



Voter Registration

GUIDES ON GOOD ELECTORAL PRACTICES

Voter Registration



The Commonwealth

Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House
Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

© Commonwealth Secretariat 2016

All rights reserved. This publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or otherwise provided it is used only for education purposes and is not for resale, and provided full acknowledgement is given to the Commonwealth Secretariat as the original publisher.

Published by the Commonwealth Secretariat
Typeset by Commonwealth Secretariat
Printed by Hobbs the Printers Ltd, Southampton, UK

Views and opinions expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the author[s] and should in no way be attributed to the institutions to which they affiliated or to the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Wherever possible, the Commonwealth Secretariat uses paper sourced from responsible forests or from sources that minimise a destructive impact on the environment.

Copies of this publication may be obtained from

Commonwealth Electoral Network
Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House
Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 7747 6500

Email: cen@commonwealth.int

Web: www.thecommonwealth.org/commonwealth-electoral-network

Contents

1. Key Principles for Voter Registration	1
2. Background: Voter Registration	3
3. Good Practices	5
3.1 Joined-up approach	5
3.2 Adequate and timely resourcing of an EMB	6
3.3 Clear and feasible operational and legal timelines	6
3.4 Providing comprehensive voter information	7
3.5 Special measures to reach all target groups	8
3.6 Appropriate voter eligibility criteria and proof of identity	9
3.7 Adoption of appropriate voter registration methodology	11
3.8 Appropriate use of information technology	14
3.9 Ensuring reliable data collection	15
3.10 Determining the viability of biometric registration	17
3.11 Ensuring sustainability	18
3.12 Maintaining quality control	20
3.13 Partnering with electoral stakeholders and donors	22
4. Commonwealth and Other International Instruments for Democratic Elections	23
4.1 Commonwealth Charter (2012)	23
4.2 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948)	24
4.3 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)	25
4.4 UN Committee on Human Rights, General Comment 25 (1996)	25

4.5	International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1966)	26
4.6	UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)	26
5.	The Commonwealth Electoral Network	27



1. Key Principles for Voter Registration

For an election to be credible, there must be universal and equal suffrage, with the right to vote provided for eligible persons and integrity of the balloting procedures ensured. Voter registration is critical to these rights and obligations.

A voter registration process should be designed to verify the identity of potential voters, then enter their names and supporting information on a voter register. For registration to be fair, comprehensive and inclusive, potential voters must be aware of the registration process, and must have reasonable opportunities and relatively easy access if they are to complete it.

Participation, as promoted by universal suffrage and the right to vote, is essential to the credibility of the democratic process. A credible, comprehensive and accurate voter register helps an EMB to administer an election effectively, while also providing a strong, early indication to electoral stakeholders that an election is being administered effectively.

There are clear international obligations protecting the right of all citizens, without discrimination or unreasonable restriction, to participate in choosing their representatives. There are further international obligations specifically protecting the electoral accessibility rights of particular groups in society that may be marginalised or face obstacles in accessing their franchise rights.

Electoral legal and regulatory frameworks, and voter registration systems, policies and practices, exist to give full legal and administrative effect to these franchise rights, and should in no way limit them. The EMBs are the custodians that ensure that these rights are implemented in practice.

There are numerous frameworks, models and implementing strategies for voter registration. Differences in political and electoral systems, in election frequency, in physical and social environments, and in human, technological and financial capacities mean that all voter registration systems are environment-specific. There are, however, some core commonalities that can be applied as guidelines and some options that can constitute good practice under particular circumstances.

The key principles for voter registration can be summarised as:

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| • Accessible | • Feasible |
| • Accountable | • Inclusive |
| • Accurate | • Integrity |
| • An informed public | • Sustainable |
| • Comprehensive | • Transparent |

2. Background: Voter Registration

Participation, as promoted by universal suffrage and the right to vote, is essential to the credibility of the democratic process. It is the cornerstone of a democracy, and if citizens are to be able to exercise their right to vote, there must be a comprehensive and inclusive register of voters.

There are clear international obligations protecting the right of all citizens, without discrimination or unreasonable restriction, to participate in choosing their representatives. There are further international obligations specifically protecting the electoral accessibility rights of particular groups in society that may be marginalised or face obstacles in accessing their franchise rights, such as women, those with disabilities, internally displaced persons and those in prison.

