



Securing the Vote Beyond Borders

**Key Considerations for
Organizing Out-of-
Country Voting**

MARCH 2026

About IFES

At IFES, we envision a world where people are free, societies are democratic, and elections are fair. We collaborate with civil society, public institutions, and the private sector to build resilient democracies that deliver for everyone. As a global leader in the promotion and protection of democracy, our technical assistance and applied research develop trusted electoral bodies capable of conducting credible elections; effective and accountable governing stakeholders; civic and political processes in which all people can safely and equally participate; and innovative ways in which technology and data can positively serve elections and democracy. Since 1987, IFES has worked in more than 145 countries, from developing to mature democracies. IFES is a global, nonpartisan organization and registered as a nonprofit organization [501(c)(3)] under the United States tax code.



**International Foundation
for Electoral Systems**

2000 M Street NW, Washington, DC, 20036, United States

www.IFES.org

 [IFES1987](#)

To request reprints or author engagement, please message Media@IFES.org

Securing the Vote Beyond Borders

Key Considerations for Organizing Out-of- Country Voting

LEAD AUTHORS

DR. STAFFAN DARNOLF

IFES Senior Global Advisor, Electoral
Operations and Administration

ANNA DENIS

IFES Consultant

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Tarun Chaudhary

Chelsea Dreher

Dr. Cassandra Emmons

Nicole Leaver

Vasu Mohan

Rushdi Nackerdien

Dr. Lisa Poggiali

Manuel Wally

This paper was peer reviewed internally by Dr. Fernanda Buri,
Catherine Murphy, Peter Erben and Erica Shein.

PUBLISHED MARCH 2026



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems



Sida

About this Report

Modern democracies increasingly use out-of-country voting (OCV) to enable citizens residing abroad to exercise their electoral rights and maintain political ties with their home countries. As of a 2025 IFES review, 119 out of 182^[1] countries and territories currently provide for some form of OCV. In recent years, several countries have introduced reforms to improve the accessibility of voting services for citizens abroad, such as enabling online voter registration or additional voting methods. Moreover, many other countries have expressed their intention to adopt OCV in future elections.

Although offering OCV is widely regarded as a practice that strengthens democratic outcomes, no international instruments, except for the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, bind countries to implement it. Moreover, some countries have reversed or intentionally politicized OCV provisions, underscoring the fact that changes to OCV systems can also be pursued as a political tool to entrench partisan advantages and undermine the electoral competitiveness of political opponents. Importantly, politicization is not the only challenge OCV faces – nor, in some cases, the most significant one.

By definition, OCV occurs outside of the country administering the election, and thus it presents uniquely challenging logistical and administrative hurdles for election management bodies (EMBs). These challenges can be compounded by the chosen voting method, whether it is embassy voting, in-person voting outside diplomatic missions, postal voting, online voting, or proxy voting. Additionally, prior to Election Day, the chosen method of registration can introduce added complexities, as can the scale of operations, security infrastructure, and the level of coordination with other relevant state agencies and authorities in foreign countries. For example, when a country employs postal voting modalities, ballot delivery and return processes may be vulnerable to mail delays and losses.

1. The sample includes 175 UN-recognized countries, as well as seven semi-autonomous geographic areas: American Samoa, Montserrat, Northern Ireland, Puerto Rico, Sint Maarten, Somaliland, and Taiwan. These territories are included in IFES' ElectionGuide. For more on the inclusion criteria, please see International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). (2025, May 1). ElectionGuide Codebook Version 3.0. <https://electionguide.org/p/methodology/>

About this Report, con't

In addition, voting outside controlled polling stations, where the privacy of the vote cannot be guaranteed, may make voters more vulnerable to coercion or other intimidation. EMBs, law enforcement, and prosecutorial authorities may face both legal and practical limitations to address election-related complaints as dispute resolution mechanisms often lack clarity on jurisdiction, timelines, and evidence collection across borders. In addition, as within-country voting, OCV is vulnerable to cybersecurity threats, as well as misinformation and disinformation-related issues. Oversight, including external oversight via meaningful election observation, is logistically complex and therefore frequently limited. Political finance compliance and incidents involving the abuse of state resources are more difficult to monitor abroad, especially with the rise of online campaigning.

Considering these attendant challenges, the success of OCV depends on a holistic operational plan that covers the entire electoral cycle and addresses not only malpractice and fraud risks at home but also across the countries where OCV is taking place. EMBs that establish coordination mechanisms with relevant domestic and foreign state agencies, such as ministries of foreign affairs, migration authorities, security, and postal services, as well as diaspora organizations and media, are in a significantly stronger position to successfully execute both their OCV and domestic voting services. Hence, countries wishing to implement OCV or maximize the franchise abroad should carefully consider their capacity to do so without putting at risk the in-country voting operation.

In 2012, IFES published *Out-of-Country Voting: A Brief Overview*, aiming to provide decision makers and election authorities worldwide with critical insights on practical challenges related to OCV and how to mitigate them. This paper revises and expands on that work, considering the latest developments in electoral processes, including the introduction of new technologies, the spread of artificial intelligence (AI), and emerging challenges to information integrity. It also offers an updated analysis of the operational aspects of various voting methods abroad and practical recommendations for EMBs.

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), which made this paper possible. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of Sida.

The authors wish to express their sincere appreciation to the National Electoral Institute (INE) of Mexico, the Central Election Commission of Albania and the Permanent Electoral Authority of Romania for their collaboration and for providing data and documentation that informed this study. Their openness and technical insight were instrumental in enriching the comparative analysis presented in this paper. IFES would also like to acknowledge Peter Erben, Ben Goldsmith and Aysha Shujaat, the authors of the first edition of the white paper, *Out-of-Country Voting: A Brief Overview*. Their valuable study of OCV provided important context and methodological guidance for this paper.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
Out-of-Country Voting: Evolving from an Optional Exercise to a Recognized Good Practice	2
International Obligations and Legal Frameworks	4
2. Analysis of Out-of-Country Voting Methods	7
2.1. Summary of Global Use of Out-of-Country Voting Methods	7
2.2. In-Person Voting at Embassies and Consular Offices	8
2.3. In-Person Voting at Locations other than Embassies	10
2.4. Postal Voting	13
2.5. Proxy Voting	16
2.6. Internet Voting	18
3. Complexities and Risks of Out-of-Country Voting	23
3.1. Political Influence and Determining the Enfranchisement of Diaspora Voters	23
3.2. Operational Challenges	26
Balancing OCV and In-Country Election Preparations	26
Identifying and verifying eligible voters abroad	27
Coordination with host countries	28
Distribution and return of voting materials	29
Recruitment and training of polling staff abroad	30
Interagency coordination	30
3.3. Voter Eligibility and Registration	31
Voter Eligibility	31
Voter Registration	32
3.4. Voter Eligibility of Citizens Externally Displaced Due to Climate Change	34
3.5. Security	36

3.6. Access for Marginalized Groups	38
3.7. Costs	40
3.8. Campaign Oversight	44
3.9. Election Dispute Resolution	47
3.10. Voter Outreach	50
3.11. Information Integrity	53
3.12. Out-of-Country Voting and AI	57
Uses of AI in OCV Contexts	58
Voter verification across borders	58
Communicating with voters	59
Digital infrastructure and threat detection	59
Building Trust With Voters	60
4. Out-of-Country Voting: True Means of Enfranchisement or Political Tool?	62
5. A Process to Decide on and Implement Out-of-Country Voting: Recommendations	65
Mitigation of Operational Challenges	65
Safeguarding Election Integrity and Security	66
Voter Registration	66
Enhancing Accessibility	67
Voter Outreach	67
Information Integrity	68
Useful Resources	69
General Publications and Literature	69
Online Tools	70

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full term
AEC	Australian Election Commission
AI	Artificial intelligence
AP	Asia-Pacific
DDoS	Distributed denial-of-service
E&E	Europe and Eurasia
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EMB	Electoral management body
FPCA	Federal Post Card Application
FVAP	Federal Voting Assistance Program
GCM	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration
HITL	Human-in-the-loop
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Works and Members of Their Families
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
INE	National Electoral Institute (acronym comes from the Spanish spelling)
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LLMs	Large language models
MENA	Middle East/North Africa
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OCV	Out-of-country voting
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SERVE	Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SoW	Scope of Work
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency

1. Introduction

Out-of-Country Voting: Evolving from an Optional Exercise to a Recognized Good Practice

OCV can play an important role in furthering several important political and social goals, particularly for countries with sizeable and/or politically active diasporas. Providing accessible and transparent voting opportunities abroad advances human rights, which in turn enhances a country's international reputation by demonstrating commitment to democratic norms and inclusive governance. Enfranchising citizens abroad also helps preserve the diversity of political views within the electorate, as diaspora communities often hold perspectives shaped by different social and economic environments than domestic voters. OCV furthermore helps sustain links between emigrants and the elected institutions of their country of origin in the longer term. It may foster social cohesion by enabling emigrants to contribute to national decision making, thereby reducing the risk of political divides between those who stayed behind and those who left. Moreover, the enfranchisement of emigrants is a way to recognize expatriates' contributions through remittances, which in many cases constitutes a substantial share of a country's national income.

The number of countries practicing OCV has grown in recent years despite the complexity of this operation. According to one study, as of 2024, 73%² of electoral democracies allowed for some form of voting from abroad, which represents a 16% increase compared to 2007.³ Additionally, some countries, such as Nepal⁴ and Sri Lanka,⁵ have repeatedly expressed their intention to introduce OCV in the future. These trends reflect that OCV is increasingly recognized as a good practice,⁶ although international electoral standards do not oblige countries to enfranchise expatriates given the associated operational challenges, discussed further below.⁷

² Please note figures may slightly vary across sources due to geographical scope and classification used by different organizations, as some aggregate data for UN-recognized countries only, whereas others also sometimes include territories.

³ Cîrlig, C.-C., & Mentzelopoulou, M. M. (March 2024). *Voting from abroad in European Parliament elections*. European Parliamentary Research Service.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751457/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)751457_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751457/EPRS_BRI(2023)751457_EN.pdf)

⁴ For example, see The Rising Nepal. (2024, February 18). *EC working to secure voting rights for Nepalis living abroad*. <https://risingnepaldaily.com/news/39070>

⁵ For example, see Weeraratne, B. (2024, November 5). *Voting beyond borders: Can overseas Sri Lankans finally have their say?* Talking Economics. <https://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2024/11/05/voting-beyond-borders-can-overseas-sri-lankans-finally-have-their-say/>

⁶ The development of a dedicated observation methodology by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, along with its decision to test this approach in the context of out-of-country voting (as approved in Bureau Decision AS/Bur(2025)50), confirms the growing importance and institutional recognition of OCV as a critical component of democratic electoral processes.

⁷ The only international document that emphasizes the right of emigrants to participate in public affairs is the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

OCV has also been strongly advocated for as an essential mechanism in post-conflict settings, enabling conflict-affected emigrants to actively participate in shaping the future political, social, and economic trajectory of their country of origin. For example, after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992-1995, millions of citizens were displaced both inside and outside the country. Aiming to make postwar politics inclusive, externally displaced persons were allowed and encouraged to vote from abroad during the 1996 general election.

While early OCV implementation efforts primarily focused on introducing provisions in a country's legal framework and preparing the electoral infrastructure for its implementation, more recent developments have concentrated on reforms to existing systems aimed at maximizing the franchise and improving accessibility of the already existing practice for expatriates (e.g., Singapore in 2023,⁸ Moldova in 2024⁹). In 2019, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down provisions of the Canada Elections Act that restricted voting rights for citizens who have resided outside Canada for more than five consecutive years. The Court held that such limitations infringed upon the constitutional rights of citizens, affirming that all Canadian citizens, regardless of their duration of residency abroad, have the right to vote in federal elections.¹⁰ The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland also abolished the 15-year "overseas voting residence limit" with the passage of the Elections Act 2022.¹¹ Denying the right to vote to expatriates has been found unconstitutional in South Africa.¹² At the same time, a few countries have recently refused to implement OCV at all.¹³

Ultimately, the success of OCV depends on effective administration that ensures integrity, accessibility, and fairness for all voters and candidates. Conversely, poorly implemented OCV risks significant pitfalls, including fraud, malpractice, voter disenfranchisement, and logistical problems, which could undermine the credibility of elections and erode public trust. For example, insufficient security measures might expose election systems to cyberattacks, while inadequate voter outreach could leave large sections of the diaspora¹⁴ population unregistered or uninformed. The introduction of OCV can also pose risks to the overall electoral preparation process, as the

⁸ Singapore Statutes Online. (2023, June 30). *Political Donations (Amendment) Act 2023 (S 468/2023)*. Retrieved November 10, 2025, from <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/SL/PrEA1991-S468-2023?DocDate=20230630>

⁹ International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2024). *Elections in Moldova: 2024 presidential election and constitutional referendum*. <https://www.ifes.org/tools-resources/election-snapshots/elections-moldova-2024-presidential-election-and-constitutional>

¹⁰ Frank v. Canada (Attorney General), 2019 SCC 1, [2019] 1 S.C.R. 3. <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/scc/doc/2019/2019scc1/2019scc1.html>

¹¹ United Kingdom. (2022). *Elections Act 2022*. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/37/contents/enacted>

¹² *Registered expatriates cleared to vote*. (2025, September 2). Legalbrief. <https://legalbrief.co.za/diary/legalbrief-today/story/registered-expatriates-cleared-to-vote/print/>

¹³ See Section 4. 'Out-of-Country Voting: True Means of Enfranchisement or Political Tool?' for more information.

¹⁴ The term "diaspora" is sometimes used to describe people residing in one country but originating from another country and maintaining cultural and social ties with the country of their origin but not necessarily retaining citizenship. In this publication, we use the term "diaspora" as a synonym to emigrants, assuming that they are retaining the citizenship of their country of origin.

administrative and logistical complexities involved may overwhelm the election authority and compromise its capacity to effectively manage in-country operations.

To better support policymakers and election authorities navigating the evolving OCV landscape, IFES has undertaken a full revision of its 2012 publication *Out-of-Country Voting: A Brief Overview*. This update reflects more than a decade of developments in election administration, including new technologies, the growing influence of AI, and heightened concerns around information integrity. The paper also expands the original analysis of the voting methods and operational challenges associated with each aspect of OCV. This updated white paper serves as a practical guide for ensuring OCV design is inclusive, well-considered, and aligned with international good practices.

International Obligations and Legal Frameworks

The only international document that emphasizes the right of emigrants to participate in public affairs is the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW) which, as of September 2025, was signed by 60 countries. The relevant United Nations Treaty Body lacks enforcement mechanisms and can only “remind” signatory countries to act on their commitment to OCV.¹⁵ Despite this sparse normative framework, national judiciaries have increasingly intervened to clarify, expand, or enforce diaspora enfranchisement. Courts in jurisdictions such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, and Mexico have required governments or electoral authorities to take concrete measures enabling citizens abroad to participate in the electoral process. These rulings are context-specific and rooted in domestic constitutions, but they illustrate a growing trend: while OCV is not an international obligation, the denial of meaningful participation can, under certain circumstances, violate constitutional guarantees of equality, citizenship, and political rights.¹⁶

Although no international instruments can, in practice, oblige states to grant nonresidents unrestricted voting rights, leaving wide discretion to national legislatures, the international trend remains favorable to OCV.¹⁷ The United Nations General Assembly endorsed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM), a cooperative non-binding framework, in

¹⁵ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. (2008, November 28). *Press release: Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families concludes ninth session; adopts concluding observations and recommendations on initial report of El Salvador*. United Nations Office at Geneva. <https://www.un Geneva.org/en/news-media/press-release/2008/11/committee-protection-rights-migrant-workers-concludes-ninth>

¹⁶ International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2023, December 20). *Election FAQs: The Democratic Republic of the Congo – General Elections, December 20, 2023*. <https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/IFES%20DRC%20Election%20FAQs%202023%20General%20Elections.pdf>

¹⁷ For example, see European Commission for Democracy through Law, Venice Commission. (2015, December 21). *Voters residing de facto abroad (Interpretative declaration)* (CDL-AD (2015)040). Council of Europe. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2015\)040-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2015)040-e)

December 2018, encouraging states to enable emigrants to be able to take part in their home country elections.¹⁸ Objective 19 refers to creating conditions for emigrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries. Thus, OCV has been largely seen as a logical and necessary step to uphold electoral rights for non-resident citizens.

Within the Council of Europe system, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has developed the most extensive body of jurisprudence on non-resident voting rights. The Court has consistently held that states enjoy a wide margin of appreciation in determining whether and how expatriates may vote. Early decisions from the former European Commission of Human Rights, and later the Court, found that residence-based restrictions were generally compatible with Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects the right to free elections. For example, in *X. and Others v. Belgium, 1975*,¹⁹ the Court found the Belgian residence rule to be compatible with the Protocol on several bases, including the presumed weaker connection of emigrants to domestic affairs, difficulty for candidates to campaign abroad effectively, and concerns about granting decisive electoral influence to persons no longer directly affected by domestic policies.²⁰ At the same time, the Court has repeatedly emphasized proportionality as a central requirement. In several cases, restrictions were upheld partly because they were time-bound (e.g., voters could participate for a defined period after emigration) or because voting rights were automatically restored upon return.²¹

In *Shindler v. the United Kingdom (2013)*,²² the Court acknowledged an emerging European trend toward enfranchising non-resident citizens. Nonetheless, it concluded that the absence of a uniform European consensus meant that states retained broad discretion. Importantly, the Court made clear that according to Article 3 of Protocol No. 1, states are not required to create an OCV system, nor does it oblige them to accommodate expatriate voters in the country where they reside. However, once a state chooses to grant voting rights to its citizens abroad, additional obligations arise. The ECtHR has repeatedly held that when national law provides for OCV, the authorities must ensure that the system is practical, non-discriminatory, and capable of delivering a genuine opportunity to participate. This includes, where necessary, organizing additional voting opportunities abroad – even when doing so poses logistical or diplomatic challenges. But the Court has also upheld restrictions that flow directly from the technical constraints of administering OCV. For example, when Turkish law permitted voting from customs-post polling stations only for

¹⁸ United Nations General Assembly. (2018, December 19). *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* (Resolution A/RES/73/195). United Nations. <https://docs.un.org/A/RES/73/195>

¹⁹ *X and Others v. Belgium*, No. 24159/08, Eur. Ct. H.R. (Mar. 11 2010). <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-75036>
²⁰ https://ks.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr-ks/guide_art_3_protocol_1_eng, pages 12-14

²¹ *Doyle v. the United Kingdom (dec.)*, No. 30158/06, Eur. Ct. H.R. (Feb. 6, 2007), <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-79548>; and *Shindler v. the United Kingdom*, No. 19840/09, Eur. Ct. H.R. (May 7, 2013), § 108, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-119229>

²² *Shindler v. the United Kingdom*, No. 19840/09, Eur. Ct. H.R. (May 7, 2013), § 108, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-119229>

party lists (not independent candidates), the Court accepted that it was impossible to allocate expatriate voters to domestic constituencies and that ensuring equal treatment with in-country voters was not feasible.²³

Taken together, these cases and the broader international framework reflect a nuanced international position:

»»»	There is no general duty to enfranchise citizens abroad, and residence-based limitations remain permissible.
»»»	States must avoid disproportionate or arbitrary exclusion of citizens abroad once voting rights are recognized in domestic law.
»»»	Operational constraints such as security, campaign access, or constituency alignment may justify certain limitations in OCV models.
»»»	Procedural fairness becomes enforceable once an OCV system is adopted. Where OCV is provided, failures in ballot distribution, inconsistent application of eligibility criteria, or lack of reasonable voting opportunities abroad may not violate international obligations per se but can undermine constitutional guarantees or trigger litigation.

