The population should be made aware of this risk to encourage them to do the procedure to update their registration.

OFFER PREREGISTRATION PROCESSES TO STREAMLINE PROCEDURES AND REDUCE THE NEED TO SPEND LONG AMOUNTS OF TIME IN REGISTRY OFFICES

To streamline procedures to register or update the electoral registry in countries that require individuals to be physically present, mechanisms could be offered to make this process easier by downloading the corresponding forms from the Internet in order to be able to fill them out prior to visiting the corresponding office. People could also be allowed to fill in this information directly on a webpage.



CONDUCT REGISTRATION CAMPAIGNS FOR HISTORICALLY-EXCLUDED GROUPS

Encourage the registration of people from groups that have historically seen lower registration rates: young people, women, people with disabilities, older adults, illiterate persons, the indigenous population, persons of African descent, and those experiencing poverty.

IMPLEMENT A STRATEGY TO REMOVE FROM THE VOTER ROLLS THOSE WHO HAVE DIED FROM COVID-19

The pandemic has had very painful consequences for society as deaths have increased. The institution in charge of the registry is responsible for removing from the rolls those individuals who have unfortunately lost their lives. In the absence of a regular process to remove those who have passed away, we suggest exploring working together with State institutions that handle vital statistics, including death records.

SUSPEND MECHANISMS FOR PURGING THOSE WHO DO NOT VOTE FROM THE REGISTRY

In some countries, citizens can be purged from the electoral registry by failing to participate in certain elections. Given the current context, we suggest suspending this mechanism for electoral processes taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alternatively, suspension of this mechanism could be applied automatically for older adults, and the suspension could also be offered to individuals with serious underlying conditions and pregnant women, upon registration and submission of supporting documentation. We suggest making this registration possible through the electoral body's website.

ALLOW HIGH-RISK PEOPLE TO EXCUSE THEMSELVES FROM VOTING REQUIREMENTS

In the same spirit, in countries where voting is obligatory, we suggest considering allowing older adults, people with underlying conditions, and pregnant women to excuse themselves from voting. Such a measure must be implemented through the corresponding legal or administrative mechanisms. One factor to consider when adopting this measure is the country's epidemiological status. Based on this factor, it could also be focused on certain regions.

EXTEND THE VALIDITY OF EXPIRED VOTER IDENTIFICATION CARDS

In most countries of the region, people identify themselves at polling station tables with their national identification cards. They are then allowed to vote if they are registered on the voter roll and their identification card is not expired. In view of the need to reduce the number of bureaucratic procedures that expose people to infection from the coronavirus, we suggest extending the validity of expired identification documents exclusively to allow citizens to use them to vote.



SUSPEND REGISTRATION OR NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION CARD ISSUANCE FEES

The pandemic has had a severe economic and social impact, causing many people to lose their jobs. Some state agencies charge fees to register or to obtain a national identification card. It is important to avoid such fees becoming onerous for those wishing to exercise the vote, particularly in the current context. We therefore recommend suspending fees so people can vote in elections without facing an additional burden in this complex economic context.

COMMUNICATE AND CONSULT WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

The electoral registry is one of the most sensitive components of an electoral process. Often it gives rise to political conflicts. It is therefore important for the decisions and measures taken with regard to the electoral registry during the pandemic to be preceded by consultation and dialogue with political parties, and ideally, that they be supported by a country's main political movements.

DISINFECT THE COMPUTER EQUIPMENT USED TO REGISTER BIOMETRICS

Some electoral bodies have added biometrics to their enrollment systems, while others are in the process of transitioning to such a registry. Biometrics require people to be physically present and come in contact with computer equipment. It is important to disinfect all equipment with which citizens come in contact in order to register, including fingerprint readers, styluses for digital signatures, and other equipment. They must check with suppliers to verify which cleaning products to use so as not to damage the equipment, and check with health authorities to confirm that the products are authorized and available on the market in sufficient quantities.¹³



13 Buriil, Fernanda; Darnolf, Staffan; Aseresa, Muluken, "Safeguarding health and elections", 2020. Available at: <https://www.ifes.org/publications/ifes-covid-19-briefing-series-safeguarding-health-and-elections>

8. REGISTRATION OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND CANDIDACIES



In order to participate in elections, political parties must be authorized as a political organization after meeting the requirements established by law. For their part, those wishing to participate as candidates also must meet certain legal conditions.

Whatever the case, a series of procedures must be undertaken, culminating in the corresponding steps before the electoral body to register the party or candidacy. Managing these processes is crucial for the election.

Several of the activities related to registering political organizations and candidacies require physical interaction with a significant number of people, especially the activities involving the mobilization of supporters to comply with a series of formal requirements as established in the electoral law in order to participate in an election. Additionally, interactions also take place when political representatives take procedural steps before electoral officials, whether collecting information, requesting documentation, performing the formal registration procedure, filing challenges, etc.

ESTABLISH SANITARY MEASURES FOR THE IN-PERSON REGISTRATION PROCESS

Most countries in the region require an in-person process for political parties or candidates to register their candidacies for the various offices, as they have to complete the legal and administrative formalities. As with the offices of the electoral registry, sanitary measures must be implemented and followed to minimize the possibility of contagion.

- Use of surgical masks must be required for electoral officials, candidates, and party members.
- Everyone who enters to do a bureaucratic procedure must sanitize with alcohol gel.
- Access should be restricted only to the persons who are strictly necessary and who have a role in the registration process. Political parties must cooperate by not crowding their supporters outside the facility when the registration is taking place—something that is common in many countries of the region—as doing so would increase the likeliness of transmission of the coronavirus.
- Physical distancing measures must be applied in offices, both between officials and between the people they are attending to.
- Measures must be taken to disinfect the furniture and areas of contact. Special attention should be paid where officials are sharing equipment or materials. We suggest making additional materials available for exclusive use, or disinfecting every time an official finishes using something.
- Writing implements and computer equipment should be disinfected after every use. We suggest recommending that party representatives bring their own pencils or pens.
- Signage should be used, along with physical barriers if necessary, to guide and organize the flow of persons within facilities.
- If possible, encourage the delivery of receipts and certifications digitally, via email or some other method.
- Install plastic screens in areas where party representatives and candidates are attended so as to provide a protective barrier.



PROMOTE THE USE OF TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS

Without prejudice to the above recommendation, countries should explore options for moving the in-person procedures surrounding the registration of parties and candidacies to digital platforms or carrying them out in ways that reduce in-person visits to the offices of the electoral body. Among other procedures, this could mean allowing information, documents, photographs, and signatures to be submitted digitally.

USE TECHNOLOGY TO COLLECT SIGNATURES OR ESTABLISH A SANITARY MEASURES PROTOCOL FOR THE PROCESS

Many countries require the collection of signatures to form a party, submit candidacies, or even to hold referendums on amending the constitution. Such a process poses a risk of transmission due to the number of people coming into physical contact and the documents passed back and forth between them.

Ideally, a technological platform could address the risks inherent in this process by enabling individuals to input their information electronically, with authentication and security mechanisms for comparison against the electoral registry. A more viable option is to allow people to download a form to fill out and that parties will only be in charge of collecting. This would reduce contact only to the moment the document is delivered.

If no solution like this is possible, we suggest that the electoral body establish a protocol that organizations must strictly follow, detailing the sanitary measures that must be taken when collecting signatures.

EXTEND THE DEADLINES FOR COLLECTING SIGNATURES

Signature collection processes generally have fixed deadlines. In the current context, these deadlines could be insufficient given the restrictions on movement, the need to follow preventative measures that can slow the process, the reluctance of the population to expose itself, and other factors. Following an evaluation of the status of the pandemic, countries may consider moving up the start of this process and extending the corresponding deadline.

EXTEND CANDIDACY REGISTRATION DEADLINES

In many cases, the stages of the electoral process and each one's impact on the other stages of the process put significant pressure on the course of the election. One example is candidate registration, which is followed by the stage for challenging those registrations. There are multiple examples in the region of individuals who have found weeks or even days before the election that it had yet to be resolved whether they were authorized to stand for office. Additionally, there is a tendency to handle electoral processes through the courts, leading to a significant burden on the entity in charge of handling these conflicts. This issue then impacts on the printing of the ballots, as the ballots cannot be printed until the situation is resolved, which in turn impacts electoral logistics by pushing back the timeline for the distribution of materials.

This is only one example of how the stages of an electoral process interconnect with each other. We therefore suggest exploring whether to move up registration or extend deadlines in order to provide enough time for registration during the pandemic. This would also help avoid delaying other phases of the process, which will also face difficulties due to the country's epidemiological situation.



COMMUNICATE AND CONSULT WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

The various measures to be adopted with regard to registering political parties and candidacies must be arrived at through a process of dialogue with political organizations to reach satisfactory solutions in this crucial area of the electoral process. Authorities must hear from the parties about the difficulties they are facing or that they will face in the different procedures surrounding this process, especially to provide the facilities that, under the law, can help contribute to minimizing the pandemic's impacts.

The issue must also be approached with regional or local parties that do not have the same operational conditions or capacity as a national party and for who the challenges in this area may be even greater.


PROMOTE TECHNICAL TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR NEW TOOLS OR MODALITIES

Provide the proper training and technical support to political parties if new modalities are developed for registration or new technological tools are introduced.

DISSEMINATE INFORMATION ON THE PROCESS FOR REGISTERING PARTIES AND CANDIDACIES

Use the formal media, webpages, and social networks to disseminate information to the public on the process for registering political parties and candidacies, especially if there have been changes from previous processes and/or new tools are available.

9. ELECTORAL CHALLENGES AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION



Despite existing health risks, electoral authorities managing the electoral justice system are responsible for handling lawsuits and challenges throughout the electoral process, including those concerning the results. Although we could make numerous recommendations with regard to processing electoral dispute procedures, the following are some general suggestions for moving these processes along.

APPLY SANITARY MEASURES DURING ALL IN-PERSON HEARINGS

Should hearings be conducted in the physical presence of those involved, the recommendations given in previous sections related to physical distancing, hand hygiene, and the use of personal protective equipment should be applied.

SET UP AN ELECTRONIC MECHANISM FOR FILING THE CORRESPONDING BRIEFS

Provide a secure alternative electronic measure for sending and submitting remedies related to the electoral process and other types of briefs.

HOLD THE HEARINGS VIA VIDEOCONFERENCING PLATFORMS

Encourage the holding of hearings online for submitting, substantiating, and ruling on motions related to the electoral process.

10. VOTING ABROAD

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the challenge of holding elections abroad even more complex. Strategies for responding to the pandemic have also been mixed. The approaches have thus been too varied to pinpoint planning strategies and procedures that could be applicable to all countries.

Some important variables to consider when implementing voting abroad depend on institutions other than the electoral body. It is therefore important to secure support and collaboration from the ministries of foreign affairs and health in finding satisfactory solutions that enable nationals living abroad to exercise their political rights.

CONSIDER THE PROVISIONS ADOPTED IN EVERY COUNTRY

Voting abroad poses particular challenges, as it is likely that the status of the COVID-19 pandemic is different in every country. This means that sanitary provisions and measures in response to the pandemic will differ, and plans must therefore be made for each individual situation.

COORDINATION WITH THE MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND HEALTH

We recommend that the electoral body conduct an evaluation of the conditions in each country with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also, the WHO, PAHO, and other public health institutions can provide valuable information in this regard.

TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE OPINIONS OF THOSE LIVING ABROAD

We suggest the evaluation include feedback from the community living abroad as to their concerns and suggestions about the upcoming election.

MAINTAIN TALKS WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

It is important to stay in constant contact with political parties to ensure that the decisions made incorporate their considerations, that the political system backs the measures adopted, and that parties are aware of how the process is playing out.

FORM A ROUNDTABLE GROUP TO COORDINATE THE VOTE ABROAD

Forming a roundtable group to coordinate the vote abroad that includes representatives of the actors mentioned in previous recommendations can contribute to successful implementation. The roundtable group should map the risk in order to take certain actions depending on the course of the pandemic in each country.

COORDINATE WITH COUNTRY AUTHORITIES

Coordinate with the authorities of each country to comply with the measures adopted there in response to the pandemic and follow the established protocols.

KEEP ACTORS CONSTANTLY UP-TO-DATE

We recommend using institutional channels to continually provide citizens abroad with information on the progress of the election and the sanitary measures to be applied on the day of the vote.

EXPLORE ALTERNATIVES TO FACILITATE VOTING ABROAD WHILE FOLLOWING MEDICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Drastic changes to the voting system in response to the pandemic are generally not recommended. However, depending on the number of voters registered and the amount of time available for implementation, mail-in voting could be explored as an option for voters living abroad.





B.

**USE OF
TECHNOLOGY**



OAS

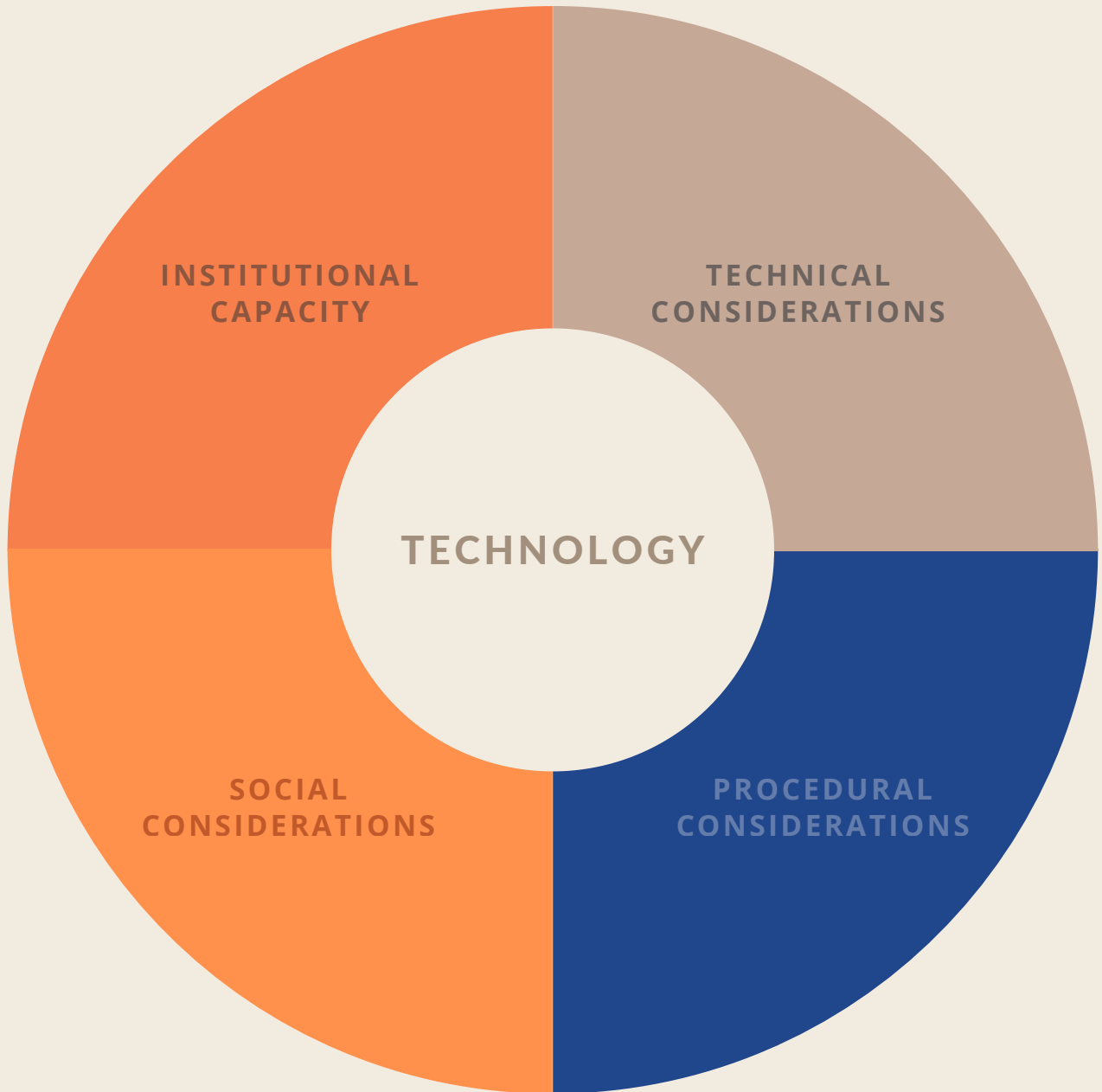
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USE OF TECHNOLOGY

The sanitary conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the exploration of using information technology and online tools to offer solutions that eliminate or reduce physical contact between persons in order to diminish risk and limit the spread of COVID-19.

