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## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES: HOW DO THEY HELP VOTERS ABROAD?**

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### **Abstract**

The use of information and communication technology in electoral processes has become commonplace, being seen simply as another tool in the hands of policy-makers to improve the quality and effectiveness of public policy and representation. There have been diverse experiences in this area, and the instances in which ICT has been used in the mentioned processes differ. This article analyses and evaluates systematically, for the first time in literature, the incorporation of ICT when voting from abroad, paying attention to the practices of some of those countries that have implemented these technologies in one way or another, into their voting processes. Hence, by introducing the Electronic Voting From Abroad Index, this paper observes at which phase of the process the technology is being used and how this vary from country to country.

**Keywords:** elections, participation, political rights, democracy, Information and Communication Technologies, e-Governance

## **Introduction**

The extension of political rights is an unfinished process that has not stopped in countries that are, or are becoming, democratic. Within the range of rights and freedoms taken as guarantees of citizens' political participation, the right to vote is, perhaps, one of the most important. It would be safe to say that modern democracies are based to a large extent on the freedom to vote. Both formal and substantive/normative theorists of democracy take the extension of universal suffrage, the open electoral competition between candidates, and the freedom of the electorate to exercise their right to vote in secret and equal conditions, as the basic elements configuring democracy (Dahl 1963). Undoubtedly, this should be the context in which to frame the relevance of Voting From Abroad (VFA). It has been more than 150 years since this concern was raised regarding the electoral participation of those who, due to various reasons among which war stood out, were not able to effectively cast their ballots and influence their country's electoral outcomes. It happened in the State of Wisconsin, where for the first time, soldiers fighting in the American Civil War enjoyed the right to vote as "out-of-country" citizens (IDEA 2007).

Over the years, countries have gone through numerous transformations, but facilitating the vote to those nationals who are outside their boundaries has been a constant for all of them. Every democratic country, regardless of its quality or consolidation grade, has stressed the importance of the right to vote abroad. Nevertheless, different factors have

reshaped the participation patterns and conditions for these voters: wars, migratory flows, and cultural, economic, and social globalisation have blurred the borders of the concept of classic nation-states, changing the relationship between citizens and their countries, transforming socio-economic conditions, and configuring new interdependency relationships (Held 1997; Castells et al. 2007). As an example, post-war and transitional societies take into account the dispersion of their citizens to other countries as refugees or displaced persons when organising large-scale policies of voting abroad in order to include these groups in the electoral and political processes of the democratic rebuilding and, thus, when trying to ensure long-lasting peace in their territories. Moreover, given that they have suffered mass emigration for years, developing countries set up these types of operations in receiving countries with the aim of including the voice of those who left the country in forthcoming electoral processes. In the case of countries with consolidated democratic tradition, the possibility of offering expatriates the ability to exercise their vote abroad has more of a sense of a legal extension, since citizens' motives for leaving their home countries can be due to a variety of reasons such as geographic mobility, economic interests, and professional reasons. Information society has greatly contributed to this mobility. However, it has also revolutionised the means of communication and relationships between governments and their citizens. Clearly, information and communication technology have helped to improve the processes by which citizens living abroad can exercise their right to vote, improving quality and guaranteeing the effectiveness of this right by breaking, to a large extent, the tyranny of distance.

Yet, processes enabling voting abroad are not easy, and their correct execution poses serious challenges. In most consolidated democracies, where there have been regular elections during prolonged periods of time, it is normal to observe legal measures implemented in relation to overseas voters. It is not the case in many other younger democracies and emerging countries, where the lack of enough established procedures and administrative structures, in addition to the political climate, their own socio-economic situation, political culture, and electoral behaviour, add a good amount of difficulties to the successful outcome of voting.

This paper studies the role of ICT when analysing the implementation of Voting From Abroad policies in a diverse sample of 30 democracies. Section 2 introduces the relevance of paying attention to voters living abroad. Section 3 describes the different possibilities that ICT presents for the effective development of political participation abroad. To that end, the Electronic Voting From Abroad Index is introduced: a comprehensive measure of what countries actually offer online to their expatriates in order to make their political rights abroad effective. Section 4 presents a description of the most relevant findings in this paper. Section 5 provides an analysis of the consequences of developing strong Voting From Abroad services for the actual prospects of overseas participation. Finally, Section 6 presents the conclusions.

## **The relevance of voters living abroad: scope and limits**

Nationals living abroad, whether they are diplomats, members of the military, personnel abroad, migrants, refugees, or people displaced by a previous regime or warfare, make up a critical group of citizens that pose a dilemma for any democratic executive, and a challenge as regards maintaining a balance between inclusion and effectiveness of rights (Bauböck 2005). On the one hand, normatively, they should not be left out of the representative process in their native political systems; on the other hand, their long-distance connection and inclusion by the possibility of offering them the right to vote must be guaranteed in a way that is effective and efficient both for them and for the proponent country.

