Observing ICT Applications to Electoral Processes

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Background

- ICT applications are part of any electoral process

- Observation methodology must adapt to deal with the changing environments if it is to continue fulfill its role

- Observation assessment can provide important clues to orient the investments and the electoral assistance in the post-electoral period

- Digital voter registration and electronic voting are the two areas where EU is facing specific challenges

Voter Registration

- Voter registration is the most complex, controversial and costly component of every electoral process

- What can EOMs say about a process that they barely observe?

- Yet, problems with voters' lists are the most common feature in EU EOM assessments and the second most frequent recommendations in EU EOM Final Reports.

- How to ensure that EOM assessments have a value and a significance in the reform process?

Digital Voter Registration – What does it change?

- The ability of normal observers to evaluate elements such as transparency, inclusiveness, accuracy in the digital dimension

- Is a digital register more or less accessible to public scrutiny?

- Can the use of internet help transparency? What is the ideal system?

- Can disadvantaged categories be better included?

Key issues to focus on

- Who has gained access to the data with a DVR?

- How has the DVR improved the inclusiveness for disadvantaged categories (gender, minorities, rural, illiterate)

- Has a DVR removed traditionally lengthy administrative requirements – length, costs, required documentation

- How has voter information and training been included

What can still be observed?

- Statistical breakdowns (age, gender regions)

- E-day quality indicators (design, usage of lists, duplicates, voters not found, simple procedures)

- System quality indicators (centralised database, efficiency in cross-checking data, data-exchange programs and ability to determine voter identity)

- Balance between citizen-friendliness and fraud prevention mechanisms

When to recommend a digital register?

- When a country does not have a manner to identify effectively its citizens

- When the administrative documentation used for the voter lists is corrupted and not reliable

- There is a possibility to establish synergies with other sources of data that are acceptable

- Difficult inter-institutional information exchange

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Electronic Voting

- Two categories: Voting in controlled environment and in uncontrolled environment - EVM and Internet Voting

- Common advantages attributed to Internet Voting are higher turnout, increased voters' mobility, facilitation of disadvantaged categories, economies of scale in large countries

- Does not solve the major issues of the secrecy of vote and of the vote coercion

- Transparency?

Electronic Voting

- EVM voting does not necessarily maintain the benefits normally associated to Internet voting

- It does not endanger the fundamental requisite of the secrecy of the vote

- It does offer some important answers on the issue of transparency through a development of various forms of auditing mechanisms.

- Possibility to introduce Voter Verified Audit Trails (VVATs)

Observing EVM – What does it change?

- Presence in EU EOM Core Team of IT experts and in particular of software developers

- Drastic changes in the forms. Questions to be asked are different

- Different observation strategies. Concentrate observation efforts on the closing and counting/audit procedures and on the results aggregation process

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Observing e-voting in Venezuela

- High polarization of political life

- E-voting introduced to curb electoral frauds

- Individual results of the Recall Referendum publicly available

- 2005 Parliamentary Elections: nationwide introduction of EVMs and electronic voter registers

- Touch-screen EVMs

The Venezuela Paradox

- The extreme sophistication and high reliability of the voting system does not make up for the lack of trust in the EMB among several stakeholders

- The huge investment in technology has not been yet matched by a similar effort in capacity building

- The higher the distrust in the EMB, the higher the need for transparency and security measures

- Technology cannot fix the underlying political problems

What can be observed:

- The political context, electoral campaign, media, stakeholders in general

- Understand the level of acceptance and confidence that various stakeholders have in the ICT applications

- Observe the level of voter education and capacity building measures that accompany the introduction of e-voting

- Observe the degree of trust enjoyed by the EMB

- Transparency measures introduced by the EMB

What can be observed:

- Problems caused by system malfunctioning and lack of education/training

- Type of training being provided to the EMB by the vendor

- The legality of systems

- The timing or sequencing of the e-voting introduction

- Observe the degree of progressive ownership of the EMB

- Observe the audits and the documentation made available

What an EOM cannot do:

- Validate the reliability of digital registration kits or voting machines

- Exclude the potential vulnerability of the system to massive frauds from inside or successful hacking for outside

- Turn itself into an auditing mission

- Exclude with certainty the possibility to connect the voter identification sequence with the voting sequence in fully automated contexts

When to recommend EVMs?

- Very reliable election administration, very complex elections and complicated count

- When the transparency of the process is maintained through VVAT (it will not be the cheapest option!!)

- There is Trust In The EMB!

Issues for Reflection

- Where do we stand in case of a legal framework that provides for a digital upgrade or e-voting ?

- What to say in case of "black box" selling?

- Does electoral assistance have to place conditionalities in these areas? Which ones?

- Do vendors implement the electoral cycle better than assistance providers?