Without question, the current context provides an opportunity to develop mobile applications, websites, and other tools that can function as sites to answer citizen questions, offer information on the electoral process, and handle procedures before electoral bodies. Most countries in the region have already incorporated technology solutions in different points of the process.

The different chapters of this guide offer recommendations for using technology. However, a number of variables should be considered to ensure their effective, safe, and inclusive use. Especially during a pandemic, electoral bodies must avoid implementing or accelerating the implementation of a technological tool without ensuring that the proper processes are in place for it to develop.



1. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY



Technology must be used in an environment with the institutional capacity to develop and execute technology solutions. This includes the right personnel, training, IT infrastructure, financial resources, etc.

At a number of points, this guide suggests using technology for certain electoral procedures in order to reduce the likelihood of transmitting the coronavirus by minimizing or eliminating the physical presence of persons for hundreds of procedures. These recommendations are by themselves generally applicable to normal contexts, as they improve, facilitate, and strengthen countries' electoral services. However, the reason they have not yet been applied is often the limited institutional capacity to develop and maintain certain technologies.

It is therefore important for electoral bodies to seriously evaluate the institution's ability to implement technology solutions so any decisions made are properly thought through, justified, and developed.

PERFORM A DIAGNOSIS OF THE INSTITUTION'S CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT A TECHNOLOGY SOLUTION

We recommend conducting a comprehensive diagnostic assessment of the electoral body's computing capabilities and infrastructure in order to have an objective picture of the conditions for implementing proposals related to the use of technology in elections and/or new proposals for managing electoral services in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This diagnostic assessment must take into consideration the resources available to the institution, including human, financial, and technological.

DETERMINE NEEDS

Together with this diagnostic assessment, a determination should be made of what is needed to implement a specific proposal, as it may require a larger qualified workforce, equipment procurement, training for officials, education and informational campaigns, testing, service contracting, time, and other things. All of this translates into financial resources.



EVALUATE THE AMOUNT OF TIME AVAILABLE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Time is an indispensable factor to consider when deciding whether to implement a certain technology solution, and it will depend largely on the date of the election. It is crucial to be objective and realistic with regard to the ability to offer a technology tool within the amount of time available. This evaluation should consider the various restrictions or limitations that the pandemic may impose on execution.

PRIORITIZE BASED ON MITIGATING CONTAGION

Based on the diagnostic assessment, the determination of needs, and evaluation of the time available, among other factors, electoral bodies must decide whether they are able to embark on one or several of the proposals made in this guide, or others they may be considering.

If conditions allow for implementing more than one, the proposals should be prioritized that together contribute to reducing the risk of contagion. We recommend seeking technical support from health experts to evaluate this aspect.

INCLUDE THE ELECTORAL BODY'S INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AREA IN ANY DECISIONS

It is important to involve the electoral body's information technology area in any evaluation and decision-making process, as it can offer not only technical information but also its own experience in implementing these tools.

APPLY THE SAME CRITERIA WHEN CONTRACTING TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

The above-described criteria should also be applied to technology solutions acquired through contractors and supplier companies.

FOSTER HORIZONTAL COOPERATION

Facilitate horizontal cooperation among the region's electoral bodies. Many technology solutions have been adopted in a variety of countries. The experience and good practices that electoral institutions can share among each other will enrich the decision-making process for those considering technology solutions or are in the early stages of implementation. Those with a developed technology solution will always be able to learn from other models in order to continuously improve.



PREPARE THE INSTITUTION FOR REMOTE WORK

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the workplace dynamic. Implementation of sanitary measures has led to restrictions on mobility in countries throughout the world, forcing many institutions to establish remote work arrangements for their employees.

The electoral body must plan and provide tools to its officials to ensure that all work that does not require travel can be continued remotely. The course of the pandemic is uncertain, and the epidemiological situation may require measures to confine the population, meaning everyone will have to stay home. It is important for the institution to have a service—accessible to the entire staff—that provides video calls and remote access to workstations, offers technical support, and guarantees security.


EXPAND THE TECHNICAL STAFF

Consider expanding hiring of certified technical staff to reinforce the electoral body's IT area to meet the need to provide electoral services through IT solutions.

STRENGTHEN HELP DESKS

Strengthen the capacity of help desks to provide adequate technical support to meet the increase in demand associated with new digital administration tools.

2. TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS



In addition to designing apps, devices, or tools that are intuitive and easy to use, the planning and development of technology solutions must take a number of technical aspects into account to ensure implementation is secure, effective, and fulfills its purpose.

In order for people to trust technology—for transmitting results, in the use of computerized voting, tools for administering electoral services, etc.—it must undergo a proper design, development, and implementation process.

ESTABLISH TECHNICAL PRODUCTION AND EXECUTION PROCESSES

Establish a development, production, and execution protocol for all IT programs to be implemented in order to prevent and reduce malfunctions and incidents. The protocol should include work methodologies and response or mitigation methods.

AIM FOR GRADUAL IMPLEMENTATION

Consider rolling out technology innovations gradually, based on formal software development accompanied by a rigorous testing and release process for the system. Electoral bodies, parties, and citizens must be prepared for the changes to come.

CONDUCT INTEGRITY AND QUALITY CONTROL TESTING

Take sufficient time to consider the controls needed prior to the production phase and to making it available to users. This includes adequate integrity testing, including quality control, incident analysis, security analysis, network verification, software control, and IT infrastructure analysis.

DEVELOP AN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECURITY PLAN

Any change to electoral management and administration that involves technological challenges gives rise to more vulnerabilities. Therefore a strategic plan for adequate IT security must be developed. This will make it possible to effectively address any incident related to integrity and to the operational quality of the IT services offered to citizens, as well as protect information.

RESPONSIBILITY AND CONTROL OF EXTERNAL SERVICES

Determine the security mechanisms, service levels, and administration requirements for all network services to reach an adequate service level agreement with supplier companies.

PLAN AUDITS

Provide for independent audits and evaluations as part of a formal, announced, and properly scheduled process.



ESTABLISH CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR OPERATIONAL CONTINUITY

Contingency plans give authorities the opportunity to minimize risk of interruption of critical activities or processes. Contingency plans also help ensure activities are quickly restored in the event of an interruption, particularly on election day.

One element to consider in the context of the pandemic is the possibility that the electoral officials working in the electoral body's IT area may end up having to isolate or quarantine themselves. Whether because they have COVID-19, they are infected by the coronavirus, they have symptoms compatible with the illness, or they have been in contact with cases of COVID-19, the disruption this could cause—especially if multiple workers are affected—in a sensitive area of the electoral process must be planned for so the appropriate contingency measures can be taken.



SECURE THE REGISTRIES OF COMPUTER EQUIPMENT


Authorities must guarantee that at each stage where technology is used, a physical or printed record is kept.

ADEQUATELY DETERMINE RESPONSIBILITIES

Adequately determine the responsibilities of everyone involved in planning and executing the tasks at hand, especially where external parties have been contracted and operation levels are not as expected.



3. PROCEDURAL CONSIDERATIONS



Technology implementation must take place in the framework of a process that is transparent, open to citizens, and open to political parties to ensure the main users of the tools or services provided are prepared to use them.

The following measures are important for successfully implementing technology under any circumstances,¹⁴ but should be especially taken into account during a pandemic. It is crucial to remember that the success of the technology will be measured by the credibility and trust they bring to the electoral process and not by the degree of automation or the attractiveness of the tools themselves. Therefore, implementation must be progressive and gradual.

¹⁴ Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO/OAS), "Observing the Use of Electoral Technologies: A Manual for OAS Electoral Observation Missions", 2010, Pg. 29-30. Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/sap/docs/Technology%20English-FINAL-4-27-10.pdf>

HAVE PROCEDURAL REGULATIONS IN PLACE

It is important for the development and implementation of technology to provide manuals or guides for their use and application.

CONSULT WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

The positive effect that a decision to implement a technology solution may have is closely linked to how political actors view that technology and the impact it will have on them in the election process. It is therefore highly advisable that before making a decision, parties are consulted to incorporate their points of view. Implementing a solution in a way that rejects one of the main political actors will reduce trust in the election.

ACCESS TO TESTING AND PILOT RUNS

Political actors, civil society, the media, and others must have access to the testing, pilot runs, and simulations carried out, particularly where the technologies will be used for components that are essential to the process, like electronic voting, the transmission of results, biometric voter authentication, etc.



PROVIDE ADEQUATE TRAINING

All technology requires a training process, both for those responsible for its operation and maintenance and for those using it, such as political parties and voters.

EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION


In order for citizens, political parties, the media, and civil society to be aware of the new technology solutions or tools made available as part of the electoral process, a civic educational campaign is needed on the technology they should be using, along with a communications strategy on the characteristics, objective, use, and expected result of implementation.



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2020

4. SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS



Social realities in the region can vary widely. Some segments of the population have difficulty accessing devices, technology education often falls short, and Internet coverage is limited. This is a variable that should be taken into account when making decisions that could end up excluding a part of the population.

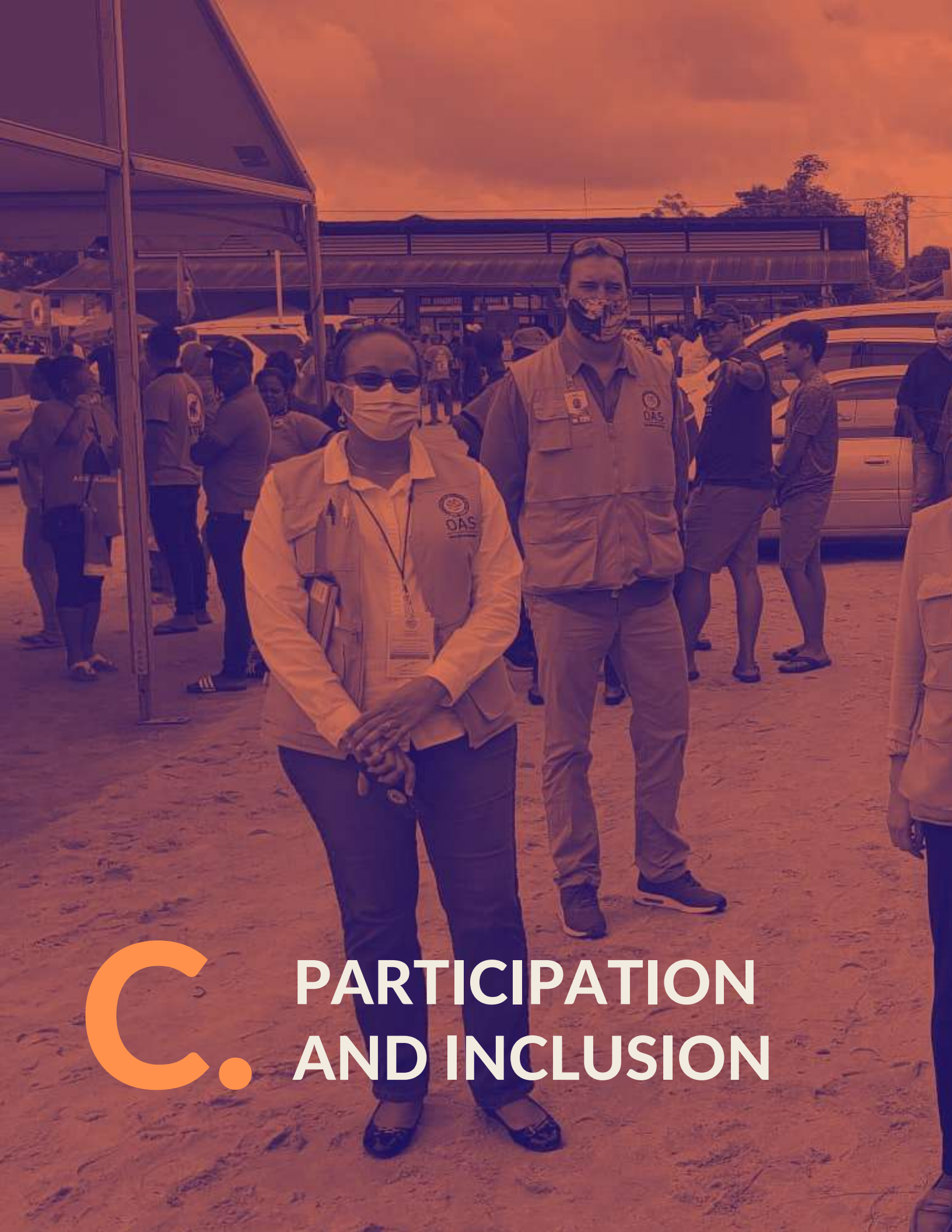
CONSIDER A DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH

Education on technology can vary depending on age, region, training, and other factors. It is therefore important to keep in mind that the technological tools introduced may require differentiated training.

PROVIDE ALTERNATIVES TO CERTAIN TOOLS

Regarding mechanisms for providing information or answering questions through mobile apps or webpages, consider alternatives like call centers for those who cannot access them, or have difficulty doing so.





C.

**PARTICIPATION
AND INCLUSION**



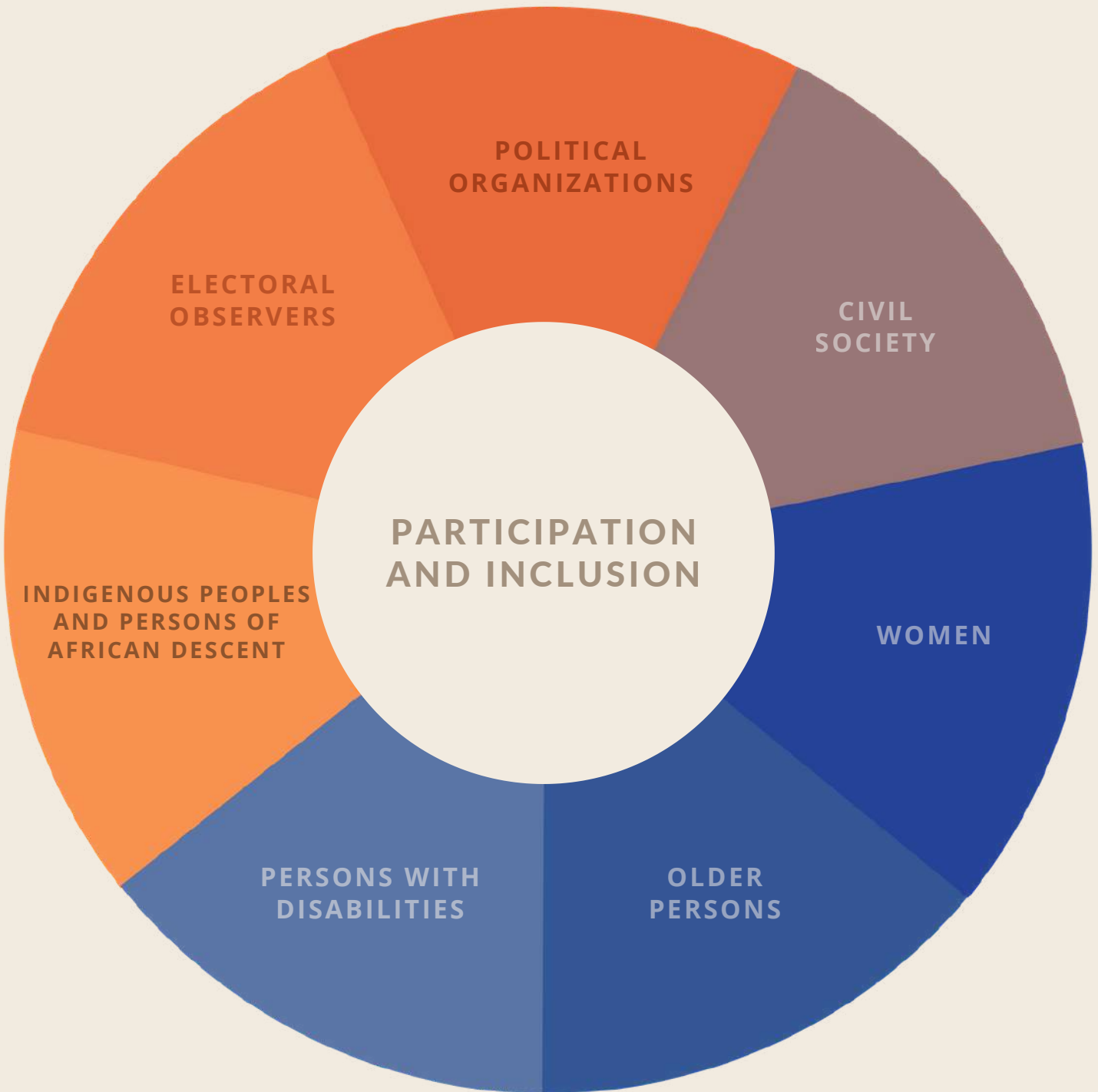
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PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION


Citizen participation and inclusion in elections are fundamental to democracy. Citizens have a right to actively participate at all stages of the electoral process. Their involvement increases trust and transparency in the elections decision-making bodies and can include activities like setting up polling and vote tally stations, as well as other electoral functions.