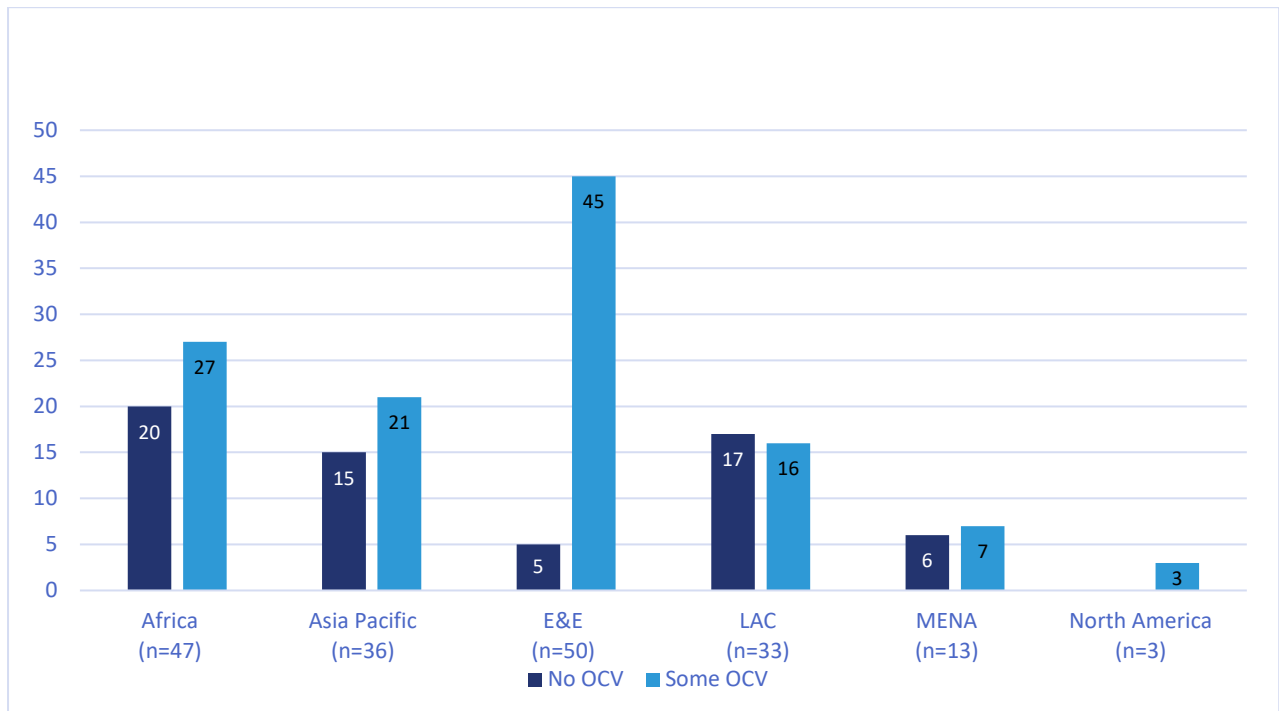
²³ *Oran v. Turkey*, No. 28881/07, Eur. Ct. H.R. (Apr. 15 2014). <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-142636>

2. Analysis of Out-of-Country Voting Methods

2.1. Summary of Global Use of Out-of-Country Voting Methods²⁴

In reviewing 182 countries and territories,²⁵ 119 offer an option for voters who are outside of the country on election day to participate in the poll. Regionally, except for North America, where all three countries on the continent offer OCV options to their citizens, Europe and Eurasia (E&E) stands out as the region with the most countries (proportionally) providing this right to voters. A majority of countries in Africa and Asia-Pacific (AP) offer it, while about half the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) have OCV options (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of Countries that Permit OCV by IFES Region

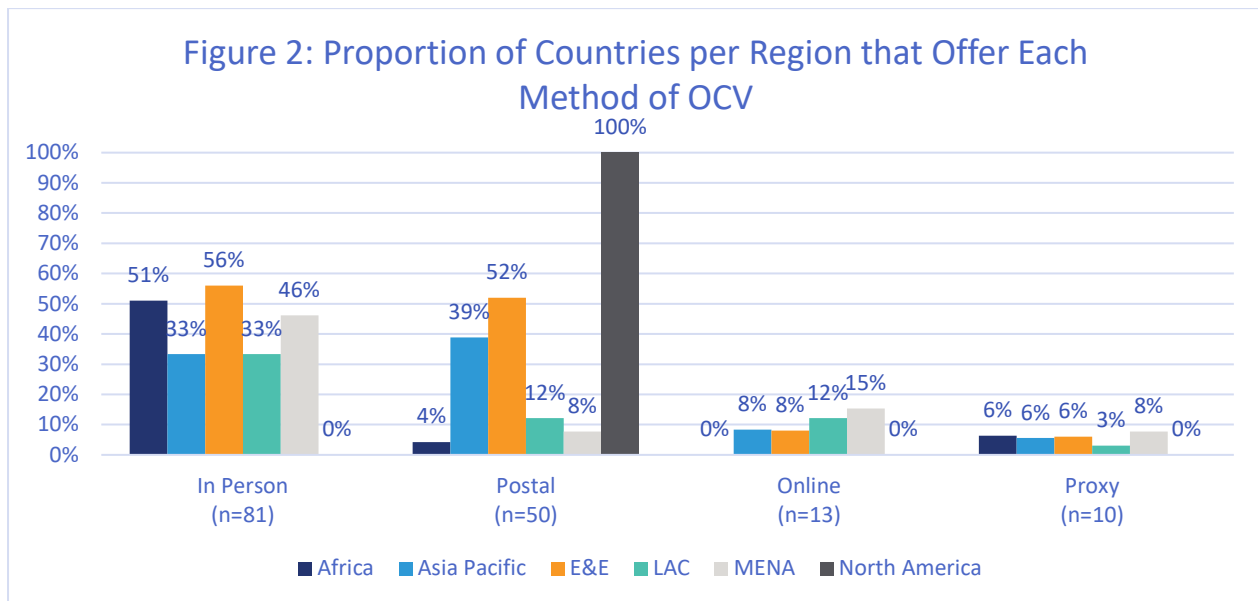


²⁴ This section is based on an assessment of OCV options in countries that have held at least one national election between 2020 and 2025. Most of the analysis is based on data from the most recent election, though trends over time are available for some. The primary data sources include IFES' ElectionGuide, a database of national legislative and executive elections since 1998; International IDEA's voting methods database; and the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network's voting operations database. The information in these databases was further triangulated and supplemented by election observation reports from accredited international observers, primarily the European Union, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe.

²⁵ The sample includes 175 UN-recognized countries, as well as seven semi-autonomous geographic areas: American Samoa, Montserrat, Northern Ireland, Puerto Rico, Sint Maarten, Somaliland, and Taiwan. These territories are included in IFES' ElectionGuide. For more on the inclusion criteria, please see International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). (2025, May 1). ElectionGuide Codebook Version 3.0. <https://electionguide.org/p/methodology/>.

81 countries employ in-person voting as a method of OCV, usually at certain embassies or consular offices in foreign countries. 50 countries offer postal voting for voters abroad. Online voting is available in 13 countries and proxy voting in 10 (see Figure 2). In all these cases, there are very specific conditions around eligibility criteria and the type(s) of elections when OCV is organized.

86 of the 119 countries with OCV offer only one mode of participation to voters abroad although some countries offered multiple. 33 offer more than one method of participation. Only a handful of countries provide more than two methods of voting from abroad: Estonia, France, Mexico, the Philippines, and Portugal all permit at least three voting methods.



2.2. In-Person Voting at Embassies and Consular Offices

Overview

In person voting at embassies and consular offices, using similar procedures to domestic voting, is the most common form of OCV. Properly organizing this method of OCV requires careful training of embassy staff, close coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and consideration of whether or not the ballots will be counted on-site or off. One major drawback to this method is the limited accessibility provided to voters, who may not live near an embassy or be able to travel to it. On the other hand, this method of OCV is sometimes more acceptable to political actors, particularly if the EMB is using OCV for the first time.

As shown in Figure 2, one of the most common voting methods abroad is in-person voting, in which eligible citizens cast their ballots inside the premises of their country's embassies or consulates. Typically, the polling station setup and voting procedure is very similar to the setup used inside the country, which makes the process familiar for voters. Despite this, embassy voting can introduce complexities as elections are usually an extra responsibility requiring specific training for embassy staff. Additionally, to avoid the abuse of administrative resources, some countries prohibit diplomatic staff – who are considered part of the government – from taking part

in the election process or serving as polling officers. In this context, electoral legislation may oblige EMBs to recruit independent polling staff from among the diaspora population or to second the EMB's own personnel to administer voting abroad, which can be quite costly. It is worth noting that embassy premises can also be used for in-person voting with electronic machines (e.g., Brazil). This approach can mitigate challenges related to the speed of ballot counting but raises concerns over cybersecurity and the integrity of the election results.

Although voting occurs at the embassy or consulate, counting does not necessarily need to take place onsite. Ballot counting may be performed at the same location, although some countries may choose to transport ballots and count them within their borders to have more control over the process. However, the latter option risks delaying the announcement of polling station-level results. In close elections, the counting of diaspora ballots can hold up the announcement of the overall results, something the EMB leadership should consider when designing its election results management system and communication strategy. Regardless of the counting location or process, election observers should be encouraged and accredited to observe the procedure, thereby enhancing transparency.

To organize embassy voting, an EMB also needs to coordinate closely with its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and its diplomatic missions. The operational complexities of this approach are particularly evident in the distribution of voting materials. For example, ballot papers must arrive at each diplomatic mission ahead of time, but they can only be printed after political parties and candidates have been registered and confirmed.



To organize the legislative elections abroad in 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine had to send 449,624 ballot papers alongside with other election materials to 102 polling stations located in embassies and consulates, not earlier than three days prior to the Election Day.^{26 27}

The process becomes even more complicated when a diplomatic mission must also facilitate voter registration and the compilation of voter lists. Although sometimes lists can be drafted from the consular register, many migrants are not always in regular contact with embassies. These complexities can suppress voter turnout. If authorities wish to increase turnout, they may implement voter outreach and education activities and facilitate more accessible voter registration through an app or a web-based solution, for example, as Bangladesh did ahead of 2026 elections.

²⁶ Central Election Commission of Ukraine. (2019, July 30). *Protocol of the Central Election Commission on the results of voting in the nationwide multi-member electoral district within the Foreign Electoral District for the election of People's Deputies of Ukraine*. (21 July 2019). https://www.cvk.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/protokol_zbvo_zvo_30072019.pdf

²⁷ Central Election Commission of Ukraine. (2012, September 20). *Resolution of the Central Election Commission of Ukraine No. 1003: On the procedure for the transfer of ballot papers for the election of People's Deputies of Ukraine to precinct election commissions of foreign electoral districts*. <https://ips.ligazakon.net/document/W121033>

The biggest drawback of embassy voting, however, is the limited accessibility provided to voters. Countries may not have open embassies in every country with a diaspora. Thus, in some cases, voters may be asked to vote in a neighboring country, such as Ukrainian voters residing in New Zealand who are assigned to a polling station in Australia. Having to travel to the embassy or consulate to vote (and possibly register as well) may effectively exclude diaspora voters because of the cost and time involved. Furthermore, the embassy facility, typically accustomed to fewer visitors, may not have the physical or staff capacity to handle large numbers of voters.

On the other hand, if a country is planning its first rollout of OCV, it may consider this voting method for greater control and level of acceptance among political actors and voters. A limited and controlled rollout can serve as a testing phase, enabling EMBs to assess operational capacity and voter behavior before considering broader OCV modalities.

2.3. In-Person Voting at Locations other than Embassies

Overview

Alternatively to embassy or consulate voting, an EMB may establish in-person polling stations in locations where there is a high concentration of diaspora voters. This method requires negotiation with the host nation, careful selection of locations to enfranchise as many voters as possible and properly estimating the number of voters. Moreover, because the election is not taking place in the controlled environment of a diplomatic mission, attention must be paid to security concerns, particularly as it relates to the counting and transfer of ballots.

A second approach that can be used for in-person voting is the establishment of polling stations in premises outside embassies or consulates, in locations where diaspora populations are concentrated. In these cases, voting can be conducted either with paper ballots or electronic voting machines. The Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan, Bulgaria, Turkey, Moldova, and Romania are among the countries that take this approach.

The most significant challenge of this method is negotiating the organization of voting on the sovereign soil of the host nation, as detailed further below. Recruitment and training of polling officials are other common challenges. Many countries completely prohibit voting outside embassies or consulates, while others may impose restrictions – for example, allowing only a limited number of polling stations outside those settings. While polling stations located closer to voters can enable a greater level of enfranchisement, they also pose a significant logistical burden for EMBs.

To organize in-person polling stations outside of embassies, EMBs, typically in coordination with the MFA, should begin by identifying locations where opening voting facilities would enfranchise the largest number of voters. Once suitable locations are determined, an EMB and/or MFA would

request permission from the host government to conduct out-of-embassy voting and then negotiate with local authorities on the specific venues. In some contexts, security could pose significant concerns and could also be negotiated on national and sub-national levels – for instance, during the 2005 Iraqi elections (the first post-Saddam Hussein) the organizers needed to come to an agreement with three levels of authorities (federal, state, local) in the U.S. before moving forward with in-person OCV. In some cases, this process can take several months, so preparations for an OCV operation should begin well in advance. Moreover, some host states may choose not to accommodate the request, which requires the EMB to arrange an alternative voting method for voters in these countries, such as opening of polling stations in diplomatic missions, or introducing postal voting.

As with embassy voting, assigning voters to specific polling stations and compiling accurate voter lists require a strategic approach. Since these locations are temporary, EMBs typically require voters to register in advance to facilitate logistical planning. Collecting contact information is essential, as it enables EMBs to inform voters of any changes, including the exact polling address, operating hours, or specific requirements such as the need to present a valid foreign passport.



The Central Electoral Board of the Dominican Republic rolled out in-person OCV beyond diplomatic missions during the 2004 Presidential elections. The initiative relied heavily on “organized groups of Dominicans abroad” to support voter outreach and public information efforts as well as to identify suitable locations for the establishment of registration centers and polling stations.²⁸

Some countries allow any eligible voters to be included in the voter list on Election Day. When this is the case, EMBs should take steps to prevent double voting. Romanian voters, for instance, must sign a statement acknowledging their responsibility to vote only once. Another common solution is to mark a voter’s finger with indelible ink, indicating to polling station staff in all polling locations that the person has already voted, should they try to illegally cast another ballot.²⁹

Predicting turnout is especially difficult in diasporas with a large volume of refugees or displaced people as unlike long-term expatriates, they often lack a permanent residence. Thus, the number of ballots an EMB needs to send to each location can shift on short notice.

²⁸ Ellis, A., Navarro, C., Morales, I., Gratschew, M., & Braun, N. (2007, November 14). *Voting from abroad: The International IDEA Handbook*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/voting-abroad-international-idea-handbook>

²⁹ For more information, please see Gerhard, A., Atic, M., Letic, P., & Erben, P. (May 2019). *Indelible ink in elections: Principles and practices, IFES White Paper*. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. <https://aceproject.org/ero-en/indelible-ink-in-elections-ifes/view>



Even with proper planning, it is often difficult to estimate how many out-of-country voters will turn out on Election Day, which could lead to either election material waste or shortages. For example, in the 2016 Moldovan presidential election, hundreds of citizens living abroad were unable to vote due to insufficient ballot paper supply at diplomatic missions, when more voters arrived to vote than the EMB predicted. In response, 143 overseas Moldovans from Italy, the UK, France, and Ireland filed a legal complaint at Chişinău's Centru Court, demanding the state acknowledge this denial of constitutional voting rights.³⁰

EMBs must identify and rent suitably sized, located, and accessible premises for voting. Even when a venue is provided *pro bono*, the owner – for example, a municipality or a private company – may request reimbursement if any damages or losses are discovered after election day. Additionally, EMBs will need to recruit polling officials. If local recruitment is not feasible, some countries may opt to deploy trained personnel from their home country, as in Moldova. An EMB should also ensure the timely delivery of all necessary equipment and voting materials to the polling locations. Establishing in-person polling stations outside the capital will almost always require development of new logistical schemes that are integrated into the EMB's overarching operational plan for the election.

One of the most critical aspects of this voting method is ensuring the security of ballot papers or electronic voting machines throughout their delivery, on election day, and in the return process to the EMB, as well as observing the laws and regulations of both the host and home country during voting. EMBs will, therefore, need to collaborate effectively with local law enforcement agencies or private security providers. The city of Paris, France, for instance, maintains a permanent OCV support office to assist diplomatic missions in finding venues, arranging security, and expediting the import of election materials. Ensuring the enforcement of some election legal provisions in a foreign country may also be challenging, as voting takes place under a foreign jurisdiction. For example, a local police officer cannot be expected to detain a voter for taking a photo of their ballot paper if such an act is prohibited under the voting country's laws but not considered an offense under the host country's laws.³¹

The counting of ballots is usually regulated by law. Three approaches are broadly implemented: 1) counting ballots on-site; 2) centralized counting at an embassy or at a specially established location in a host country; or 3) transporting ballots back to the country of origin. On-site counting allows results to be produced more quickly and can reduce the risk of tampering during transportation. However, it may limit transparency as party agents and independent observers rarely can cover all out-of-embassy polling stations. This approach also requires secure facilities

³⁰ Vlas, C. (2016, November 21). *Moldovans living abroad sue the state of Moldova for violation of voting rights*. *Moldova.org*. <https://www.moldova.org/en/moldovans-living-abroad-sue-state-moldova-violation-voting-rights/>

³¹ For more information, please see Section 3.8. '*Election Dispute Resolution*'.

and trained staff at every individual polling site. Centralized counting can provide stronger visibility and oversight, and fewer people need to be trained on the most important electoral procedure. That said, it requires developing additional procedures for handing ballots from each polling commission to an embassy or a “counting center.” It also introduces risks related to the secure transportation of sensitive materials under the jurisdiction of a foreign country. Transporting ballots back home mitigates risks related to transparency and training but amplifies concerns about transportation across borders. It also delays results announcement.