Electoral legal and regulatory frameworks, and voter registration systems, policies and practices, exist to give full legal and administrative effect to these franchise rights, and should in no way limit them. The EMBs are the custodians that ensure that these rights are implemented in practice.

Voter registration is vital in ensuring public and political confidence in the outcome of an election. An EMB will also use voter registration data in the following ways to help it to plan and manage the electoral process.

- Voter registration data is the basis on which electoral constituencies are created.
- The number and location of polling stations will be determined on the basis of the number and location of voters needing to be served on election day.

- The numbers of ballots to be printed and their breakdown by polling station is strictly managed on the basis of actual numbers of voters at each voting location.
- The accurate calculation of voter turnout is determined against the accurate identification of the total number of persons on the voter register.

There are numerous models and implementing strategies for voter registration among which countries must choose. There are, for example, active and passive voter registration systems, continuous and periodic voter registration, and computerised and manual registration lists.

Each country will develop its own system for voter registration to reflect its own particular circumstances. Differences in political and electoral systems, in election frequency, in physical and social environments, and in human, technological and financial capacities mean that all voter registration systems are environment-specific. Further, the level of responsibility for voter registration of the EMB in each country may vary, with some having far greater responsibility for voter registration than others.

3. Good Practices

The practices and mechanisms that each country chooses to implement voter registration will reflect its own particular circumstances. The following good practices are options based on helpful practices used across the Commonwealth.

3.1 Joined-up approach

- The extent to which an EMB may be responsible for voter registration may vary from country to country, but two key considerations need nonetheless to be kept in mind, as follows.
 - The EMB must ultimately manage the overall process, as the institution responsible for the electoral process.
 - There will need to be close co-operation between the EMB and relevant state institutions—that is, a joined-up approach—to ensure that the EMB has access to all relevant data, including updates on deaths, disqualifications, or changes to residence. Subject to data protection regulations, EMBs can establish useful links for such information with institutions such as registrars of deaths, the courts system, citizenship and education authorities, emigration authorities, licensing authorities and utilities providers. In some instances and in respect of the prevailing legal framework, EMBs may be able to access significant amounts of the required data from existing government or public data sources.

*Accurate
Comprehensive
Feasible
Integrity*

Accurate

Feasible

Integrity

Sustainable

Transparent

3.2 Adequate and timely resourcing of an EMB

- To enable the EMB to implement its voter registration functions independently and effectively, legal or constitutional provisions should provide for: the protected tenure of EMB staff members; the EMB budget to be directly appropriated from the state consolidated fund; and the EMB to have full control over the hiring and firing of its staff. Delays in the resourcing of an EMB can have serious implications for the quality of the electoral process.
- Further, voter registration data quality is heavily dependent on the skills of the staff who process it. Within continuous voter registration systems, it is often possible for data collection to be undertaken by core EMB staff who are available for continuous training. The initial collection of data for a new voter registration system and any periodic updates of a permanent register may require similar numbers of staff to those required on polling day, and will also demand more of training and development, because of increased numbers of temporary or ad hoc staff.

Accessible

Accountable

Accurate

An informed public

Comprehensive

Feasible

Inclusive

Integrity

3.3 Clear and feasible operational and legal timelines

- Operational timelines for voter registration defined in law, regulation or government policy should be sufficient to compile a credible voter register. Such timelines need to provide adequate time for each phase of the registration process, should integrate effectively with related electoral procedures (such as candidate registration and ballot printing), and must allow the register to be published in good time to ensure understanding and confidence among stakeholders.
- Just as there is an overall electoral cycle, there is within this a voter registration cycle that plans for voter registration must take into account. Traditionally, the period required for registration was dominated by the data collection period; with the advent of biometric-based systems, significant time is now spent on data matching to remove duplicates. It is critical—especially when introducing new voter registration

systems—that sufficient time is allowed to complete all tasks in the voter registration process in full, from the pilot study through to the production and distribution of polling station lists, while providing sufficient time for all eligible voters to register.

