



The International IDEA Handbook on External Voting

The globalization of political, personal and professional life, the spread of democracy throughout the world and an increase in migration for many different reasons have all contributed to increasing interest in voting rights for refugees, diplomats, members of the armed forces serving overseas and other people who are temporarily or permanently absent from their own country. While the constitutions of many countries guarantee the right to vote for all citizens, in reality voters who are outside their home country when elections take place are often disenfranchised because of a lack of procedures enabling them to exercise that right.

The case for external voting is usually presented as a question of principle, based on the universality of the right to vote. In reality, however, the introduction of external voting is enacted or enabled by legislation passed by elected politicians. While there have been a variety of reasons for the enactment of external voting provisions, almost all have been the result of political impetus, and many have been controversial and even nakedly partisan. The practical arrangements for external voting often face limitations in terms of financial, administrative resources.

The earliest known use of external voting took place in 1862, when Wisconsin became the first of a number of US states which enacted provisions to allow absentee voting by soldiers fighting in the Union army during the US Civil War. Outside the military context, New Zealand introduced absentee voting for seafarers in 1890, and Australia adopted it in 1902, although under operating arrangements which made its use outside Australia practically impossible. Canada provides more early examples of the influence of political factors in the introduction and form of external voting. Postal voting for military electors on active service was agreed at federal level in 1915. France introduced external voting in 1924 to cater to a different constituency: French administrators posted to the occupied Rhineland were enabled to vote by post.

91 countries and territories in the world have provisions for external voting for its electors who are abroad, permanently or temporarily. 21 African nations have external voting provisions while 13 countries of the Americas and 15 Asian countries have the same. Most European countries practise external voting and 6 Pacific countries do so. Some countries have adopted legal provisions but have still not applied them, as in the case in Angola, Bolivia, Greece and Nicaragua. About 7 countries have reserved seats in Parliament for residents abroad. There could, in theory, be either a greater or lesser number of votes for each of these seats compared to the average within the country. Voting from abroad can apply to four types of elections. These are national elections, local and regional elections, presidential elections and referendums. It is most common to allow external voting for national elections.

About ten countries have some type of restrictions to external voting in place. This can be restrictions in terms of length of stay abroad, or that a certain number of electors must be registered in one and the same country in order for external voting to be organised. To cast an external vote can be done in three different ways, and each respective country decides which system to use. The most commonly used voting method is voting in person at designated places such as diplomatic missions. Some countries use the option of voting by proxy or by mail, and some countries use a combination of some or all three voting methods.

International IDEA, the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico (IFE), and the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judicial Power of Mexico (TEPJF) have come together to jointly produce this Handbook, one of the series on electoral design topics which IDEA has pioneered. This partnership combines IDEA's experience in producing global knowledge on electoral matters in a practical form for democracy builders on the ground, and the groundbreaking work of IFE and TEPJF in the course of the introduction of external voting in the 2006 Mexican presidential elections. This Handbook maps, explains and compares external voting provisions worldwide. It is a unique comparative product for anyone involved in improving present electoral structures, planning for external voting processes, or participating in debate.

The aim is that this Handbook will engage stakeholders in debate and further discussion on the topic in order to improve present structures, future readiness and practice in external voting. On both theoretical and practical levels it aims to contribute to the discussion of the basic principle of representation and how to operationalize and balance criteria such as inclusiveness and effectiveness. IDEA hopes that it will also create greater general understanding of electoral and institutional design issues on the part of legislators, Electoral Management Bodies, political parties and other participants debating change. Providing good external voting practices is a future challenge to democracy and to the perception of democracy.

Contents:

- A comparative overview which illustrates, for 213 countries and territories; (1) The type of elections to which external voting applies (2) Who is eligible to vote from abroad and (3) the voting method when voting from abroad.
- Chapters discussing each of the following issues in external Voting: The Politics and Process of External Voting, Legal Framework of External Voting, Entitlement of external voters, Implementation issues, Issues for host countries, Political Rights of Refugees, Political Rights of migrant workers, Observation of external voting, E-Voting and, External Voting, External Voting and Participation
- At its heart a collection of case studies written by experts which illustrates the different approaches, backgrounds and systems of external voting. Case studies of the following countries are included: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Cap Verde, Chad, Colombia, Cook Islands, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Mozambique, Portugal, Philippines, Senegal, Switzerland and Zimbabwe,.
- Maps, tables, sample materials, glossary of terms and references to additional information.

For more information please contact:

International IDEA

Maria Gratschew

Programme Officer

Electoral Processes

Strömsborg

103 34 Stockholm

Phone: +46 8 698 37 62

Fax: +46 8 20 24 22

E-mail: m.gratschew@idea.int

The handbook will be available during 2006 and can be order from International IDEA www.idea.int .

About International IDEA

Founded in 1995, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization that seeks to promote and develop sustainable democracy world-wide.

For information about IDEA, its work and publications, please visit www.idea.int