A task force comprising representatives from the EMB, the MFA, and host country authorities should be established to respond effectively to any unanticipated challenges that may arise across different time zones. It is critical that the legal mandate of the various members of such a cross-nation taskforce be made clear prior to beginning operations. Additionally, the media of the host country might be interested in covering the election process. For this reason, there should be a clear understanding of who has the authority to officially comment on the voting operations.



Tunisia organizes in-person voting abroad in embassies, consulates, and ad-hoc polling stations. To help resolve issues at polling stations abroad, the Independent Higher Electoral Body sets up a phone hotline that is available throughout election day and during the vote count. This hotline provides quick answers to polling staff and diplomatic missions on urgent matters such as voter lists and access rules. Additionally, an “operations room” at the consulate allows polling station presidents to get real-time support.³²

2.4. Postal Voting

Overview

Postal voting is the second most common OCV method, gaining particular popularity after the COVID-19 pandemic. With this method, the EMB usually mails ballots and return envelopes to voters, who then mark them and return them for counting. A major challenge with this method is timing, particularly when candidate nomination deadlines are near to the election. Additionally, attention needs to be given to the ballot design, including barcodes to track ballots and prevent double voting.

Postal voting is the second most widely used voting method abroad, either as the sole OCV option (e.g., in Albania or Luxembourg), or as one of several options (e.g., in France).³³ The use of postal voting has increased significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of the 27 EU member states now offer postal voting to citizens abroad.³⁴ With postal voting, ballots and return

³² Migration EU eXpertise (MIEUX) Initiative. (2023, February 10). *Knowledge sheet – Implementation of diaspora voting: The cases of France, Tunisia and Senegal*. <https://www.mieux-initiative.eu/en/resources/18-factsheets-and-infosheets/201-implementation-of-diaspora-voting/>

³³ Cîrlig, C.-C., & Mentzelopoulou, M. M. (September 2023). *Voting from abroad in European Parliament elections*. European Parliamentary Research Service. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751457/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)751457_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751457/EPRS_BRI(2023)751457_EN.pdf)

³⁴ Ibid.

envelopes are mailed out to registered out-of-country voters, which voters complete and return ballots by mail or into drop-boxes for counting.

One challenge with postal voting is timing. The deadline for concluding candidacy disputes is often less than a month before polling in many electoral legal frameworks, compressing the timeframe for designing and distributing postal ballots. Late candidate list finalization could delay ballot printing and reduce the time available for shipping ballots to OCV host countries, mailing them to voters, and having voters return them on time for counting on election day.³⁵

The time needed in the mail stream can be shortened by two measures:

Voters who do not receive their postal ballot by a certain deadline can be permitted to download and print PDF ballot packs and return them by mail. Downloadable PDF ballots may be preferred by undocumented emigrants, who may fear detection and deportation by host country immigration officials when registering for OCV with their actual physical address.

Voters who receive their ballots late can be permitted to drop them off in drop boxes at diplomatic missions (countries that allow this include Austria, France, and New Zealand) or additional drop-box locations strategically placed in areas with dense expatriate populations.

The safest way to ensure timely passage through the mail stream, however, is to close candidacy disputes early enough to ensure sufficient mailing time, which may require amendments to the election law. Luxembourg, for instance, cuts off postal ballot requests 40 days before polling, allowing for sufficient printing and mailing time.³⁶

Most postal ballot systems use barcoded inner envelopes that are scanned to mark ballots as received on the voter list to prevent double voting. Many postal ballot systems also use postal bar codes on outbound and inbound ballot packs to allow EMBs and voters to track their ballots in both directions, which can foster stakeholder confidence in the postal aspect of the process and increase transparency. In addition, using a distinct color for the outer envelopes is also a practical solution to reduce the risk of straggling postal ballots while in the custody of the postal service. Procuring priority mail service and calibrating envelope size, ballot pack weight, and postal service indicia to the mail standards of each OCV host country can save on postage and expedite the passage of postal votes through sorting machines.

³⁵ In Bangladesh, the EMB has enabled the diaspora to mail the return envelope containing ballots directly to their respective Returning Officer. For more information, please see Bangladesh Election Commission. (n.d.). *Voting process (IT-supported postal voting)*. <https://www.ecs.gov.bd/bec/public/files/Postal%20Voting/Voting%20Process.pdf>

³⁶ *Applying to vote by post in European elections [Luxembourg]*. (n.d.). Guichet.lu. Retrieved January 21, 2026 from <https://guichet.public.lu/en/citoyens/citoyennete/elections/elections-europeennes/vote-correspondance-elections-europeennes.html>

EMBs must therefore decide the best method for mailing the ballots. One option is to send ballots from their national territory via international mail and have voters return them directly to the EMB through international mail, which will lengthen the time ballot packs spend in the mail stream. Conversely, mailing them out from and having them returned within each host country's national mail system shortens the time needed in the mail stream and facilitates marking return envelopes with prepaid postage. Courier services such as DHL will ship postal ballot batches to respective host countries and use the domestic mail service in those countries for last-mile delivery. This approach also enables the EMB to obtain guaranteed delivery times from each respective national mail service. Some EMBs purchase proof of mail delivery and return receipt from local postal services, which may require repeated delivery attempts before being marked as undeliverable. EMBs are advised to test national and international mail options extensively before taking operational decisions. Loss or delay of ballots in the mail stream can undermine stakeholder trust in the OCV process and its outcome, as well as cost implications of the options.³⁷ These costs can be significant: Bangladesh for instance, obtained bids from DHL at approximately 37 USD per ballot envelope, while the public Bangladeshi mail service offered a slower service for 3.50 USD.³⁸

The impact of postal voting on turnout is varied based on a variety of logistical challenges. Postal voting can increase turnout and ease of access to the voting process for OCV populations spread out across geographically-large host countries with reliable postal services, such as Canada, Australia, and the United States. Postal voting can also be successfully conducted in member states of the European Union and the European Economic Community (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland), as well as for growing expatriate communities in East Asia (Japan, Korea, China, and Taiwan), where reliable postal service is available. Turnout can vary also between countries where OCV postal ballots are mailed to all registered OCV voters automatically and those that require voters to request a ballot for each election, given that the latter requires a higher level of effort and awareness from each voter.³⁹ In any case, effective voter information strategies and user-friendly processes are critical to boost OCV turnout.

Invalid postal ballot rates can be mitigated by requiring voters to provide a phone number and/or email address to notify them of the need to cure ballot errors, such as omitted voter or witness signatures.⁴⁰ Clear instructions for voters, an intuitive ballot and return envelope design, and staff proper training, are critical to reducing ballot invalidity.

³⁷ For more on OCV costs, please see Section 3.7. 'Costs'.

³⁸ *EC moves to postal voting for expatriates with online registration option.* (2025, July 1). [bdnews24.com. https://www.bdnews24.com/bangladesh/64fa12aaa3b6](https://www.bdnews24.com/bangladesh/64fa12aaa3b6)

³⁹ Turnout in Albania's 2025 postal OCV was for instance much higher than Moldova's in the same year.

⁴⁰ Underhill, W. (2024, June 20). *Elections Defined: Ballot curing provides safeguard.* National Conference of State Legislatures. <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/elections-defined-ballot-curing-provides-safeguard>

Unlike internet voting, postal voting produces a voter-verifiable paper audit trail and therefore allows for transparent recounts or risk-limiting audits,⁴¹ which can be critical in closely contested referenda or elections. At the same time, political actors and independent observers should be allowed to scrutinize all stages of the postal voting process to dispel allegations of fraud and mitigate malpractice.



Moldova and Albania both introduced OCV postal voting in 2024 and 2025 respectively. In Moldova's 2024 presidential election, which was combined with an EU referendum, the cutoff to finalize the candidacy list was not changed by a special law, introducing other changes to frame OCV postal voting, so the CEC only had 21 days to print, expedite, and receive back international postal ballots. The special law allowed postal voting in six countries: the United States, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland. Even though registration could be completed online, only around 1,800 voters abroad requested postal ballots, and around 1,400 ballots reached the CEC by the cutoff time. For the subsequent parliamentary elections in 2025, 2,606 voters abroad requested postal ballots in the initial six countries plus Australia, Japan, Korea, and New Zealand. Of those, 2,067 were received back on time by the CEC, but 163 were invalidated.⁴²



Albania rolled out postal voting across 85 countries as the exclusive modality to vote from abroad.⁴³ Through online registration, 245,953 Albanian expatriates requested postal ballots, of which over 195,000 reached the CEC by the statutory cutoff. Over 41,000 postal ballot requests were rejected, because applicants could not prove legal residence in the host country.⁴⁴ The partisan OCV vote split reflected exactly that of votes cast in-country. Both Moldova and Albania contracted DHL for ballot delivery and return.

2.5. Proxy Voting

Overview

Proxy voting involves a voter designating an individual to vote on their behalf, referred to as a proxy. This method can be easier for the EMB to implement, given that the proxy votes in the same manner as other voters. However, proxy voting is rare in practice and carries inherent risks to ballot secrecy and voter autonomy.

⁴¹ Shein, E., & Brown, A. (2021, March 2). *Risk Limiting Audits: A Guide for Global Use*. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. <https://www.ifes.org/publications/risk-limiting-audits-guide-global-use>

⁴² In 2025 a total of 2,606 Moldovan citizens have registered to vote by mail, including 1,399 who have settled in the United States, 686 in Canada, 166 in Sweden, 121 in Finland, 109 in Norway, 57 in Australia, 38 in Iceland, 14 in Japan, 13 in South Korea and 7 in New Zealand. See *2,606 Moldovan citizens abroad have registered to vote by mail in the upcoming elections*. (2025, August 15). INFOTAG. <https://www.infotag.md/populis-en/326143/>;

⁴³ Albanian Times. (2025, April 10). *CEC begins ballot preparation for Albanian diaspora voters in 85 countries*. <https://albaniantimes.al/cec-begins-ballot-preparation-for-albanian-diaspora-voters-in-85-countries/>

⁴⁴ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2025, May 12). *Albania — Parliamentary Elections, 11 May 2025: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions* (pp. 10). https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/f/590598_1.pdf

Proxy voting is an arrangement that allows a registered voter who cannot be physically present at their polling station on election day to authorize another person (referred to as the voter's proxy) to vote on their behalf. This method is rare in domestic elections and rarer still as an option in OCV, although some countries, such as France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, employ it. In total, only 10 out of 182 countries and territories reviewed allow for proxy voting, usually under strict eligibility criteria such as being sick on election day. From a cost and logistics perspective, this method can be easy to integrate into existing in-country processes, although it carries inherent risks, especially regarding ballot secrecy and voter autonomy.

A credible proxy voting system requires a clear legal basis that defines:

- Eligibility criteria for voters abroad and for proxies;
- Procedures for registering as a proxy voter, including deadlines and documentation; and
- Penalties for breaches of secrecy or misuse of authority.
- Regulations should also stipulate whether proxies must reside in the same constituency as the voter, whether there are limits on the number of voters a proxy can represent, and how the arrangement is recorded in the voter register.



A British citizen living overseas can ask a person to act as their proxy, so long as the chosen person is registered to vote, is allowed to vote in the type of election taking place and can vote in the polling station stated on the voter's poll card. A proxy can vote for a maximum of 4 people.⁴⁵

Diaspora registration for proxy voting typically involves submitting an online or paper application to the EMB or diplomatic mission. The registration process must integrate seamlessly with the voter register, flagging that a specific voter's ballot will be cast via proxy to avoid duplicate voting. A secure web-based platform can make the process accessible to voters abroad, provided that it meets accessibility standards for persons with disabilities and is protected against cyber threats such as phishing, ransomware, or DDoS attacks.

At the polling station, proxies cast ballots following the same procedure as regular voters, albeit with adjustments for verification. These adjustments should require minimal adjustments to the election officials' training curriculum. Potential differences include marking in the register that a ballot is cast by proxy and ensuring that tally sheets reflect the number of proxy votes issued and cast, enabling reconciliation between ballots and voter register entries.

⁴⁵ *Voting by proxy*. (n.d.). GOV.UK. Retrieved October 22, 2025, from <https://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/voting-by-proxy>

For overseas voters, proxy voting may be more appealing than other options, as their countries might not have an embassy/consulate presence where they live or postal services might not be reliable or convenient. Additionally, if the registration process allows voters to arrange an emergency proxy close to election day, proxy voting may provide a more flexible option for voters to cast their ballot. Assigning a proxy voter may also be a convenient option for voters with disabilities, those who might find it difficult to travel to an embassy or consulate, or to complete all the steps required for postal voting. Critically, the availability of proxy voting should not replace efforts to make both in-person and postal voting as accessible as possible.

However, there are downsides to the proxy option. First and foremost, the principle of vote secrecy is not observed by definition, as the original voter must instruct the proxy on how to mark the ballot. This may lead to misunderstandings or mistakes that ultimately lead the ballot to be marked incorrectly. Additionally, finding a suitable proxy can be challenging, especially since they typically need to be available to vote at a person's polling station. The proxy may miss the poll due to illness or emergency, leading to the voter's wishes not being heard. In more serious cases, the proxy may intentionally vote against the voter's wishes.

Voters are, furthermore, selecting their proxy in a non-controlled environment, such as their homes, and may make this choice under duress. For instance, in some societies, a young female voter could be pressured to pick a male relative as her proxy, even though she would have preferred her older sister or to not have had a proxy at all. Diaspora voters can also with relative ease sell their votes by picking proxies that have been selected by a certain candidate or political party.

In a highly-polarized political environment, proxy voting may face greater public skepticism. When trust in political institutions is low, concerns may arise that proxies could misuse their role or that the system itself could be manipulated. Explaining all the procedures related to proxy voting to the electorate can also be slightly more challenging than regular in-person or postal voting, also increasing public skepticism.

2.6. Internet Voting

Overview

At present, a handful of countries use internet voting to enfranchise specific groups, such as diplomatic personnel, military members, and expatriates. On the one hand, internet voting provides a solution to the time challenges of physical mail and an alternative to OCV methods that require voters to travel. On the other hand, the method is by nature more prone to cyber-attacks and other security threats, which can lower the voter confidence in the electoral process.

While internet voting is used at the national level only by Estonia, a few more countries practice it as a modern way to enfranchise expatriates, military, and diplomatic personnel. Internet voting is

praised by its proponents for providing enhanced accessibility for specific voter groups, such as people with disabilities. Internet voting offers a direct solution to the challenges inherent to physical mail, including potential mail deliveries amidst tight deadlines. Additionally, it provides a reliable channel for military and overseas citizens who might otherwise be disenfranchised and an alternative to physical voting solutions which require traveling.⁴⁶ Proponents point to long-term cost savings from reduced printing and postage, reduced logistical burden requiring fewer distributed physical assets, as well as faster tabulation of results.⁴⁷ For example, one analysis of Estonian elections found that the cost per internet vote was half that of the next-cheapest method.⁴⁸



France employs a ‘risk-based’, expatriate-only internet voting model. French citizens abroad can vote online for legislative and consular elections, but not for the higher-stakes presidential election. This strategy deliberately limits the potential impact of a security failure.⁴⁹

While often hoped to increase participation, evidence that internet voting consistently raises overall turnout is weak and contested. It appears more effective at facilitating voting for motivated groups who are facing high barriers, such as expatriates, than at mobilizing apathetic voters. Moreover, it highlights the continued problem of the digital divide. In other words, uptake is not consistent across age groups, wealth and class divides, or among minority and majority social groups. One analysis of French trends in internet voting from abroad finds “internet voter turnout is most influenced by the host country’s economic and infrastructure development.”⁵⁰

Moreover, an internet voting system presents a vast attack surface for cyber threats. Key threats include, but are not limited to, client-side malware, server-side attacks, and distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. Moreover, as with postal voting, internet voting takes place outside the controlled polling station setting, increasing the risk of voters being intimidated or paid to vote a certain way, which is nearly impossible for officials to detect.

⁴⁶ For a dated, but still relevant discussion of benefits and drawbacks, please see European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers. (2018). *Study on the benefits and drawbacks of remote voting*. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/d3cfb473-fd9d-40ab-baa8-169696605c5d_en?filename=remote_voting_exec_summary_en.pdf

⁴⁷ These benefits are frequently highlighted by commercial vendors themselves. Please see McNamara, T. (2020, February 26). *What does it cost to vote?* Edge Elections. <https://medium.com/edge-elections/what-does-it-cost-to-vote-78eed7b5722c>

⁴⁸ Krimmer, R., Duenas-Cid, D., & Krivososova, I. (2021). New methodology for calculating cost-efficiency of different ways of voting: Is internet voting cheaper? *Public Money & Management*, 41(1), 17–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2020.1724662>

⁴⁹ Wetherall-Grujić, G. (2024, July 4). *French overseas voters set new online voting record*. Democracy Technologies. Retrieved November 6, 2025, from <https://democracy-technologies.org/voting/france-new-online-voting-record/>

⁵⁰ Sandoy, R., & Kernalegenn, T. (2021). Internet voting from abroad: Exploring turnout in the 2014 French consular elections. *French Politics*, 19(4), 421–439. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-021-00148-8>

The "black box" nature of electronic systems can also fuel public skepticism in the process. Unlike paper ballots, which can be publicly counted or recounted by hand, electronic votes are intangible data streams, making it harder to build and maintain public confidence even in the best-designed system. A minor technical glitch can be amplified into a belief that the entire election was compromised.



Switzerland has pursued a cautious, decentralized trial model since 2003, driven largely by the need to enfranchise its large expatriate community. The federal government authorizes trials, but cantons are responsible for implementation. In 2019, all trials were halted after critical security flaws were discovered in the system's source code. Trials resumed in 2023 under a redesigned framework demanding stricter security, transparency, and the use of systems with "complete verifiability."^{51 52 53}



In Canada, internet voting is used in municipal elections in provinces like Ontario, but not at the federal level. While proponents argue that it would benefit OCV populations, such as military members, federal authorities have remained cautious due to security and verifiability concerns. The lack of national standards has led to a fragmented landscape and some technical failures, such as when network bandwidth issues caused by a third-party provider were blamed as the cause of problems that disrupted elections in 2018 in Ontario, according to the system vendor.^{54 55 56 57}

The administration of any democratic election rests on a delicate balance of core principles and internet voting is no different. The introduction of internet voting, particularly for OCV populations, places these principles into direct and often acute tension. Designing an OCV internet voting system is not a simple technical task; it is an exercise in navigating a complex, multidimensional problem space where gains in one area often come at a cost in another.

⁵¹ Serdült, U., Germann, M., Mendez, F., Portenier, A., & Wellig, C. (2015). Fifteen years of internet voting in Switzerland: History, governance and use. In L. Terán & A. Meier (Eds.), 2015 Second International Conference on eDemocracy & eGovernment (ICEDEG) (pp. 149–156). *IEEE*.