It is therefore important to adopt measures to ensure that citizens can actively participate—especially minority groups or historically excluded sectors—to guarantee the exercise of their political rights.

In order to contribute to this aim, this chapter will offer recommendations for strengthening electoral authorities' capacity to guarantee spaces for participation by implementing the necessary sanitary measures pursuant to operational procedures recommended by authorities in response to COVID-19.



1. POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS



Political organizations and candidates are the ones who compete for the different offices filled through a popular vote. During the electoral process, they undertake activities to publicize their platforms and ideas to gain the support of voters. They play a key role in the political representation of various interests in each society.

An electoral process must have clear, fair, and equitable rules, especially in the exceptional context of this pandemic. For this reason, dialogue and communication between the electoral authority and the players in the competition must be fostered. Experience and good practices indicate that when political organizations are involved in the various stages of the electoral cycle, greater trust and transparency are achieved, key elements for recognition of the results.

Political organizations also suffer the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has impacted their campaign planning, their interaction with supporters, and the way they conduct their activities and events. It is important to understand the challenges they face and find institutional solutions that offer conditions under which political organizations are able to overcome the obstacles that have emerged with the pandemic.

The conditions for holding free, fair, and transparent elections must be met despite the obstacles arising from the pandemic. Therefore, the electoral body must ensure an equitable competition with equal conditions for all, while political parties must commit to transparency and trust building. Both share the responsibility of protecting people's health.

FOSTER THE PARTICIPATION OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS AT ALL STAGES OF THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

- Strengthen dialogue and communication with political organizations on all matters related to organizing elections and any changes made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Guarantee multi-party participation in the pandemic response strategy. Include the perspectives and proposals of political representatives. One model that could work is a political party consultation committee as a mechanism for incorporating the perspective of political organizations in this context. It could meet regularly in a virtual setting.
- Establish formal channels to equitably provide information to all political stakeholders on the decisions made surrounding the different stages of the electoral process and the measures to be taken to protect public health.
- Encourage the use of technology for holding meetings; produce written communications and audiovisual material to facilitate understanding; and diversify communication strategies to reach all political organizations, both national and regional.
- Publicize the process for selecting political party representatives to observe and monitor the electoral process, especially the technical organizational aspects and electoral technology.
- Recognize the difficulties that political parties are having in carrying out electoral activities as normal, with the aim of finding consensual solutions to the challenges they are facing.



FOSTER REGIONAL AND LOCAL PARTICIPATION

- Involve regional and local party structures in planning the COVID-19 pandemic response measures.
- Strengthen regional and local mechanisms for communication and dialogue. The model of consultative political party commissions or committees could also be beneficial regionally and locally.
- Include regional minority parties and political organizations in the spaces for coordination, dialogue, and decision-making in the framework of the response to the pandemic.

PROVIDE POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS WITH TECHNICAL SUPPORT ON SANITARY ISSUES

Help political organizations by providing technical support on compliance with the sanitary measures ordered for the electoral process. To do this, we recommend providing opportunities to work with health experts.

PROVIDE TRAINING TO PARTY CANDIDATES AND LEADERS


Offer training—preferably virtual—on sanitary measures for regional political leaders and candidates to provide them with accurate information on health risks, the operational procedures at the different stages of the electoral process, the measures taken to protect life and health, and the protocols established for the electoral process in response to the pandemic.

FACILITATE THE PROCESS OF CREDENTIALING PARTY DELEGATES OR OBSERVERS WITH THE RELEVANT ENTITIES

- Allow delegates or observers to be credentialed electronically to prevent them from having to physically visit the offices of the electoral body.
- Consider strategies to distribute the credentials to the organization sufficiently ahead of time in order to adhere to the sanitary measures and policies established.
- Encourage alternative methods for safely delivering credentials to the representatives of political organizations (legal representation, general delegates, voting station delegates, IT representatives, and others).
- Provide informational material on the required sanitary measures to party delegates or observers when delivering their credentials. The representatives of political organizations must be aware of all the preventative sanitary measures that need to be implemented—especially in voting centers—to prevent conflicts on election day.



2. CIVIL SOCIETY



Organized civil society provides a pluralistic perspective that contributes to transparency and trust during the electoral process. Their participation offers an independent perspective during the election thanks to their knowledge and technical experience.

In the context of the pandemic, civil society's perspective and involvement is important during the electoral process, especially considering the ways in which people must change their behavior, the exceptional measures adopted, and the way in which various procedures may be different during the election.

Electoral authorities will benefit from close consultation and collaboration with civil society organizations, who can actively contribute at the different stages of the process of preparing proposals for holding safe elections in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The mobilization of the members of civil society is generally voluntary. One of the greatest challenges is finding effective mitigation strategies that enable organized civil society to continue its work under appropriate conditions.

FOSTER THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

- Strengthen dialogue and communication with civil society organizations to include their participation in the electoral process.
- Share the pandemic response strategy and explore joint efforts to transmit the information to all sectors of society.
- Encourage the use of technology for holding meetings; produce audiovisual material to facilitate understanding; and diversify communications strategies to reach all parts of the country.
- Provide opportunities for civil society organizations to express their concerns and submit proposals to the institutions that decide on which measures to implement for the electoral process.
- Include civil society organizations when planning and evaluating measures that may have an impact on voter participation, especially in more vulnerable sectors and rural areas.
- Include representatives of civil society organizations in activities that are part of the elections process, such as mock election simulation drill, testing, accountability, and meetings that may be of collective interest.
- Promote the processes to accredit civil society representatives' participation at different stages of the process, and also offer accreditation electronically.



FOSTER REGIONAL AND LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

- Involve regional and local civil society organizations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Strengthen regional and local mechanisms for communication and dialogue.

PROMOTE COOPERATION AGREEMENTS

Civil society organizations can play a pivotal role in guaranteeing citizens' exercise of their political rights. We therefore suggest looking to cooperate through specific agreements that contribute to raising awareness around voting, the sanitary measures adopted, and the importance of complying with them. This cooperation could have a differentiated approach by working with organizations focused on women, young people, older adults, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, and others.

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO TRANSMIT INFORMATION ON SANITARY DECISIONS AND MEASURES

Collaborate with civil society organizations to provide information on sanitary decisions and the measures adopted for the electoral process. As with political parties, it is important to offer the civil society organizations involved in the electoral process spaces for dialog with health experts.

PROMOTE TRAINING FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Offer training—preferably virtual—on sanitary measures for civil society organizations and social leaders to provide them with accurate information on health risks, the operational procedures at the different stages of the electoral process, the measures taken to protect life and health, and the protocols established for the electoral process in response to the pandemic.



3. WOMEN ¹⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic emergency is having specific impacts on women and widening existing gender inequalities, both inside homes and outside them, in hospitals, in health centers, in workplaces, and in politics. Because of this, equal participation of women in decision-making and a gender approach must be central elements of mitigation policies.¹⁶

Homes have become the space where everything happens: caregiving, the education of children and adolescents, socializing, and productive work. This has exacerbated the caregiving crisis. The workload associated with caring for and supporting persons has increased, and the response to this must be a collective one. However, the reality is that this load is not distributed equitably. Rather, it falls mainly on women, and it is neither socially nor economically valued.¹⁷

Outside homes, women also make up the largest contingent of those providing care, including in the health sector, in paid domestic labor, and in centers specializing in the care of minors, older adults, and persons with disabilities.

This situation has a differentiated impact on women's health and exposes them to greater risk of infection. Women represent a large proportion of the informal economy in all countries, and the data indicate that the sectors of the economy most adversely affected by measures of social isolation end up significantly impacting women.¹⁸

¹⁵ This chapter incorporates the work published by the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM/OAS) entitled "COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts," as well as the report from the OAS Department of Social Inclusion entitled "Practical Guide to Inclusive and Rights-based Responses to Covid-19 in the Americas," and it complements the technical experience of the Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) of the Organization of American States (OAS).

¹⁶ Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) – "COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts." Available at: <http://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-EN.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

As regards political participation, it is crucial to strengthen the gender approach in order to reduce inequality and promote the political leadership of women at all levels. In addition to men and women citizens having the same opportunities to exercise their right to vote, efforts toward the inclusion of women should be intensified to achieve parity, alternation, and sequentiality in offices filled by nomination, appointment, and popular election, as well as in leadership roles in political organizations.

The barriers to reaching decision-making roles remain very high. Women generally have an easier time reaching secondary positions or positions as alternates on candidate lists. Despite these differences, women are the ones who make up the majority of those working the tables at polling stations on election day.

This chapter looks at some considerations for mitigating the effects of the pandemic during an election process, with a focus on gender, with the aim of reducing historical inequalities in the political participation of women.



GENDER PERSPECTIVE WITH AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

Incorporate a gender perspective using an intersectoral approach with regard to the sanitary measures issued by national and electoral authorities. Effective response to the pandemic must incorporate an approach that takes into account the demands and difficulties facing women wishing to participate in political life, especially in an electoral process.

INCLUDE WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING

Guarantee the equal participation of women in decision-making on measures intended to mitigate the effects of the pandemic during the electoral process. Include women in spaces for organizing and making decisions on the electoral process at all levels throughout the country, including both immediate and long-term solutions.

INCREASE THE PARTICIPATION OF EXPERTS ON GENDER ISSUES

Increase the participation of experts and of women's social organizations to offer an independent, specialized voice that serves as a multiplier of the gender focus of sanitary measures in electoral processes.

PROMOTE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PARTY POLITICS AND THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

Promote initiatives on co-responsibility and equitable distribution of domestic care and workloads so women can participate in party politics in the context of the pandemic. This will also help women to participate in different roles associated with the stages of the electoral cycle.

IMPLEMENT POLICIES OR PROGRAMS AIMED AT PROMOTING THE RIGHT TO VOTE FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Implement policies or programs developed to promote the right to vote from a gender perspective. These measures must be aimed at fostering equitable conditions for registration, access to voting centers, and voting.

Measures also must be promoted to guarantee equal conditions for men and women in receiving identification cards and registering to vote. Data also must be provided that is disaggregated by sex so any inequalities in this area can be analyzed.

PRIORITIZE ACCESS AND VOTING FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

Implement rules on access and priority voting that are specifically designed for pregnant women. Also, although it is not recommended to take children to voting centers, it should be recalled that this may be the only option for a woman to be able to vote, and therefore they must also be given priority access to vote.



ENSURE POLLING STATIONS ARE EQUITABLY INTEGRATED WITH BOTH MEN AND WOMEN

Establish rules aimed at guaranteeing equitable integration of polling station members with both men and women. When most of the polling station members are women, they are at greater risk of infection. Also, allow pregnant women or women with babies to excuse themselves from working at polling stations.

OFFER ALTERNATIVE MEASURES FOR WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Offer alternative voting measures, including special services for women with disabilities (especially deaf and blind women):¹⁹



19 Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), "COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts." Available at: <http://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-EN.pdf>

4. OLDER PERSONS²⁰

According to the information issued by the WHO, older adults represent one of the population groups most likely to develop serious complications associated with COVID-19. Protecting them must therefore be one of the main concerns when adopting measures to protect health.

It should be noted that older persons are not a homogenous group. In addition to age, other vulnerabilities to the virus can also be present: it will not affect people who have all their basic needs met (housing, food, health, education, income, relationships, etc.) the same as those who do not, with the latter being a group that is especially vulnerable within this already at-risk group.²¹

Regarding the political participation of older adults, countries must guarantee the rights to elect and be elected, in safety and on an equal footing. This means adopting the recommendations issued by specialized organizations and prioritizing the protection of the health and lives of those persons most vulnerable to the pandemic.

20 This chapter incorporates the work published by the OAS Department of Social Inclusion entitled "Practical Guide to Inclusive and Rights-based Responses to Covid-19 in the Americas," and it complements the technical experience of the Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) of the Organization of American States (OAS). Available at: http://www.oas.org/es/sadye/publicaciones/GUIDE_ENG.pdf

21 OAS Department of Social Inclusion, "Practical Guide to Inclusive and Rights-based Responses to Covid-19 in the Americas." Available at: http://www.oas.org/es/sadye/publicaciones/GUIDE_ENG.pdf

PROTECTING OLDER ADULTS

Because older persons are a priority group in the context of COVID-19, sufficient technical, financial, and sanitary resources must be made available to guarantee effective implementation of preventative actions in response to the pandemic. This requires precise information for decisions and evaluating sanitary and social risk.

AVOID UNNECESSARILY EXPOSING OLDER ADULTS

Avoid exposing older adults in activities and procedures that are part of the electoral cycle. Should they participate in in-person activities, make sure sanitary measures are strictly applied, including respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene (use of alcohol gel), use of surgical masks, and making sure such activities take place in ventilated spaces.

CONSIDER THE HETEROGENEITY OF THE OLDER ADULT POPULATION

The sanitary measures adopted must take into account the heterogeneity of the older adult population, which includes the indigenous population, persons of African descent, women, and persons with disabilities, as well as urban and rural areas.

CONSIDER BARRIERS IN TECHNOLOGY USE

Consider the barriers that may face older adults in the use of technologies and access to the digital applications used in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, because this is an at-risk population, the measures adopted to protect their health should be communicated through newspapers, radio, and television, not only social media or websites.

TRAIN OFFICIALS TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS

Provide guidelines and information to health teams, social aids, and especially those who serve in any electoral roles on protecting the rights of older persons, with particular emphasis on combating stigma.

SUPERVISE THE EXECUTION OF SANITARY PROTOCOLS TO PROTECT OLDER ADULTS

Supervise execution of sanitary protocols for the elections to ensure they are implemented with a particular focus on protecting the health of older adults, especially those with disabilities or chronic conditions. Because this population is more likely to develop serious complications associated with COVID-19, it is recommended they use surgical masks.



TAKE APPROPRIATE PRECAUTIONS IN PLACES WHERE OLDER ADULTS MAY BE EXPOSED TO THE VIRUS

Take appropriate precautions in long-term or assisted-living residences for older adults—including homes and hospitals—when organizing campaign activities or setting up electoral services for the procedures they must perform.

AVOID DESIGNATING OLDER ADULTS TO WORK POLLING STATION TABLES

Avoid selecting older adults to serve as electoral officials or work polling station tables, as they are at higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19.

AVOID HAVING PEOPLE WHO WORK AT RETIREMENT HOMES OR HOSPITALS PLAY A ROLE IN THE ELECTIONS

When selecting people to work the table at polling stations on election day, whether via lottery, political party nomination, or on a volunteer basis, those who work in retirement homes or hospitals should not be chosen.

PRIORITIZE PUBLICITY CAMPAIGNS THAT FOCUS ON VOTING BY OLDER ADULTS

Implement effective mechanisms for disseminating information on the pandemic and the electoral process that focuses on older adults. In these campaigns, include all the information, programs, and protocols adopted to encourage older adults to vote.