According to some basic descriptive statistics offered by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), in 2000, 175 million people were international migrants; that is to say, one in 35 people resided outside their home country. By 2005, that number had increased to 190 million. This number doubles that of half a century ago and its growth is concentrated in a reduced number of developed countries. Migrant population flows continue to concentrate fundamentally in North America, Europe, and the geographical area of the former Soviet Union, decreasing in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, and other traditional outgoing areas. In order to make it clear, in 2000, there were 70 countries in which 10% of the population originally came from another country. However, as previously mentioned, we are not only talking about those migrants who left their countries due to necessities related with survival; political, economic, and cultural globalisation, along with the appearance of supranational polities such as the European Union, have produced a mass mobility of those citizens who, in a temporal or mobile fashion, have changed their place of residence for personal, academic, or professional reasons (Castells 1997).

Therefore, these circumstances reflect the ever-growing necessity of offering voting processes with plenty of guarantees for citizens living abroad. Having said that, and despite its history of over 150 years, voting from abroad is, however, a recent phenomenon, except for rare exceptions (Iceland has allowed its fishermen to vote for more than 100 years ago). In consolidated democracies such as Italy and Mexico, mechanisms of this type were approved a few years ago, and the future setting up of their use is currently under debate in other countries, as may be the case in Paraguay. In this sense, only 115 out of 214 countries have a settled system of voting from abroad. This number could be lower if considering that, even within those countries that allow expatriate voting, in 50% of these, only two-thirds of all of these citizens are enabled to vote. The other third is excluded from exercising this right for some reason, such as, for instance, temporary residence, loss of accreditation, or non-fulfilment of the sufficient conditions to be registered to vote (IDEA 2007). Hence, the first problem that an expatriate needs to solve is identifying who is, and is not, recognised as a citizen living abroad. In order to do so, he or she should inevitably pay attention to the legal framework that specifies not only voting procedures, but also describes who has the right to vote and which are the compulsory requirements for exercising the vote, along with the circumstances necessary for it.

This context establishes a set of limitations to be considered: beyond those generally stipulated (e.g., legal age, being a national of the country, not being deprived of liberty, etc.), the first of these constraints is usually the condition of residence abroad. Some countries exclude groups of citizens, depending on their reasons for leaving the country or being away from it. According to this, there are countries that only allow overseas voting to civil servants or military personnel on duty. On the contrary, other countries with recent autocratic history limit precisely the right to this same group. Consequently, the consideration of those citizens who live abroad is sometimes limited by historical and political considerations. The degree of temporariness is also relevant, that is, the time that any citizen has to live abroad to reach the non-resident voter category. This may be a restriction for lengthy durations (in the case of Australia, citizens who have been out of the country for more than six years lose their right), or it may be for short durations (e.g., visitors, tourists, students). The third constraint is related to the type of election: in most of these 115 countries, the right to vote abroad is restricted to Legislative and Executive National Elections, disregarding, to a large extent, local elections, as well as regional ones. The last limitation, an inescapable step for all the democracies studied in this article, is the requirement to be registered as a voter. It is usually a *sine qua non* condition for all voters, whether within the national territory or abroad, and apart from the obligation to vote in the general electoral system; but in the case of expatriates, either a second registration as a resident abroad or a series of more profound paperwork in order to proceed with registration as a voter are sometimes required. I will, further on, look at these specifics, and determine whether or not they redound upon the participation of these electorates.

Still, the existence of a law referring to the specifics of voting abroad does not necessarily guarantee that it will be actually exercised or implemented: in Nicaragua, for example, the 2000 VFA law has not yet been applied given the lack of structural and organisational conditions for its successful development (equality, transparency, security, etc.). This necessarily connects with the other relevant constraint that VFA usually faces: the administration of the electoral processes.

The electoral administration of overseas voters usually entails additional complications, particularly in countries that have recently made the transition to democracy and where internal and external expectations are high (Przeworski 1991). In these countries, holding competitive and free elections is a fundamental step towards democracy. But elections are also relevant for consolidated democracies, as the necessary means for representation by the configuration of the party system and the balance of institutional powers (Sartori 1962; Blais et al. 2010). Therefore, the fair and effective management of the electoral process plays a key role in the legitimation of the whole process and in this sense, reaching small but geographically scattered groups of overseas voters, and the implication of a third institutional player in the process (i.e., guest countries) is always a challenge. The electoral administration of those voters living abroad usually requires a complex interaction between the national institution in charge of the election (governmental or judicial institution) and the foreign affairs department. Thus, the first challenge for a country willing to develop VFA policies depends on whether or not it has diplomatic relations with those countries where their citizens live. Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq, for instance, have relevant displaced