3.4 Providing comprehensive voter information

- Every EMB requires a co-ordinated and targeted communication strategy as part of its overall work. In regard to voter registration, the EMB's public information programme should match the voter registration methodology; hence continuous voter registration requires a continuous information programme. Campaigns encouraging participation in voter registration may need to target both the population at large and specific sectors with lower participation rates, such as young people, women and other marginalised groups.
- Using stakeholders to help to motivate people to register can extend the reach and effectiveness of the EMB's participation campaigns. Using civil society organisations (CSOs) that represent and work with marginalised groups is effective, as is including electoral issues in the educational curriculum. Political parties can also be a key partner in this endeavour.
- Where registration is voluntary, eligible voters may need to feel that there is an incentive to register. In countries in which there is no functioning national identity (ID) card system, for example, issuing each registered voter with a relatively high-integrity voter ID card that is widely accepted as evidence of identity has proven to be successful in boosting participation.

Accessible
Accurate
An informed public
Comprehensive
Inclusive
Integrity
Transparent

Accessible
Accurate
An informed public
Comprehensive
Integrity
Inclusive
Transparent

3.5 Special measures to reach all target groups¹

- Providing accessible and convenient voter registration services can be significant factors in encouraging participation. Generally, young people are under-represented on voter registers; providing registration facilities at their places of education can lift the participation rate. Providing mobile registration facilities for remote areas or convenient registration facilities in high-traffic areas—for example at entertainment events, in government offices and within transport hubs—can also boost participation. In all of these instances, however, providing increased accessibility must be balanced with maintaining the integrity of register data.
- The legal and regulatory framework for voter registration should clearly uphold citizens' full franchise rights, without unreasonable restrictions, paying particular attention to promoting accessibility to voter registration among less-advantaged groups—such as women, people with low literacy, ethnic and language minorities, people with no permanent abode and those with a disability. This may require prescription of special measures, such as the use of braille. Further, the EMB should consider how to adapt voter registration premises to ensure accessibility, and should prepare designated voter information and voter outreach campaigns in local languages. It is also important that EMBs produce disaggregated registration statistics that can show where registration rates do not match the country's demographic make-up.

1 Further relevant guidelines for encouraging participation can be found in CEN, <Report of the Working Group: Voter Education and Electoral Participation, 16-17 June 2011>, Voter Education and Electoral Participation, London: Commonwealth Secretariat.



3.6 Appropriate voter eligibility criteria and proof of identity

- Critical to the credibility of the voter register is that anyone who applies to register to vote or who change their registration details can prove, to an acceptable degree, their identity and their fulfilment of legal qualifications, such as age, citizenship and residence. The strictness of requirements for such proof will depend largely on the level of political trust and on practical issues, such as the availability and integrity of official personal documentation.
- If a national ID system with an acceptable level of integrity is in place, this can be an effective foundation for proof of age, identity and citizenship. Similarly, officially issued documents, such as birth certificates or passports, provide proof of identity and citizenship, as can other official documents, such as marriage certificates and driving licences.
- Proving residence can be less straightforward. Documents suitable for proving identity may not contain address data or the data may be out of date. Any legal provisions determining a qualifying period of residence before a voter is eligible to register at an address need to be considered. To check proof of residence, a visit to the residence claimed may be ideal, but such a visit can be costly and unwieldy. While such a visit may be the best way in which to combat low levels of political trust,

*Accountable
Accurate
Inclusive
Integrity
Comprehensive
Transparent*

documents such as attestations from local governments, utility bills, or some other form of vouching may be regarded as sufficient.

- Some EMBs can usefully institute special measures based on geo-referencing (such as using Google Maps) or geographic information systems (GISs) to assign addresses for areas where addresses are not routinely and uniquely assigned to all residential locations. To avoid disenfranchising voters who are internal migrants, persons should be able to register in respect of their current place of permanent residence on the basis of satisfactory proof, rather than only in relation to their official residence as shown in identity documents that may have been issued some years ago.
- In countries in which systems for provision of official documents are not fully comprehensive or effective, other means of proving eligibility may be appropriate, depending on levels of political trust, to avoid disenfranchising those sectors of the population who do not possess any such documents. These means may include using documents issued by education institutions, employers, banks or government offices, or 'vouching' systems such as a 'web of trust' mechanism. Treatment of nomadic peoples, those with no place of residence and non-resident citizens may be regarded as special cases. However, if it accepts these documents and methods as proof of eligibility to register, an EMB must carefully assess the risks of potential fraudulent registration, and must be transparent and consistent in its application of proof-of-eligibility requirements.
- In considering the fields of data to be collected, EMBs should also ensure that only the data required for the purpose of voter registration and the associated integrity verification needs to be collected. All EMBs should be wary of collecting unnecessary data, which can slow down and complicate the registration process.