CONSIDER RESERVING A TIMESLOT EXCLUSIVELY FOR OLDER ADULTS TO VOTE

Setting aside a timeslot exclusively for voters over the age of 65 early on in the elections could help reduce this population's exposure to risk of infection. The measures must be accompanied by the effective implementation of sanitary protocols at polling centers and can depend on how widespread the coronavirus is in a particular country.

ESTABLISH PRIORITY VOTING FOR OLDER ADULTS

In addition to establishing an exclusive timeslot, we recommend guidelines that allow priority voting for adults 65 and older. This should include training for electoral officials and those working the polling stations to provide efficient services to the older adult population, with the corresponding priority and sanitary measures.



ESTABLISH GUIDELINES FOR ASSISTED VOTING

Establish guidelines for assisting older persons who are experiencing a loss of autonomy and needing help from electoral officials and those working the polling tables in order to vote.



5. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND PERSONS OF AFRICAN DESCENT ²²

Because of the historical situation of discrimination and social exclusion faced by most of the indigenous population and persons of African descent in the Americas, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on these individuals. Most of the measures adopted by the countries of the region do not have a differentiated approach, nor a perspective that is inclusive, crosscutting, and intersectional.

Also, indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation and first contact need a unique approach. This group is extremely vulnerable in terms of sanitary, demographic, and territorial factors. Transmission of disease is one of the most serious threats to their physical survival, as they do not have immunological defenses against relatively common illnesses, and the spread of an illness can have tragic consequences. Thus, given that COVID-19 is a new and highly transmissible disease, this group will require special care.²³

It is extremely important when implementing measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that States guarantee the principle of equal protection and nondiscrimination, take these population groups into account with their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, and incorporate gender and intersectional approaches.

22 This chapter incorporates the work published by the OAS Department of Social Inclusion entitled "Practical Guide to Inclusive and Rights-based Responses to Covid-19 in the Americas," and it complements the technical experience of the Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) of the Organization of American States (OAS). Available at: http://www.oas.org/es/sadye/publicaciones/GUIDE_ENG.pdf

23 OAS Department of Social Inclusion, "Practical Guide to Inclusive and Rights-based Responses to Covid-19 in the Americas." Available at: http://www.oas.org/es/sadye/publicaciones/GUIDE_ENG.pdf

CROSSCUTTING INCLUSION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

Incorporate a multicultural approach to the indigenous population and persons of African descent in policy discussion spaces and guarantee the principles of equality and inclusion by taking ethnic, cultural, gender, age, and ability diversity into account.²⁴

PROMOTE THE PERSPECTIVES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND PERSONS OF AFRICAN DESCENT WHEN ESTABLISHING SANITARY MEASURES

Promote the intersectoral perspective of indigenous peoples and persons of African descent with regard to the sanitary measures issued by national authorities. Effective responses to the pandemic must address the barriers that these groups face when participating in political processes. Therefore, initiatives aiming to eliminate all forms of discrimination and intolerance should be strengthened.

HAVE DISAGGREGATED INFORMATION AVAILABLE FOR MAKING DECISIONS

Have disaggregated sociocultural and epidemiological information on indigenous peoples and persons of African descent available for supporting decision making prior to the electoral process.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

GUARANTEE THE CONDITIONS FOR ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

Conditions must be guaranteed for persons from indigenous groups and persons of African descent to be able to compete in elections and hold political decision-making offices on an equal footing, especially in the context of COVID-19.

DEVELOP PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE VOTING AND EDUCATE VOTERS THAT ARE TARGETED TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND PERSONS OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Include indigenous populations and persons of African descent in the programs to promote voting and educate voters that were created in response to the pandemic. These programs should make sure they have consent and provide information on procedures for participation in the electoral process.



TAKE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC FACTORS INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN PUBLICIZING HEALTH MEASURES

Adapt the sanitary measures of the electoral process according to the cultural and linguistic characteristics of each population in order to guarantee clear and simple implementation.²⁶ If they cannot obtain information in their languages, they are unlikely to comply with the measures established, thus endangering the health of their communities.

CONSIDER GEOGRAPHIC AND WEATHER CONDITIONS

Guarantee that the sanitary measures established for the electoral process take into consideration the geographic and weather conditions of the locations where indigenous peoples and persons of African descent live in order to ensure implementation.

GUARANTEE THAT PEOPLE ENTERING INDIGENOUS TERRITORY ARE NOT INFECTED WITH COVID-19

Make sure the electoral officials, health personnel, and other State agents entering indigenous territory to prepare for and hold elections are in good health and not carriers of COVID-19.²⁷ In particular, make sure these persons:

- Do not have COVID-19 and/or a coronavirus infection, pursuant to the definition established by national authorities.
- Do not have symptoms compatible with COVID-19.
- Have not had contact with COVID-19 cases, pursuant to the definition established by national authorities.
- Do not belong to groups at higher risk of developing serious complications from a coronavirus infection.

RESPECT THE TRADITIONS, CULTURES, AND COLLECTIVE EXPRESSION OF THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND PERSONS OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Guarantee that sanitary measures intended to protect people's health during the electoral process encourage respect for and recognition of these populations' traditions, cultures, and collective expression of rights.

27 Ibid.


PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE MEASURES ADOPTED AND COORDINATE IMPLEMENTATION

Inform indigenous peoples and persons of African descent of the special measures adopted for the electoral process and coordinate with community authorities to implement the measures on their territory.

PROMOTE SPACES FOR DIALOGUE AND INCLUDE COMMUNITY LEADERS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In view of the rapid spread of the coronavirus and fear of contagion, some communities may restrict the entry of outsiders. Such an action will have an impact on interaction between members of the community and those organizing the electoral process. We recommend promoting spaces for dialogue and including community leaders in the decision-making process and the organization of the election in order to find solutions that incorporate the perspectives of these communities.

6. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES²⁸



In the current context resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the population of people with disabilities is one of the most forgotten, especially in the absence of accessibility mechanisms that reduce the day-to-day barriers already facing them, which could make prevention and care measures in response to the pandemic more effective.

For some people, their inability to move their extremities prevents them from washing their hands by themselves or reaching the faucet or hand sanitizer. Some people need to touch surfaces in order to receive information about their environment and move about. Others use their hands to travel through physical space. All are at high risk of infection, and for them, it is impossible to follow the recommendations of national authorities to the letter. Even the instructions on how to wash one's hands correctly are often inaccessible to people with visual disabilities.²⁹

Electoral services must be offered to all citizens, with the aim of eliminating the barriers that make the full, effective, and active participation of persons with disabilities in elections difficult. States have a responsibility to guarantee this group's ability to vote and, in view of the context of the pandemic, a responsibility to expand efforts to protect the health and lives of persons with disabilities so they can participate in political life.

The following measures aim to strengthen the institutional capacities of electoral authorities to fully include the participation of persons with disabilities and minimize the risks of them contracting COVID-19.

²⁸ This chapter incorporates the work published by the OAS Department of Social Inclusion entitled "Practical Guide to Inclusive and Rights-based Responses to Covid-19 in the Americas," and it complements the technical experience of the Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO) of the Organization of American States (OAS).

²⁹ A Guide to Political Action to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic. Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy (SSD), Department of Sustainable Democracy and Special Missions. Organization of American States.

INCORPORATE A CROSSCUTTING FOCUS THAT IS INCLUSIVE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Incorporate a focus on people with disabilities in the comprehensive planning of elections, including procedures and facilities to protect their rights.

Establish spaces for dialogue with organizations and institutions that support people with disabilities to promote operational solutions and collective efforts to protect the right to vote and address the obstacles caused by the pandemic.

PROMOTE PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

Provide spaces for the participation of persons with disabilities in electoral campaigns by using a variety of communications methods and encouraging public discussion. The aim is not only to guarantee their participation and protect their rights but also to create spaces for building more inclusive societies.

CARRY OUT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AIMED AT PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Carry out communication strategies in language and formats that are understandable and accessible to the population on the election, the campaign, and the measures to minimize the chance of infection with the coronavirus. Include experts, interpreters, and support to ensure these services are effective.

INCORPORATE SIGN LANGUAGE AND SUBTITLES INTO THE ELECTORAL BODY'S COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Include sign language interpretation and subtitles for persons with hearing disabilities throughout the communication strategy, following the standards recommended as good practices in this area. It is particularly important that the sanitary measures for this electoral process be properly communicated to the entire population.

PROVIDE SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION IN VIDEO CALLS AND ACTIVITIES THAT ARE CENTRAL TO THE PROCESS

Foster the inclusion of simultaneous sign language interpretation during video call and virtual sessions, as well as during activities central to the electoral process.

DEVELOP MATERIALS WRITTEN IN BRAILLE AND WITH AUDIO SUPPORT

Provide materials in braille and expand access to information using radio signals and audio materials for electronic devices. Persons with disabilities should be guaranteed access to information on sanitary measures and should be aware of the procedures in place to guarantee the right and ability to vote.



IMPLEMENT PROTOCOLS FOR VOTING BY PERSONS WITH VISUAL DISABILITIES

Special protocols must be established for voting by persons with visual difficulties, and in this current context, they must include special measures for preventing contagion. Volunteers are needed who, with the appropriate personal protective equipment, guide persons to their corresponding voting tables and booths.

SET GUIDELINES FOR PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Establish guidelines for providing special support to other persons with disabilities who need help from electoral officials and those working the polling tables in order to vote.

CONSIDER THOSE WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

Take into consideration people with multiple disabilities who depend on personal support to access information, such as deaf-blind persons and deaf persons with other disabilities. In the former case, tactile signing interpreters are needed, and hygiene and care measures must be redoubled for this type of assistance.

ESTABLISH OPERATIONAL MEASURES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The electoral body should plan for inclusive measures to ensure voting centers have the materials, signage, information, and facilities with adequate access for persons with mobility disabilities.

AVOID UNNECESSARY EXPOSURE


Avoid unnecessarily exposing persons with disabilities who have a difficult time following the recommendations issued by the WHO when involving them in the activities or procedures of the electoral cycle.

PRIORITIZE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES WHEN DELIVERING HYGIENE AND PROTECTION MATERIALS

Prioritize persons with disabilities in the delivery of materials for hand hygiene, given that they will need them more frequently because in some cases, they use their hands for mobility and to interact with their environment.



7. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ELECTORAL OBSERVERS



National and international electoral observers play an important role in the process of building democracy. Through a series of actions and activities carried out by a group of organized citizens, they participate in the different stages of the electoral cycle to observe the process as it plays out.

Using a variety of observation methodologies, they issue findings and recommendations for improving electoral processes. Among other things, this activity involves monitoring a series of elements of the electoral process, including the legal framework governing the election, the equity of the process, the campaign finance model, gender equity, transparency in the election's administration, how the polling stations are operated, the vote count and tally, the use of technology, and other elements.

Given the characteristics of this activity, which entails interacting at different points in the electoral cycle with electoral officials, political party representatives, the media, government authorities, civil society representatives, voters, and others, sanitary provisions must be implemented so the observation work can be performed safely and to reduce the chances of infection from coronavirus.

The COVID-19 pandemic should not prevent elections observation, but it does require that safeguards be implemented in the way it is performed. All segments of society must be included to enhance trust and transparency. It is therefore crucial to encourage cooperation, openness, and strengthening operational procedures to ensure the electoral observation work can be carried out.

The OAS was the first organization on the continent to deploy an Electoral Observation Mission during the pandemic. Based on the technical knowledge and experience gained from that deployment, the following measures are recommended for reducing the likelihood of transmitting the coronavirus.

ESTABLISH A PROTOCOL FOR ELECTORAL OBSERVERS

Establish a protocol with sanitary procedures and provisions that electoral observers must follow at all points in the electoral cycle and throughout the country.

PROMOTE COOPERATION WITH HEALTH INSTITUTIONS

Promote as much cooperation as possible between health institutions and electoral observation organizations in order to obtain the necessary personal protection units.

AVOID RECRUITING FROM THE POPULATION AT RISK OF DEVELOPING SERIOUS ILLNESS

Avoid recruiting observers, drivers, or officials older than 65 and/or with pre-existing illnesses who are at risk of developing serious complications should they contract COVID-19.



ENCOURAGE REGISTRATION AND CREDENTIAL DELIVERY THROUGH A VIRTUAL PLATFORM

Encourage electoral observer registration and delivery of credentials digitally in order to reduce the presence of people in accreditation offices.

OFFER VIRTUAL TRAINING OR, WHERE NOT POSSIBLE, IN-PERSON TRAINING THAT FOLLOWS SANITARY PROVISIONS

Encourage virtual training sessions for election observers to prevent crowding in enclosed spaces. To do so, we suggest creating digital training materials.

When in-person training is necessary, take the necessary sanitary precautions, especially physical distancing, respiratory hygiene, ventilated spaces, and use of surgical masks.

PROVIDE OBSERVERS WITH EPIDEMIOLOGICAL INFORMATION ON THE COUNTRY

Provide information on the COVID-19 situation in different areas of the country.

PROVIDE OBSERVERS WITH SANITARY KITS

Provide electoral observers with a kit containing sanitary products including surgical masks, alcohol gel, disinfectant wipes, etc.

ENCOURAGE VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Encourage some of the work meetings held with those involved in the process to be carried out virtually, through digital platforms, to avoid physical contact between persons.

AVOID UNNECESSARY TRAVEL

Avoid unnecessary travel in parts of the country with community transmission, as reported by health authorities.



PROVIDE ADEQUATE SPACES FOR OBSERVERS TO BE PRESENT

Identify adequate spaces within voting centers where electoral observers can observe the vote while respecting physical distancing rules and the secrecy of the ballot.

ADD THE COVID-19 RESPONSE TO THE OBSERVATION METHODOLOGY

Incorporate aspects of the elections related to COVID-19 into the electoral observation methodologies so as to provide an independent perspective on the electoral strategy for responding to the pandemic so recommendations can be made for future processes.



WE DON'T STOP WHEN WE'RE TIRED
WE WORK TILL WE'RE DONE

OAS

OAS

WPS
TOURIST

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OEA Organismo Electoral
Peruano
Instituto de Observación Electoral

D.



ELECTORAL
CAMPAIGNS



OAS

More rights
for more people

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

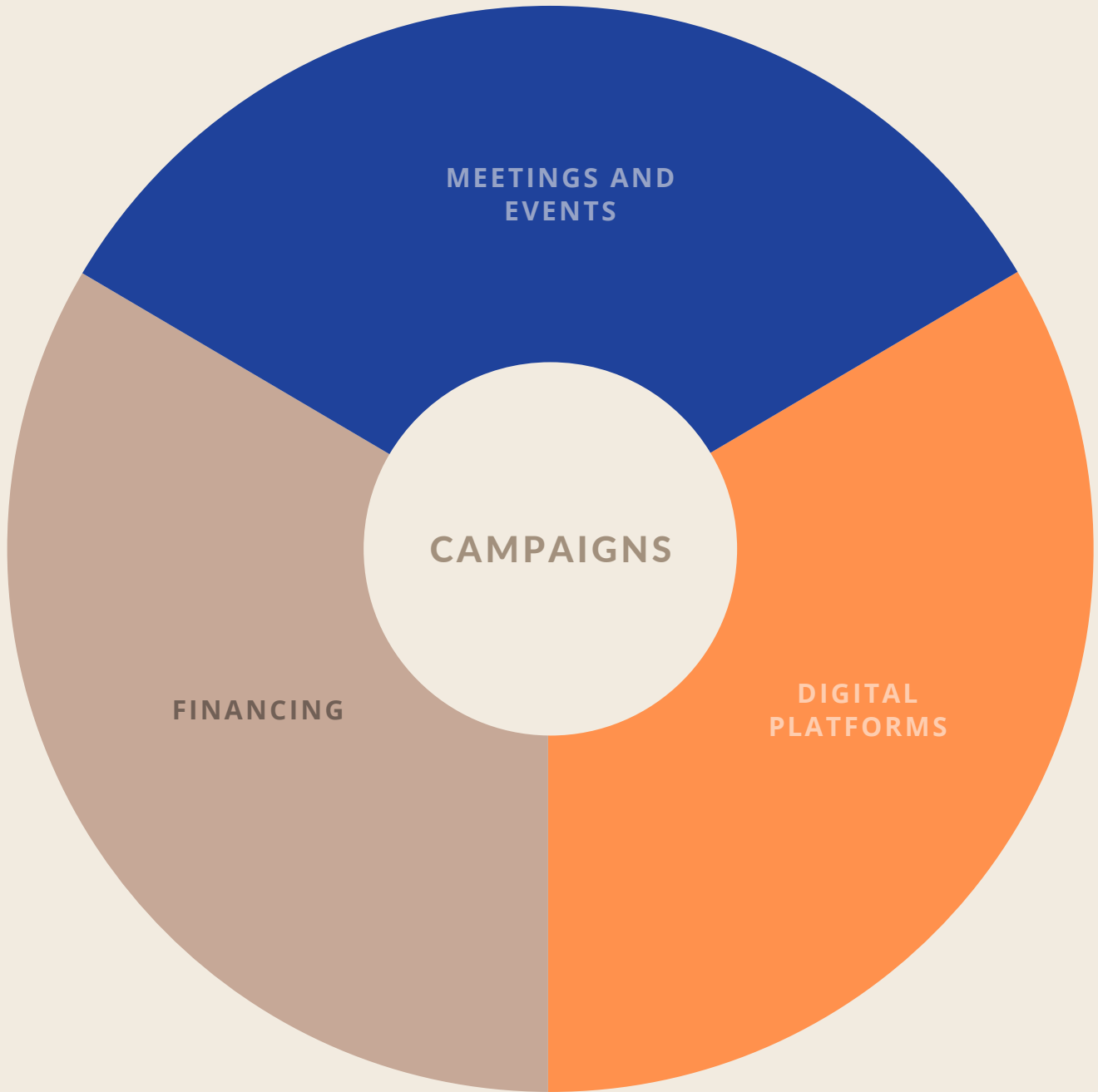
Electoral campaigns are central to political participation and to the functioning of a democracy. Through them, political parties seek to inform the public about their candidates, publicize their proposals or platforms, compare their ideas with those of their opponents, and convince citizens to vote for them.