⁵² Górný, M. (2021). I-voting – opportunities and threats: Conditions for the effective implementation of Internet voting on the example of Switzerland and Estonia. *Przegląd Politologiczny*, 26(1), 133-146. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pp.2021.26.1.9>

⁵³ Haines, T., Pereira, O., & Teague, V. (2022). Running the race: A Swiss voting story. In R. Krimmer, M. Volkamer, D. Duenas-Cid, P. Rønne, & M. Germann (Eds.), *Electronic Voting: 7th International Joint Conference, E-Vote-ID 2022*, Bregenz, Austria, October 4-7, 2022 – Proceedings (Lecture Notes in Computer Science, Vol. 13553, pp. 53-69). *Springer Cham*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-15911-4_4

⁵⁴ CityNews Toronto. (2018, October 23). *Online voting issues in Ontario*. <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2018/10/23/online-voting-issues-ontario/>

⁵⁵ Goodman, N., Spycher-Krivonosova, I., Essex, A., & Brunet, J. (2023). Verifiability experiences in Ontario's 2022 online elections. In M. Volkamer, R. Duenas-Cid, P. Rønne, & M. Germann (Eds.), *Electronic Voting. E-Vote-ID 2023*. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, Vol. 14230 (pp. 87-105). *Springer, Cham*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43756-4_6

⁵⁶ See, for example, Bailey, I. (2024, January 18). *Online voting 'not on the radar screen' for federal elections, chief electoral office says*. *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-online-voting-not-on-the-radar-screen-for-federal-elections-chief/>

⁵⁷ Katawazy, A. (2022). Identifying challenges and advantages of internet voting and assessing the impact on voter turnout in municipal elections (MPA Major Research Paper No. 236). *Western University*. <https://uwo.scholaris.ca/items/570c715a-50d0-4a26-9680-1353eb45bf42>

In brief, the following primary attributes of any internet voting systems are important:

>>>	Accessibility: This is the core promise of OCV internet voting—to provide a convenient and effective channel for citizens to exercise their right to vote, regardless of their geographic location or physical ability. ⁵⁸
>>>	Security: This encompasses the protection of the entire election ecosystem—from the voter's personal device to the central tabulation servers—from a vast array of cyber threats or other issues of security. These include malware designed to alter votes, DDoS attacks to disrupt access, and server penetrations to manipulate results or compromise voter data. ⁵⁹
>>>	Secrecy: The secret ballot is a bedrock principle of free elections, protecting voters from intimidation and coercion. Remote internet voting fundamentally challenges this principle by moving the act of voting from a controlled, supervised polling station to an uncontrolled, private environment, where coercion or vote-selling becomes a tangible risk. ⁶⁰ In addition, various modalities of internet facilitated voting and related processes may also introduce other challenges to secrecy. For example, voter identification methods and digital records that are insufficiently anonymized or not properly secured could, conceivably, be utilized to link specific voters to specific votes.
>>>	Verifiability and Trust: Verifiability refers to the ability of voters, observers, and auditors to check and confirm the integrity of the process and the accuracy of the result. ⁶¹ For an election to be legitimate, the public must have confidence that votes are recorded as cast and counted as recorded. The electronic and often opaque nature of internet voting can undermine this trust.



The U.S. Department of Defense's Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) conducted a small but successful "Voting Over the Internet" pilot project in 2000, allowing a handful of overseas military personnel to vote in the general election via a secure website. Buoyed by this success, Congress mandated a larger project, the Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment (SERVE), intended to serve up to 100,000 military and overseas voters in the 2004 election. However, in early 2004, just months before its planned deployment, the SERVE project was abruptly cancelled after a security review by independent experts found serious security concerns causing widespread public reporting raising doubts about the system's integrity. The report concluded that the system was "vulnerable to a variety of well-known cyberattacks" that could undetectably alter votes, and that there was no way to secure it against such threats. This public and high-profile failure created a long shadow over the usage of the internet for OCV purposes in the US, and is an early example of the complex relationship such endeavors can have with public trust, political will, and technical design.⁶²

⁵⁸ Please see Trechsel, A. H., Kucherenko, V., & Silva, F. (May 2016). *Potential and challenges of E-voting in the European Union: Study for the AFCO Committee*. Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament Directorate-General for Internal Policies. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556948/IPOL_STU%282016%29556948_EN.pdf

⁵⁹ International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2022). *Understanding cybersecurity throughout the electoral process: A reference document*. https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Understanding_Cybersecurity_Throughout_the_Electoral_Process_A_Reference_Document_FINAL.pdf

⁶⁰ Lupiáñez-Villanueva, F., Devaux, A., Faulí, C., Stewart, K., Porcu, F., Taylor, J., Theben, A., Baruch, B., Folkvord, F., & Nederveen, F. (2018). *Study on the Benefits and Drawbacks of Remote Voting*. European Commission. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/d3c9b473-fd9d-40ab-baa8-169696605c5d_en?filename=remote_voting_exec_summary_en.pdf

⁶¹ U.S. Vote Foundation. (July 2015). *The future of voting: End-to-end verifiable Internet voting — Specification and feasibility assessment study*. https://usvotefoundation-drupal.s3.amazonaws.com/prod/E2EVIV_full_report.pdf

⁶² Kelleher, W. (2013, July 9). *Internet voting in the USA: History and prospects [WPSA paper]*. U.S. Election Assistance Commission. https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/eac_assets/1/28/William-Kelleher-Internet-Voting-

A simplistic pros-and-cons analysis is insufficient to determine if internet voting should be implemented because these principles are not independent variables on a checklist; they are deeply interconnected. A system's design choices create a cascade of effects across all dimensions. The decision to adopt internet voting for citizens abroad involves a direct trade-off between increasing accessibility and introducing significant security risks. For a country considering internet voting, the path forward requires a prudent, security-focused strategy that will prioritize verifiability, embrace transparency, implement robust procurement practices and controls, adopt a phased approach that allows for adequate testing and refinement before widespread deployment, and put in place a governance structure that aligns national policies and standards with mechanisms of oversight and process to ensure a secure, resilient, and auditable voting infrastructure that is accountable and transparent to the public.⁶³

WPSA-Paper-July-9th.pdf

⁶³ For the types of security governance and control structures, please see International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2023). *Understanding cybersecurity throughout the electoral process: A reference document*.

https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Understanding-Cybersecurity-Throughout-the-Electoral-Process_1.pdf

3. Complexities and Risks of Out-of-Country Voting

3.1. Political Influence and Determining the Enfranchisement of Diaspora Voters

OCV is becoming an increasingly common feature of modern democracies. However, its political effects are still widely debated. The key question, especially relevant when the size of the diaspora is large (e.g., as in Tunisia or Lebanon) or even equals the population living inside the country (e.g., as in Cabo Verde), is how much influence and for how long after departure emigrants should have over decisions that affect voters still living within their country's borders. This question is particularly relevant given that diaspora communities may show strong support for a specific candidate or political party, sometimes in stark contrast with domestic voters' preferences.⁶⁴ For instance, during the 2025 Presidential elections in Moldova, more than 330,000 voters, or 19% of the total turnout, cast their ballots from abroad. Of those, 83% voted for Maia Sandu, a significant contrast to the in-country vote, where Alexandr Stoianoglo edged her out with 51.2 percent.⁶⁵



In 2018, Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled that overseas Pakistanis had a constitutional right to vote. The subsequent Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government amended the Elections Act to enable diaspora voting via electronic voting machines. Following a change in government due to a vote of no confidence in 2022, the Pakistan Muslim League introduced amendments reversing these provisions given doubts about electronic voting machine reliability. However, several media outlets – both in Pakistan and within the diaspora – reported that many overseas Pakistanis, particularly supporters of the ousted PTI leader Imran Khan, believed they had been deprived of their voting rights because of their political preferences. The participation of approximately 7.6 million Pakistani emigrants could have a measurable effect on electoral outcomes, given the high level of competitiveness that typically characterizes general elections in Pakistan.⁶⁶

Determining whether migrants are eligible to participate in elections is a potentially divisive political issue. Some citizens may question why individuals living abroad for a long period of time should have a say in determining the country's direction. However, perceptions may shift if those abroad

⁶⁴ For more analysis, please see to Fidrmuc, J., & Doyle, O. (2005). *Voice of the diaspora: An analysis of emigrant voting behavior* (ZEI Working Paper No. B 02-2005). Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/39603/1/51293259X.pdf>

⁶⁵ Calus, K. (2024, November 4). *Moldova: Diaspora votes propel Maia Sandu to re-election*. OSW Centre for Eastern Studies. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2024-11-04/moldova-diaspora-votes-propel-maia-sandu-to-re-election>

⁶⁶ See, for example, Inam, T. (2022, April 13). *Pakistani diaspora rejects premature end of Imran Khan's elected regime*. New Canadian Media. <https://www.newcanadianmedia.ca/pakistani-diaspora-rejects-premature-end-of-imran-khans-elected-regime/>

were forced to leave due to conflict, as after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or if emigrant workers contribute significantly through remittances, as in the Philippines.

Government and political parties may support or oppose or limit the enfranchisement of emigrants based on their anticipated political preferences. For example, Venezuelans abroad leaning heavily to the opposition encountered significant barriers registering and voting during the 2024 Presidential elections.⁶⁷ Conversely, in El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele expanded OCV modalities ahead of the 2024 elections, including enabling internet voting, in a context where the diaspora has shown high levels of support for him.⁶⁸



The Russian full-scale invasion launched against Ukraine in February 2022 caused a mass wave of internal and external migration in Ukraine. According to various sources, 6 to 8 million people, constituting approximately one-fourth of the Ukrainian population, left the country seeking safety and protection. In the third year of the war the polls showed that approximately 67% of citizens continuing to reside in the country believed that Ukrainian forced emigrants should have the right and the opportunity to participate in elections and approximately 28% were opposed, according to the sociological center SOCIS.⁶⁹

Because the enfranchisement of citizens abroad can influence electoral competitiveness and the distribution of political power, states need to consider and take a decision on:

- voter eligibility criteria;
- the geographical scope of implementation;
- the types of elections in which OCV should be permitted;
- how votes from abroad are counted and how emigrants are represented in the legislature; and
- voter registration and voting methods.

Voter eligibility rules have important political implications. States must determine whether all citizens regardless of duration abroad can vote, or only those qualifying under specific criteria such as occupation or duration of residence abroad. These choices shape the composition of the external electorate and can influence electoral competitiveness. Similarly, decisions about where OCV is implemented (whether in all host countries or only in selected locations) can privilege certain diaspora communities over others.

⁶⁷ Valiquette, T., Valenzuela-Méndez, C., & Su, Y. (2024, July 23). *The votes of Venezuelans abroad are being suppressed*. The Conversation. <https://www.theconversation.com/the-votes-of-venezuelans-abroad-are-being-suppressed-234672>

⁶⁸ Magaña, Y., & Janetsky, M. (2024, January 9). *Votes by El Salvador's diaspora surge, likely boosting President Bukele in elections*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/el-salvador-election-bukele-overseas-voting-54e0898ea2837a309fd2767356ad320a>

⁶⁹ Prasad, A. (2024, December 26). *Almost 70% of Ukrainians believe that expatriates should vote in elections – poll*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.ua/news/mayzhe-70-ukraintsiv-vvazhayut-shcho-ekspati-povinni-golosovati-na-viborakh-opituvannya-26122024-25879>

A few countries permit expatriates to vote in all types of elections, including local elections (e.g., New Zealand); however, the majority of OCV implementers choose between all general elections or specific types of general elections (e.g., Panama provides for OCV only during presidential elections).

The graphic below shows the types of tallying for emigrant votes and a given example.

Emigrant votes are tallied in the national vote tally if the country uses a single national constituency.

The Netherlands uses nationwide open-list proportional representation with an effectively single national constituency for its 150-member lower house. Votes from abroad are added to the total national vote tally when calculating each party's nationwide vote share.

If a country uses a parallel or mixed-membership proportional electoral system, emigrant votes are counted in the overall national vote tally for the proportional component but emigrants are not given a ballot for the majoritarian component. Or, if a country has an open-list proportional representation electoral system and multiple districts, the legislation may prescribe that voters abroad cast their ballot only for a political party and reserve the prerogative of choosing individual candidates for in-country voters only.

During the 2019 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, a parallel electoral system was in place: voters residing in the country received two ballots – one for a political party and one for their single-member district candidate. Voters residing abroad were issued only the party-list ballot.

Emigrant votes are counted in the constituencies where they are registered in the country or, in some rare cases, in the constituency to which they intend to move upon their return.⁷⁰

German expatriates can vote in federal elections, but their votes are counted within the domestic electoral districts either where they were last registered, or in their home constituency. Or, for example, in Australia, citizens living abroad can vote in federal elections, and their votes are counted in the electoral division where they were last enrolled in Australia. There is no separate district or special allocation of seats for voters living abroad in either country.

Emigrant votes are counted in a separate OCV constituency (or multiple constituencies) and elect a representative(s) from this specific constituency.

France has 11 legislative seats for French voters residing outside the country, consisting of 577 total members. As of 2024, the OCV constituencies represent almost 1.7 million French voters in total. The two-round system – the same system as is used in France internally – is used to elect these representatives. Similarly, Tunisia, for example, reserves 18 out of 217 mandates in total to represent Tunisians abroad. These seats are distributed in 6 OCV constituencies. Tunisia uses a proportional representation electoral system abroad. The diaspora voters cast ballots for party lists in overseas constituencies specifically allocated for them, and seats are allocated proportionally based on the votes each party receives.

The way the EMB selects voter registration and voting methods can significantly shape the political influence of citizens abroad, even though these choices are often framed primarily as operational or logistical. Registration and voting procedures determine not only how citizens abroad can participate but also which groups are most likely to overcome the barriers to participation. Registration systems that require proof of legal residence, a permanent address, a

⁷⁰ During the 1996 post-war elections, Bosnia and Herzegovina allowed voters abroad, mainly forced migrants, to cast their ballots not only for the constituency of their origin but also for the constituency that they intended to return to. This measure was introduced as part of the Dayton Peace Accords and aimed to give IDPs and forced migrants the opportunity to vote in the location where they planned to resettle after the conflict, thus facilitating their future return.

national identity number, or in-person appearance at consulates may discourage participation among undocumented emigrants, refugees, temporary workers, or citizens living in remote areas, who may face greater administrative and financial burdens when registering.

The method of voting may also carry distinct political implications. Postal voting, while often seen as more inclusive than in-person voting, requires voters to provide a reliable physical address. This may unintentionally exclude or deter citizens whose living arrangements are temporary or informal. Similarly, citizens who frequently change residences abroad, like seasonal workers, or those living in shared accommodation, may experience practical barriers in receiving ballots on time. If voting requires an in-person visit to a polling station, participation is naturally higher among citizens living in large metropolitan areas where such polling stations are typically established. This can advantage particular communities, such as students or professionals, clustered in major cities, while diminishing the voice of labor emigrants or refugees dispersed across multiple regions or countries. Digital divides can influence political representation as well. Internet voting or mobile app-based systems may expand access for technologically-literate groups while reducing turnout among older citizens, recent refugees, rural diaspora communities, and others with limited digital access or skills. This can skew participation toward specific demographic or socioeconomic segments of the diaspora, ultimately distorting the electoral and political power of certain groups.

3.2. Operational Challenges

Conducting OCV can be highly complex and cumbersome for an EMB, especially if it is the first time the institution has been tasked to undertake it or if the voting method has changed. EMBs frequently confront a range of operational challenges in the implementation of OCV, as described below.

Balancing OCV and In-Country Election Preparations

Achieving the appropriate balance of resources and planning bandwidth between in-country and OCV operations can be a significant challenge for EMBs. In some cases, a complex or highly consequential OCV process may divert the EMB's bandwidth and resources from the in-country electoral operation, undermining its quality. In some countries, a large OCV operation could also divert attention from other significant priorities for the EMB, including longer-term reforms and improvements outlined in a strategic plan or other reform process. A further complicating factor can be timing. If a legal decision or other determination to extend the vote to the diaspora arrives relatively close to election day, the pressure on the EMB to prepare for both in-country and OCV services may prove extremely challenging.

The risks to in-country election preparations can grow exponentially if the diaspora voter registration and voting methods differ significantly from those used domestically. Such divergences increase operational complexity: an EMB must extend voting operations across multiple jurisdictions and time zones, coordinate with host countries at various levels, and develop and implement separate policies, procedures, training programs, and voter information efforts – often under different legal and operational timelines. Beyond these logistical demands, offering certain voting methods exclusively to citizens abroad may also raise legal and normative concerns, particularly in relation to the importance of equality before the law. Several countries have faced debates or legal scrutiny when specific methods – such as postal or internet voting – were made available only to defined groups of voters abroad. By contrast, countries like Germany, Sweden, and New Zealand apply alternative voting methods uniformly to all eligible voters to safeguard equal treatment under the law. In some contexts, an EMB's focus may instead be entirely on the in-country voting operation. EMB leaders with limited experience with OCV can fall into the trap of dismissing the complexities of preparing elections for the diaspora communities, especially when they comprise a small portion of the overall electorate. As a result, the EMB may devote insufficient attention to developing a detailed operational plan to guide the OCV process and encounter many challenges.

Identifying and verifying eligible voters abroad

Countries may choose to enfranchise all citizens residing abroad (as is the case in Ukraine) or only specific groups, applying various eligibility criteria such as the type of employment abroad (as in Armenia), duration of residence abroad (as in Australia), or historical ties to the country (as in Hungary⁷¹). Each of these approaches carries operational implications. Automatically compiling voter lists using data from EMBs, MFAs, or civil registry authorities may streamline processes but also raise challenges related to data accuracy, cross-agency interoperability, and compliance with privacy requirements. Conversely, systems that require voters to actively apply from abroad can reduce the number of eligible participants if the process is burdensome, poorly communicated, or dependent on documents that are difficult for some emigrants to obtain. Both models require EMBs to identify and verify eligible voters, which can be complicated by incomplete records, inconsistent documentation standards across countries, or the need to authenticate information remotely. For these reasons, EMBs should strive to implement diversified, accessible, and secure remote registration systems.

⁷¹ Hungary links out-of-country voting modalities to voter eligibility categories: citizens without a registered residence inside the country are enfranchised through postal voting for the party list only, whereas citizens with a registered residence are required to vote in person at consular posts but retain the right to cast both constituency and party-list votes.