3.7 Adoption of appropriate voter registration methodology

- There are two basic methodologies of voter registration: that in which data is automatically loaded and continuously updated from a civil registry database; or that in which a stand-alone voter register is compiled from data collected directly from eligible voters, which may be augmented by data from other sources. Stand-alone registers may be 'temporary', where the register of voters is compiled from a zero base for every electoral event, or 'permanent', where the data is stored in a permanent database and updated—either 'periodically', through registration drives at set or irregular intervals, or 'continuously', in which case facilities are available continuously through which users can make amendments, additions, transfers and deletions to the register. Each of these different models for voter registration has specific advantages and disadvantages that may make it more or less suitable for particular environments.
- Voter registers based on civil registries tend to be most suitable for environments in which there is political trust in government authorities, where the civil registry is managed effectively and impartially, and is updated regularly with changes of residence and other registration-related data. The major advantages of this methodology are that it is reasonably current and may result in lower costs spread over the whole electoral cycle. No motivational or information campaigns are required for voter registration and individuals are automatically added to the register when they reach voting age.
- In practice, however, except where the civil registry is exceptionally well managed, there are also disadvantages to using this methodology. In the first instance, it requires an effective national ID card system to be in place. Further, the EMB does not have direct control over the data being compiled for the voter registry nor is voter registration a core business of the civil registration agency, whose data interests are more related to identity than to the residence data that is equally vital to the EMB.

Accessible
Accurate
Comprehensive
Feasible
Inclusive
Integrity
Sustainable

- Temporary periodic voter registers may be appropriate for a low-tech voter registration process in response to an immediate need for a voter register, such as in a post-conflict environment. However, their high and repeated direct costs, and rapidly degrading data, mean that this method is not regarded as a long-term solution for voter registration. The major advantage of temporary periodic registers is their simplicity: they can be used in a very low-tech environment, with neither a permanent administrative structure nor long-term planning requirements, and there is no maintenance workload. Moreover, motivation and information campaigns can be concentrated.
- There are, however, a number of disadvantages to temporary periodic voter registers, not least among which is that they are expensive. They require a zero-base compilation of large amounts of data for each election, which places pressure on electoral administrators at a critical time, and that data degrades rapidly, so the register does not serve unforeseen electoral events well. Further, implementing such a register requires the training of large numbers of staff, who will have only infrequent experience of the tasks involved.
- Periodically updated permanent voter registers tend to be most suitable for environments in which the EMB has reasonable management capacity, including a secure and skilled central data management facility, and when elections tend to be predictable, at known intervals. In such environments, this type of register can provide an acceptable balance between costs and currency of data. The major advantage of a permanent register is that it provides a basis for voter registration data that needs only to be updated and enhanced over time to serve the needs of future elections. Further, the costs of voter registration are spread over time and there can be less of a spike in registration activity during the election period. Using a periodic update may also lessen the permanent administrative structure required for data maintenance.

- There are, however, disadvantages to periodically updating a permanent register, including the need for relatively high-cost repeated update drives. Unless updates are implemented close to an election, which may not be possible in the event of an unexpected election, register data for the election will not be current. In common with all permanent registers, the accuracy of a permanent voter register relies on receiving timely and accurate notice of entries to be deleted.
- To the extent that it is possible to do so, continuously updated voter registers provide data that is always current. They are particularly suited to environments in which elections may be held with little notice or where registration data is used as the basis of a national ID card system. They work well in environments in which voters prefer not to, or cannot, attend in person to register or amend registration details. They do not require significant investment in technology, long-term planning and funding commitments, nor do they demand a technologically mature EMB. The major advantage of a continuously updated voter register is that up-to-date data is always available, so the register is ready at all times for an electoral event. Moreover, costs are spread over the whole electoral cycle, as is the administrative burden for voter registration. A continuous update process can promote continual electoral awareness in the population and professionalism among EMB staff, and allows for continuous public review of register data. Quality control measures can also be enhanced, because they do not have to deal with large data spikes. Continuous updates can also help to capture young people on the register, provided that legislation allows the recording of data before the subject reaches voting age, with automatic transition to the register of voters at that time.
- In practice, however, many people do not avail themselves of continuous voter registration facilities; thus periodic and costly update drives are generally also required. To operate effectively,

continuous update requires a developed infrastructure, the acquisition and maintenance of high-tech resources, and a high level of technical skill.