The sanitary measures intended to mitigate and prevent the spread of the coronavirus will have an impact on standard campaign events, such as meetings, rallies, canvassing, etc. However, countries should guarantee that elections are competitive and materially reflect the right to elect and be elected.

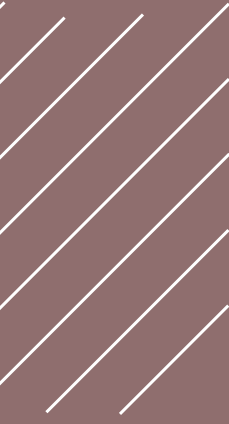
The context of the pandemic will require exploring other electoral campaign modalities aimed at different population profiles. Given the sanitary regulations, activities with less crowding of people should be considered to prioritize the health and life of voters.

At the same time, this is a crucial moment for encouraging the use of technology, which has made it possible to reach a greater number of people at a lower cost. The development of platforms and audiovisual content should be encouraged so political organizations can transmit their messages and proposals through them. Additionally, even in this unprecedented context, campaign finance systems should not be ignored.

This chapter of the guide offers recommendations and actions to promote electoral campaign modalities and methods for conducting in-person activities with the sanitary conditions ordered by health authorities. It also provides recommendations on incentivizing the use of technology to offer alternatives for disseminating the ideas and proposals of political actors. These COVID-19 response measures will provide the right conditions for reducing the chances of infection. Additionally, a special section will be dedicated to campaign-finance, with emphasis on fostering actions to ensure the election is equitable and transparent.



1. MEETINGS AND EVENTS



Political meetings have traditionally provided a space for citizens and leaders to interact and discuss the ideas and proposals at issue in the elections, a dynamic that is common in the region's political culture.

To continue holding in-person events and meetings during electoral campaigns, the following recommendations should be considered to reduce the chance of transmitting the coronavirus between participants and to provide conditions that guarantee supporters can safely attend in-person political activities.

A commitment from political organizations is crucial for complying with the provisions issued by health authorities. Response to the pandemic requires the collective action, willingness, and commitment of political leaders to raise the awareness necessary among their followers.

DESIGN PROTOCOL FOR IN-PERSON CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

Establish a protocol for election campaign activities for political parties, informing them of the sanitary provisions needed to hold such events.

Encourage the actions needed to ensure rigorous compliance with the sanitary measures established in the protocol.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL FOR POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

Prepare educational and informational materials to be disseminated to citizens involved in political activities and to the general public to precisely communicate the sanitary measures necessary to participate in events and meetings.

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES PER MEETING

Consider limiting the number of attendees at in-person events and meetings—pursuant to national pandemic response provisions—in both closed and open spaces.

Discourage high-risk individuals from attending in-person events, including older adults or people with underlying conditions.



CONSIDER THE INFRASTRUCTURE AT EVENTS OR MEETINGS

Promote respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette: Also, try to hold activities outside or in spaces with good ventilation.

When holding activities in enclosed spaces, have ample physical space available, with proper signage to ensure that people comply with physical distancing rules.

This should include civil protection signs, warnings, and markings to clearly inform people on how to move about and what measures to take within the event space.

IMPLEMENT SANITARY MEASURES FOR THOSE ATTENDING EVENTS OR MEETINGS

Require facemasks at in-person campaign events and meetings.

Consider having extra supplies (alcohol gel, facemasks) for people who come to the events without sanitary supplies. Have alcohol gel available at the entrance of campaign events. Encourage hygiene in the form of handwashing before and after attending campaign events.

Identify which surfaces people will be heavily in contact with to disinfect them ahead of time (common areas, door handles, windows, light switches, toilets, faucets, computers, keyboards, audio equipment, microphones, and writing implements).

ADOPT OTHER PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Reduce the amount of physical material passed among attendees (papers, writing implements, microphones, brochures, etc.) to prevent potential surface contamination with coronavirus and subsequent spread.

For social meetings that include food and drink, remember the sanitary requirements regarding physical distancing and keep attendees from coming into contact with materials passed among them (flatware, trays, glasses, bottles, etc.).

FOLLOW SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES DURING IN-PERSON DEBATES

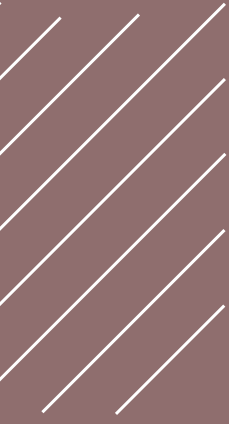
If it is possible to hold in-person debates, we recommend limiting public attendance to prevent crowding and comply with physical distancing measures.

LIMIT SHARING TRANSPORTATION

Avoid using shared vehicles to transport supporters, especially buses or other similar means of transportation that group multiple people in tight spaces. Although such means of transportation are used traditionally, they do not allow for compliance with physical distancing recommendations.



2. USE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS



In recent years, traditional ways of campaigning have mixed with modern methods that involve the use of technology and social networks. During the pandemic, technology has become an important instrument for disseminating ideas through digital platforms (websites, apps, virtual communities, etc.) without requiring supporters to expose themselves to the risk of becoming infected with the coronavirus.

It is therefore important to improve access to technology, strengthen the capacity to benefit from its use, and produce good practices so political parties and their candidates can participate on an equal footing.

ESTABLISH AN ONLINE PORTAL FOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

Have the electoral body build a web platform offering information on political parties, candidates, platforms, etc. Using preestablished criteria, political parties can be asked to send information and multimedia content. This will make it possible to inform voters on those competing in the elections. We suggest publicizing this initiative through the institutional channels of the electoral authority.

OFFER DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL CONTENT ON THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

In the same spirit as the previous recommendation, encourage the use of technology for developing content with key information on the electoral process, making it available through the electoral body's website and its social media presence: polling stations, the voting procedure, electoral regulations, key deadlines in the process, statistics on the electoral roll, etc.

This information should especially include audiovisual materials to communicate sanitary measures to voters. It should be easy to use so that political players can share it with their supporters.



PROMOTE ONLINE DEBATES

Promote virtual/online debates between candidates. The debate should follow rules set beforehand and promote the dissemination of ideas and proposals under conditions that are not discriminatory, that are equitable, and that are transparent.

This can be done through video streaming platforms, and the debates can then be re-broadcast on radio and TV. Thematic debates may be a good thing to consider.

ENCOURAGE THE RESPONSIBLE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS TO COMBAT VIOLENCE, DISCRIMINATION, AND ABUSE

The pandemic will further increase the use of technology and social networks. We recommend encouraging actions within the applicable regulatory framework to provide education through these platforms on using technology responsibly to combat violence, discrimination, and abuse during the campaign.

Conditions should be established to promote the responsible use of technology as a valuable instrument in a democracy.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Promote digital tools and platforms as plural methods of communication so ideas can be disseminated inclusively to people who have a difficult time accessing technology or are illiterate, disabled, older adults, or belong to other such groups.

PROMOTING VIRTUAL MULTI-SECTORAL DIALOGUE

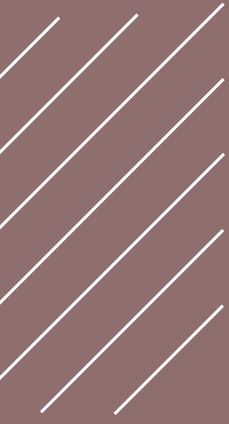
Promote meetings or events with other actors via virtual platforms, including social, academic, business, and activist organizations, to enhance efforts at raising collective awareness on measures to protect health and life during the electoral process.

PROVIDE MECHANISMS FOR FILING ALLEGATIONS AND COMPLAINTS

We suggest providing spaces for citizen feedback, whether digitally or by other means, so they can submit allegations or complaints regarding the electoral process.



3. CAMPAIGN FINANCE



The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an enormous social and economic upheaval as a result of the measures taken to stop its spread. States have prioritized resources for addressing the emergency, easing the economic effects, and financing social aid programs. In some cases, this has already led to cuts in public funding for political activity.³⁰

Electoral financing is essential for party operations and their efforts to obtain political office. However, in the current context, these financing systems must be equitable and transparent. Therefore, measures taken in response to the pandemic must not produce inequity in the election or reduce transparency on how funding is used.

At the same time, citizens expect campaigns to manage public resources transparently, with oversight and accountability mechanisms. Stricter controls are needed on the use of special public resources for national emergencies in order to prevent political opportunism in the context of elections.

30 The Potential Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Political Finance Systems, Insights from Recent Public Funding Reforms, International IDEA Technical Paper 3/2020. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/potential-impact-covid-19-pandemic-political-finance-systems.pdf>

RESPECT LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES WHEN AMENDING CAMPAIGN RULES

Changes made to the rules regulating electoral processes must always comply with constitutional, legal, and administrative procedural requirements, and we reiterate the importance of complying with this practice when changing campaign finance regulations. Any changes in this area must be the result of formal deliberation, discussion, and approval, rather than based on states of exception using mechanisms not provided for in legislation.

CAP CAMPAIGN SPENDING

In the context resulting from the pandemic, consider provisions to reduce the cost of political campaigns, especially in countries that do not cap spending. Alternatively, countries could explore shortening campaigns where they tend to be extremely long.



PROTECT ELECTION EQUITY

Respect for the principle of equity in the election must be guaranteed on an equal footing. In view of the current exceptional circumstances, any changes made to laws regulating campaign finance should consider increases to public financing and restrictions on private financing, which are among the most important elements for contributing to equity in campaign finance systems.³¹

Reducing the former could lead to a search for private funding and throw the contest out of balance, in which case it is important to use limits and bans to foster equity, including: banning anonymous donations, foreign donations, donations from contractors and concessionaires, donations from the media, and capping individual donations. Restricting public financing can also cause an influx of money from illicit origins.³²

31 Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (DECO/OAS) "Observing Political-Electoral Financing Systems: A Manual for OAS Electoral Observation Missions." 2012. Available at:

http://www.oas.org/es/sadye/publicaciones/GUIDE_ENG.pdf

32 Ibid.

CONTROL THE IMPROPER USE OF PUBLIC RESOURCES

Another element important for protecting equity is banning the improper use of public resources. This ban is particularly important in the context of this emergency. The extraordinary spending and measures used to mitigate the economic and social impacts of the pandemic may have a propensity to be used for political purposes. Therefore, steps should be taken to ensure the social benefits granted are not used for campaigning during the election.

This is especially relevant if cuts have also been made to public campaign financing, as those in power could unfairly benefit from the public resources they manage. Such political opportunism arising from this emergency should therefore be prevented.

RESTRICT STATE ADVERTISING DURING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS TO PUBLICIZING HEALTH AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

State advertising on the emergency during an electoral process must be aimed at providing information on sanitary measures and on criteria and procedures for accessing the social benefits that have been made available. Advertising should not be used to praise achievements in these areas or for electoral purposes.



PROMOTE INDIRECT FINANCING MECHANISMS

Because restrictions on mobility and on holding events in public places affects how campaigns are traditionally run, we suggest offering indirect financing mechanisms to provide parties with access to radio and television ad time.

CONSIDER PROVIDING FINANCING FOR SANITARY SUPPLIES

Explore the possibility of allocating public resources to funding the sanitary kits used during political parties' campaigns.

ENHANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

This is an opportunity to strengthen accountability mechanisms by offering digital platforms—which already exist in several countries—so political parties can do their reporting online. This way, in addition to the audit and oversight bodies or offices, the general population and the media can also access this information. Such public scrutiny improves the transparency of the process. Online reporting would also contribute to reducing infections, as it would no longer be necessary to physically go to an office.

INTERACTING AND COMMUNICATING WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

Provide a space for dialogue between electoral authorities and political parties to exchange perspectives on how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting campaigns. It is important to understand the difficulties political parties may face when campaigning in this context and to eventually find solutions to mitigate them.





E.

COMMUNICATION



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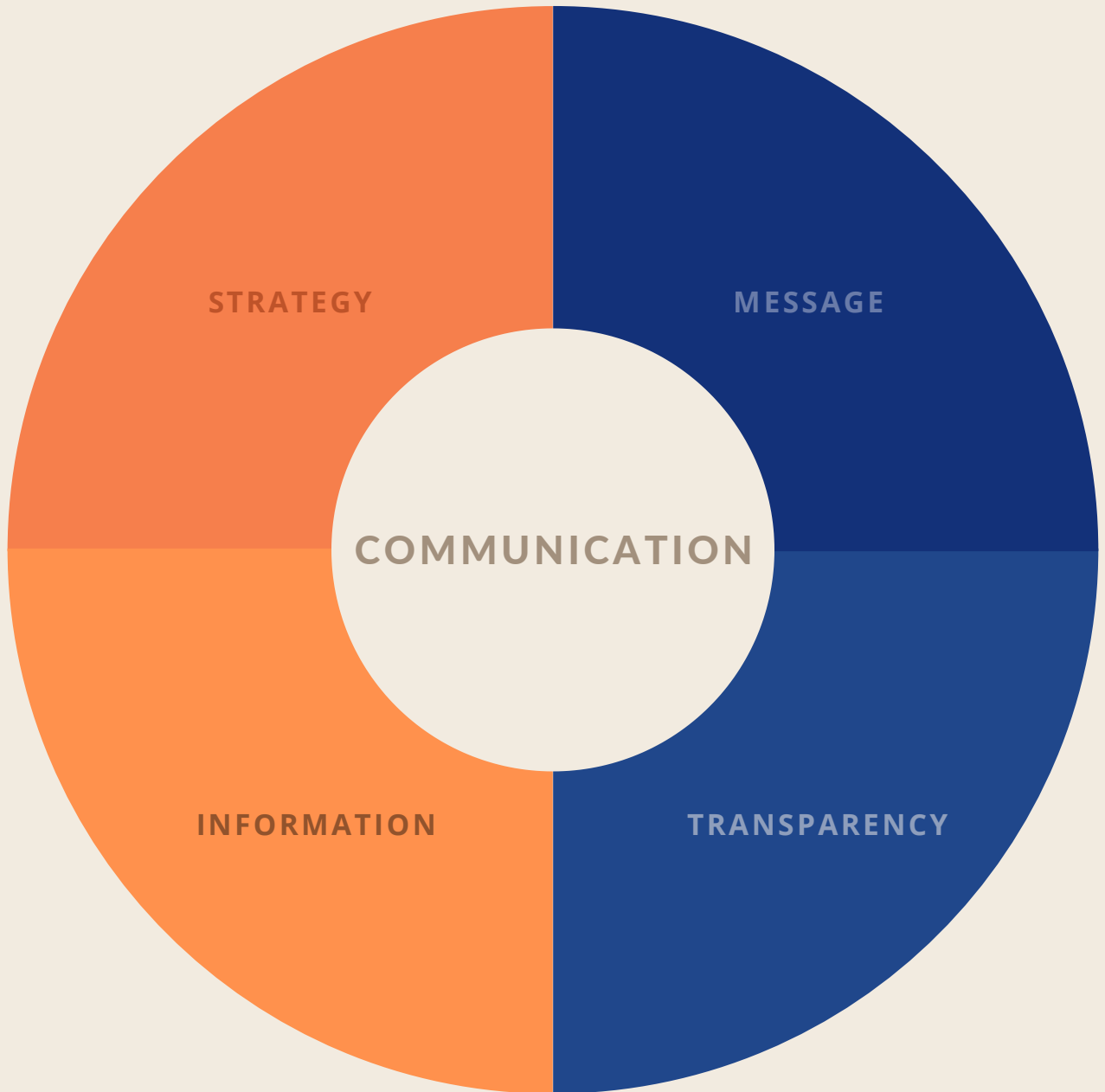
COMMUNICATION

Electoral bodies must be sure to strictly follow the principles of certainty, impartiality, independence, equity, legality, objectivity, and maximum publicity. Pursuant to this, institutional communication is crucial for all electoral bodies.


