

Section II: Initiatives and Activities

Campaigns to encourage and maximize voter turnout are run by many different kinds of entity throughout the world—governments, EMBs, political parties, NGOs, citizen groups, youth organizations and so on. Some approaches rely on formal lines of communication through traditional partners, while others attempt to build social networks using non-traditional partners to promote their message of encouraging voters to turn out. The definition of partner organizations as traditional or non-traditional may vary depending on the national context, but traditional partners would include public officials, community organizations, high schools, advocacy groups, youth political groups and campus clubs, while non-traditional partners might include businesses, large employers, trade unions, non-formal education centres, community non-profit groups, youth-focused service organizations, religious groups and media organizations.¹

There is an enormous range of activity worldwide which can be used as the source for case studies and examples that illustrate effective practice and/or imaginative initiatives. The focus chosen here is on the activities of EMBs and non-partisan, non-profit groups. This definition is not always easy to apply in practice, as ideas of ‘non-partisanship’ in particular are not necessarily alike in all political contexts. The attempt has been made, however, to consider activities designed to encourage turnout and to exclude activities by organizations that are directly affiliated with, or funded by, political parties, which may be better considered as a means to build or mobilize party support. The selection made from a huge range of initiatives is inevitably to some extent arbitrary but is intended to represent the wide range of activities that are taking place.

Activities to encourage voter turnout can be categorized into the framework of the six basic approaches identified in section I:

1. *information campaigns*—campaigns that address the question of how a potential voter is to register (if this is required), outlining the basics of who can vote, and advertising when an election is to be held, where one goes to vote, the hours when polling stations are open, and how the very process of casting a ballot works;
2. *advertising campaigns*—campaigns that address the motivational issue as to why electors should participate in the electoral event;
3. *grass-roots movements*—groups of citizens working to inform, register (if this is required), and mobilize their fellow citizens at election times;
4. *school/mock elections and other special-purpose programmes* within the educational system—campaigns designed to teach the workings of democratic systems and electoral processes. These programmes may be directed to children, adults or particular demographic groups, and may vary greatly in length and intensity;
5. *entertainment*—campaigns that operate on the premise that learning about elections and politics can be more engaging to certain target audiences if it is presented in a lighter atmosphere and accompanied by music and/or spectacle; and
6. *inducements*—programmes designed to make voting more enticing by offering actual or potential compensation.

1. Information Campaigns (‘how’)

Information campaigns generally address the fundamental processes of registering potential voters and the ‘*how, when and where*’ of voting itself. These campaigns are often led by EMBs throughout the world. In addition, in countries where the onus is on the individual rather than the state to ensure registration (either legally or in practice), significant mobilization by non-government groups often takes place to get this basic information across to the public. Examples include Declare Yourself (USA), Freedom of Choice (Ukraine), Pora (Ukraine), Mjaft! (Albania), the Association of Election Officials in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Emang Basadi Women’s Association (Botswana), Conciencia (Argentina), Freedom of Choice (Ukraine), and the advertising campaigns run by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)’s Burundi Office.

Information campaigns tend to be as inclusive as possible. The primary goals are to register many potential voters, and to ensure that the voting process

is clear and accessible. In addition, both EMBs and non-government groups at times direct particular efforts to specific groups in society that are less likely to vote. These may include immigrant groups, minority groups (e.g. Freedom House in Slovakia), particular geographical areas where voter turnout is low, disabled voters (e.g. the Central Electoral Commission in Bulgaria, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal in Costa Rica, and the National Office of Electoral Processes in Peru), and so on. Information campaigns often tend to be multilingual even in countries with only one official language (e.g. the electoral commissions of Western Australia and Victoria in Australia). In Sweden, the voter information booklet contains material in 15 languages and basic information about elections is available in about 20 languages.

As with any other operation, information campaigns directed to a mass audience need to consider the most effective ways to communicate their message. Common mediums include mail-outs (direct or general), advertising in the print media and on radio and television, leaflets, and posters. Many countries have also embraced new technologies to assist direct communication and voter registration by making use of the Internet to establish information websites (e.g. the South African and Nigerian electoral commissions, the Latvian Central Electoral Commission, and the French Ministry of the Interior), or email, and some EMBs are even employing text messaging (e.g. in New Zealand). Additionally, in order to more directly reach smaller groups of specific potential voters, workshops and seminars are sometimes offered (e.g. by the Electoral Commission in the United Kingdom, the Botswana Electoral Commission, the New Zealand Electoral Commission, the National Democratic Institute in Niger, We The Citizens in Russia, and the Committee of Voters of Ukraine).

2. Advertising Campaigns ('why')

Unlike campaigns that provide strictly information, this category includes activities that introduce the motivational question of *why* potential voters should cast a ballot. The answer can be phrased in a variety of ways, but the message is often common across borders.