3.8 Appropriate use of information technology

- Accessible* • A register does not have to use high-tech methods to be of good quality nor is a high-tech register necessarily of good quality.
- Feasible*
- Integrity*
- Sustainable* • Information technology (IT) equipment and software for voter registration is often one of the biggest single purchases that an EMB makes, requiring careful decision-making in a sea of supplier, consultant and, at times, donor vested interests. Thorough cost–benefit analyses using whole-of-life costs, sustainability analyses and pilot testing under field conditions are required before the EMB makes its decision. For these reasons, among others, including building political acceptance and public awareness, work on a new IT-based voter registration system is best commenced very early in the electoral cycle. The suitability of the IT system for local objectives, local skills and the local operating environment is a key consideration, and is why locally developed systems can be the most appropriate. There are also practical ways of reducing IT costs, such as the use of open-source software (OSS), which eliminates significant current and future licensing costs, local software development and arrays of small inexpensive servers. However, EMBs should take particular care when entering into contracts in which ownership of any of the hardware, software or data collected during registration is not fully vested in the EMB, and must also be alert to the expected lifespan of technology assets.
- Other than appropriate equipment and software, a key issue is the availability of skilled computer operating staff. It is possible that, in some field areas, there may be little knowledge of computers—which presents the EMB with both an opportunity for voter registration to lead a skills revolution in these areas and a challenge in terms of staff training.

3.9 Ensuring reliable data collection

- Computer-based data collection has two basic methods: optical scanning and data keying. There are other unique and successful formats, such as the barcode-reading 'zip-zip' machine, but whatever the system used, each person registering should receive some proof of registration at the time of registration.
- If biometric data—most usually, photos and fingerprints—is collected in the field, the means of data capture has to be determined. For photographs, webcams are cheaper than digital cameras, but whether image quality and equipment life is sufficient must also be considered. Electronic signature pads can be used, but taking a photo of each signature can be as effective. Fingerprints can be taken with ink and later scanned, or captured with a digital scanner at the outset—noting that a scanner may struggle to capture data from rough hands. The number of fingerprints captured will affect the time taken for registration and the reliability of fingerprint matching: scanning of fewer than five fingers tends to give reduced reliability. It is important that all biometric data is incorporated with textual data within a single file when data is collected; failing to do so risks a later mismatch between biometric and textual data.
- Two critical issues with regards to data collection in the field are ensuring adequate electricity sources, and the securing and backing up of data. There will always be hardware breakdowns and software problems in the field; the use of a regional structure of helpdesks or engineering support can be effective in countering these.
- In systems in which voter ID cards are issued to registered voters, there are two different approaches to printing and distribution.
 - In the first instance, the ID card may be issued at the registration data collection point, the strong advantage of which lies in ensuring that each person who registers

*Accurate
Comprehensive
Inclusive
Integrity*



receives a card. However, it requires portable printers to be supplied as part of the registration equipment kits and, unless wide-ranging duplicate checks are made at the time of registration, it may result in a person obtaining multiple voter ID cards from multiple registrations.

- Alternatively, cards can be issued centrally after the data has been corrected, and after duplicate and ineligible entries have been removed. The risks of this approach are significant, however, in that it may not be possible to deliver a card to each person who has registered or to do so in time for an upcoming election.
- The availability of skilled personnel, adequate security measures, clear communication routes and sufficient funding, and the type of electoral system used are among the factors affecting how and where data collected in the field is verified, authenticated, amalgamated, cleaned and divided into polling station lists. There are those who advocate using centralised databases and processing, and those who prefer processing using regional or electoral district-level databases linked to a central database; each can be appropriate depending on the environment. It is at this stage of voter registration that the process becomes invisible—and at which it is therefore all the more important that the EMB maintains trust by being open and communicative about the methods used, progress made and any problems in processing the data collected.