The COVID-19 pandemic poses particular challenges for electoral authorities. It is not enough to take measures to prevent and reduce the risk of contagion during the electoral process and make decisions on how to conduct the process in this context: electoral bodies must also properly communicate these measures and decisions.

In this context, we offer the following recommendations, adapted from the PAHO publication “Guidelines for communicating about coronavirus disease 2019: A guide for leaders”³³ and the literature consulted on this subject.

33 Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), “Guidelines for communicating about coronavirus disease 2019: A guide for leaders.” Available at: <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/covid-19-guidelines-communicating-about-coronavirus-disease-2019-guide-leaders>



1. INTEGRATED RISK AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY



Both administrative and jurisdictional authorities should have integrated communication strategies that are ongoing, open, and transparent to keep citizens, political parties, candidates, the media, and other interested parties informed throughout the electoral cycle.

The current context also requires any existing communication strategy to be integrated with risk management. Regarding this, Riorda notes that risk communication "does not mean shutting down processes" but rather "prevention, raising awareness, changing habits or behaviors" and that it "works through integrated actions aimed at reducing vulnerability: policies, strategies, instruments, and measures, deployed in either preparation or post-impact."³⁴

Along these lines, the "Guide for leaders" published by PAHO emphasizes that risk communication departs from other strategies in that it depends on speed and trust to be effective. "At times of crisis, leaders are called on to provide a quick, sensitive and trustworthy response. The public wants to know what you know, what you are doing about it and what they can or should do."³⁵

It is important to understand that the context of an emergency and its effects pose risks for an electoral process. While the sanitary measures issued by national authorities are intended to control the spread of the coronavirus, they inevitably impact electoral rights like freedom of movement, assembly, and even expression. If these restrictions are not communicated and addressed, they can impact citizens' trust at any stage of the electoral process.

34 Riorda, Mario. "Antes de comunicar el riesgo o la crisis: hay que diferenciarlos." Más Poder Local. Number 41 (pgs. 20-23), 2020. Available at: <http://maspoderlocal.es/files/revistas/comunicacion-politica-covid-19-impl41.pdf>

35 Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). "Guidelines for communicating about coronavirus disease 2019: A guide for leaders", 2020. Available at: <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/covid-19-guidelines-communicating-about-coronavirus-disease-2019-guide-leaders>

Just as messaging without content or action does not produce citizen trust, the implementation of measures to protect the health of the electorate will not, as excellent as they may be, have the desired impact if they are not communicated. The key is understanding that "communication is part of the strategy, and poor communication can cause the entire strategy to fail."³⁶

Although a whole series of elements must be taken into account when forming an institutional communications strategy, this chapter specifically looks at aspects involving the communication of measures and considerations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic—that is, having to do with safety and protecting the health of all actors participating at the different stages of the electoral process.



36 Riorda, Mario. "State capacity to communicate crisis and risk", 2020.

ESTABLISH A COMMUNICATIONS WORKGROUP

Consider forming a "workgroup" (or other similar structure with a clear chain of command) made up of officials in charge of the key stages of the electoral process to "collaborate closely with the decision-making structure to inform its measures and adjust the communication strategy accordingly."³⁷

INCORPORATE A VARIETY OF MEDIA

From the start, incorporate traditional national and regional media outlets (radio, television, and print newspapers) as well as social networks and virtual communities. Do not pass up any communications method and make sure to establish relationships with all media.

CONTINGENCY BUDGET

In a context in which the crisis has already come to pass and the risks are "effective and specific,"³⁸ it is crucial for the institutional communications budget to provide for contingencies. This will make the resources needed available for mass dissemination of relevant information on protecting the health of the electorate.

37 International IDEA - Bicu, Ingrid. Communication guidelines for electoral management bodies (EMBs) during COVID-19 crisis, 2020. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/es/news-media/news/es/pautas-de-comunicaci%C3%B3n-para-los-organismos-de-gesti%C3%B3n-electoral-oge-durante-la>

38 Riorda, Mario. "Antes de comunicar el riesgo o la crisis: hay que diferenciarlos." Más Poder Local. Number 41 (pgs. 20-23), 2020.

COMMUNICATE AS AN INSTITUTIONAL UNIT

It is natural for differing voices to exist when going through the process of making decisions. But it is important for electoral authorities to consolidate the diversity of opinions and internal debate into an institutional message from members once decisions have been adopted. That is, once a collegial body has adopted a decision, its members should avoid releasing individual messages or differing personal opinions, as doing so generates confusion, impacts the certainty of the process, and reduces actors' trust in the authority and in the electoral process.

IDENTIFY THE AUDIENCE AND AIM TO TARGET EACH GROUP

During the electoral process, the electoral body must communicate different measures that affect each sector differently. This requires adapting not only the message but also the language and the channels through which it is communicated. For example, PAHO has underscored that young people “only follow communications they perceive as genuine.” It is also recommended to look into the beliefs of a community and incorporate them into the messages and actions, while avoiding technical jargon. Authorities should aspire “to be very pedagogical, accessible to the entire population.”³⁹

³⁹ Zuban, Paola. Interview in LaTecla Info, 2020. Available at: <https://www.latecla.info/5/110965-comunicacin-en-pandemia>

COORDINATE WITH KEY INSTITUTIONS

Communicate clearly that the measures adopted by the electoral body are in line with the provisions and recommendations issued by health authorities and by other institutions involved in responding to the health crisis, and that interagency coordination is taking place. In this context, the responsibilities that fall to the electoral institution should be clearly established.⁴⁰



⁴⁰ For example, tracking and tracing infected individuals who have visited a voting center may require information from the electoral authority, but the responsibility for this type of work falls to other institutions.

2. MESSAGE

As mentioned previously, a risk management strategy objective will include changing citizen behavior to establish a new "normal." In the electoral context, this first requires for citizens to understand the specific actions expected of them during the different stages of the electoral process, including on election day, and their personal decision to accept them, comply with them, and support them. PAHO notes that in the context of the pandemic, messages must be "clear, honest, concise, and coherent."⁴¹

⁴¹ Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), "Guidelines for communicating about coronavirus disease 2019: A guide for leaders." Available at: <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/covid-19-guidelines-communicating-about-coronavirus-disease-2019-guide-leaders>

RECOGNIZE UNCERTAINTY

Take into account that the pandemic produces worries and uncertainty, not only with regard to its impact on health but also regarding holding elections and impact on democracy.

The electoral authority must accept this situation of citizen uncertainty and address these concerns directly and transparently. For example, it could acknowledge that the pandemic could make it difficult for certain traditionally vulnerable electoral groups to participate: women, persons with disabilities, older adults, indigenous peoples, and others.

We recommend against avoiding the subject or claiming that the institution has the situation under control. Rather, electoral authorities should communicate what it is doing to reduce the risk of each population group and its efforts to guarantee citizens' political and electoral participation. It should be assumed that the health crisis could lead to lower turnout than in previous elections and that this response from citizens who may be afraid is understandable.



ACKNOWLEDGE MISTAKES

Carrying out an electoral process during the pandemic will require numerous adjustments. In some cases, the electoral authority will have to revise its established protocols and conditions upon identifying new risks or challenges.

Be aware that it is possible to make mistakes, and when that happens, they must be acknowledged. When mistakes do happen, they should be corrected quickly, and the reasons for reversing a decision made previously must be communicated. Make sure citizens understand that the electoral body's work is also being conducted in a context of uncertainty. It should seek to gain the trust of all actors by operating with transparency and not hiding information, even information about errors the institution has committed.



BE THE FIRST TO PROVIDE INFORMATION

An electoral process has numerous stages that can be affected differently depending on the level of risk. In cases in which a stage involving other actors must be suspended or changed, such as candidate registration, the electoral body must be the first to provide this information to those who may be affected and to citizens in general. Do not wait until rumors have started to make this public.

COMMUNICATE BY SETTING AN EXAMPLE


Remember that actions communicate as much as or more than words. It is important for actions to be consistent. Make sure all electoral authorities strictly follow all the measures and recommendations set forth by health authorities, in both their professional and personal lives.

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Depending on the country's epidemiological situation, the electoral body may have to make different types of decisions, including possibly suspending the election or setting a new date for the vote. The institution may not have all the answers when asked for this information.

In these cases, we advise communicating the real status of the situation and giving citizens a date by which a decision is expected to be made. Expectations should be set and updates should constantly be given on potential developments to prevent speculation.

3. TRANSPARENCY



Trust-building is among the central objectives of any communication strategy. “For citizens to have confidence in political institutions, they must perceive them to operate in ways that are free of bias and irregularities.”⁴² The general perception of the institution's work surely depends on the legality of the actions of its officials. But a significant portion also depends on electoral authorities’ commitment to transparency and inclusion in decision-making, as well as accountability.

It is worthwhile to reflect on expectations and how transparency should be understood in the context of a pandemic. María José Canel notes that in a crisis like this one, “the idea is not to just dump all the information, as it will overwhelm the reader. Also, some people will not know how to interpret it.” In this context, the expert recommends understanding transparency as the capacity to “provide access to information in such a way that people can understand the situation.”⁴³

42 Zechmeister, Elizabeth J., and Noam Lupu (Eds.), “The Pulse of Democracy”. Nashville, TN: LAPOP. 2019. Available at: https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2018/2018-19_AmericasBarometer_Regional_Report_10.13.19.pdf

43 Canel, María José. Webinar: “El futuro del branding gubernamental post COVID-19.” Universidad Austral. 2020. Available at: <https://www.austral.edu.ar/posgrados-comunicacion/contenidos/los-desafios-del-branding-gubernamental-post-covid-19/>

EXPAND TRANSPARENCY MEASURES

Given the possibility of less participation from national and international observers and political party representatives—as it would cause crowding—consider expanding transparency tools. For example, one way to promote operations oversight at the different stages of the process is to livestream activities through different channels. Especially consider doing this at moments when the absence of representatives from different actors may cause heightened political tension, such as at vote tallies and recounts. It is important to constantly be communicating the existence of these citizen oversight tools.

INVOLVE ALL ACTORS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

During elections, a well-known good practice is to maintain open, ongoing, and close dialogue with political organizations. All the actors in the process have a right to information on matters that may affect how they exercise their political and electoral rights. Working tables must therefore be set up to identify the concerns of each sector and agree on measures to mitigate the risk. Implementation of these measures will be more successful if they include the participation and support of all actors.

4. INFORMATION

The current context has a direct impact on citizens' capacity to access information, whether information on the measures taken by electoral authorities, or information on the ideas and platforms of the different candidates.

This crisis could be the right time for States to consider the recommendations in the "Joint declaration on freedom of expression and elections in the digital age," issued by the United Nations (UN) the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Organization of American States (OAS).⁴⁴

44 The Organization of American States (OAS) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media. "Joint declaration on freedom of expression and elections in the digital age." Available at: <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/showarticle.asp?artID=1174&IID=1>

PROMOTE AND PROTECT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Electoral authorities are part of the institutions in charge of promoting and protecting freedom of expression. In this regard, the general principles of the Joint Declaration of the Rapporteurs for Freedom of expression stand out:

Establish “a regulatory and institutional framework that promotes a free, independent and diverse media, [...] which is able to provide voters with access to comprehensive, accurate and reliable information about parties, candidates and the wider electoral process.”

Promote “effective access to the Internet and other digital technologies for all parts of population, including by closing digital gaps based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status and other bases, and putting in place clear requirements and policies to ensure respect for the principle of net neutrality.”

Ensure that “any restrictions on freedom of expression that apply during election periods comply with the international law three-part test requirements of legality, legitimacy of aim and necessity [...]”

COMBAT DISINFORMATION WITH INFORMATION THAT IS CLEAR, VERIFIED, AND TIMELY

PAHO notes that social media can exponentially increase pressure and the demand for information, as well as enormously increase the chance that incorrect information and rumors will spread rapidly.

We therefore recommend involving representatives from different media outlets, social media platforms, and civil society groups at different stages of the process. This relationship and openness to collaboration will help in the spread of messages and/or publicizing of verified information.

ENCOURAGE COOPERATION WITH FACT-CHECKING ORGANIZATIONS

Encourage cooperation with fact-checking organizations in order to combat false news items and detect errors.

DEVELOP PLATFORMS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION THAT IS ACCESSIBLE

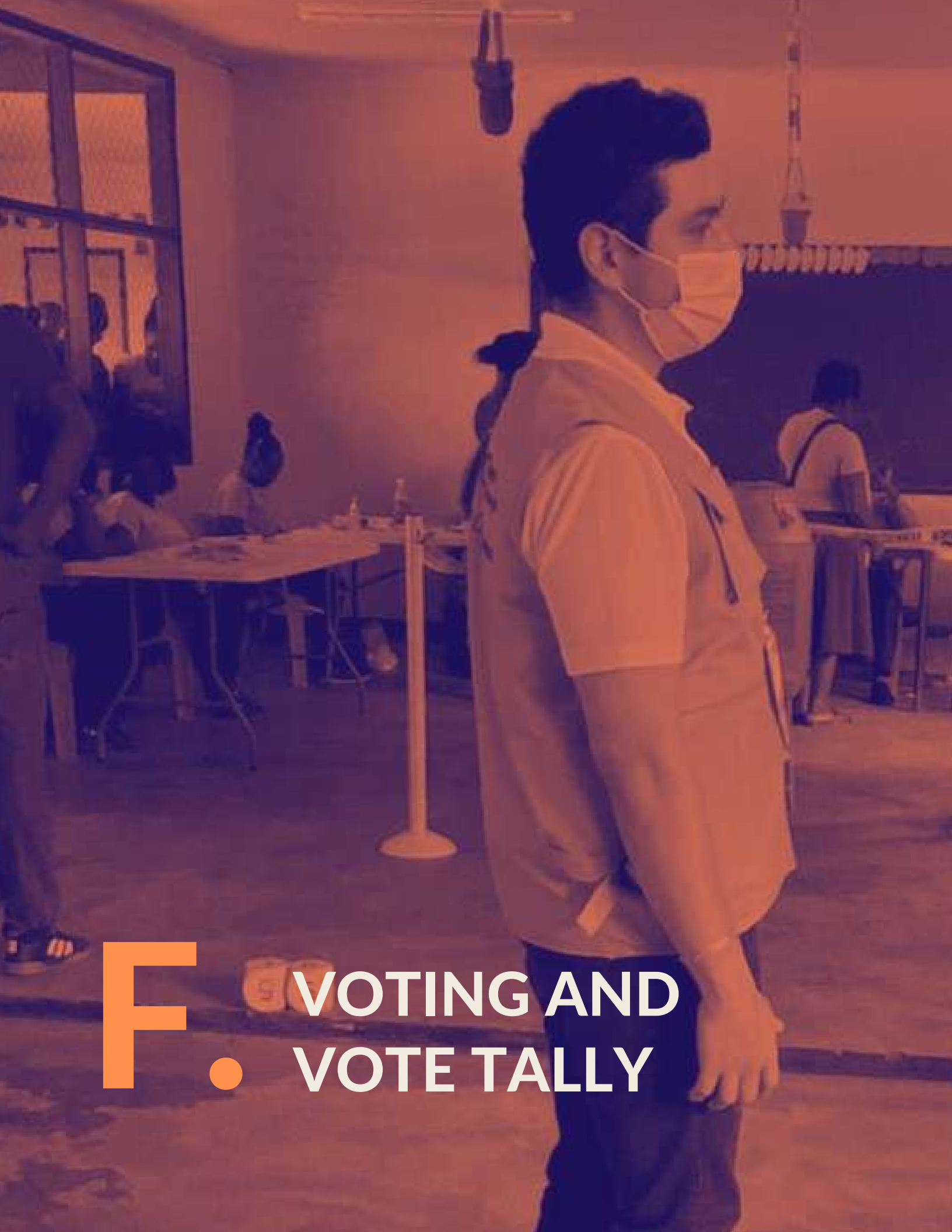
Develop apps and websites with information that is accessible and up-to-date regarding the electoral process, as well as information on the candidates running for office and their proposals. Information should be easy to share on social networks and using mobile devices.