or refugees populations installed in bordering countries that do not collaborate when ensuring access to vote for these citizens. International organisations play an important role as facilitators, but they also increase the pressure and, sometimes, disturb the process. Knowing how many voters are away from their national borders, where they are, and if they want to vote also presents a relevant challenge. The necessity to have a census, in addition to other further registration requirements, certainly complicates the process. These and other particularities related to the effective development of the process clearly increase the costs of VFA. Ensuring the secrecy, transparency, and freedom when voting abroad causes more than a few headaches for those in charge of the national electoral administration. The solution usually lies in facilitating some of the following possibilities:

- 1) Personal voting: normally in a diplomatic office or in a space facilitated for it.
- 2) Postal voting: the voter receives the documentation by post and casts his/her ballot by the same procedure.
- 3) Voting by delegation: the overseas voter authorises someone in his/her home country to vote for him/her. Lately, there are examples of countries where the delegation process can effectively be done online.
- 4) Voting using electronic devices: the voter can cast his/her vote by fax, telephone, the Internet or by any other digital device, either at home or in an officially recognised place.

### **Information and communication technology: towards the online administration of electoral processes abroad**

Many organisations and authors in literature nowadays accept the effect of the digital revolution when reshaping how citizens and governments interact; observing, as a result, a new type of relationship identified as e-Government (Heeks 2001; United Nations 2001; Parrado, 2002; Friis and Traunmüller 2002; Tsekos 2003). Although this concept is not the specific subject of this article, given its relevance for the posterior design and measure of the Electronic VFA Index that is proposed here, the features and complexities of this new concept need to be briefly discussed.

The aim of e-Government is to establish a one-way communication protocol for improving public services and making public policies attuned to the needs of the citizens. Several international organisations have been studying the inclusion of ICT in public administration and governments, along with the challenges and difficulties that this poses; for instance, the concept of digital divide or the problems of access to these technologies. These organisations have tried to analyse how and to what extent ICT has been introduced into public services and processes, and the measures some countries are taking to transform their societies, firstly, into an information-based society and, secondly, into a knowledge-based one (Dahlberg 2001; United Nations 2001; OECD 1999; Commission of the European Union 2002; Communities 2002, 2003, 2005; Lanvin and Cornelius 2003; Nations 2008).

For these reasons, the Division of Public Administration of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the UN has been regularly monitoring the e-Government policies of its member countries ever since 2000, using a complex index that lists the

official websites of member countries and the e-services they offer to their citizens. In recent studies, the index has included a new category that measures the degree of e-services offered and their quality: "connected". "This concept is understood from a global approach to e-Government that sees technology as a strategic tool and a facilitator for innovation in the public sector and the growth of productivity" (UN 2009). Therefore, it implies a step forward in the global study of the use of technologies in government-citizen interactions, provoking an evolution from the concept of e-Government to e-Governance. Accordingly, citizens now have the chance to play an important role in deciding and deliberating on the public policy process. This introduces the necessity to consider this communication type as two-way (Heeks 2001; Natera 2001; Tsekos 2003).

ICT offers a set of features that can help governments achieve their goals: cost-cutting, speeding up paperwork, breaking through geographical and temporal barriers and boundaries, and personalising the service attending citizens' particularities. As Subirats pointed out, government is no longer a matter of equal treatment but of personalised attention (2008). In the past, studies have been fine-tuned to measure e-Government and e-Governance services. As a result, there is an international scale that has been regularly used to rank different countries according to the availability and quality of their online services. The scale describes the following stages:

- Emerging: a static web service that offers basic links to government areas, and little direct information.
- Enhanced: more detailed information, availability of downloadable documents and the possibility to receive warnings or newsletters.
- Interactive: the government provides full online documentation and information. It allows the downloading of forms and their filling out, along with downloadable tax forms for their payment.
- Transactional: the government facilitates a two-way interaction between the citizens and the government, and vice versa, including the possibility of paying taxes online.
- Connected: the government becomes a connected organisation that requires citizens' engagement for management (United Nations 2005; United Nations 2008).

The services that these organisations evaluate are related to national infrastructures, and public policies related to healthcare, the job market, education, social security, record accessibility, claims, and taxes (Guy & Pierre 1998). However, they do not analyse services related to electoral processes. Following the methodology elaborated by the UN when measuring e-Government and the study of official government websites (OECD 1999; Riley 2000; Ronaghan 2002; UNESCO 2002 and 2003; Dutta 2003; OECD 2003; UNCTAD 2003; Sakowicz 2004; United Nations 2005; Norris 2006; United Nations 2008; Reddick 2010), this article presents a measure that shows how, where, and to what extent governments and administrations incorporate ICT into their electoral administrations, specifically with respect to those people living abroad. This seems especially relevant given that the own characteristics of ICT match with the necessities of overseas voters when effectively casting their ballot. Consequently, this also relates to the diversification of citizens' interactions with the government and to the innovation on their capabilities when exercising their political rights.