3.10 Determining the viability of biometric registration

- The recording of biometric data for each person registering—the digital capture of human characteristics such as faces, fingerprints and irises—is increasingly being used to varying extents as a means of front-line quality control in compiling the voter register. It is used for identifying duplicate entries on the register (helping to establish whether each entry is unique) and at polling stations for verification (helping to ensure that a person is who he or she claims to be), although it is still more usual in the latter instance for staff to compare the voter against a photo ID or a photo on the register of voters.
- Use of biometrics can be expensive (especially in the case of iris recognition, which is fast and accurate) and/or time-consuming in terms of eliminating duplication (especially in the case of fingerprint recognition). Speed can be increased, but only by sacrificing accuracy. In all cases, human investigation is also required to confirm automated results, which can include high numbers of false matches. High-quality data capture is essential: lighting must be right if digital photographs are to be of good quality; rough fingertips may need to be carefully prepared if scans of fingerprints are to be acceptable.
- The EMB's operating environment also has to be suitable if the use of biometrics is to be effective. Factors that affect both the introduction of a biometric system and its sustainability in the longer term have been found to include:
 - acceptance and support for the use of biometrics among both voters and political parties;
 - whether there is an adequate level of available skills within the EMB and its contractors;
 - whether electoral timelines allow sufficient time for the implementation and follow-up investigations required for biometric-based matching;

Accessible
Accountable
Accurate
An informed public
Comprehensive
Feasible
Inclusive
Integrity
Sustainable
Transparent

- whether the available supporting infrastructure is both sufficient and fully reliable;
- physical environmental factors—such as high temperatures, dust and transport methods—which may not allow effective operation of the equipment; and
- whether there is sufficient vendor support.

3.11 Ensuring sustainability

Feasible
Integrity
Sustainable

- Sustainability issues for voter registration specifically, and for electoral management in general, go beyond the most visible issue of financial sustainability, to include issues of institutional, political, human resources, technological and environmental sustainability.
- The continuity of sufficient funding is critical for the financial sustainability of voter registration. Voter registration systems have high start-up costs, but they also have significant ongoing maintenance costs and, within 5–10 years, will have large equipment replacement costs. No matter how they are funded initially, it is essential that there is an analysis of the whole-of-life and future replacement costs of any proposed voter registration system, and assurance sought that funds required in future years will be available.
- A coherent legal, regulatory and policy framework that allows the EMB and other involved institutions to fulfil their voter registration responsibilities is vital for the institutional sustainability of voter registration. Stakeholders should also accept the legal framework for voter registration and the manner in which it is implemented so as not to threaten the viability of the institutions responsible. Instability among those institutions, corrupt practices in state tendering processes

and civil service policies that require frequent rotation of staff within EMBs are some of the factors that can undermine this institutional sustainability.

- Human resource sustainability requires the EMB to develop and retain its voter registration expertise, so that its skilled resources are sufficient to manage the voter registration process. The EMB needs to ensure that any external technical assistance for voter registration—especially in terms of computer operations—is targeted towards knowledge transfer, rather than task takeover.
- Technological sustainability requires that any equipment used for voter registration be reliable in local conditions, capable of being operated and maintained within the country, and publicly accepted as appropriate for the local environment. It is also important that the technology adopted is not likely to be obsolete within too short a time period.
- No matter how accurate and comprehensive it is, a voter registration system will not be credible if it does not have political sustainability. Political sustainability requires the voter registration framework, systems and processes to be widely accepted across the political spectrum. In this way, it works to promote the legitimacy, inclusiveness and integrity of elections, and helps to reduce the potential for conflict.

Accurate
Accountable
Integrity
Transparent

3.12 Maintaining quality control

- It must be feasible to implement quality assurance mechanisms within available time frames, yet the mechanisms must be sufficiently robust to engender trust in the credibility of the register of voters. An EMB can take a layered approach to controlling the quality and integrity of voter registration data.
 - The first layer is at the point of data collection, and is based on the documents and processes required as proof of eligibility to register.
 - The second layer is that at which data is processed and amalgamated. This is the most usual point at which data should be checked for accuracy and completeness, validated and authenticated against addresses, and analysed for registration patterns to detect anomalies for investigation. Data from other sources—such as on deaths and disqualifications from registration—should also be applied at this stage.
 - The third layer is the public review of the register, and the claims and objections that will result from this review. Historically, few people access a display location to check whether or not they appear on the register. The accessibility of physical display locations and limited periods for review, claims and objections affect the rates of access. Web-based, SMS and smartphone app-based review facilities can increase accessibility. The role of political parties in motivating their supporters to check that they are correctly registered is also important and the EMB should strongly encourage such campaigns.