U.S. citizens abroad can complete the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) online using the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) portal. This form simultaneously registers them to vote and requests an absentee ballot for federal, state, and local elections. Alternatively, U.S. citizens living overseas may register in person by submitting a printed FPCA at U.S. embassies or consulates.⁷²

Coordination with host countries

By definition, OCV operations are carried out in countries governed by foreign jurisdictions. Typically, the organizing country notifies the host country's authorities about the electoral operation, as some level of assistance may be required. Even when voting takes place at embassies and consulates, local police are often involved in maintaining order outside these premises on election day but can also be engaged for the secure transportation of sensitive voting material. For example, during 2020 parliamentary elections in Serbia, Kosovo Police assisted the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which was in charge of OCV, to transport election materials to municipalities where Kosovo Serbs resided.⁷³ In-person voting using public buildings may require country-specific security planning involving host nation security forces and intelligence services. The threat profile to elections often differs significantly from host country to host country, as does a government's willingness and capacity to offer such support. In some instances, the EMB may hire a private security company, while in other countries, the relevant police department may be made available. Additionally, countries may need to negotiate with the host country regarding campaign activities, as some states restrict or prohibit foreign political campaigning on their territory. These negotiations typically determine whether political parties may hold public events, distribute materials, or engage in media outreach abroad, and host governments may approve, limit, or deny such activities based on domestic law, security considerations, or diplomatic sensitivities. All of these activities require careful planning, sufficient time, and, generally, formal approvals from the host country government.



In the January 2005 Iraq elections, Turkey and Canada agreed to host polling but refused to allow Iraqi political parties to conduct campaign activities in their territory. Their decisions reflected concerns about domestic political sensitivities, security risks, and the principle of limiting foreign partisan activity within their borders.⁷⁴

⁷² Federal Voting Assistance Program. (n.d.). *Citizen-voter*. Retrieved November 6, 2025, from <https://www.fvap.gov/citizen-voter>

⁷³ Orainfo. (2020, June 20). *OSCE assisted by Kosovo Police for transporting Serbian election votes*. <https://orainfo.net/en/osbe-ja-asistohet-nga-policia-e-kosoves-per-transportin-e-votave-te-zgjedhjeve-te-serbise/>

⁷⁴ Ellis, A., Navarro, C., Morales, I., Gratschew, M., & Braun, N. (2007, November 14). *Voting from abroad: The International IDEA Handbook*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/voting-abroad-international-idea-handbook>

Distribution and return of voting materials

Voting materials, including – when applicable – electronic voting machines, often need to travel long distances to reach voters abroad. Whether they are intended for in-person participation or postal voting, logistics should be carefully planned in both cases. For example, if voting takes place in a neighboring country, ballots may be transported by ground. When ballots must reach voters overseas, they are sometimes flown to an international airport hub and then distributed to different countries in the region. EMBs, in coordination with other institutions involved in material distribution, must ensure the security and integrity of ballots throughout their journey. If a country relies on electronic voting machines, as Brazil and El Salvador do, it will need to dispatch bulky cargo, which impacts costs and may require tailored transportation solutions.



During 2022 Presidential elections in France, around 1,450,000 citizens were registered on the consular electoral lists. France managed to send 34,752,000 ballot papers and 215 tons of electoral material by plane and truck to over 200 diplomatic and consular posts.⁷⁵

The return of in-person ballots can be complicated, especially when the vote count takes place at different times in different countries – making centralized returns challenging. For postal voting, generally the EMB and/or MFA, in cooperation with embassies and consulates, must collect accurate mailing addresses. Timely return is not guaranteed, and some ballots may arrive too late to be counted – sometimes even months after the election, due to inefficient postal services.



Australian voters abroad have several options for returning their completed postal ballots. They may submit them in person or send them to the nearest Australian diplomatic or consular mission. To facilitate this process, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) provides a priority return service from these missions to Australia. Alternatively, voters may choose to return their ballots directly to the AEC in Australia using the postal service of their host country.⁷⁶

In district-based parliamentary elections, it can be extremely complex to deliver, reconcile, and count all different district ballots at in-person voting locations, which is why, for instance, Turkey allows expatriates to vote only in the national list component of its mixed system. Routing the correct district ballot to each voter by postal voting is also challenging, unless PDF downloadable ballots are used. On the other hand, electronic voting machines, like the ones used for OCV by El Salvador, can deliver each voter their district-based ballot. More than 20 countries⁷⁷ have now

⁷⁵ Migration EU eXpertise (MIEUX) Initiative. (2023, February 10). *Knowledge sheet – Implementation of diaspora voting: The cases of France, Tunisia and Senegal*. <https://www.mieux-initiative.eu/en/resources/18-factsheets-and-infosheets/201-implementation-of-diaspora-voting/>

⁷⁶ Australian Electoral Commission. (n.d.). *Overseas – Australians overseas*. Retrieved November 6, 2025, from <https://www.aec.gov.au/overseas/>

⁷⁷ These are: Algeria; Cape Verde; Colombia; Croatia; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; France; Italy; Lithuania; North Macedonia; Portugal; Romania; Tunisia; Senegal; Lebanon; Niger; Mozambique; Peru; Guinea-Bissau; and Moldova.

also created special seats/constituencies for diaspora representation, so that each OCV polling station offers only one parliamentary ballot.

Recruitment and training of polling staff abroad

Serving as a polling official for OCV may be more complex than regular in-country voting given that the support network of experienced EMB officials assisting polling workers is not as readily available due to time differences. To minimize risks during OCV and the subsequent processing of ballots, special attention should therefore be paid to the clarity of polling and counting manuals and the design of training programs. Supervisory staff must also be trained, as they are expected to resolve more complex procedural questions. Given that in-person, hands-on training led by EMB officials can be resource-intensive, EMBs increasingly rely on video modules and online sessions – which can be both cost-effective and flexible for personnel across multiple time zones, provided they are tailored to specific country contexts and operational realities.

Interagency coordination

The prerogative to coordinate with the government of another country, as well as the authority to oversee the work of embassies and consulates, typically falls to the MFA. This implies EMB coordination with another agency in the election administration process beyond its in-country relationships with cybersecurity, health, civil service, and security agencies and municipal governments, among others. It is common (and advisable) for the MFA to designate specialized units or staff for overseas voting coordination. For example, Indonesia and the Philippines have created specific OCV units within their MFAs to manage the complex logistics of diaspora voting. Organizing postal voting also requires coordination with postal service providers both as the ballots are being delivered to voters and when the ballots are being returned, which can be particularly challenging during the initial rollout. Other agencies commonly engaged for OCV are security and intelligence services, including entities responsible for cybersecurity. Determining the locus of authority for tracking and responding to mis- and disinformation related to the postal voting process, and the process for doing so simultaneously in a large number of countries, are additional issues to be addressed through interagency coordination. The remit of this coordination can be outlined in a formal Memorandum of Understanding, or scope of work, to facilitate a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, including timelines and resource allocations. The interagency collaboration could also benefit from joint training simulations.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ For guidance on safeguarding EMB independence and clarifying institutional mandates in interagency cooperation, please see Global Network on Safeguarding Election Integrity. (October 2024). *Principles for Democratic Electoral Reform Processes*. <https://www.ifes.org/document/gnsei-principles-democratic-election-reform-processespdf>



During Romania's December 2020 parliamentary elections, approximately 14,000 postal ballots – about 40% of those sent by diaspora voters – failed to reach Bucharest in time to be counted. The Permanent Electoral Authority suggested that the issue lay with the postal system, while Poșta Română responded by stating that it had fulfilled all obligations and that delays were caused by external postal partners abroad.⁷⁹

In view of the different operational challenges outlined above, some countries – especially with large diaspora communities – choose to establish a dedicated OCV unit within the EMB. Such units help centralize expertise, streamline coordination with other state agencies, and ensure consistent management of registration, voting, and results transmission processes across multiple jurisdictions.

3.3. Voter Eligibility and Registration

Voter Eligibility

Citizenship has always been a fundamental requirement for participating in national-level elections.⁸⁰ Apart from that, countries implementing OCV have adopted various approaches to defining eligibility, including:

- Allowing all citizens abroad to vote, provided they are included in the relevant voter list (e.g., South Africa, Portugal, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)⁸¹;
- Allowing only specific categories of citizens abroad to vote, usually those on official government business, such as diplomats and military personnel (e.g., Armenia, Botswana, Zimbabwe), and, sometimes, students (e.g., the Bahamas, Bhutan); or
- Applying residency-based eligibility criteria, such as limiting voting rights to those who have lived abroad for no more than a specific number of years or to citizens who can provide proof of tight ties to the country, such as a proven intent of return considered on a case-by-case basis (e.g., Australia, Germany, Singapore).

⁷⁹ Zanfir, C. (2020, December 5). *Scandal la votul prin corespondență: Peste 14.000 de plicuri nu au ajuns – Ce spun șeful AEP și Poșta Română*. Aleph News. Retrieved November 6, 2025, from <https://alephnews.ro/alegeri-parlamentare-2020/alegeri-parlamentare-2020-posta-romana-reactie-scandal-voturi-corespondenta>

⁸⁰ Only a few countries offered voting rights to non-citizens in the national elections in the past, and almost all of them have now discontinued this practice. The remaining example is Ireland, which permits British citizens to vote in its national elections (but not presidential). For more information on this case, please see *Voter eligibility*. (n.d.). *Electoral Commission*. Retrieved November 6, 2025, from <https://www.electoralcommission.ie/voter-eligibility/>

⁸¹ The voter registration may be permanent or temporary.



According to the Federal Ministry of the Interior of the Federal Republic of Germany, “citizens who live outside of Germany are eligible to vote if they had a domicile or were otherwise permanent residents of Germany no more than 25 years before for an uninterrupted period of at least 3 months after reaching the age of 14; or if they are for other reasons personally and directly familiar with and impacted by the political circumstances in Germany. This latter category includes German citizens employed abroad, German cross-border commuters, and German citizens living abroad who are significantly involved in German politics and society through their activity in associations, parties, or other organizations and can demonstrate their involvement.”⁸²

The expansiveness of the chosen approach to OCV eligibility can significantly increase the number of eligible voters, exacerbating the logistical and political implications of the process. Conversely, the approach taken can disenfranchise large numbers of citizens, potentially fostering distrust in the government and weakening the connection to the country of origin.

Voter Registration

Once eligibility criteria are defined, citizens wishing to participate in elections from abroad must be included in the voter lists. Countries employ a range of practices around out-of-country voter registration. In some cases, countries passively register external voters – for example, all Ukrainians over the age of 18 who are enrolled in the consular register are automatically included in the voter lists abroad. Some countries, such as the Philippines, deploy mobile consular teams to reach secondary cities or remote diaspora communities who may not be as connected to the consulate.⁸³ These visits often include voter registration services, sometimes in coordination with diaspora events or town hall meetings.

However, more commonly, external voters must actively apply for voter registration and prove their eligibility by submitting the required documents. This process can be challenging, depending on the registration method (e.g., in-person registration as opposed to postal or online applications) and the document requirements. Proving voter eligibility can be nearly impossible in situations where emigrants have expired identity documents and are required to travel long distances (to the capital of the host country or even to the home country, as in Belarus) to renew their documents. Proving eligibility and registering to vote typically involve verifying a voter’s identity using government-issued documents. Many countries also require proof of residence abroad, such as consular registration or local residency documentation. In some cases, voter registration authorities may accept utility bills as evidence of a person’s residence abroad, but others have

⁸² Federal Returning Officer. (n.d.). *Germans abroad*. Bundeswahlleiterin. <https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2025/informationen-waehler/deutsche-im-ausland.html>

⁸³ Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines, Washington D.C. (n.d.). *Consular outreach program*. <https://philippineembassy-dc.org/consular-outreach-program/>

more stringent requirements. Thus, legal provisions enabling OCV should clearly specify the acceptable forms of documentation.

Most countries require voters to register for each election (e.g., Germany), while others maintain the out-of-country voter lists from one election to the next (e.g., Slovenia). Registration time periods fluctuate widely, ranging from a few weeks to several months before Election Day. Danish voters, for example, may register as early as two years before an election with their diplomatic mission, for example, but they still must do so for each individual election. Snap elections, which have become more frequent, further compress the timeline for OCV registration.

Modern technologies facilitate voter eligibility verification remotely and securely by using tools such as digital IDs, biometric verification, and encrypted online platforms. To protect voters' personal data, best practices like data minimization (collecting only necessary data), encryption, and legal compliance with privacy regulations (e.g., the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR) are crucial. In the 2025 national elections, registered overseas Filipino voters could vote online in the U.S. and the Caribbean. To enroll for voting online, voters were required to fill out the enrollment form, enter a one-time password received via email or SMS, capture a clear image of an accepted identity document, and upload a selfie through the system.⁸⁴ Mexico's National Electoral Institute (INE) developed an online portal and mobile app allowing Mexicans abroad to register with their voter ID card and select their voting method (postal, in-person, or online).⁸⁵ This led to a significant increase in diaspora registration from 2021 to 2024. For the 2026 parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, diaspora voters will be required to register online using their national ID card. The registration process will require submitting the ID number and completing a liveness test via facial recognition technology. Based on these inputs, the Bangladesh Election Commission plans to generate an OCV voter register.⁸⁶

As noted in Section 3.1. "Political Influence," decisions on eligibility and voter registration methods reflect both technical and socio-political considerations. While administrative capacity, documentation systems, and the availability of consular services shape what is operationally feasible, states may also consider broader political dynamics when determining which categories of citizens abroad can participate.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Del Cid Lugo, A. (2024, June 14). *The Mexican diaspora in LA can vote – but it's not so easy*. Los Angeles Public Press. <https://lapublicpress.org/2024/06/the-mexican-diaspora-in-la-can-vote-but-its-not-so-easy/>, and Hermosillo, M. (2024, February 23). *How Mexican citizens in Texas can vote in Mexico's 2024 elections*. Texas Tribune. <https://www.texastribune.org/2024/02/23/texas-mexican-citizens-vote-mexico-2024-elections/>

⁸⁶ Bangladesh Election Commission. (n.d.). *Ensuring inclusive diaspora voter registration for Bangladesh*. Retrieved November 10, 2025, from <https://www.ecs.gov.bd/bec/public/files/Probasi%20voting/Ensuring%20Inclusive%20Diaspora%20Voter%20Registration%20for%20Bangladesh.pdf>

3.4. Voter Eligibility of Citizens Externally Displaced Due to Climate Change

Environmental challenges – including fires, droughts, floods, hurricanes, and rising sea levels – are being intensified by climate change, increasing both the scale and complexity of human mobility. Although cross-border climate-related displacement remains smaller in scale than internal movement, the empirical record is increasingly clear, and the prospect of entire populations being compelled to relocate is no longer theoretical. While research, advocacy, and practice have expanded somewhat around the protection of the electoral and political rights of conflict-affected and economically displaced populations, these rights remain markedly under-examined.⁸⁷

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) as of June 2025, 117.3 million people had been forced to flee their homes globally due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order. Among them 42.5 million were refugees and 8.42 million were asylum-seekers.⁸⁸

In the Pacific, slow-onset environmental stressors—including sea-level rise, groundwater salinization, and intensifying storm systems—have contributed to sustained outward migration from states such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, often through New Zealand’s Pacific Access Category, a mechanism not formally designed for climate protection yet functioning in practice as an adaptive pathway. In South Asia, recurrent flooding, cyclones, and river-bank erosion in the Ganges–Brahmaputra delta continue to drive movement from Bangladesh into India, where emigrants remain without formal recognition despite the growing environmental dimensions of their displacement. In the Horn of Africa, prolonged droughts and climate-amplified livelihood collapse in Somalia have led to significant inflows into Kenya’s Dadaab complex, underscoring the compound nature of climate stress and socio-political fragility.

This short chapter focuses on the legal framework that needs to be established to protect the electoral and political rights of people displaced out-of-country due to environmental/climate reasons. Operationally and logistically, this enfranchisement is similar to OCV that is necessitated by other issues discussed in this paper. However, environmentally-displaced people face unique

⁸⁷Responding early to this emerging need, IFES worked between 1999 and 2021 with electoral management bodies and civil society partners to explore how environmental displacement intersects with participation, inclusion, and the integrity of electoral processes, producing a seminal publication on the topic: Mohan, V., Roberts, H, (2021) *Electoral Rights of Environmentally Displaced Persons*, IFES
https://www.eods.eu/library/IFES_2021_ElectoralRightsEnvironmentallyDisplacedPersons.pdf

⁸⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2025, November 4). Mid-year trends: Key displacement and solutions trends in the first half of 2025. <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/mid-year-trends-report-2025.pdf>

challenges, including a lack of legal protection, that warrant special attention in the legal framework. Protecting the electoral and political rights of people environmentally displaced outside their countries is not merely a logistical challenge but also one of global justice. Those least responsible for climate change – often the most marginalized in developing countries, are disproportionately affected and displaced due to climate change. Thus, there is a moral obligation for the international community to protect their rights.⁸⁹

Persons externally displaced to other countries for environmental reasons currently lack international legal protection, as they have traditionally not qualified for refugee status under international law. The key stipulation of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is that a person must be fleeing persecution from a state or non-state actor.⁹⁰ Under this definition, the environment is not recognized as a persecuting agent.⁹¹ Thus, while there is an escalating need, there has been a lack of protection for the internationally displaced. This protection gap has been subject to increased legal testing; courts in Australia and New Zealand have upheld the exclusion, although at times with some qualifying commentary.⁹²

A recent landmark view by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the treaty monitoring body for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), has the potential to change this course.⁹³ New Zealand's Supreme Court ruled in 2015 that a citizen of Kiribati did not qualify as a refugee because the state had taken some measures to protect its population, while cautioning that this should not preclude future climate-related protection claims. In 2020, the UN Human Rights Committee upheld the deportation of the citizen, but affirmed that climate change can threaten the right to life and that people must not be returned to countries where climate impacts would endanger their essential human rights.⁹⁴ The committee also noted that, "given that the risk of an entire country becoming submerged under water is such an extreme risk, the

⁸⁹ Junaid, U., Ali, M., & Sultan, S. (2025). Climate-induced migration: Gaps in refugee law and the right to environmental asylum. *Contemporary Journal of Social Science Review*, 3(4), 570–578. <https://doi.org/10.63878/cjssr.v3i4.1409>

⁹⁰ United Nations. (1951, July 28). *Convention relating to the status of refugees*. *United Nations Treaty Series*, 189, 137.

⁹¹ The 1951 UN Convention and 1967 Protocol (UN General Assembly, [Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees](#), January 31, 1967, United Nations Treaty Series vol. 606, p. 267) classify a refugee as a person possessing "a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, [or] membership of a particular social group or political opinion" and specify the protections they are afforded.

⁹² There have been 19 court cases in Australia and New Zealand. [New Zealand: Climate Change Refugee Case Overview](#). Library of Congress. United States Congress, July 29, 2015.