**Table 1.** Battery of items generating the Electronic VFA Index

Stage	Item	Explanation
I	Label for voting from abroad	Absence or presence of a special label for these voters
I	Personalised information	Do they have special information or regular information?
I	Multimedia information	Multimedia information available
I	Hotline	Phone, chat, or text messaging service
I	FAQ section	FAQ tag available
I	Agenda	Electoral agenda available
I	Rules	Electoral rules availability
I	Polling location	Information for local or electoral colleges
I	Voting explanation	Voting explanation
I	Information of exit polls	Availability of the electoral results
I	Traceability	Voter can track its vote at any moment
I	Other information	Further information
I	Accessibility	Information available for every citizen
I	Electoral registering compulsory	It is compulsory to be previously registered to vote
I	Who initiates the process?	The electoral process changes depending on who starts the process: the state or the citizen
I	Submitting errors	Can voters submit registering or voting errors?
R	Basic information	Basic information is provided by the government
R	Partially downloadable	Some documents can be downloaded from the official webpage
R	Fully downloadable	All the necessary documents are available on the official webpage
R	Interaction procedure	Documents can be sent by telematics processes
V	Connected service	Voter can cast the vote online (e-voting), including payment of taxes if necessary

To that end, I have created a battery of 20 items, which includes a set of elements measuring the information, resources, and tools available to expatriates when choosing to vote. Specifically, I account for three different moments in the process: the information gathering stage, the registration moment, and the final voting stage. The first stage accounts for all items related to the available online information about the process. The second stage measures those tools and services needed by voters to register themselves. In the exceptional case in which national electoral administrations automatically register those already counted as expatriates, the battery is reduced to 16 items. Finally, the third stage is measured by a unique dummy variable controlling the possibility of voting electronically.

This data has been collected from the official electoral administration websites of a diverse sample of 30 democracies,<sup>1</sup> creating the so-called Electronic Voting From

<sup>1</sup> Australia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Cape Verde, Colombia, Croatia, the Dominican Republic, Finland, France, Georgia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Mozambique, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States (all of them range from a score of 5 to 10 according to POLITY IV). Additional information and empirical appendix is available on request.

Abroad Index. The Index ranges from 0 to 1 after obtaining the mean of the items' use, with the purpose of comparing these results with those obtained by previously mentioned measures such as, for instance, the UN e-Government and e-participation indexes. In order to avoid any selection bias that could overestimate the Index, the sample accounts for countries with heterogeneous levels of wealth, democracy, and e-Government scores. The selected cases accomplish three different criteria: all these countries recognise the right to vote from abroad to their expatriates (case specificities); they all have, at least, an official website where electoral information is available; finally, all these countries should provide basic information on the electoral process regarding voters abroad.

## Findings

All of the countries in the sample have passed the initial stage of static or emerging websites. Commonly, most of these countries (around 90%) offer online, basic electoral information about the agenda, the rules (all of the countries in the sample provide this information), the procedure, and the polling place. Some of them, as in the case of the more developed countries, have multimedia elements available for configuration and, based on the complexity of the process, offer more detailed information. The average results of the first set of indicators (those related with information provision to voters) show that more than two-thirds of the countries are in an "enhanced" stage or even higher.