- The fourth layer is an independent two-way audit of the voter register: the first compares the eligible voters found at a sample of residences with the names entered on the register for these addresses (the list-to-voter test); and the second compares a sample of names from the register with those persons found to reside at the relevant locations (the voter-to-list test). If the register is to be credible, it should score well over 90 per cent accuracy in the first test, and in the 80–90 per cent range for comprehensiveness in the second.
- It may also be appropriate to have a final quality control layer that involves using polling-day processes to deal with potential quality issues in the voter register. These could include (in cases in which it is felt to be necessary) allowing political agents to challenge voters whom they believe to be ineligible to vote and using tendered or provisional ballots for voters who claim to have registered, but who cannot be found on the register at a polling station. However, the use of such mechanisms at the polling station should be the exception rather than the rule, and best practice is for parties to be actively engaged in the initial compilation and verification of the register, ensuring then that it is an accurate and trustworthy source.

3.13 Partnering with electoral stakeholders and donors

Accessible
Accountable
An informed public
Inclusive
Integrity
Sustainable
Transparent

- Building a transparent and effective partnership with electoral stakeholders means more than simply allowing them to access, or to observe, voter registration activities. The EMB's active engagement with key stakeholders on voter registration should create allies among media, political parties and CSOs in terms of informing and mobilising the public. Stakeholders also play an important role in the quality control process, mobilising voters to check their registrations, and helping to increase transparency and confidence, for example when stakeholders act as observers and when party agents closely follow the process. The EMB should ensure that its decision-making and operations are transparent, that it provides prompt, accurate information, and that it engages in effective consultation and complaint resolution in its effort to build this engagement. Implementation of a regular voter registration liaison mechanism between the EMB and a broad-based group of stakeholders that is transparent, informative and consultative is also useful.
- It is common for donors to provide significant support for new voter registration systems, particularly because high-tech systems have significant start-up costs, not least in terms of equipment and software. Where there are doubts about the efficiency of locally managed purchasing, or where purchasing decisions are contentious, asking donors to purchase major items directly, as agents of the EMB, can be effective. However, the EMB must ensure that it retains control, determining the appropriate systems to be purchased, and defining the priorities, timetables and support needs. It is imperative that it assesses offers of support from donors for sustainability, to ensure that it has the capacity to maintain, refurbish and update voter registration systems after donor support has ended.

4. Commonwealth and Other International Instruments for Democratic Elections

The various rights and obligations associated with voter registration, such as universal suffrage, equal suffrage and the right to vote, are recognised in a series of Commonwealth and other international agreements and instruments.² These not only require such rights to be provided for in law, but also oblige the state and national institutions to ensure that such rights are realised in practice and available to all, without discrimination.

4.1 Commonwealth Charter (2012)

Principle I, Democracy:

We recognise the inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, in particular through free and fair elections in shaping the society in which they live. Governments, political parties and civil society are responsible for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices and are accountable to the public in this regard ...

[...]

Principle II, Human Rights:

We are committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant human rights covenants and international instruments. We are committed to equality and respect for the protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights,

2 There are also various regional commitments and instruments relevant to Commonwealth members, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, and the Copenhagen Commitments of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), among many others. However, such regional instruments invariably reflect the obligations reflected in international instruments and so, for brevity only, the key provisions are reproduced in this pamphlet.

including the right to development, for all without discrimination on any grounds as the foundations of peaceful, just and stable societies. We note that these rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and cannot be implemented selectively.

We are implacably opposed to all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds.

Principle VII, Rule of Law:

We believe in the rule of law as an essential protection for the people of the Commonwealth and as an assurance of limited and accountable government. In particular we support an independent, impartial, honest and competent judiciary and recognise that an independent, effective and competent legal system is integral to upholding the rule of law, engendering public confidence and dispensing justice.

Principle XII, Gender Equality:

We recognise that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights
...

Principle XVI, The Role of Civil Society:

We recognise the important role that civil society plays in our communities and countries as partners in promoting and supporting Commonwealth values and principles, including the freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and in achieving development goals.