⁹³ States that are parties to the ICCPR [Optional Protocol](#) recognize the competence of the Human Rights Committee to receive and consider communications from individuals who have exhausted all available domestic remedies. The committee is not a judicial body, but its views are "arrived at in a judicial spirit" and represent "authoritative interpretation of the treaty." General Comment 33, Human Rights Committee, paragraphs 11 and 13. <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/CCPR.C.GC.33.pdf>

⁹⁴ See [Views Adopted by the Committee Under Article 5 \(4\) of the Optional Protocol, Concerning Communication No. 2728/2016](#), UN Human Rights Committee (treaty body for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), January 7, 2020. See also [UN Human Rights Committee Decision on Climate Change is a Wake-up Call](#), UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic, January 24, 2020.

conditions of life in such a country may become incompatible with the right to life with dignity before the risk is realized.”

The legal status of environmentally displaced persons in their country of residence is a critical determinant of their ability to exercise electoral rights. Even when a country of origin provides OCV opportunities, these mechanisms may be effectively inaccessible if displaced individuals lack secure status in the host state. Where residency is irregular or uncertain, voters may be unwilling—or afraid—to appear at OCV polling stations, engage with electoral authorities, or otherwise make themselves visible to host-state institutions. Legal precarity can therefore nullify rights that exist on paper.

Given the scale of environmental displacement, both national actors and the international community must prepare well in advance. This requires coordinated action among affected states, neighboring countries, civil society, and international organizations. Above all, those most affected must have their voices heard and be represented in local and national decision making processes—ensuring that democratic participation is not another casualty of the climate crisis.

3.5. Security

Traditionally, election authorities establish a joint election operations unit (sometimes called a Joint Election Security Unit) to manage security threats to the commission and elections.⁹⁵ This can take many different forms, and membership varies greatly from country to country and from election to election given the changing threat context. In recent years, risk analysis has expanded from its traditional focus on physical security of election-related offices, campaigning, voting day, warehouses, transportation of sensitive election material, and key election officials to include the safety of election officials responsible for cybersecurity and the security of election ICT infrastructure and results systems.

In recent years, EMBs have expanded their role in safeguarding elections in response to an increasingly complex and evolving threat environment. Addressing contemporary election security risks now requires broader and more specialized expertise than in the past. As a result, many Joint Election Operations Units bring together traditional security and intelligence services alongside agencies responsible for cybersecurity and the protection of critical infrastructure. Depending on a country’s geopolitical risk profile, malign foreign actors and governments could

⁹⁵ For details, please see United States Agency for International Development. (July 2010). Electoral Security Framework: Technical Guidance Handbook for Democracy and Governance Officers. <https://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/23249516/402039315/USAID-Creative-Associates-Electoral-Security.pdf>

represent an additional tangible threat not only to the EMB's own infrastructure, but to the nation's critical infrastructure, as well as to private companies undertaking election-related tasks such as ballot production or distribution of polling material.⁹⁶

The leadership and decision making structure of the joint election operational units can be decisive factors in their effectiveness. Many EMBs engage former senior police or military officers as the leading focal point for security on the Board of Commissioners. In some cases, this is a reasonable approach, especially if complemented with technical in-house expertise on cybersecurity or other relevant security issues. In other cases, the responsibility for security falls on the EMB Chairperson, irrespective of that person's level of security expertise. However, the chairperson is often already engaged in numerous high-profile and complex issues and can lack the necessary bandwidth to also lead a time-consuming election area as security.

The joint election operations units led by the EMB, with representatives from other agencies participating in advisory capacity, can have the advantage of expedited decision-making and swift actions by security agencies. However, that might not always be the case, as non-EMB representatives might be required to seek prior approval from their own command structure before engaging. To avoid sluggish decision-making or unclear command and control situations, it is advisable to agree on a clear Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among participating agencies from the outset, as well as clear operational principles outlined in an approved Scope of Work (SoW).

The joint election security unit is likely to face the same pressures as other election stakeholders. Elections are highly political events, and the scrutiny by media, observers, and a range of different interest groups is often far more intense than what most entities and their representatives will have experienced previously. It is therefore advisable for the unit to undertake simulation exercises and game out standard operating procedures to be followed. Another critical preparatory undertaking often found among successful joint election security units is a thoughtful and proactive communications plan. Security incidents are often extremely sudden events requiring rapid reactions, both to mitigate the actual ongoing security incident as well as communicating with key stakeholders and the public at large.

Even EMBs with a well-established joint election security unit in place can struggle with the rapid introduction or expansion of a country's OCV services. For instance, the risk assessment must be significantly more sophisticated as attackers and attack surfaces can multiply from a relatively

⁹⁶ For more information, please see Byman, D. (2025, March 20). *Foreign malign influence targeting U.S. and allied corporations*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/foreign-malign-influence-targeting-us-and-allied-corporations>

well-confined in-country risk profile to extensive international threats across continents. To tackle these new challenges, EMBs and their security units often benefit by coordinating with host countries' security forces and intelligence services, as each country's risk profile might differ, requiring tailored solutions. In some instances, the national police service will take the lead in the host country, while in others the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may have primary authority. Depending on the type of voting system in place and the relationships between the host country and the nation undertaking OCV, the threats can include various forms of cybersecurity attacks on voter registration and voting services, including ransomware, and mis- and disinformation on various media outlets and online platforms. In jurisdictions permitting the use of drop-boxes for postal voting, these could also become targets, just like voting material storage facilities, party campaign rallies, and queues of voters outside embassies and consulates. If MoUs and SoWs can be time-consuming to finalize with an EMB's domestic security forces and intelligence services, the planning phase can be even more drawn out when negotiating with foreign entities.

3.6. Access for Marginalized Groups

Equal access is an international electoral standard that can be a very difficult operational challenge for election administrators organizing voting abroad. Providing meaningful access for voters can be very challenging when they are spread across and dispersed within a wide array of countries. For instance, EMBs cannot set up polling stations in every place where their citizens find themselves. Embassy and consulate voting will primarily service citizens residing in the capital and other large cities, while citizens elsewhere might incur significant expenses to travel to cast their in-person vote. In many countries, postal services are unreliable or insufficient, or voters lack the familiarity needed to effectively use postal services. Additionally, the digital divide may exclude some voters abroad from accessing online voter registration or internet voting.

The situation becomes even more challenging for marginalized groups voting from abroad, such as persons with disabilities, forced emigrants, parents with young children, and older voters. The table below describes how various voting methods can either support or hinder access for different groups of voters.

Impact of Different OCV Voting Methods on Marginalized Groups

Embassy Voting	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Poll workers can provide tailored assistance to voters. ✓ Embassies can prepare reasonable accommodations for voters with disabilities in advance. ✓ Embassies, in some cases, may reserve a space for breastfeeding mothers and young children and/or rent mobile outdoor toilet facilities. ✓ Controlled environment reduces risks of coercion, intimidation, or family voting. <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Overcoming distances to reach an embassy as well as queuing on voting day(s) can be cumbersome and costly for voters with disabilities, older voters, parents with young children, less affluent voters or those living in refugee camps. ✗ Voters with uncertain legal status in the host country may be afraid to come to an embassy. ✗ Some embassies are not physically accessible, so voters with disabilities and older voters might not be able enter them.
In-Person Voting (not in Embassies)	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Poll workers can provide tailored assistance to voters. ✓ Reasonable accommodations could be prepared for voters with disabilities in advance; however, due to upscaling of the number of in-person polling stations open under another country's jurisdiction, it is rarely done so. ✓ Although voting is expected to be free from coercion and family influence, this can be compromised in remote areas where polling stations are under the influence of specific groups and lack independent oversight, particularly when their representatives are engaged as polling staff. <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ While it boosts accessibility, voters residing in parts of the country without polling stations may still be required to travel considerable distances. ✗ Organizing voting out of embassies requires more efforts to inform voters of polling locations, including putting information into accessible formats.
Postal Voting	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Postal voting boosts access for voters with some types of disabilities, those unable to travel, such as older people, and people who live far away from an embassy or polling station.. ✓ The ballot package can be designed to accommodate voters with disabilities, for example by using large fonts, high-contrast colors, and clear instructions in accessible formats. ✓ Voters have more time to familiarize themselves with the ballot and make an informed decision in a calm environment. <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Postal voting does not allow for secrecy of the ballot for voters who have visual impairments, unless braille ballots are provided. ✗ Requires familiarity with the postal services (especially if the return envelope was not pre-addressed and stamped). ✗ Often, the EMB and/or embassy will require confirmation of a mailing address in writing, an additional step that could be time-consuming. ✗ Undocumented citizens might be afraid of providing an address and thereby becoming more vulnerable to deportation by local authorities. ✗ Individuals living in refugee camps or informal settlements abroad may face difficulties in providing a standardized or verifiable address, potentially resulting in their exclusion from postal voting processes. ✗ Often regulations require another person, usually a citizen, to witness the process of voting which could lead in some cases to coercion. ✗ Postal voting is held in an uncontrolled environment which cannot guarantee freedom from coercion.
Internet Voting	<p>Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Internet voting enables voters to cast their ballots from virtually anywhere, offering convenience including for those who face mobility challenges. ✓ Internet voting can help facilitate voting for people with psychosocial disabilities who require a calm environment. ✓ People with disabilities can use their own assistive technology to cast their ballot. ✓ Online systems may offer accessibility features such as text-to-speech or magnified fonts. <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Existing digital divide can exclude non-tech savvy voters as well as those lacking access to computers and/or internet. ✗ Internet voting is held in an uncontrolled environment which cannot guarantee freedom from coercion, although some i-voting systems try to mitigate this issue by letting people change their vote multiple times before election day.

EMBs can proactively mitigate accessibility challenges for voters abroad – as they should for all eligible in-country voters by informing the public about registration requirements and accessible voting options in a clear and timely manner and in accessible formats. These formats may include providing sign language interpretation, easy-to-read ballots, tactile ballot guides, large-print fonts, audio interfaces, and implementing other reasonable accommodations. Additionally, it is critical to train polling officials and embassy/consulate staff on accessibility standards, the use of assistive tools, and confidential assistance protocols.

As each voting method has its benefits and disadvantages and may help to enfranchise some groups of voters while inadvertently excluding others, to create an enabling environment for as many voters as possible an EMB should consider using a combination of different voting methods to address varied needs. It is important that the election administration assesses adequately its capacity to manage multiple voting options with different timelines and in coordination with other institutions. Cost is another factor that needs to be considered when weighing the various alternatives and combinations of voting options. Regardless of efforts made to enfranchise voters abroad, OCV accessibility and coverage gaps will likely still make EMBs vulnerable to accusations of political bias, particularly if there are clear trends in political preferences among voters with more or less access to OCV processes.



During the 2022 presidential election, Hungarians living abroad who did not have a Hungarian address (usually ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring states who allegedly favored the Orban government) had the option to mail in their votes. Hungarians who had kept their in-country addresses but were living outside Hungary (usually students and working emigrants, mainly in the European Union) were limited, on the other hand, to a few in-person polling stations abroad. That approach was fiercely criticized by recent emigrants and the opposition as unfair and favoring pro-governmental forces.⁹⁷

To proactively mitigate accusations of politicization of the OCV process, the EMB must develop clear, objective criteria for the countries in which voting services will be provided and the levels of service provided. They should engage with a range of interested stakeholders to obtain broad political agreement for these criteria prior to making a decision.

3.7. Costs⁹⁸

Assessing the comparative global cost of elections, particularly the cost of OCV, is challenging, as not all countries publish detailed or timely election expenditure reports. Furthermore,

⁹⁷ Rutai, L. (2022, February 21). *A tale of two diasporas: The battle for Hungarian voters abroad*. RFE/RL. <https://www.rferl.org/a/hungary-election-diaspora-orban-marki-zay/31712662.html>

⁹⁸ Please note that all costs in dollars are calculated according to the average exchange rate prevailing at the date of the event in question.

comparing available data across countries is difficult due to inconsistencies in what is included in reported costs. For example, some countries account for voter registration or for the development of online registration platforms, while others exclude or omit these and other costs. In addition, the electoral mandate and associated costs are sometimes divided across several different state agencies, or integrated into ministries' standard operations. As a result, they can be difficult to separate from non-election related activities. A country may undertake major and expensive reforms leading up to one election, such as introducing a new biometric voter registration system, while another country might hold a traditional election with few or no costly reforms, which further complicates comparative cost analysis. The costs below are therefore to be regarded as approximate and illustrative rather than definitive. In general, OCV operations tend to be more expensive, on average per voter, than in-country voting.⁹⁹

For example, according to information provided to the authors by the Permanent Electoral Authority of Romania, total expenses incurred by central public authorities during the 2024 parliamentary elections amounted to approximately USD 137 million (597 million LEI), of which voting from abroad accounted for around USD 16 million. The number of citizens included in the electoral lists was approximately 19.5 million, resulting in an average cost per registered voter of USD 7.01 (30.61 LEI). Approximately 8.68 million voters participated in the election inside the country, while 0.775 million citizens voted from abroad. This resulted in a cost per actual vote – both inside the country and abroad – of USD 14.47 (63.15 LEI). The cost per actual vote inside the country was USD 13.90 (60.69 LEI), while the cost per actual vote abroad was higher, at USD 20.78 (90.67 LEI).

A similar trend was observed during the 2025 presidential elections in Romania. The average cost per registered voter increased to USD 10.20 (44.52 LEI), while the cost per actual vote, both inside the country and abroad, reached USD 17.31 (75.54 LEI). The cost per actual vote inside the country was USD 16.44 (71.79 LEI), compared to USD 23.40 (102.21 LEI) per actual vote cast from abroad.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ For example, please see Erben, P., Goldsmith, B., & Shujaat, A. (2012, April). Out-of-country voting: A brief overview (IFES White Paper Series). International Foundation for Electoral Systems. <https://www.ifes.org/publications/out-country-voting-brief-overview-0>; or Ellis, A., Navarro, C., Morales, I., Gratschew, M., & Braun, N. (2007, November 14). Voting from Abroad: The International IDEA Handbook. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/voting-from-abroad-the-international-idea-handbook.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ Total expenditure incurred by central public authorities was almost 161 million EUR (801 million LEI), of which voting from abroad constituted almost 27 million EUR (134 million LEI). The number of people registered in the electoral lists were almost 18 million citizens. 10,6 million citizens actually turned to vote, among which 1,3 million voted abroad.

In Senegal, OCV operations are financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Abroad, and the expenses are included in its budget. In the 2022 legislative elections, out of a total election budget of approximately 16 million USD (10 billion CFAF), 1.61 million USD (1 billion CFAF) was allocated to the in-person diaspora vote.¹⁰¹ With approximately 7 million registered voters,¹⁰² around 320,000 of whom reside abroad, this brings the cost to 2.15 USD per registered voter in-country and 5.00 USD per registered voter abroad. The expenditure for OCV comprised 10% of the total election budget, although the OCV electorate was less than 5% of the total cost.

According to media reports, the cost of election operations during the 2024 presidential election in Mexico was approximately 480 million USD (8.8 billion MXN).¹⁰³ With around 98 million voters included in the voter register in 2024, the approximate cost per registered voter in-country was 4.90 USD. According to the information provided to the authors by the National Electoral Institute (INE) of Mexico, the cost of the OCV operation during the 2023-2024 federal and local electoral processes was approximately 8.7 million USD (165.8 million MXN). 223,970 voters registered to vote overseas, and 184,326 participated in the election,¹⁰⁴ amounting to approximately 38.84 USD per registered voter. The OCV expenditure accounted for 2% of the total electoral budget.

It is also possible to argue that diversification of voting methods and the introduction of the online voting abroad proved to be cost saving to some extent for Mexico. For comparison, during 2017-2018 federal and local electoral processes, when only the postal voting method was used for diaspora voters, the cost of OCV was 14.76 million USD (281 million MXN). There were 181,873 registrations in the list of out-of-country voters and 98,708 citizens cast ballots for the presidency (and 98,419 votes were received for the Senate) from abroad, amounting to approximately 150 USD per registered voter abroad.

It is worth underlining that countries considering implementation of internet voting for cost saving reasons should account for all expenses related to online solutions. For example, France first implemented internet voting for voters residing abroad during the legislative elections in 2012 but dropped it in 2017 because of security concerns. Its new electronic system, introduced in 2022, cost around 1.46 million USD (1.39 million EUR).¹⁰⁵ Around 250,000 French voters residing abroad decided to cast their ballot online, amounting to approximately 6.50 USD (5.55 EUR) per

¹⁰¹ Migration EU eXperts (MIEUX) Initiative. (2023, February 10). *Knowledge sheet – Implementation of diaspora voting: The cases of France, Tunisia and Senegal*. <https://www.mieux-initiative.eu/en/resources/18-factsheets-and-infosheets/201-implementation-of-diaspora-voting/>

¹⁰² *Senegal Country Profile*. (n.d.). International Foundation for Electoral Systems' ElectionGuide. Retrieved November 6, 2025, from <https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/190/>

¹⁰³ Velasco, A. (2025, June 2). *INE gastó 619 pesos por cada voto en elección judicial, 4 veces más que en 2024*. UnoTV. <https://www.unotv.com/nacional/costo-por-voto-en-eleccion-judicial-supera-a-elecciones-de-2024/>

¹⁰⁴ 122,497 online; 22,243 in person, and 39,586 by post.

¹⁰⁵ There are minor discrepancies considering the cost of the system development when described by different sources. For example, the MIEUX (EU-ICMPD) Project earlier referenced in the document, stated that the cost of the system was 1.32 million EUR.

voter. However, additional costs, such as controls and audits, full-scale testing, and operational costs generated by the activation of the voting solution during the 2020–2024 period, represented an additional cost of around 1.79 million USD (1.65 million EUR), increasing the cost per registered voter.

The rollout of OCV or the introduction of an additional voting method typically incurs a higher cost per registered voter during initial implementation, as all operational and security systems must be established from scratch and voters must become accustomed to the novelties. For example, according to the information provided to the authors by the Central Election Commission of Albania, the participation of Albanian citizens residing outside the territory of the Republic of Albania in national elections was enabled for the first time in the parliamentary elections of May 11, 2025. A total of 245,808 voters abroad registered to participate in the election. The total budget allocated for the preparation and implementation of OCV totalled 18.41 million USD (1,581,146,000 ALL), approximately 75 USD per registered voter abroad. A significant portion of this budget – around 10.64 million USD (912,679,991 ALL) – was designated for postal services, covering the costs of printing, packaging, and international postage for all registered diaspora voters. The remaining funds were used to support other essential components of the process, including development of a secure voter registration and verification system; training of election administration staff personnel; public information and voter education campaigns targeting diaspora communities; and coordination with diaspora organizations, embassies, and consulates to facilitate voter communication and assistance.

The Republic of Moldova piloted postal voting for the first time during the 2024 presidential elections and the constitutional republican referendum.¹⁰⁶ The number of voters whose applications were approved after verification and who were sent envelopes with ballot papers was 1,809. The number of returned outer envelopes with ballot papers for postal voting was 1,312 (72.52%) in the first round and 1,459 (80.65%) in the second round. The total executed budget for the pilot implementation of postal voting was approximately 110,000 USD (1,943,750 MDL). Thus, the average cost per registered postal voter abroad was approximately 60.50 USD (1,070 MDL).¹⁰⁷

The cost of OCV can often depend on the specific provisions set forth in national electoral legislation. In particular, legal obligations such as Austria's requirement to return a marked ballot by registered mail or France's requirement to distribute printed official campaign materials such

¹⁰⁶ The Republic of Moldova also organizes in-person OCV. The cost of in-person OCV was not counted in this example.