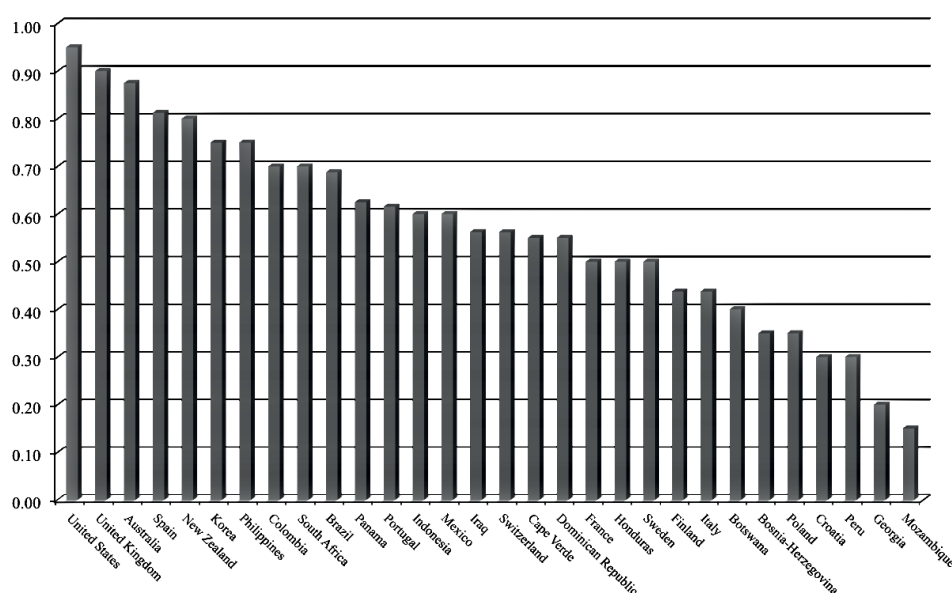
The second set of items, that is those indicators related to the availability of tools and services for effective participation, presents higher levels of heterogeneity among the countries in the sample. In 56% of cases, there is a hotline number where citizens can be kept informed, whether it is a free phone number, mobile telephone number, or instant messaging. The distribution of the countries that offer this option is random in itself; that is to say, it is not in response to matters of economic resources or democratic itinerary. So, Spain, Philippines, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Brazil, Cape Verde, Honduras, Indonesia, Mexico, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, Portugal, the Dominican Republic, and Sweden have hotlines devoted to answer the queries of their citizens. There is actually a correspondence between those countries that supply a hotline and those that go even further by incorporating a frequently asked questions (FAQs) section. Despite the fact that only 43% of the countries offer this service to their citizens, all of the ones that do it, with the exception of Colombia, also incorporate telephone lines to deal with citizens' doubts. Yet, only a quarter of the countries make multimedia information available to explain the process of voting from abroad. In the case of non-residents, the possibility of visualising the official coverage of campaign events, along with getting information regarding the voting process, might be one of their few methods of getting institutional electoral information about the process. Even today, when any information seems to be available online, this is important, since most of the time this type of podcasts or videos do not reach the mainstream online media. Within those countries that register their overseas voters automatically (Australia, Brazil, Iraq, Italy, Korea, Panama, Philippines, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland), only a few of them offer voters the possibility of correcting the errors on their official electoral registration profiles online. On the contrary, the rest of the



countries in the sample require voters to register themselves to vote. With the purpose of enhancing the transparency of the voting process, various countries such as Colombia and South Africa, offer the chance to track the locus or the situation of the vote at any moment.

In any case, here is a brief description on how far they allow this access and in what measure they reach levels of interactivity and connectivity. Close to 66% of the countries that require registration from voters make the necessary information for electoral registration available to citizens abroad. However, only 45% offer partially downloadable documents, somehow inviting applicants to finish part or the entire process offline. Only a quarter of the countries give all the information necessary for completing the process, whether online or offline. Australia, Philippines, Mexico, New Zealand, the UK and the US allow the downloading of all of the documentation, online completion of documents, and the opportunity to contact the electoral administration when there is a need to resolve doubts. Lastly, the capacity to complete the whole electoral registration process electronically, including the ability to pay charges or expenses when needed, is facilitated only by New Zealand, Switzerland and the US. The case of France is a tricky one, as expatriates have the right to delegate their vote online to somebody living in the in-country territory. Poland recognises the possibility of voting by fax. Based on the described data, the country score of Electronic Voting From Abroad Index is displayed in the bar graph in Figure 1. The Electronic Voting From Abroad Index measures the electronic practices of the countries in the sample with respect to the regulation in force at the time of the research, that is, 2014.