4.2 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Article 21:

1. *Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his [sic] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.*
2. *Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his [sic] country.*

3. *The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall [sic] be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or equivalent free voting procedures.*

4.3 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)

Article 25:

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

- a. *To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;*
 - b. *To vote and to be elected at genuine period elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;*
- [...]

4.4 UN Committee on Human Rights, General Comment 25 (1996)

This General Comment on Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ('The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service') includes the following paragraph.

11. *States must take effective measures to ensure that all persons entitled to vote are able to exercise that right. Where registration of voters is required, it should be facilitated and obstacles to such registration should not be imposed. If residence requirements apply to registration, they must be reasonable, and should not be imposed in such a way as to exclude the homeless from the right to vote. Any abusive interference with registration or voting as well as intimidation or coercion of voters should be prohibited by penal*

laws and those laws should be strictly enforced. Voter education and registration campaigns are necessary to ensure the effective exercise of article 25 rights by an informed community.

4.5 International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1966)

Article 5:

... States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights:

[...]

- c. Political rights, in particular the right to participate in elections—to vote and to stand for election—on the basis of universal and equal suffrage, to take part in the Government as well as in the conduct of public affairs at any level and to have equal access to public service;*

[...]

4.6 UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)

Article 7:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- a. To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for elections to all publicly elected bodies;*

[...]



5. The Commonwealth Electoral Network

Reflecting the Commonwealth's commitment to the inalienable right of individuals to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in shaping the society in which they live, the Commonwealth Electoral Network (CEN) aims to ensure that elections within the 53 member countries of the Commonwealth community are fair, credible and transparent, by helping election management bodies (EMBs) to share, and to implement, best practices. The conduct of credible elections is critical, as the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security has emphasised:

When the electorate believes that elections have been free and fair, they can be a powerful catalyst for better governance, greater security and human development. But in the absence of credible elections, citizens have no recourse to peaceful political change. The risk of conflict increases while corruption, intimidation, and fraud go unchecked, rotting the entire political system slowly from within.³

The CEN was set up in 2010 to establish a 'gold standard' in election management in Commonwealth member countries. The CEN promotes good practice in managing elections, facilitates peer-to-peer exchanges of experience and knowledge, and fosters a community of Commonwealth EMBs.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government recognised and endorsed the value of the CEN when they stated, in the 2009 Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles:

[W]e endorse the proposed Commonwealth Network of National Election Management Bodies, which would facilitate experience sharing and serve to create support mechanisms, promote good practices and

3 Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security, 2012, Deepening Democracy: A Strategy for Improving the Integrity of Elections Worldwide, Stockholm: IDEA, p. 3.

*facilitate opportunities for peer support across the Commonwealth, thus enhancing member countries' capacity to hold credible elections which enjoy the confidence of the people.*⁴

Under the auspices of the CEN, EMBs from across the Commonwealth gather at biennial conferences to discuss and identify best practices, to address common challenges and to further enhance peer relations.

As well as biennial conferences, the CEN has established working groups on a broad range of electoral matters, with the aim of enhancing exposure to best practices and sharing innovative techniques. Working groups have been held on vote counting and tabulation processes, voter education, campaign finance, new media, the independence of EMBs, managing the power of incumbency and voter registration,⁵ among other issues. The CEN working group programme provides a structured avenue for peer-to-peer experience-sharing. Working group meetings draw together subject-matter experts from a geographically representative cross-section of CEN members for in-depth discussions on specific issues. The aim of these meetings is to identify guiding principles and good practices on issues of relevance to all CEN members.

A Commonwealth Junior Election Professionals (JEP) initiative is training young electoral professionals. Regional workshops have been held in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean. In the long run, this direct assistance stands to benefit not only junior officials, but also other permanent employees, as well as temporary election officials brought in to work at polling stations and other facilities ahead of election days. It does so by means of the sharing of best practices among all electoral commission employees.

4 Commonwealth Heads of Government, 2009, Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles, available online at <http://thecommonwealth.org/history-of-the-commonwealth/trinidad-and-tobago-affirmation-commonwealth-values-and-principles> [accessed 4 August 2016], para. 11.

5 The CEN Working Group on Voter Registration was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in June 2011.

Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom
thecommonwealth.org



The Commonwealth