¹⁰⁷ Infotag. (2025, August 15). *2,606 Moldovan citizens abroad have registered to vote by mail in the upcoming elections*. <https://www.infotag.md/populis-en/326143/>, and Shikiriiskaia, T. (2025, March 26). *Each vote by mail cost the treasury 100 euros*. Logos-Press. <https://logos-pres.md/en/news/each-vote-by-mail-cost-the-treasury-100-euros/>

as candidate manifestos to all in-country and diaspora voters can significantly increase the overall cost of administering the election. Decision-makers at the national level should consult with the country's election authorities when drafting and adopting laws regulating OCV, as the EMB may be able to suggest practical, cost-effective solutions that comply with legal requirements. For instance, a requirement to include all candidate manifestos in the postal voting package mailed to voters abroad could be achieved by including a single piece of paper with a QR code linking the voter to a dedicated website hosting all manifestos.

3.8. Campaign Oversight

Rules for political campaigning are established by domestic laws and regulations; however, in OCV elections, host countries may also impose varying rules for campaign-related activities that can be carried out abroad. Most host governments allow for basic voter education activities targeting diaspora voters residing within their borders, but many limit or ban partisan campaigning on their territory to protect national sovereignty.¹⁰⁸ Even in cases where partisan campaigning is prohibited by the host country, setting clear rules for appropriate conduct and maintaining oversight is still critical as campaigns and candidates can find creative ways around campaign restrictions. For example, candidates may visit and meet with diaspora communities before formally launching a campaign or utilize official state travel to connect with or direct messages to voters abroad.¹⁰⁹ Political candidates are also utilizing online advertising to reach voters regardless of where they reside. In Romania's 2025 presidential elections, for instance, candidates relied heavily on social media to reach voters in the diaspora.¹¹⁰

In contexts where electoral contestants are permitted to campaign abroad, they should be bound to the same laws and regulations on money in politics that shape in-country campaigns. Generally, these rules seek to strengthen transparency and accountability in party and candidate financing, and maintain an even playing field for all candidates by regulating:¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ See Lacy, B. (2007). Host country issues. In A. Ellis, C. Navarro, I. Morales, M. Gratschew, & N. Braun (Eds.), *Voting from Abroad: The International IDEA Handbook*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/voting-from-abroad-the-international-idea-handbook.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ As an example, two Mexican political figures visited diaspora communities in the United States before returning home and launching their campaigns for the 2018 presidential election. See: Paarlberg, M. A. (2018, May 15). *Mexico's diaspora electorate*. Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/mexicos-diaspora-electorate>

¹¹⁰ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2025, October 28). Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report, Romania: Repeat Presidential Election, 4 and 18 May 2025. https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/3/600295_0.pdf

¹¹¹ Öhman, M., Klein, L., & Jouan Stonestreet, B. (2024). Oversight – Toolkit for political finance institutions. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. <https://www.ifes.org/oversight/3.2-Compliance%20Control%20Mechanisms>



Common safeguards may require impartiality or neutrality of civil servants; bar use of public offices, equipment, and allocated budgets for campaign purposes; and require that public officials refrain from active campaigning while discharging their formal duties.¹¹²

There is also likely to be overlap in the types of political finance violations that occur in campaigns targeting domestic and foreign-based voters. Common issues may include the use of “straw donors” to mask the true source of donations or instances of political campaigning or favoritism amongst civil servants and poll workers. However, these violations may be harder to detect or prove in overseas-focused campaigns, because oversight bodies are likely to have diminished monitoring capacities and less access to corroborating data to support fact-finding.

Domestically during an election process, there is often an array of stakeholders monitoring for integrity breaches. Civil society groups and citizen and international observers can help gather and document information on campaign activities, such as size and estimated costs of rallies, production and distribution of promotional materials, misuse of state funds to support incumbent campaigns, or application of pressure on civil servants to support an incumbent party.¹¹³ Moreover, institutions such as media regulators are often legally required to track and report on activities like placement of political ads and the biased treatment of candidates in the news, which helps with monitoring.¹¹⁴ Oversight bodies can request data from peer institutions to help verify the validity of donations,¹¹⁵ and ensure that parties and contestants have submitted full and

¹¹² International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (March 2018). Abuse of state resources: Research and assessment framework—Guidelines for the democracy and governance community of practice.

<https://www.ifes.org/publications/abuse-state-resources-research-and-assessment-framework>

¹¹³ Öhman, M. (2022, September 27). Vote for free: A global guide for citizen monitoring of campaign finance.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems. <https://www.ifes.org/publications/vote-for-free>

¹¹⁴ Öhman, M., Klein, L., & Jouan Stonestreet, B. (2024). Oversight – Toolkit for political finance institutions, Section 3.2: Compliance control mechanisms. International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

<https://www.ifes.org/oversight/3.2-Compliance%20Control%20Mechanisms>

¹¹⁵ As an example, an institution with a political finance oversight mandate may request data from a ministry managing a civil registry, to verify that a donor is a citizen; or from the ministry managing a tax registry, to ensure that

accurate reports on their campaign spending.¹¹⁶ Taken together, this information from external sources helps authorities verify that parties and candidates are fully and accurately reporting on their funding and spending in electoral cycles, and helps unearth irregularities or potential violations that may require further investigation.

Yet these layers of monitoring are unlikely to be present in OCV-focused campaigns. Observer groups are not commonly deployed to monitor OCV, and foreign regulators lack legal requirements (and likely incentives) to closely monitor foreign candidates. Oversight bodies also lack access to the external datasets (such as tax records or foreign bank records) they need to monitor illegal donations and spending. For example, when Moldova was undertaking electoral reforms in 2022, it drafted a provision that would allow citizens living abroad to donate to campaigns from their international bank accounts. While it is good practice to allow citizens who vote from abroad to contribute to parties and campaigns,¹¹⁷ the Venice Commission cautioned “it is unclear how [the Central Election Commission] would enforce control that the means from abroad come from the citizens’ income” rather than from an anonymous third party hiding contributions through straw donors, for example.¹¹⁸ The Commission recommended that as a safeguard “the legislator could consider mandating that the donor sign a declaration that the donations are provided in compliance with the law under the penalty of perjury” and introduce a transparent methodology for further investigation where warranted.¹¹⁹

Further, obtaining data from host country institutions to support political finance investigations might be particularly difficult, as verification often requires cross-checking financial reports with sensitive data on citizenship and residency status, income levels, potential conflicts of interest, and foreign tax records of the individual contributing funds. Host governments may have reasonable concerns about the disclosure of such sensitive data.

As a practical measure, policymakers considering OCV should collaborate with oversight bodies to understand and address gaps in data that compliance officers and auditors may encounter when verifying the accuracy and completeness of political finance reports or identifying misuse of

the donor has not exceeded legal caps on the amount an individual can donate to a political entity per annum.

¹¹⁶ Oversight bodies may compare a candidates’ declared spending on ads verse the number of observed billboards, online ads, television and radio spots, etc. in a campaign period to verify that the submitted financial report was complete, and the candidate stayed within legal limits on campaign expenditure.

¹¹⁷ Venice Commission stated that “In principle, donations from citizens, regardless of their place of residence, should not be restricted if they are allowed to participate in elections at home”. For more information, please see European Commission for Democracy through Law, Venice Commission & OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2020, December 14). Guidelines on political party regulation (2nd ed.; Study No. 881/2017).

[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2020\)032-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2020)032-e)

¹¹⁸ European Commission for Democracy through Law, Venice Commission & OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2022, October 26). Joint opinion on the draft Electoral Code, Republic of Moldova (CDL-AD (2022)025). Council of Europe; OSCE/ODIHR.

<https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD%282022%29025-e>

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

state resources. Oversight bodies will also need to review their own monitoring methodologies. With an increasing shift towards online advertising in elections around the world, they may need to give priority consideration to issues such as expanding their online monitoring to capture ads in additional languages (e.g., not just official national languages, but official languages of host countries with high numbers of out-of-country voters); or uncovering attempts to target ads at members of the diaspora specifically using AI and metadata.¹²⁰

3.9. Election Dispute Resolution

Transparent, fair, and timely resolution of disputes through administrative or judicial processes is an important aspect of trusted elections. When polling takes place domestically, election-related complaints may be submitted to the police, the election commission, or other public oversight bodies for review and potential investigation. Depending on the nature (such as civil v. criminal) and severity of the alleged violation, investigations may be carried out by any of these actors or transferred to state prosecutors or justice ministries for further action. Regardless of which entity has jurisdiction, evidence must be collected in line with the laws, regulations, and procedures relevant to that entity. OCV presents unique questions and challenges around how to collect and secure evidence, conduct robust investigations on foreign soil, and resolve issues in a timely manner.

A country's legal framework should establish the process for the resolution of election disputes, from initial decisions through the appeals stages. However, laws may be silent on or fail to adequately account for effective handling of OCV complaints, particularly when new methods of OCV are first introduced. Gaps may include failure to clarify that electoral violations on foreign soil will be heard through a pre-specified domestic institution, adjust filing and appeals deadlines to accommodate out-of-country voters, or expand acceptable measures for complaint filing.¹²¹



In Libya's 2014 elections for members of a Constitutional Drafting Assembly, complaints had to be filed in person at one of the 17 complaints committee offices located across the country, which effectively prevented overseas voters from pursuing disputes.¹²²

¹²⁰ As outlined by OPORA, "microtargeting remains an effective tool for delivering political ads based on specific demographics, creating an information environment where different populations are exposed to very different political content and allows advertisers to spread false, misleading, or harmful narratives with limited oversight or accountability as some microtargeted advertising is never seen by mainstream audiences." For more information, please see Elections and Online Political Ads Monitoring Case Study: Civil Network OPORA. (n.d.). National Democratic Institute.

<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Elections%20and%20Online%20Political%20Ads%20Monitoring%20%20Case%20Study%20Civil%20Network%20OPORA-FINAL%20.pdf>

¹²¹ European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). (2017, October 9). Compilation of Venice Commission opinions and reports concerning election dispute resolution (CDL-PI (2017)007). Council of Europe. <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-PI%282017%29007-e>

¹²² The Carter Center. (2014). *The 2014 Constitutional Drafting Assembly Elections in Libya: Final Report* (p. 30). <https://www.cartercenter.org/publication/final-report-the-2014-constitutional-drafting-assembly-elections-in-libya>

Institutional policies and procedures also shape EDR processes. The institution that receives the complaint will generally follow standard operating procedures for triaging reports, determining when and how to pursue further investigations, and when a case may need to be redirected to another authority (e.g., an election commission with authority over administrative violations may refer around criminal violations to relevant police or prosecutors). These processes are even more complicated with respect to OCV.

For countries introducing OCV in forthcoming election cycles, there may be a need for legal reform to clarify jurisdiction¹²³ and for institutional-level regulatory and procedural reform, including extending standard operating procedures to cover review and routing of complaints pertaining to voting overseas. Further, OCV may require domestic institutions and foreign ministries to engage in planning with their host country counterparts in advance of each new election cycle, to negotiate jurisdiction of OCV violations and related investigations.

Even with careful planning and legal and procedural reform, OCV may present additional challenges for the timely and effective resolution of complaints. EDR processes commence with the detection and reporting of suspected violations or irregularities. Where consulate or other forms of in-person voting are used for casting ballots out of country, multiple factors could negatively impact detection, including more limited pre-election training for polling station staff overseas and absence of international and domestic observer missions to detect and document irregularities and challenges. For postal and electronic forms of OCV, election officials may also have limited opportunity to observe or sufficiently document infractions such as vote buying, violations of secrecy of the ballot, or family voting, thus making evidence collection exceedingly difficult.¹²⁴ Postal voting can also be a slow process; by the time voters realize their ballot may have been mishandled or uncounted, the deadlines for filing complaints may have passed.¹²⁵ Further, where civic and voter education for overseas voters is limited by host countries or by

¹²³ As articulated in International IDEA's Handbook on Special Voting Arrangements (SVA) "Regulations adopted by the EMB or similar secondary legislation may be sufficient for introducing an SVA on an experimental basis. However, the decision to incorporate an SVA into the electoral framework on a wider scale or on a permanent basis should be regulated by a legislative act, with the amount of detail comparable to the conventional voting method." Reforms should extend to cover election dispute resolution arrangements, as the right to a timely and effective appeal is an important principle of free and fair elections. For more information, please see Barrat, J., Ellis, A., Orr, G., Vashchanka, V., & Wolf, P. (2023, November 14). Special voting arrangements: The International IDEA handbook. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/special-voting-arrangements-international-idea-handbook>

¹²⁴ European Commission for Democracy Through Law, Venice Commission & OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2024, June 21). Opinion on the Law on the Partial Implementation of the Postal Vote, Republic of Moldova (CDL-AD (2024)022) ¶ 36-37. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2024\)022](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2024)022)

¹²⁵ This is a challenge for mail-in ballots in general and is not restricted to OCV.

resourcing and bandwidth of election administrators, these voters may not understand how to submit electoral complaints or their rights to do so.¹²⁶

Following review and triage of complaints, responsible agencies must decide whether there are sufficient reasons and evidence to pursue a more thorough investigation. For OCV cases, agencies will need to evaluate whether any special permissions are needed from host country authorities to collect evidence, including interviews with host country nationals. Considering that election disputes are generally resolved along accelerated timelines compared to traditional court proceedings, particularly where they relate to the validity of votes and tallies, delays in securing such permissions could be detrimental to the timely resolution of a case and finalization of OCV results.

Challenges to securing evidence are numerous. For example, investigators may need to coordinate extensively with foreign governments to secure physical and digital forms of evidence – maintaining a rigorous chain of custody over evidence at steps of the collection and transit process. If search and seizure of physical evidence is required, investigators will likely need to coordinate with host country authorities to secure warrants and conduct inspections. They may also need to negotiate with local law enforcement to collect additional evidence such as video footage from outside of a consulate, or copies of electronic data on overseas voters pertinent to a complaint. Investigators will also need to arrange for safe storage and transit of materials such as ballots or tally sheets. Gaps or errors in maintaining logs, safe storage, and overall chain of custody could preclude the use of evidence in a later trial. Further, coordination around logistics, information sharing, and retrieval of evidence requires coordination with foreign law enforcement and between foreign ministries, further delaying the EDR process.

Identifying and securing appropriate interviewers may also be particularly challenging where questioning is conducted on foreign soil. Good practice establishes that, where possible, two interviewers should be present to conduct interviews with subjects, particularly where recordings are not allowed. Factors such as interviewee gender, language, age, and cultural context must also be weighed in interviewer selection,¹²⁷ which may limit the pool of available interviewers in

¹²⁶ As outlined in the ACE Encyclopedia Version 1.0 entry on “Voting in a Foreign Country,” “It is more difficult to provide voters in foreign countries with information on electoral processes...Whether, and how, any political campaigning or official publicity of voting rights can be undertaken in foreign countries will be dependent on the law of each foreign country.” See ACE Network. “Voting in a Foreign Country.” <https://aceproject.org/main/english/po/poa02c.htm>. Embassies and consulates hosting overseas voting, and civil society organizations supporting voter inclusion may seek to educate out-of-country voters on how to submit complaints through their websites and social media accounts, regardless of the method(s) of OCV offer, but practices may vary by election cycle and host country.

¹²⁷ See for example: United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services. (2009). Conference of International Investigators. (CII 2009): Uniform Principles and Guidelines for Investigations (2nd ed., ¶ 37 & fn 9). United Nations. https://oios.un.org/sites/oios.un.org/files/Reports/investigations_uniform_guidelines.pdf, and Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System. (2013, October). Norms and standards for inspection, norms and standards for evaluation and general principles and guidelines for investigations (A/68/34 Annex VII) (¶ 39). United Nations.

host countries. Furthermore, investigators may need to coordinate extensively with host countries to establish logistics for interviews. This may include cooperation to secure appropriate venues for questioning.

Ultimately, resourcing and bandwidth for EDR is finite. An investigating body may make the difficult decision that a complaint from abroad does not warrant further investigation based on factors such as:

- completeness, credibility, and timeliness of the complaint;
- evaluation of the substance and nature of the complaint (e.g., was the alleged violation severe enough that it may have impacted results?); and
- evaluation of the time and resourcing needed to follow up on a complaint.¹²⁸

While it is not uncommon to triage and dismiss complaints in EDR processes, the decision to dismiss an OCV complaint should be carefully evaluated and communicated to the public to avoid allegations of cover-ups and fraud. While communications with complaint filers vary by jurisdictions, common practices for keeping complaint filers apprised of the status of their cases include confirming receipt and registration of a report; following up with requests for further detail or corrections where errors in reporting forms may otherwise risk summary dismissal of a case; and, in situations where cases are dismissed without further investigation, issuing a written justification and notice to the complaint filer to inform them of the decision. Where complaints do lead to formal investigations, the responsible state institutions must also notify the complainants and other relevant stakeholders of the case outcomes.¹²⁹ Though seemingly small measures, these forms of feedback to filers, parties with a direct stake in an election dispute, and the public more generally are critical to demonstrating that potential integrity breaches are taken seriously by relevant authorities, and that EDR mechanism presents a credible means for addressing disputes.

3.10. Voter Outreach

Meaningful and consistent voter outreach is critical for engaging citizens abroad throughout the electoral process and should be based on a thoughtful strategy.

https://www.unju.org/sites/www.unju.org/files/en/norms_and_standards_a_68_34_annex_vii_english.pdf

¹²⁸ Vickery, C., & Ellena, K. (2020). Election Investigations Guidebook: Standards, Techniques and Resources for Investigating Disputes in Elections (STRIDE) (pp. 24-34). International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/migrate/ifes_election_investigations_guidebook_december_2020.pdf

¹²⁹ Ibid.

In most countries, an EMB has the legal mandate for elections. However, embassies and consulates typically serve as the frontline for overseas voter services – from hosting polling stations to assisting with registration. Voter outreach is also partially effectuated by these institutions. Embassies and consulates can post printed registration notices on-site, distribute flyers in waiting areas, and disseminate email newsletters to nationals registered with them. Some countries, like Italy, even include voter registration reminders in new passport mailings.

Leveraging diplomatic networks offers cost-effective advantages – embassies' existing presence and community ties can greatly extend the EMB's outreach. Thus, efficiency of the strategic communications largely hinges on close coordination between the EMB and MFA. However, this interdependence requires clear delineation of the operational roles, ideally defined in regulations or agreements, and establishing communication channels well in advance.

