

# Methodology

### **AIM**

The aim of International IDEA's Voter Turnout project is to provide updated and reliable information about voter turnout from around the world. Some trends are highlighted and preliminary conclusions are drawn, but International IDEA does not aim to explain or definitively prove why turnout differs between countries and across regions. The data should be seen as a basis for further research; additional correlations and comparisons can be drawn based on the user's particular needs and interests.

As the project contains the most comprehensive global data on voter turnout since 1945, it will be of great use to all those interested in elections and global political participation whether from a general, a professional or an academic perspective.

### **CHOOSING THE ELECTIONS**

The criteria for including elections in the database are:

- that the elections were held after 1945 but before 30 September 2001;
- that elections were for national political

office in independent nation states. The only exceptions to this rule were those nations which held elections on the eve of their independence from colonial rule, or those small island nations whose sovereignty is limited by “free association” with a larger power (for example, Nigeria in 1959 falls into the first category, and Aruba into the second);

- that there was a degree of competitiveness (that is, more than one party contested the elections, or one party and independents contested the elections, or the election was only contested by independent candidates). This criterion excludes the one-party states of North Korea, China and the Soviet Union, but led to the inclusion of elections such as those in Uganda (where parties were banned) and Egypt in 1976 (where a number of independent candidates ran against the ruling party). Within this “grey area” of competitiveness we have erred on the side of inclusion and, at least where data is available, have included the turnout figures and explanatory variables in the tables for each country; and
- that the franchise was universal. However, for the purposes of comparison we have included the following elections that excluded women from voting: Liechtenstein (pre-1986), Switzerland (pre-1971), Greece (pre-1956), Belgium (1948), Kuwait (1992-1996), Bahrain (1973) and Argentina (1947). In these cases, the voting age population figure only includes men. We have not included elections where the franchise was limited to a very small (and ethnically defined) segment of the population, e.g., South Africa before 1994 and Western Samoa before 1991.

### SOURCES

Many researchers have difficulty obtaining information about registration figures and voter turnout rates. International IDEA’s extensive network of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) around the world has made it possible for us, in most cases, to use the official data compiled in different countries as our main source of information. When this source has not been available we have used information from government departments, universities or research institutes to find the necessary electoral data.

### VARIABLES DEFINED

#### *Voting Age Population*

International IDEA has chosen to use not only the reported registration rate to calculate turnout percentages, but also the voting age population (VAP) which includes all citizens above the legal voting age.

We show both indicators for two reasons. First, registration figures can be inaccurate or unavailable, and sometimes voter registers are not used (as in South Africa in 1994). Second, the voting age population figures can provide a clearer picture of participation as they may signal a problem with the voters’ register or registration system.

In some countries, the registration rate for a country may exceed the estimated VAP. The explanation for this apparent anomaly usually lies in the inaccuracy of the electoral register. In some countries the register is difficult to keep up to date, and deaths or movements of electors from one district to another are not reflected. Of course, the

opposite can also occur: the register can under-represent the true size of the eligible voter pool if, as is often the case, it fails to record the names of new voters who have come of age or migrated to an area. Both of these scenarios represent relatively common problems facing electoral administrators around the world. It is important to emphasize, however, that registration figures are, in most cases, more often updated than population figures.

### *Literacy, GDP and HDI*

The adult literacy rate (1997), human development index (1997), and gross domestic product (GDP) per capita \$US 1987 (1997) were taken from the statistical annex of the Human Development Report 1999 (HDR), published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These were matched with the most recent parliamentary election available in the International IDEA database. There were 153 common countries between the two data sources. The figures were computed as per their subtitle.

The 153 countries common to both the International IDEA and the 1999 HDR databases are: Albania, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central

African Republic, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Comoros Islands, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