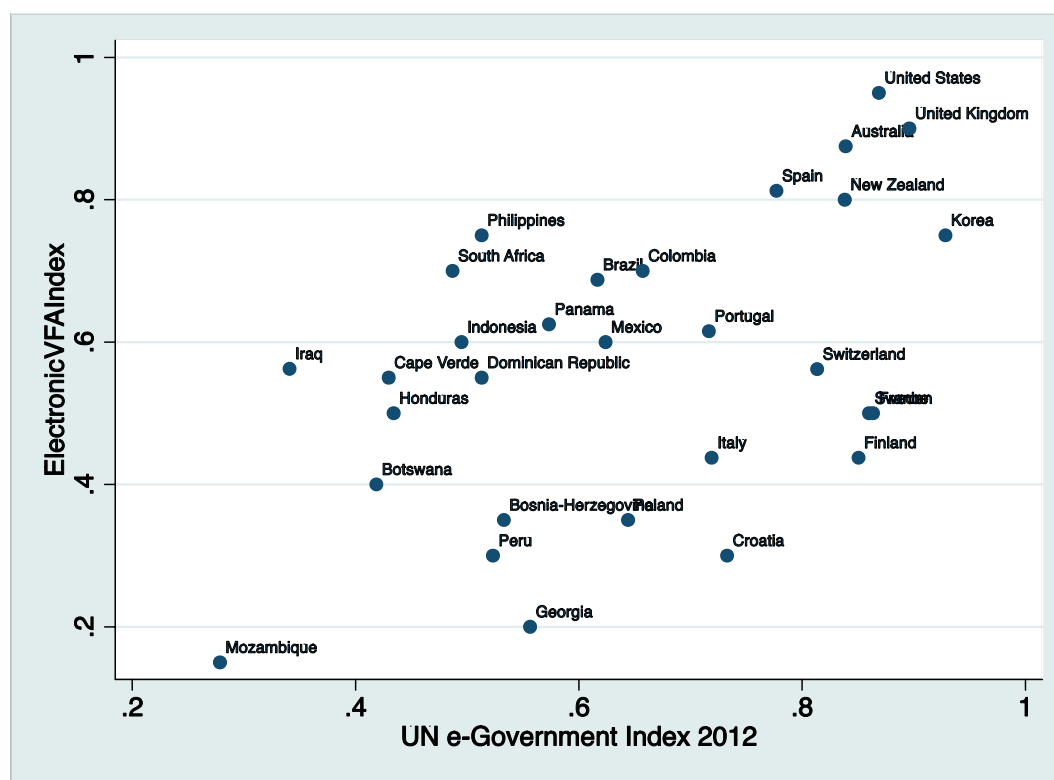
**Figure 1.** Electronic Voting From Abroad Index by country



Interestingly, the first group of consolidated and wealthy democracies (the US, the UK, Australia, Spain, and New Zealand) is closely followed by a diverse group of emerging economies, among which there are examples of countries that have experienced recent events of civil war, ethnic conflict, transition to democracy, or massive migrations due to

economic downturns (Korea, Philippines, Colombia, South Africa, and Brazil). Moreover, among the cases in the lower tail, Mozambique, Peru, Georgia, and Croatia provide good examples of countries that use official websites purely to inform voters about procedural issues in a static manner. All of these countries devote most of the space of their websites to more or less comprehensive explanations of the procedure, as the rules of the process and information about how to vote, for example. Surprisingly, Poland, which is one of the countries with a higher number of expatriates in the sample and more broadly, in the world, receives a timid score in the Index. Switzerland, where the electronic vote for expatriates is recognised in some of the cantons, or Italy, a late comer into the process of Voting From Abroad recognition, are middle ground examples of countries that, however, enjoy higher levels of development regarding to e-Government scores.

