



## Initiatives to Encourage Higher Turnout: An Inventory with Case Studies

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The past several decades have witnessed a general decline in voter turnout throughout the world, and while there is little agreement as to what specifically constitutes a good level of turnout, recent declines in many countries have raised concern among governments, non-governmental organizations, and citizens.

Voting is the act by which ordinary citizens choose their representatives and influence public policies. It provides the foundation for the operation of representative democracy and has great symbolic value. If voting participation declines, the primary link between the citizen and the system is diminished, government actions may be less likely to correspond with the desires of the citizens, and on a larger scale, the legitimacy of the democratic system may be undermined.

Voter turnout has been a focus of International IDEA's work since its inception. More recently a myriad of voices have sought International IDEA's advice on what can be done to reverse this decline and increase voter participation. As a response to this need, a handbook has been developed which collates, categorises and examines some of the proactive and direct efforts that have been conducted throughout the world both to reverse the decline in voter turnout and to seek to maximize turnout at elections of all types.

This handbook has two purposes: to disseminate information and share knowledge on voter maximisation activities in an effort to stimulate a more informed debate, and to inspire and promote new thinking and the design of new activities. Its target audiences include civil society, election management bodies and related government bodies, politicians, legislators, NGOs, educational institutions, media and other stakeholders. The handbook is non-partisan in nature.

The handbook includes:

- A collection of case studies written by experts to illustrate the different approaches and activities that have so far been undertaken worldwide to maximise voter turnout.
- An inventory of worldwide voter turnout maximisation activities.
- An analysis of measures that can be taken to increase turnout and a series of recommendations on how this can best be achieved.
- A brief analysis of voter turnout and what it means for a democracy.
- A matrix categorising different types of voter maximization activities, their aims, target audiences, methods used and who has used them.
- Global voter turnout data from national elections since 1945

### Contents

#### Chapter One: Introduction

Locates the issue of participation within democratic theory and discusses the usefulness/desire for maximized voter turnout. Identifies broad categories which impact upon voting behaviour and gives an overview of some major factors which affect voter turnout. Introduces the particular problem of low voter participation amongst young people.

#### Chapter Two: Inventory

Presents the types of actors (both governmental and non-governmental) who work on voter maximisation activities and outlines and categorises these activities according to the approach taken, the main problem addressed, the target audience, methods used, and who they are used by. Six basic approaches are identified: information campaigns; advertising campaigns; grassroots movements; school/mock elections and other special purpose educational programs; entertainment; and inducements. An inventory compiled from a wide range of international sources is included as an annex, from which case studies are drawn covering each category of study.



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## Chapter Three: Case Studies (a selection of the following)

### Information:

- Elections New Zealand (the NZ electoral management body): comprehensive registration campaign with information available in numerous languages.
- South African Independent Electoral Commission: website providing detailed information on both registration and voting.

### Advertising:

- UK Electoral Commission: nationwide media campaign explaining why people should vote
- CIDEM (Civics and Democracy Association, France): widespread media and public advertising campaign encouraging citizens to vote and aimed primarily at young voters.
- Botswana. Voter apathy project which focuses mainly on young voters.

### Entertainment:

- RECIF (a network of NGOs in Burkina Faso): a theatrical play which illustrated the positive effects of women exercising their right to vote and encouraged women to vote.
- Rock the Vote (US): a non-profit, non-partisan organization which encourages young people to vote through a variety of activities and events which incorporate the entertainment community and youth culture. Also, Rock Volieb (Slovakia 1998 and 2002) which was modelled on the above.

### School/mock elections:

- Student Vote (Canada): aims to provide Canadian students with an opportunity to actively participate in a non-partisan parallel election experience, during an official election period.
- Instituto Federal Electoral (Mexico): a civic and electoral education programme for youth.

### Grassroots:

- The Minnesota Participation Project – Nonpartisan Nonprofit Voter Mobilization (US): a variety of methods and strategies to work with other in-state non-profit organizations seeking to increase voter mobilization.
- PORA (Ukraine): non-partisan civic movement in Ukraine which employs numerous tactics in pursuing its aims of free and fair elections and maximising voter participation.
- Sweden (Ministry of Justice): supporting programmes with local groups, including individuals from different parts of the world.

### Inducements:

- Council of Ministers (Bulgaria): prior to 2005 parliamentary elections funds were appropriated from the state budget to run a lottery linked to the election. A similar scheme has been carried out by a local authority in Norway. The two are compared and contrasted.

## Chapter Four: Conclusion

Returns to the themes raised earlier and puts forth some preliminary conclusions and recommendations that may be drawn from the case studies. Questions of effectiveness and its measurement are also addressed, as are the issues of cost-benefit and controversy generated by the different activities.

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## 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](http://www.idea.int)