EMBRACE RADIO AND TELEVISION AS COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS

Without prejudice to the advantages of digital platforms and social networks, especially in the context of the pandemic, in which people use them constantly, radio and television should still be considered as the main source of information for a significant portion of the population.

Authorities should embrace these media to transmit messages to the population. In many countries, this would include rural TV channels and radio stations.





F



**VOTING AND
VOTE TALLY**



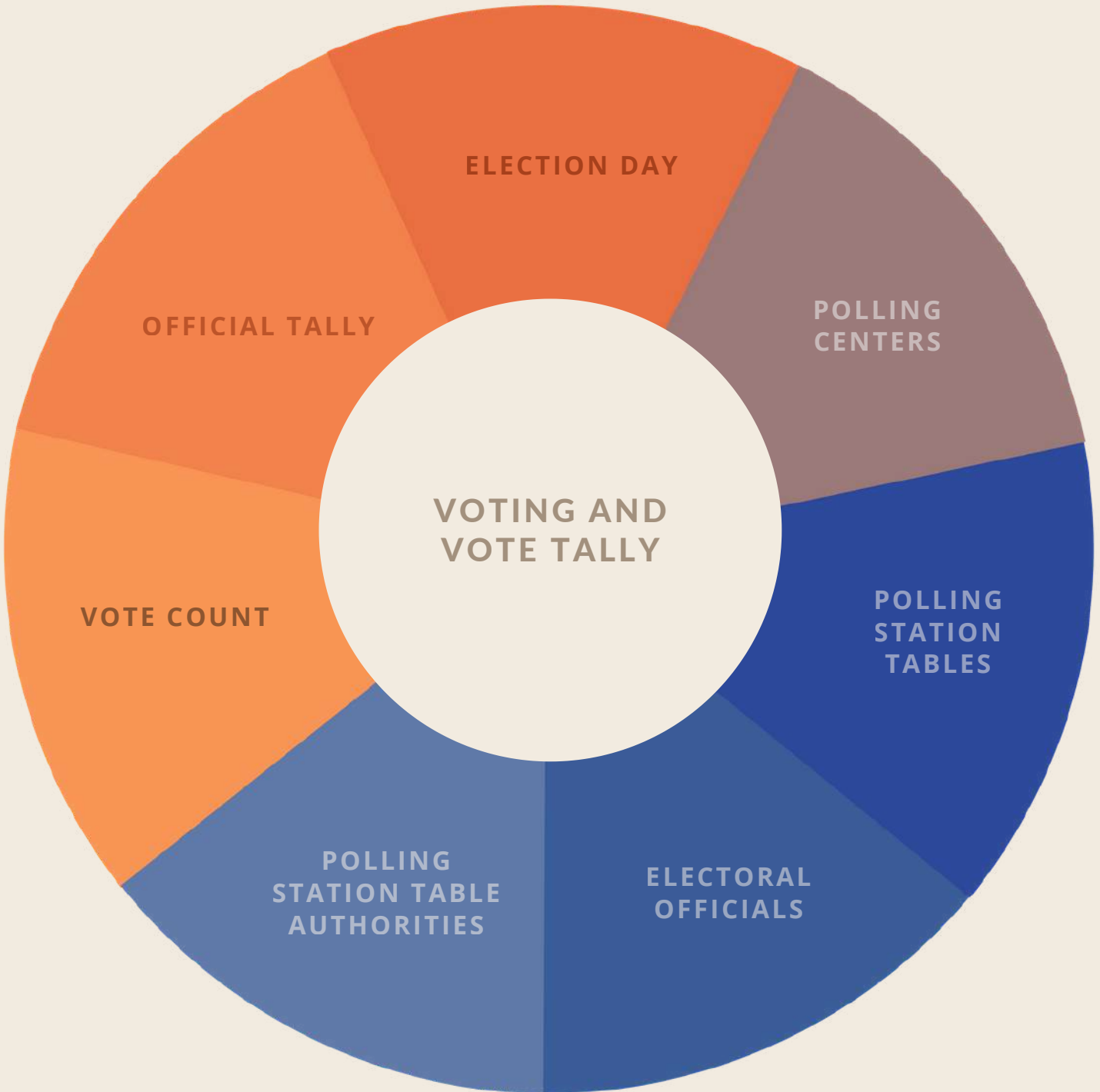
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VOTING AND VOTE TALLY

Election day is the busiest part of the electoral cycle in terms of citizen mobilization. In most countries of the Americas, voters are told to go to voting centers to cast their votes in person. In the current context, sanitary measures must be implemented to minimize the chance of transmitting the coronavirus, give voters the confidence to go to the polls, and guarantee that election day takes place.

The specific characteristics of each country's voting system are different, such as, for example, whether voting is optional or obligatory, manual voting via a single ballot or multiple ballots, or electronic voting. Whatever the particular characteristics of a voting system may be, electoral bodies must provide the infrastructure necessary for polling stations throughout the country to comply with the sanitary provisions adopted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.



1. ELECTION DAY



In most of the electoral systems on the continent, on election day, the citizens who are registered to vote go in person to a voting center in order to cast their votes. The biggest challenge facing electoral bodies is providing the conditions for an election day that follows all applicable health measures.

The large movement of persons and the potential for crowding are conditions that can help spread the coronavirus. Thus, the following are some measures or modalities to reduce this risk.

LENGTHEN ELECTION DAY

Consider the option of extending voting hours to reduce crowding. Keep in mind that this measure cannot be effective by itself, as over the course of the day, there are generally times when there is higher concentration of voters, such as before lunch or in the middle of the afternoon. In this regard, the electoral authority could incentivize a system to encourage people to exercise their right to vote during specific timeslots, based on predefined criteria like the last number of their national ID cards, age, etc.

HOLD THE ELECTION OVER MORE THAN ONE DAY

As long as the appropriate security conditions are in place, consider spreading the election over the course of two or three days. This measure could also include reasonable criteria for dividing up the population to allow older adults and other high-risk individuals to vote separately from other voters.

Such a measure would require broad consensus and appropriate logistical and operational preparations. The protocols for the protection and security of electoral materials—particularly the ballot boxes and votes—must be defined clearly.



SEPARATE ELECTIONS

Holding simultaneous elections generally means that voters take longer to vote and remain in voting centers for a longer period of time. Also, counting the votes takes longer when votes for two or more elections must be tallied.

In order to speed up elections, consider holding separate votes, particularly in cases where the presidential, legislative, and municipal or local elections are taking place at the same time.

RESERVE TIME SLOTS FOR THE HIGH-RISK POPULATION

Consider setting aside time slots at the beginning of election day exclusively for individuals considered to be at higher risk of developing grave COVID-19 symptoms should they become infected.

- Adults over the age of 65.
- Individuals with underlying conditions or chronic illnesses.

Also, consider setting aside a special timeslot for pregnant women.

REDUCE UNNECESSARY MOVEMENT OF VOTERS

Unnecessary movement of voters should be avoided on election day. It is therefore important to establish mechanisms to inform people that they need to vote and then go home.

PREPARE A PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION PLAN FOR ELECTION DAY

Public transportation poses a risk if appropriate measures are not applied to its operation during the election day. A means of transportation like a bus or metro that crowds voters together as it transports them can increase the likelihood of spreading the coronavirus among voters on their way to vote or while returning home.


Consider a plan to offer hand sanitizing at key points throughout the transportation system; to provide ventilation within vehicles; to raise awareness regarding physical distancing within vehicles; and to urge passengers to use facemasks. Plans should also provide for sufficient means of transportation to avoid overcrowding each bus, train car, or vehicle. The political parties must also commit to refraining from offering mass transportation that does not meet these conditions.

DISCOURAGE TAKING OTHER PEOPLE ALONG WHEN VOTING

We suggest highlighting the importance of voters avoiding bringing someone with them to vote, when possible. Going to the polls with minors should be discouraged.



2. POLLING CENTERS



The facilities where the voting is to take place must offer the appropriate conditions for receiving voters. This means that the regular technical requirements for organizing elections must be adjusted to strictly incorporate the sanitary requirements and the measures to prevent contagion in physical spaces where citizens will be circulating.

The effective incorporation of organizational and logistical measures will contribute to reducing the chance of spreading the coronavirus at different critical points throughout the election day. Voting centers are the places and times of greatest crowding. Taking into account the positive experiences of some countries and the technical knowledge acquired through electoral observation, here are a series of operational recommendations for setting up polling centers and stations.

ADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PHYSICAL DISTANCING AND GOOD VENTILATION

The electoral body must evaluate the infrastructure at polling centers to verify they comply with the required conditions:

- Sufficient space for setting up the polling station tables to guarantee compliance with physical distancing measures. Avoid setting up polling station tables across from each other.
- Preferably opt for spaces that are open and covered. For enclosed spaces, make sure there are windows to provide good ventilation.

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF POLLING CENTERS

To reduce crowding in polling centers, consider increasing the number of polling centers so as to guarantee adequate physical space and comply with the recommended sanitary conditions.

PROVIDE SEPARATE ENTRANCES AND EXITS

Polling centers are recommended to have different doors for entry and exit so traffic flows in a single direction, preventing crowding.



PUT UP SIGNAGE AND ORGANIZE MOVEMENTS OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE VOTING FACILITIES

Define voting center access points, including by putting up signs or security cordons. Also, use floor markers to organize the flow of voters outside voting facilities. Also, put up signs and notices so as to clearly indicate how citizens should move about inside the centers.

These measures will help guide the flow of voters and direct them to comply with physical distancing measures.

SET UP VOTER INFORMATION TENTS OR TABLES ALONG THE ACCESS ROUTE TO THE VOTING CENTERS

Consider setting up information tents or tables along the access route to the voting centers, outside their perimeters. This will help keep citizens from lingering inside voting centers while asking for information.

COMPLY WITH SANITARY REQUIREMENTS INSIDE POLLING CENTERS

All polling centers must apply sanitary measures to protect the health of voters.

Disinfect surfaces:

- Fully disinfect polling centers before and after the elections, along with all surfaces where electoral services are offered.⁴⁵ It is important to establish a disinfection timeline for election day. Consider disinfecting common areas, door and window handles, light switches, bathroom surfaces, toilets and faucets, personal devices with touchscreens, personal computer keyboards, and work surfaces.⁴⁶

Respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette:

- Promote respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.

Require use of facemasks:

- Require use of facemasks inside voting centers. Have personnel checking for facemask at the entrance of the voting facility and providing facemasks to people who were not aware of this requirement.
- Prohibit voters from discarding facemasks in voting centers.

Hand hygiene:

- Encourage hand sanitizing by providing alcohol gel to each person entering the polling place, as well as upon exit.
- Provide visible and accessible spaces where all citizens can wash their hands with soap and water, use alcohol gel dispensers, and read infographics on the hygiene measures.

Washroom services:

- Establish ongoing cleaning procedures for washrooms.

Waste:

- Establish procedures for handling waste.

45 World Health Organization (WHO) questions and answers regarding the coronavirus. "Surfaces where the coronavirus may be encountered can be cleaned easily with common domestic disinfectants that kill the virus. A number of studies have shown that the virus that causes COVID-19 can survive for up to 72 hours on plastic and stainless steel surfaces; less than 4 hours on copper surfaces; and less than 24 hours on cardboard surfaces." Available at: <https://www.who.int/es/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/q-a-coronaviruses>

46 World Health Organization (WHO) "Considerations for public health and social measures in the workplace in the context of COVID-19." Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1277575/retrieve>

SET A MAXIMUM CAPACITY FOR THE POLLING CENTER

Consider setting coherent and realistic limits on the number of people allowed in voting centers at one time, depending on its infrastructure.

SEEK SUPPORT FROM SECURITY FORCES

Consider seeking support from security forces on controlling access and preventing crowding in the areas immediately surrounding the voting centers.

ISSUE A PROTOCOL ESTABLISHING SPECIFIC RULES FOR POLITICAL PARTY DELEGATES, THE MEDIA, AND ELECTIONS OBSERVERS

Establish a protocol with procedures for delegates from political parties, individuals from the media, and the national and international elections observers governing the following voting center provisions:

- Sanitary measures
- Attendance limits
- Operating rules within the electoral facility

3. POLLING STATIONS

As with voting centers, it is also important to evaluate the conditions and setup of polling stations, as well as how the specific sanitary measures are being followed at each of them. When voters exercise their right to vote, they must do so while respecting polling stations' operational procedures. They must obey the sanitary requirements from the moment they enter the line, observing the dynamic of how the voting is taking place with a focus on contagion risk.

REDUCE THE NUMBER OF VOTERS PER POLLING STATION

One of the main factors causing crowding during an election is the number of voters assigned to each polling station table. We recommend reducing the number of voters per polling station table to control the flow of persons. That would mean increasing the total number of polling station tables throughout the country, something that should go hand-in-hand with increasing the number of polling centers.

PHYSICAL LOCATION OF POLLING STATIONS SHOULD COMPLY WITH SANITARY MEASURES

The electoral body must set parameters for physically locating polling station tables that enable each facility throughout the country to comply with the criteria established.⁴⁷

- Prioritize setting up polling station tables in open or semi-open areas, or in places with enough windows for air circulation.
- Do not set up more than one table per school classroom or equivalent space.
- Separate the tables enough to ensure physical distancing. Provide enough space to prevent the lines from the tables from coming in contact with each other.
- Evaluate the furniture provided for the members of the polling station tables to ensure its placement complies with physical distancing requirements. Also, make sure political party delegates are placed an appropriate distance from the table and the line of voters.

⁴⁷ Review the recommendation on furniture in the chapter on electoral materials.

SET UP PLASTIC SCREENS AT THE TABLES

Consider placing plastic screens on all the tables to provide a physical barrier between the voter and the person working the table.

COMPLY WITH SANITARY PROVISIONS AT THE POLLING STATION

As at the polling center level, preventative sanitary measures also must be applied and complied with at the polling station tables.

Personnel assigned to disinfect materials and polling booths:

- Personnel must be assigned to disinfect the furniture and electoral materials.
- A guide should be provided with requirements for disinfecting materials uniformly across all the country's polling station tables.

Disinfect surfaces:

- Identify surfaces that receive regular contact to make them a priority for disinfection. In the case of voting station tables, this includes the work surface, the voting booths, door handles and light switches if located in a classroom, etc. Likewise, where electronic voting machines or other devices are used, all touchscreens, keyboards, and other components must be disinfected.⁴⁸

48 World Health Organization (WHO) "Considerations for public health and social measures in the workplace in the context of COVID-19." Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1277575/retrieve>

COMPLY WITH SANITARY PROVISIONS AT THE POLLING STATION

Use of a personal pencil/pen:

- Allow voters to use their own writing implements for marking their votes and signing the voter roll. If this is not possible, be sure to have a large number of writing implements per polling station table and disinfect them after each use.
- Each person working the table must use their own writing implement throughout the day.

Physical distancing and outfitting:

- Everyone working the tables, the political party delegates, and voters must comply with the recommended physical distancing and must use masks (surgical masks for delegates and those working the tables).