**Figure 2.** Relationship between Electronic VFA Index and UN e-Government Index

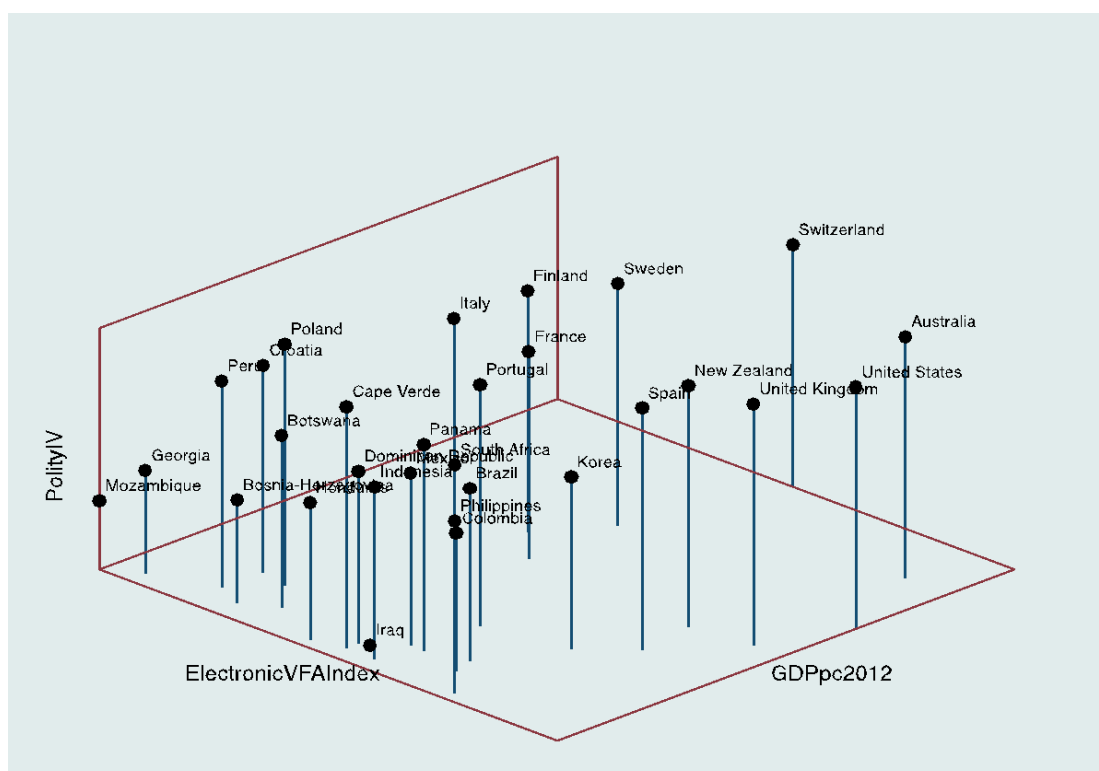


Correlation Coefficient=0.478

For the sake of consistency and reliability of the Electronic VFA Index, Figure 2 shows the relationship between the constructed and analysed measure in this paper and the UN 2012 e-Government Index scores for the countries in the sample. Relevantly, both variables show a strong positive linear trend confirming the robustness of the measure: the greater the score obtained by a country in the Electronic VFA Index, the higher the score of that particular country in the UN e-Government Index. As suggested by the preliminary analysis of the Index, countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, and Finland show a distinguishable difference between their EFVAI score and the score obtained in

the UN Index, the latter being considerably higher. This could be a clear consequence of having low and constant percentages of expatriates across time, decreasing the salience and relevance of developing this particular voting policy in the mentioned countries (at least in the time frame of this research, which is updated to the last reform of the procedure in every country).

**Figure 3.** Relationship between Polity IV score, Electronic VFA Index, and Gross Domestic Product per capita levels



Still, to what extent is the development of electronic services for overseas voters a consequence of other usual suspects of modernisation, such as the level of democratic consolidation or relative levels of wealth in a particular country? Figure 3 shows a three-dimensional graph on the relationship between the Index and the mentioned variables. Polity IV accounts for the latest reported level of democracy by 2010 in every country in the sample and GDPpc2012 is the UN per capita wealth measure by 2012. The graph confirms that there is a group of countries described in Figure 1 (Korea, Colombia, Philippines, etc.), those next to the lower corner, which even if obtaining middle levels of economic wealth and democratic performance still manage to have high scores in the EVFA Index. To some extent, this could confirm the idea that ICT makes interactions between citizens and administration in various particularly relevant contexts (both Korea and Colombia have approximately 10% of their populations living abroad) more affordable for various low GDP per capita countries. Nevertheless, any possible conclusion in this sense comes

with a necessary caveat: wealthier countries lead, no matter the empirical approach, the development of complete electoral strategies for voters abroad; as it can be inferred from the general diagonal incremental trend in the graph, the higher the level of democracy and wealth in a particular country, the higher its score in the Electronic VFA Index.

### The use of ICT and electoral participation

During the 1990s, several studies predicted that the incorporation of ICT would increase electoral participation in countries such as the US by almost 90% of the total electorate (not of the registered population). This improvement in the number of engaged voters was closely related to the inclusion of electronic voting (MIT 2001). Twenty years later, scholars and well-known research centres have gathered mixed results and, hence, cannot completely validate or refute this thesis, due to the slow path of incorporation of electronic voting in both consolidated and transitioning democracies.

**Table 2.** The EVFA Index, registered expatriates, and their electoral participation in France, Switzerland, and South Korea

Country	EVFA Index Score	Registered Expatriates 2007	Turnout (%)	Registered Expatriates 2012	Turnout (%)
France*	0.5	821,919	346,310 (42.13)	1,043,586	407,704 (39.06)

Country	EVFA Index Score	Registered Expatriates 1999	Turnout (%)	Registered Expatriates 2011	Registered Expatriates (e-voting) 2011	Turnout (%) (e-voting)
Switzerland**	0.562	70,063	35,102 (50.1)	125,567	22,000	11,660 (53)

Country	EVFA Index Score	Registered Expatriates 2012	Turnout (%)
South Korea***	0.75	222,389	158,235 (71.2)

\* Presidential Election Results: 2007 data from IDEA (2007); 2012 data from [http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/root/bank\\_mm/decisions/2012premiertourPDR/resultats-departements.pdf](http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/root/bank_mm/decisions/2012premiertourPDR/resultats-departements.pdf)

\*\* Federal Assembly Election Results: 1999 data from IDEA (2007); 2011 data from <http://www.osce.org/odihr/87417> and data about electronic voting in Basel-Stadt, St.Gallen, Grisons, and Aargau Cantons from [http://www.e-voting.cc/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/07/173-187\\_Weber\\_et-al\\_Internet-Voting-CH.pdf](http://www.e-voting.cc/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/07/173-187_Weber_et-al_Internet-Voting-CH.pdf)