- '*Your vote is your voice*': if you as a citizen want to have your input into how politics and government work, you need to vote in order to send a message to those in power.
- '*Politics affects you so be involved*': as much of social life, from the mundane to the spectacular, relies on the decisions and administration of govern-

ment bodies, your interests will not necessarily be attended to if you do not make the effort to be a part of the process.

- '*Your vote matters*': every vote cast plays a role in determining who will win and form the government, or which way a referendum issue is resolved.
- '*It is a citizen's right and duty to vote*': as part of a civic body, every citizen is granted political and legal rights of which voting is one. At the same time, every citizen in a democratic society is morally required to participate in order to ensure lawful, responsible and legitimate government.
- '*Voting is a "cool" thing to do*': the idea that voting is both an enjoyable activity, and even more so, an activity that is an attractive and desirable part of one's lifestyle.

In some national government settings, these 'pushes to encourage voting' are run by the same EMBs that provide the information campaigns described above, while in others responsibility is allocated to a complementary organization (an example is Sweden's division between the Central Election Authority (information) and the Ministry of Justice (motivation)). In many countries, however, the loudest messages regarding the importance of voting come from non-government groups, citizens' organizations and young people's organizations.

As with information campaigns, motivational advertising campaigns are often wide-ranging in their targets and scope. They try to send messages that are intended to resonate with as many potential voters as possible, but also often include pleas to specific groups. Campaigns targeting young people in particular are common, as low turnout among young voters is a concern in many countries. Campaigns to motivate young people are often part of wider attempts to reach young people, some of which are described below.

Advertising is often done by way of television, radio and print advertisements, billboards, leaflets and the Internet.

3. Grass-roots Movements

Grass-roots movements do not involve formal government bodies or EMBs. Rather they are on-the-ground campaigns that rely on ordinary people to mobilize their peers to vote. They come in many forms, for many purposes, and often with specific target groups in mind. They may appear for a specific electoral

event, or they may emerge from social groups that decide that there is a need to pursue voter mobilization in their neighbourhood or their country as a whole.

Depending on the national context and their own capacity, grass-roots groups may carry out different functions. Many focus on facilitating voter registration and/or election-day get-out-the-vote (GOTV) activities, and with this as an overarching purpose seek to convey civic education messages regarding the 'how' and 'why' of voting, and combating lack of interest and negativity. Many grass-roots groups have particular target audiences in mind when establishing their activities—young people (e.g. Get Your Vote On in Canada, the New Voters Project in the USA, Pora in Ukraine, Rock Volieb in Slovakia, Mlodzi Demokraci in Poland, Malady Front in Belarus, and the Centro de Voluntariado de Rio Claro in Brazil); minority groups (e.g. the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund in the case of the Latino vote in the USA, and Black Youth Vote in the USA); low-income groups (e.g. Project Vote in the USA); and women (e.g. Emang Basadi in Botswana, the Women's Alliance for Development in Bulgaria, and the Sector de Mujeres Campaña Por Voto Consciente in Guatemala)—or even smaller objectives such as workplace or client voter mobilization.

The methods employed by these groups can vary widely depending, once again, on context, capacity and resources. Grass-roots methods are often people-intensive, as the greatest success has often been found to come through good-quality, personal, and preferably face-to-face, contact.² This may be accomplished by actually knocking on doors and providing information or motivation to people in their homes, by setting up tables or kiosks in public places to speak to passers-by, by scheduling events or public forums, by getting friends, family, or acquaintances to promise to vote, or by use of telephone banks. Less personal direct contact methods may include leafleting, direct mailings and email, and more generally directed efforts can take the form of media support, posters and graffiti. Grass-roots organizations sometimes also provide small inducements to participants such as give-aways or souvenirs, or services to make voting easier such as transport to the polls on election day.

Although this inventory does not consider activities by political parties and political groups, it may be worth noting that the methods employed by grass-roots movements are often common to partisan and non-partisan groups alike—it is the message that varies. Some studies have suggested that both

are equally effective at boosting turnout in general.³ Party campaigns, however, tend to only target likely voters. This often leaves traditionally low-turnout groups, such as young people and minorities, out of the reach of their campaigns: if asked to vote, some of these potential electors would be likely to do so.⁴

4. School/Mock Elections and Other Special-purpose Educational Programmes

Many organizations, governmental and non-governmental alike, dedicate time and resources to setting up civics programmes on electoral matters for primary and secondary schools that fulfil the educational guidelines of their region or country and try to encourage their distribution and use (e.g. the New Zealand Election Commission's Hands Up!, the Hansard Society's Heads Up in the UK, the Victoria Electoral Commission's Your Opinion Counts in Victoria, Australia, Kids Voting USA's Civics Alive!, the Department of Education of the French Community of Belgium's Democracy or Barbarism (Démocratie ou barbarie), and the National Electoral Court in Peru). Other organizations provide less structured resources and online forums to be used as an accompaniment to civics classes. Many of these emphasize in particular that civics education can be made more enjoyable when 'hands-on' activities are provided, allowing students to 'do politics' rather than simply providing reading or lectures (e.g. the UK Electoral Commission, Elections Canada, the Western Australian Electoral Commission's Electoral Education Centre, the Australian Capital Territory Electoral Commission, and the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico).