ESTABLISH SPECIAL PROTOCOLS FOR ASSISTING CERTAIN PERSONS

Set special protocols for people who need assistance voting, such as older adults, persons with difficulties or disabilities, and others.

PRIORITIZE ACCESS AND VOTING FOR THOSE INDIVIDUALS AT HIGHER RISK

Prioritize voting by older adults, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, and those at greatest risk of developing serious complications from COVID-19.

CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES FOR IDENTITY VERIFICATION

Those working the table must verify voters' identities before they vote. This means handing over an identification card to check the name, card number, and photograph, then find the individual on the voter roll.

Depending on conditions (time, resources, corresponding evidentiary process, and identification cards that comply with certain characteristics), electoral authorities could explore using a QR code reader system to verify citizens' information, or some other method so the person working the table does not have to come in physical contact with the identification card.


One manual alternative is to set aside a specific space with the appropriate signage on the polling station table where the citizen can place their documentation and the electoral official can review it without touching the identification card. After setting down the identification card, the citizen must step back one and a half meters and wait for the official to find the entry in the voter roll and then hand over the ballot.

LIMIT PRESENCE TO A SINGLE DELEGATE PER PARTY OR COALITION

To avoid crowding around the polling station tables, authorities can limit representatives or delegates from political organizations to one per party or coalition. The same limitation could also apply to vote counting.



4. ELECTORAL OFFICIALS



Electoral officials play essential roles at all stages of the electoral cycle. Specifically, they are the ones implementing operational procedures to ensure availability of electoral materials; preparing those working the table; holding training sessions; directing the procedures for set up, day-of, and the tally; preparing the facilities; and providing assistance on procedures in the voting centers in exceptional situations, among other valuable functions. They are the ones with the most knowledge on coordinating and supervising election day.

ESTABLISH THE POSITION OF VOTING CENTER COORDINATOR

In addition to coordinating organizational and logistical aspects and providing guidance on election day, the official placed in this role must verify that voting center conditions and the preparation and setup of the tables comply with the guidelines set for sanitary measures.

ESTABLISH A SANITARY TEAM

We recommend setting up a team to implement sanitary measures and oversee their application; verify that the sanitary kit elements are available; comply with cleaning requirements at facilities; and ensure that alcohol gel is available at the entrance, exit, and certain points within the facility. The team will focus on applying protocols to combat COVID-19, as set forth in the “Voting Centers” section.

FIND VOLUNTEERS FOR ELECTION DAY

Because of the variety of procedures and actions taking place on election day in the context of the pandemic, it is important to have a team of volunteers to help with orienting citizens on respecting the measures issued to protect voters and on the preventative actions to combat COVID-19.



PROVIDE SANITARY KITS TO ELECTORAL OFFICIALS

Provide sanitary kits to electoral officials, those working the polling tables, and other citizens with key roles in polling centers (disinfectants, alcohol gel, disposable wipes, soap, surgical masks, etc.).

ESTABLISH AN INFORMATION AND MONITORING CENTER FOR ELECTORAL OFFICIALS

Establish an information center (website, app, call-center) for electoral officials through which sanitary authorities can provide guidance on situations not provided for in the plans or answer questions on procedures related to the pandemic.

ESTABLISH A PROTOCOL FOR SANITARY ISSUES AND CARING FOR PERSONS WITH SYMPTOMS

Prepare an instruction sheet for electoral officials establishing the procedure for issues related to sanitation and security within voting centers, as well as how to respond to individuals with COVID-19-like symptoms, as defined in collaboration with local health authorities.

5. POLLING STATION TABLE AUTHORITIES

Those working the polling station tables on election day play a fundamental role. They are the ones who come in contact with voters when they go to the polls. They authorize citizens to vote after verifying the identities and their corresponding entry on the voter roll.

To do this work, those working the tables must be trained, properly informed, and in possession of the right materials recommended by health authorities, as indicated in this guide. Strict compliance with the recommendations made contributes to reducing the possibility of spreading the coronavirus.

ADOPT A STRATEGY TO DISCOURAGE AT-RISK PERSONS FROM WORKING THE TABLES

Encourage strategies to make sure the following groups of persons are excluded from working the tables:

- Older adults.
- Other persons likely to develop serious complications associated with COVID-19.⁴⁹



49 Adults over the age of 65, people living in retirement homes or in long-term care facilities, people of any age with serious underlying conditions including chronic pulmonary illnesses or moderate to severe asthma, serious heart conditions, depressed immune system, serious obesity (body mass index of 40 or higher), diabetes, chronic renal illness treated with dialysis, liver disease.

PREVENT PEOPLE FROM WORKING THE TABLES WHO, AS OF ELECTION DAY, HAVE A CONDITION RELATED TO COVID-19

Ban people who have been selected to work the tables but who meet one of the following conditions as of election day or during the two weeks prior from serving in that role:

- People with COVID-19 and/or a coronavirus infection, pursuant to the definition established by national authorities.
- People with symptoms compatible with COVID-19.
- People identified as having had contact with COVID-19 cases, pursuant to the definition established by national authorities.⁵⁰

Offer mechanisms for people selected to work the tables who find themselves meeting one of these conditions to be able to send notification of their inability to perform that role.

It is important for the electoral body to disseminate these criteria so that people know when they must excuse themselves if they meet any of the conditions, and so they can help select replacements.

Those working the tables who have a fever or respiratory symptoms on election day should not go to the polling station.

PEOPLE WORKING THE TABLES WHO ARE NOT ABLE TO FULFILL THEIR ROLES SHOULD NOT BE FINED OR OTHERWISE SANCTIONED

Many countries have fines or other types of sanctions in place for people who have been selected to work the polling station tables but fail to do so. We suggest suspending these sanctions for those people who cannot attend because they meet one of the conditions listed above.

50 World Health Organization (WHO), "Global Surveillance for COVID-19 caused by human infection with COVID-19 virus. Interim guidance", March 20, 2020. Available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331506/WHO-2019-nCoV-SurveillanceGuidance-2020.6-eng.pdf>



SELECT AND TRAIN ADDITIONAL WORKERS

Consider selecting and training alternates to work at tables so that, in the event of withdrawals or absences because of conditions associated with COVID-19, they can be called on to work any polling station table in the center where assigned.

ESTABLISH A PROCEDURE FOR FILLING VACANCIES

A procedure should be in place for filling vacancies to work the tables in the event that the individuals selected report that they meet one of the above-mentioned conditions.

ENCOURAGE THE SELECTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Encourage the selection of young people and people in good health to work the tables and serve as volunteers.

ENCOURAGE THE SELECTION OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE IN THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Encourage recruitment of people to work the tables based on their geographic location and how close they are to the assigned voting center. This will help prevent long trips that could increase people's exposure.

OBLIGATORY TRAINING

We recommend that those working the tables be required to complete the corresponding training, on both the voting process and on sanitary measures and protocols.

SELECT SOMEONE TO BE IN CHARGE OF EACH TABLE'S SANITARY MEASURES

Choose a person working each table to be in charge of verifying compliance with its sanitary measures and protocols.

ENCOURAGE CONSTANT HAND HYGIENE

The people working the tables are officials who must deal with a significant number of people over the course of election day, and they will come into constant contact with surfaces and materials throughout the day. It is important for them to make regular use of alcohol gel in order to ensure good hand hygiene.



6. VOTE COUNT



Elections are clean when the preferences of all voters are respected and recorded faithfully. The vote count is conducted by those working the tables in the presence of delegates from political organizations and electoral observers. This is a key moment in terms of the sanitary situation. When people crowd together, especially in small, enclosed spaces, it could increase the chance of contagion.

Handling ballots, preparing the official ballot count form, and transcribing the information to the official final results involve coming in contact with surfaces, writing implements, and materials. Sanitary measures must be in place for all participants in this process.

The vote count is a sensitive process because of the political context and the flurry of activity around it aimed at defending votes. Despite this, it is important to respect sanitary provisions and ensure that the various actors contribute to an orderly and transparent process.

COMPLY WITH PHYSICAL DISTANCING DURING THE COUNT

Comply with physical distancing between persons at all times. This means planning to use the infrastructure properly so that the different actors can play their roles while following the sanitary measures.

DISINFECTING THE TABLE AND OTHER ELEMENTS

Prior to the start of the manual vote count, clean the table with alcohol- or bleach-based disinfectant. Do likewise with the other materials to be used, such as writing implements, folders, etc.

WASH HANDS OR SANITIZE WITH ALCOHOL GEL PRIOR TO BEGINNING AND AFTER FINISHING THE COUNT

Every person participating in this process should wash their hands or sanitize with alcohol gel before starting the count and several times over the course of the process.

CIRCULATE MATERIALS AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE

Reduce the amount of physical contact between persons, surfaces, and materials. Avoid dynamics that lead to circulating materials among people (documents, tally sheets, ballots, writing implements, cards, booklets and manuals).



REQUIRE MASKS BE WORN DURING THE COUNT

Require the use of surgical masks by electoral officials, political party representatives, electoral observers, and the other individuals involved in this electoral process.

REPEAT THE RECOMMENDATION THAT OFFICIALS NOT TOUCH THEIR FACES

The vote count is a moment in which officials working the table are physically close to each other and come in contact with surfaces and election materials. Therefore, at this point, repeat the recommendation to avoid touching one's face (mouth, nose, eyes) without the corresponding hygiene.

EVERYONE PARTICIPATING IN THE COUNT MUST USE THEIR OWN WRITING IMPLEMENTS

Instruct delegates from political organizations and those working the tables to use their own writing implements when filling out and signing the poll closure notice and the vote tally.

HOLD UP THE BALLOT SHEETS TO EACH DELEGATE

In order to properly comply with physical distancing requirements, those working the tables must hold up the ballot sheets to each delegate.

DISCOURAGE THE PRESENCE OF PEOPLE WHO DO NOT PLAY AN INDISPENSABLE ROLE

In many countries the vote count is a procedure that is open to the public, which contributes to transparency. However, the exceptional circumstances under which electoral processes will take place during the pandemic mean that the presence of people who did not play an indispensable role in this part of the process should be discouraged.

ALLOW USE OF MOBILE DEVICES TO RECORD OR LIVESTREAM

To increase transparency and prevent crowding, we suggest allowing delegates and observers to record or livestream the count over social networks, as well as allow photographs of the vote tally sheets.

COMPLY WITH PROTOCOLS FOR TRANSPORTING AND MOVING MATERIALS TO MUNICIPAL OR DEPARTMENTAL CENTERS

Establish protocols for transporting sensitive electoral materials (required official documents) and non-sensitive materials, to include a focus on preventing contagion.

Consider implementing disinfection points for materials at different stages in the recollection process that comply with appropriate security controls and with the participation of political organizations in an oversight role.



TRANSPORTATION AND MOVEMENT OF ELECTORAL MATERIALS

Urge all personnel involved in transportation, logistical services, and security to use disinfectants, alcohol gel, and masks at all times.



7. OFFICIAL TALLY ⁵¹

After the count, the official documents containing the electoral results are taken—along with the extra election materials—to collection points or results processing centers. This part of the process is key given the importance of processing the official election results.

The electoral officials assigned to collect the official tally sheets pick them up and take them to a central location. In some models, it is the heads or coordinators of those working the tables who perform the task of transferring the tally sheets. Either way, and depending on the dynamics involving materials and persons, the following recommendations should be considered necessary for minimizing the chance of coronavirus transmission, preventing crowding, and overcoming the logistical difficulties caused by the pandemic.

⁵¹ The recommendations in this section are also applicable to the dissemination or communication center from where the electoral authority disseminates information and releases national results.

GUARANTEE THE INFRASTRUCTURE COMPLIES WITH SANITARY REQUIREMENTS

It is crucial that the official results processing centers be large spaces and have infrastructure adequate to guarantee compliance with sanitary rules.

MONITOR COMPLIANCE WITH SANITARY MEASURES

Promote respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, and encourage the ventilation of spaces so as to allow air circulation. Clean surfaces, desks, tables, writing implements, etc. with alcohol- or bleach-based disinfectant before and after the official tally.

DESIGNATE SEPARATE ENTRANCES AND EXITS

Designate separate entrance and exit points, with proper signage. Ideally, the flow of persons should be in a single direction.

PLACE A SANITARY CONTROL POINT AT THE ENTRANCE

Consider placing a sanitary control point at facility entrances where alcohol gel is available and/or provided to each person who enters. Facemask use should also be checked at this control point.

CONSIDER DESIGNATING SEPARATE DOORS EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE ENTRY AND EXIT OF MATERIALS

Establish entrances reserved exclusively for delivering materials, separate from the regular entrances.

ESTABLISH GUIDELINES FOR DELIVERY OF MATERIALS

Often, processing centers receive materials from a significant number of a country's polling station tables. Steps should be taken to ensure this process plays out in an orderly fashion and to avoid crowding around entryways.

IMPLEMENT TECHNOLOGY FOR DELIVERING AND RECEIVING MATERIALS

Implement technology solutions as a means of controlling entry, receiving electoral materials, and processing tally sheets. Laser and barcode readers could be used to avoid physical contact with surfaces.



ORGANIZE THE CENTER INTERIORS

Organize the interiors of results processing centers to guarantee enough space and reduce physical contact among people.

ORGANIZE THE MOVEMENT OF PERSONS

Use signage and tape barriers to organize the flow of people and make sure it is unidirectional within the facilities.

SET ASIDE SPACE FOR OTHER ACTORS

Set aside space for the media, delegates from political organizations, electoral observers, and other institutions.

ENCOURAGE TRANSMITTING THE OFFICIAL PROCESSING OF THE TALLY SHEETS ONLINE

Encourage online transmission of the final tally in order to increase transparency and reduce the physical presence of persons. Without prejudice to this, the presence of political party delegates should always be provided for.

Also, in order to strengthen the principle of transparency, provide a recording of the transmission of the entire tally process to political organizations and relevant actors requesting it.

SECURITY CAMERAS

Encourage the use of security cameras in areas where electoral materials are delivered and stored, particularly for sensitive materials.

PROJECTION OF THE TALLY SHEETS

Consider using technology to conduct the tally sheet review via an amplified projection of the image of the tally sheet for everyone present in the room.







FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Successfully implementing a strategy to hold an election during the COVID-19 pandemic depends on State institutions functioning properly, citizens making a commitment, and, especially, the availability of technical information, which is crucial for determining which measures will be effective.

It is crucial for electoral authorities and the team in charge of the national COVID-19 response to work together closely. The more information electoral bodies have in terms of statistics on the COVID-19 pandemic and its spread, development, trends, and other relevant aspects, the better prepared they will be to make good decisions and work on strategies for organizing elections.

Of course, having reliable information on the number of active cases and on projections when deciding which policies to adopt is crucial for evaluating whether conditions are right for holding an electoral process.

Additionally, a crucial piece of information for the purposes of an election is the condition of voters' health. If a country has the capacity to track and trace active infections, people with symptoms, or people who have been exposed to infection, it will be able to find alternatives that make it possible to guarantee citizens are able to exercise their political rights. It is likewise crucial to identify the high-risk, at-risk, and low-risk, populations, for both voters and electoral officials. An app developed for this purpose would be a useful tool, although care must be taken to protect citizens' personal information and their privacy. One strategy to consider that would allow States to guarantee the right to vote for those who are in isolation or quarantine and who otherwise would expose the rest of the population by voting in person would be voting by mail or voting over the Internet.

This would of course require technical and institutional capacity, as well as guarantees as far as trustworthiness and security, in addition to political will from the country's different sectors. Experience from other parts of the world would be useful for considering successful tools or measures, as well as those that were not effective.

Data quality will also be important for assessing the epidemiological status of different regions within the country. Countries are heterogeneous, and the situation in one area may allow for the use of different communications, logistics, educational, and other strategies. Sanitary measures must be followed regardless, but the capacity to enhance messaging and take action based on varying realities is also an element that will facilitate the work of electoral bodies.

Lastly, it is absolutely crucial to assess whether a country is able to carry out an electoral process on a certain date based on its epidemiological situation. Based on this, all possible efforts must be made in order to hold elections that are fair, free, and transparent, while adopting the necessary measures throughout the process, and especially on election day, to reduce the spread of the virus.



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