

Foreword

Concern about declining participation in elections has been growing worldwide for well over ten years, even leading some people to question the health of democracy. International IDEA has worked in the field of voter turnout almost since its foundation in 1995, initially to identify the facts. The IDEA voter turnout database has become known and widely respected by researchers and practitioners as the source of worldwide data in the field, and an updated version is included in this book.

Such research is of most value when it is used to provide policy advice and tools which will be of practical assistance to governments, electoral management bodies and other stakeholders engaged in designing and building their democracies. A first task, which this book addresses, is to identify initiatives within existing frameworks which may promote electoral participation and which are easy to implement. Some have been effective, some less so; some are controversial, some less so.

This book seeks to inspire those who believe that strong participation in elections and referendums helps to build confidence in democratic institutions

to engage in networking and information sharing. It surveys initiatives and campaigns from round the world to encourage electoral participation and presents a selection of case studies, an inventory of experiences and some suggestions as to good practice.

IDEA's work on participation will continue far beyond this book. Many of the longer-term issues regarding voter turnout raise deep issues of policy, for example relating to institutional and electoral framework design or the utility and effectiveness of different approaches to civic education. Others remain research questions: is it true that an increasing number of citizens are engaging in alternative methods of participation, or are these active citizens also voters?

IDEA, with its mandate to provoke action for effective policy change, will continue to promote cutting-edge work, challenging the research community and seeking to develop clear and user-friendly messages for the policy-making community about what does and does not assist in encouraging participation and building the credibility and ownership of democracies.



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