Expanding the idea of teaching through doing, there are also many organizations that provide the opportunity for students to experience an electoral event. Different organizations have done this in different ways. One method has been to run mock elections or referendums on various (political and non-political) topics with students playing all the roles—party candidates, speech-writers, canvassers and voters (examples are the Y Vote mock elections run by the Hansard Society in the UK, and the programmes of the Western Australian Electoral Commission and the Australian Capital Territory Electoral Commission, PBS Kids in the USA, and the Regional Federation of the Houses of Youth and Culture of Rhône-Alpes in France). Another method is to provide the information to apply the structure of official national elections to school-based elections or student parliaments (e.g. Elections Canada, and the

Intenda Foundation in Slovakia). The method that provides the most realism in this experience is probably that of running a mock election parallel to an actual ongoing campaign.

As a hands-on approach to learning how political processes work, students follow a formal electoral campaign and ‘vote’ in their own assigned polling stations according to proper electoral law and voting procedures (e.g. Kids Voting in the USA, Student Vote in Canada, and the Committee of Voters of Ukraine). In addition to providing an interesting teaching method, a further objective is that, if children are interested and wanting to exercise their ‘right to vote’, or at least to see how voting works in actuality, their parents may take the opportunity to vote as well. Building on this connection between parents and their children, campaigns have also emerged such as Take Your Kids to Vote and PBS Kids in the USA, which encourage children to get their grown-ups out to vote.

5. Entertainment

Rock the Vote (USA) was established in 1990 as a response to concerns that freedom of speech and artistic expression were under attack. Its highly visible approach—to involve and empower young people by using popular culture and trends to make political education and participation more appealing—has been widely adopted by other groups throughout the world.

Organizations that use entertainment to spread their message contend that providing events that appeal to certain groups based on age (particularly young voters) or interest offers an opening to combat the negativity and lack of interest that many feel towards the political process, provide information and voter registration services, and generally make voting ‘cool’. The entertainment element can have many faces: music concerts are commonly used, but so are sporting events, theatre, comedy, cultural events and so on.

Different groups present events on different scales: some work continuously as political projects while others appear only in the context of a particular electoral event. While the entertainment is the key draw, events often also incorporate face-to-face contact with peers or politicians, give-aways and souvenirs, or contests. Larger campaigns also often involve media support, launching advertising or public service announcements.

6. Inducements

In any electoral event, there will be those who will not be persuaded to vote by arguments of civic duty, civic education or emotion. These potential abstainers may be more likely to consider participation if they feel they will receive a direct benefit by voting. In Colombia, for example, a series of institutional–administrative incentives to vote have been put into place. In this case, so long as one is an active voter, one may qualify for preference in admission to higher education, or access to government employment, scholarships and home loans; receive reduced tuition fees, consular service fees, airport tax, and costs for some government documents; and receive reductions in the term of required military service.⁵

While it is perhaps a logical counterpart to compulsory voting—the carrot rather than the stick—the very idea of offering more obvious inducements to vote tends to stir up controversy. Such proposals may engage a fierce debate of principle about what is and is not acceptable in promoting democratic participation. However, despite the uproar these initiatives frequently inspire when they do achieve an executable form, ideas in this category are not in short supply. Offerings such as lottery tickets or small gifts (provided by the EMBs, not from particular political parties), hoping to lure more people to the polls, have been tried in both local and national elections (e.g. in Norway and Bulgaria). An attempt to introduce the concept of voter inducement has been initiated in the US state of Arizona. Proposals to be voted on by the public on 7 November 2006, alongside congressional and other elections, include a measure called the Arizona Voter Reward Act. If successful, this initiative will result in the establishment of a lottery whereby 1 million US dollars (USD) will be awarded to one randomly-selected voter after each primary and general election held in that state. The money to fund this is to come from unclaimed state lottery prize money, private donations, and state money if needed. The express purpose of this proposal is to raise voter turnout. The organizers have adopted the slogan ‘Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? Vote!’. They argue that this device should be viewed as a means to encourage people to become both more interested in and better informed about politics, and that better representation will result if more people vote. Opponents, on the other hand, dismiss the proposal as a commercial ‘bribery’ attempt that might draw electors who have not studied the candidates or the issues. They argue that the measure is simply a superficial response to a real problem, and that the idea that more voters will automatically pro-

duce a better outcome is flawed. In mid-2006, there is also some question as to whether or not Arizona's lottery initiative will contravene state and federal law regarding the exchange of votes for money.⁶

Endnotes

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- 6 Archibold, Randal C., 'Arizona Ballot Could Become Lottery Ticket', *New York Times*, 17 July 2006, late edn, pp. A1/A15.
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