\*\*\* Presidential Election Results: 2012 data from [http://www.nec.go.kr/engvote\\_2013/04\\_news/02\\_02.jsp?num=263&pg=1&col=&sw=](http://www.nec.go.kr/engvote_2013/04_news/02_02.jsp?num=263&pg=1&col=&sw=)

However, even if taking this into account, it seems fair to say that in a time of significant challenges for representative democracy, electronic voting has a vibrant potential for the improvement of electoral turnout by speeding up the process of election, eliminating all kinds of barriers, and making the electoral administration more efficient. The computerisation of electoral results eliminates, for instance, transcription errors, while online services help the administration and the electorate to rationalise the process of registration and/or voting (Rubin and Park Commission 2001; Trechsel et al. 2003). On the contrary, the reasons for its slow development could also be found on the reverse side of these virtues: security problems, the legal barriers of current regulatory systems, the difficulty of reforming them, the digital divide, and the accessibility to information by citizens still pose major hurdles to the extension of its use.

Below, I propose a tentative examination of the possible effects of ICT services for overseas voters' participation, taking into account electoral results when Voting From Abroad, in three of the democracies in the sample: France, Switzerland, and South Korea.

The results noticeably show that in the case of these three countries, a higher score in the Electronic VFA Index is positively correlated with higher levels of electoral turnout among overseas voters. France (2012) and Switzerland (2011), both represent examples of countries with a mild overall score in the Index that, however, not long ago introduced the possibility of electronic voting or delegation for voters abroad. Moreover, both show higher numbers of registered voters during the second observed moment, although in the case of France, this did not necessarily reflect a higher number of final participants in the process. With respect to the latter, the differences between France and Switzerland seem especially relevant given that in the case of the former, casting the ballot overseas requires expatriates to engage in their own previous self-registration, which usually increases the levels of final turnout among these group of voters. This is the case of South Korea, where on the recent occasion of the 2012 18th Presidential Election, the government successfully mobilised, for the first time in history, around 70% of the self-registered expatriates. Although a beginner in the development of an electoral structure abroad, the Korean Government designed an ambitious and, to a large extent, interactive offer of electronic services that relevantly filled the gaps derived from the lack of a settled physical electoral administration abroad.

## Conclusions

This paper has developed one of the first systematic attempts to evaluate the implementation of ICT in a very understudied side of democratic representation: the effective political rights of the citizens voting from abroad. In an increasingly interconnected world where globalisation has transformed the patterns of economic and political interaction between world regions, the multiplied possibilities for individuals' interstate mobility has posed an unavoidable challenge to both consolidated and young democracies. Under these circumstances, the Internet is said to provide the necessary tools for overcoming the so-called tyranny of distance that expatriates suffer, by breaking the geographical and temporal barriers between home and recipient countries, and thus, facilitating participation.

With the purpose of quantifying, more broadly, the extent to which ICT has been actually incorporated in the various forms of overseas policies, the Electronic Voting From Abroad Index provides a reliable measure on the intensity of the electronic offer for each of the 30 democracies in the sample, and other derived possible effects. The comparative analysis suggests insightful observations with respect to the study of technological innovations and representation. Beyond the top scoring wealthy and consolidated democracies, there is an observed group of emerging economies and polities, with important expatriate populations, which show advanced scores in the Index. Thus, some of the countries have already developed remarkable efforts when including expatriates' voice and choice within in-country representation.

Following the latter, therefore, the overall conclusion of this paper should certainly need to emphasise the advance usage of ICT for the aforementioned purposes: no matter their level of wealth or political consolidation, most of the countries in the sample have surpassed basic and static services. The widespread provision of basic electoral information, rules, electoral results, voting explanations or, in short, general information regarding the critical aspects of the process confirm that this is, at least among the diverse democracies in this paper, a policy that has already been sufficiently addressed and developed.

More cautiousness should be conferred to the results regarding the effects of the advanced use of these technologies. The difficulties in finding a complete account of the expatriates' registration and voting records, in different elections, limit to a large extent the generalizability of the findings in the previous section. Still, the proposed cases help to overcome the consequences of these constraints by providing a sufficiently heterogeneous group of countries in relation to their Index score and the level of development of their technological services. Results seem to suggest that while a higher intensity in the EVFA Index generates a higher turnout among overseas voters, this relationship would be largely mediated by the effect of registration; that is, self-registration tends to decrease the number of registered people but increases the percentage of turnout among the registered. Any additional remark regarding the possible substantial consequences of this research for civic engagement and increasing turnouts should necessarily rely on longer linear trends studying the evolution of the Index by country, and therefore are out of the scope of the goals of this project.

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