Alongside formal state channels, partnering with diaspora community organizations, cultural associations, and civil society groups abroad can amplify messages. Such partnerships are especially valuable in low-resource settings, as they extend outreach capacity without high costs, but the messaging should be synchronized and coordinated. **Forming a standing task force** at least 12 months before an election, involving the EMB, MFA, and diaspora community representatives, could allow for alignment of timelines, messaging, and operational delivery. The result is a unified message to diaspora voters, whether they hear it from the election authority's website or their nearest consulate.



During the 2025 elections in the Philippines, the election commission partnered with Filipino community networks abroad and intensified voter education campaigns via those networks to ensure overseas voters were well-informed. At the same time, during the 2025 pilot of online voting, many overseas voters became frustrated by lack of confirmation receipts and interface glitches. The EMB faced criticism for insufficient user guidance when technical issues arose.¹³⁰

A strategic approach is to communicate in phases. Registering voters abroad is often the first major hurdle in OCV – many countries require overseas citizens to actively register or apply for absentee status. Given historically low registration rates among expatriates, EMBs should mount proactive campaigns to reach eligible voters well in advance of election day.

Once registered, overseas voters need straightforward guidance on how to cast their vote. Diaspora voting procedures can differ from domestic voting – ballots might be cast by mail weeks in advance, or at an embassy on a different date than the home election, or electronically via a

¹³⁰ Francisquete, D. (2025, April 14). *Overseas Filipinos raise concerns over new online voting system*. SunStar Davao. <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/davao/overseas-filipinos-raise-concerns-over-new-online-voting-system>

specific portal. As many countries offer multiple options to overseas voters, managing these variations requires that EMBs break down instructions by voting method. For postal voting, communications should cover when ballots will be mailed out, what steps voters must take to mark the ballot and return it, and the deadline by which the returned ballot must reach authorities. The EMB could highlight recommended mailing dates (and any arrangements, such as postage-paid return envelopes or drop-off at consulates). For in-person embassy/consulate voting, EMBs should inform voters of the polling dates and times (often embassies might allow voting on designated days prior to the main election day) and publish the list of overseas polling locations and what ID or documents voters need to bring. If a country permits proxy voting (for more information, please see Section 2.5., “Proxy Voting”), the electoral authority should ensure the forms and process for that are well explained. For internet or electronic voting, the EMB should provide a detailed but user-friendly guide: how to log in, cast a vote, and confirm it was recorded. Outreach to overseas voters could benefit from coordinated use of both traditional and digital communication methods. Well-designed websites could serve as one-stop information hubs for diaspora voters. Examples include the U.S. Federal Voting Assistance Program¹³¹ and South Africa’s 2024 portal,¹³² which allowed online registration, status verification, and notification of intent to vote abroad.

Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X are now standard tools for diaspora voter outreach. EMBs use these channels to post multilingual infographics, registration walkthrough videos, and deadline countdowns. Leading up to its 2024 elections, Mexico’s INE and consulates publicized the February 25 registration deadline on social media and diaspora radio, ensuring that those 630,000 eligible overseas voters knew to act in time.¹³³ Paid ads, budget permitting, can target diaspora communities by location and interests.

In addition to social media, platforms like WhatsApp, Viber, and Telegram are widely used by diaspora populations. EMBs or diaspora civil society groups could create announcement channels or help lines on these apps to push out official reminders and clarify FAQs. Where there are available email lists (e.g., through embassy registration), mass messages can include deadlines and clickable registration instructions.

¹³¹ Federal Voting Assistance Program. (n.d.). *Outreach*. Retrieved June 23, 2025, from <https://www.fvap.gov/info/outreach>

¹³² Electoral Commission of South Africa. (n.d.). *Voting abroad*. Retrieved June 23, 2025, from <https://www.elections.org.za/pw/VotingAbroad/About-Voting-Abroad>

¹³³ Hemosillo, M. (2024, February 23). *How Mexican citizens in Texas can vote in Mexico’s 2024 elections*. Texas Tribune. <https://www.texastribune.org/2024/02/23/texas-mexican-citizens-vote-mexico-2024-elections/>

In low-capacity or resource-constrained environments, outreach can still be effective with modest cost-effective digital channels through creative methods such as:

Assign a social media-savvy staff member in the communications team not only for posting on but also monitoring social media channels.

Use free scheduling tools (like Buffer or Meta Business Suite) to automate social media content.

Build simple static web pages that load easily on low-bandwidth connections and be more resistant to DDOS attacks.

Repurpose diaspora networks and volunteers as “e-influencers” to organically distribute content.

Use feedback loops (via polls, surveys, or platform analytics) to adjust messaging and timing throughout the registration period.

Throughout all communications, consistency and clarity are paramount. All messaging should use the same terminology (avoiding confusion by using one term for the process – e.g., if calling it “Overseas Voting” in English, stick to that in all materials or its equivalent in other languages). EMBs can counteract any complexity by using FAQs and plain language. For instance, if certain offices cannot be voted for from abroad, clearly state that to manage expectations. The goal is that an average voter abroad, after seeing the communications, understands exactly what steps to take to vote and feels confident doing so.

3.11. Information Integrity

The integrity of OCV is vulnerable to information manipulation, particularly as the scale, speed, and granularity of mis- and disinformation campaigns have advanced. False claims about registration deadlines, polling locations, or eligibility rules can sow confusion, cast doubt on electoral procedures, and discredit diaspora voters and election officials. These strategies erode trust in electoral institutions both at home and abroad and are sometimes designed to suppress turnout.¹³⁴ A robust EMB communications strategy for OCV must therefore include measures to detect and counter misinformation before it undermines voter confidence.

Information manipulation can take many forms in the OCV arena. Common examples include false claims about voting procedures (“overseas ballots won’t be counted anyway” or “you must pay a fee to register”), deadlines (“it’s too late to send your ballot”), or even conspiracy theories that a certain diaspora vote is being manipulated. In some instances, hostile narratives aim to depress turnout among diaspora groups perceived to favor one side. For example, during the

¹³⁴ Ellena, K., Mitre, M., & Quirk, P. (2024, September 5). *Supporting credible elections to advance democracy globally in 2024 and beyond*. Freedom & Prosperity Center, Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/supporting-credible-elections-to-advance-democracy-globally-in-2024-and-beyond/>

2020 U.S. election, viral hoaxes about “discarded overseas ballots” circulated in diaspora WhatsApp groups in an attempt to erode confidence in absentee voting.¹³⁵ EMBs and their partners should be prepared to address such incidents decisively.

Proactive education can help inoculate voters against dis- and misinformation. EMBs should incorporate myth-busting content in their communications throughout the entire electoral cycle. For instance, the Australian Election Commission creates a register of disinformation for each election, where it collects election-related myths and publishes the correct information. Anticipating points of confusion (e.g. around voter eligibility, confidentiality of ballots) and addressing them publicly deprives would-be rumor-mongers of fertile ground. Other EMBs sometimes create shareable infographics or Q&A videos debunking popular misinformation; these resources can be circulated by diaspora organizations on social media and messaging apps.

Malicious actors have observed that overseas voters may be less likely to consult official communication sources and rely on community networks for news or use messaging apps that are difficult to monitor.¹³⁶ This leads to situations when diaspora communities are targeted via encrypted chat apps with election-related disinformation. Thus, during the election period, EMBs should strive to monitor diaspora information spaces. This can be challenging, especially with encrypted messaging (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram), where content is private. Nonetheless, EMBs can monitor open platforms (e.g., Facebook groups, Twitter/X, diaspora news sites) for trending falsehoods. Close collaboration with diaspora community leaders¹³⁷ can help. For example, community members could alert embassy officials if a concerning rumor is spreading so the embassy can message correct information appropriately. Once a piece of misinformation is identified, EMBs should respond promptly with accurate information via official channels. During the 2022–2023 elections in various countries including Australia and Brazil, several EMBs learned to use their Twitter accounts to do real-time rumor control.¹³⁸ It’s important that the tone remain factual and non-confrontational to avoid amplifying the rumor; the goal is to reach those who are confused and reassure them of the correct process.

Social media companies have a role in curbing election disinformation; however, content in minority languages or within closed groups often evades detection. Risks do exist when it comes

¹³⁵ Gursky, J., Riedl, M. J., & Woolley, S. (2021, March 22). *The disinformation threat to diaspora communities in encrypted chat apps*. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-disinformation-threat-to-diaspora-communities-in-encrypted-chat-apps/>

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Miller, M. E., & Vinall, F. (2022, May 14). *The Twitter account defending Australian democracy*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/14/australia-electoral-commission/>. Hale, S. A., Belisario, A., Mostafa, A., & Camargo, C. (2024). Analyzing misinformation claims during the 2022 Brazilian general election on WhatsApp, Twitter, and Kwai. *arXiv*. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2401.02395>

to engagement with social media companies, as they themselves may make decisions that do not align with the transparency focus of EMBs.¹³⁹ In other regions, EMBs (through government or NGO partners) can liaise with platforms to flag harmful false content targeting their voters abroad. Additionally, international organizations¹⁴⁰ and media observation groups¹⁴¹ sometimes assist with efforts to counter disinformation; for instance, fact-checking initiatives in diaspora-heavy elections (such as during the 2023 overseas voting in Africa and Europe for certain national elections) have produced multilingual debunking. Global organizations such as the UNDP, through their iVERIFY platform¹⁴² and partnership with local organizations, have successfully used debunking in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Honduras, Kenya, Liberia, and Pakistan. EMBs should amplify credible fact-checks relevant to their election.¹⁴³ If there are influential diaspora media outlets, EMBs can consider providing them with official information feeds or briefings; journalists in those communities can help echo correct information and call out fake news. Another tactic is enlisting trusted voices – for example, well-known diaspora community figures or social media influencers – to spread accurate messages.

A working antidote to misinformation is transparency and communication from the official entity charged with organizing elections. EMBs that actively share updates about the overseas voting process leave less room for speculation. Publishing clear information about how overseas votes are collected, transported, and counted can preempt conspiracy theories. In practice, some EMBs live-stream aspects of the process (like the counting of overseas ballots) or invite party agents/observers to monitor overseas voting, then publicize those integrity measures. During the COVID-19 disruptions, election commissions, such as Finland,¹⁴⁴ that openly communicated contingency plans for diaspora voters (like extended deadlines or alternative return methods) managed to maintain higher trust. The key is to keep diaspora voters informed at every stage, so that misinformation has a harder time taking root. As noted earlier, diaspora turnout suffers when voters feel unsure or distrustful – combating misinformation is therefore integral to boosting legitimate participation.

¹³⁹ Please see developments in Sweden, where Meta no longer displays paid-for EMB adverts. Sweden Herald. (2025, December 2). *The election authority's ads are stopped by Meta*. <https://swedenherald.com/article/the-election-authority-ads-are-stopped-by-meta>. Also for Meta's official position: Meta. (2025, July 25). *Ending political, electoral and social-issue advertising in the EU in response to incoming European regulation*. <https://about.fb.com/news/2025/07/ending-political-electoral-and-social-issue-advertising-in-the-eu/>

¹⁴⁰ Sivalo, D. M. (2024). An analysis of the role of disinformation in elections. *African Journal of Inclusive Societies*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.59186/SI.HY74FJ87>

¹⁴¹ European Digital Media Observatory. (2023, November). Disinformation narratives during the 2023 elections in Europe. <https://edmo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/EDMO-TF-Elections-disinformation-narratives-2023.pdf>

¹⁴² iVerify. (n.d.). United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved December 2, 2025, from <https://www.undp.org/digital/iverify>

¹⁴³ Please see project between South African EMB and local NGO for an example on this type of collaboration: *About the Real411 and the Digital Disinformation Complaints Process*. (n.d.). Real411. Retrieved December 2, 2025, from <https://elections.real411.org.za/about>

¹⁴⁴ Wass, H., Peltoniemi, J., Weide, M., & Nemčok, M. (2021, August 5). Signed, sealed and delivered with trust: Non-resident citizens' experiences of newly adopted postal voting. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 3, Article 692396. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.692396>

The implications of mis/disinformation for electoral administration are significant, with up to 95% of cases targeting EMBs.¹⁴⁵ EMBs are typically not equipped to detect or respond to the extraterritorial targeting of voters.¹⁴⁶ Given that such threats often originate beyond their jurisdiction and outside of traditional election frameworks, EMBs must adopt both preventive and responsive strategies in coordination with national security and foreign affairs authorities.

Strategies may include:

- **Risk-Based Election Planning and Coordination:**¹⁴⁷ EMBs should conduct digital threat assessments specifically tailored to diaspora contexts,¹⁴⁸ integrating findings into OCV risk mitigation planning. This should involve coordination with cybersecurity agencies and foreign ministries to monitor transnational digital harms.
- **Voter Education and Counter-Disinformation Protocols:** EMBs should develop diaspora-focused voter information campaigns that directly counter known mis/disinformation narratives. While some efforts would be of a pre-bunking nature, tackling known past narratives, some need to be reactive to debunk emerging rumors. These materials should be gender-sensitive, multilingual, and distributed across trusted community channels.
- **Engagement with Tech Platforms and Civil Society:** As emphasized by Canada's Operation *Transnational Repression*,¹⁴⁹ information-sharing between electoral authorities, law enforcement, and platform providers can improve detection and response to manipulation campaigns. Civil society organizations, particularly those representing exiled or marginalized groups, should also be consulted in the design of countermeasures.

¹⁴⁵ Bicu, I. (n.d.). *The information environment around elections*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. <https://www.idea.int/theme/information-communication-and-technology-electoral-processes/information-environment-around-elections>

¹⁴⁶ Bicu, I. (2024, January 31). *Challenges in the information environment around elections*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. <https://www.idea.int/theme/information-communication-and-technology-electoral-processes/election-officials-challenges-information-environment-around-elections>

¹⁴⁷ The United States, ahead of the 2024 elections, developed useful preparedness tools for both physical and cybersecurity threats. Please see U.S. Election Assistance Commission. (2025, December 23). *Election security preparedness*. <https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/election-security-preparedness>

¹⁴⁸ Bajaj, S.G. (2024, October 13). Digital Disinformation Threats and Ethnocultural Diasporas. In: Adlakha-Hutcheon, G., Kelshall, C. (eds), *(In)Security: Identifying the Invisible Disruptors of Security*. Advanced Sciences and Technologies for Security Applications. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-67608-6_3.

¹⁴⁹ Government of Canada, Privy Council Office. (April 2025). *Update on Canada's actions to protect General Election 45: Transnational repression operation observed during the election*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/news/2025/04/transnational-repression-operation0.html>

3.12. Out-of-Country Voting and AI

What is AI and how can it be applied in an electoral setting?

AI is a technology that enables computers or machines to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence – such as learning from data, solving problems, and making decisions and predictions. AI encompasses a wide variety of technologies and methods, each with distinct capabilities, purposes, and risks. Most modern AI systems rely on complex models – mathematical frameworks with many adjustable settings (called parameters) that specify how the system processes information and produces results. These models are developed through machine learning – a collection of statistical and computational techniques that enable computers to detect patterns in data and learn how to make meaningful predictions or decisions. Models are taught to recognize these patterns through training, a process whereby developers feed a model large amounts of data and adjust the parameters when the model makes mistakes. Over time, this repeated process helps the model improve and produce more accurate results.

For example, a machine learning model to improve efficiency in voter roll maintenance could be developed to detect unusual patterns of changes in voter records. The data on which such a model would be “trained” could consist of voter registration lists, demographic information, and address changes. Through training, the model can improve at accurately indicating when there is an abnormal change to a voter registration record, for example, or when a particular registration is likely duplicative. An election official could then act on this information to improve the accuracy of voter rolls.

The accuracy of the model’s detection hinges on the accuracy and relevancy of the data used to train it. For example, if a model is built using data from one population and deployed to make predictions about another, the outputs of the model may be inaccurate as they are based on insufficient evidence. Similar questions about accuracy emerge if the model is trained on one set of data and is not retrained on new data as real-world conditions change. If an election official’s goal in using AI is to improve the efficiency of certain electoral tasks, they must continually test and audit the models to ensure continued accuracy.

In recent years, a form of AI called generative AI, in which the AI creates text, images, video, or other media, has become increasingly popular. Large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, Gemini, or Claude are one type of generative AI. In an electoral context, voters may use these platforms to search for election-related information, such as voting hours or polling station locations, as well as to learn about political candidates, parties, and their platforms. Some scholars predict that these AI models will soon largely supplant traditional online search engines such as Google search. It is critical that election authorities start to proactively engage with these platforms and the companies that develop them as part of their planning processes. For example, EMBs could collaborate with these companies to develop protocols for monitoring AI-generated language about the election and establish guardrails to rectify inaccuracies. These could include steps such as clearly labeling information derived from or approved by official sources, and adjusting the weights in LLMs to reduce the amount of inaccurate information generated.

Agentic AI represents a new stage in the development of AI, in which systems can act with greater autonomy and initiative. Rather than simply responding to user prompts or following specific instructions, agentic AI systems are designed to set goals, make plans, and complete tasks independently. They work by combining advanced models with tools that let them take actions – such as retrieving information, running programs, or interacting with other software. In the voter registration example discussed above, an agentic AI model could be trained to not only predict likely duplicative registrations, but also to autonomously decide what to do next within the bounds of the specific legal and policy context. For example, the AI could automatically send notification letters to voters, update internal case status logs, or escalate certain cases to human reviewers.

Uses of AI in OCV Contexts

While certain types of AI, particularly generative AI, have increased their capabilities exponentially in recent years, the technology and its applications are still rapidly evolving. So too is the market for AI technologies and integration tools, leading to a preponderance of claims attesting to AI's powers that are difficult, if not impossible, to verify. This context makes it critical that whenever election authorities deploy AI to automate processes or make decisions, humans should always be involved in determining the inputs and reviewing the outputs of such decisions. In other words, AI deployment should always include a "human-in-the-loop" (HITL), to invoke a phrase from AI discourse.

OCV contexts present particular challenges for EMBs, as they must navigate different forms of documentation, records management practices, postal and cyber infrastructure, and often time zones. Below are three aspects of the electoral process in which AI can potentially support EMBs to navigate these OCV-specific challenges: voter verification, voter communication and engagement, and cyber threat detection.

Voter verification across borders

Verifying out-of-country voters is complex. Some election authorities lack direct access to the relevant verification databases and systems. To verify domestic voters, officials can cross-check information like ID numbers, residential addresses, and other relevant data in real time. This is not always possible for out-of-country voters.

Additionally, secure methods of identity verification (e.g. two-factor authentication) may be harder to implement in contexts with different cyber infrastructure, digital devices, and levels of internet accessibility.

EMBs can develop AI models or procure AI systems to help increase the efficiency of voter verification. Models can be built to:

- handle variations in formatting, transliterations of names, or differences in address systems;
- cross-reference voter information with multiple databases (e.g. domestic voter rolls, passport records or other government registries) to confirm identity; and
- flag unusual registration patterns or anomalies, such as multiple registrations for the same voter or votes coming from unexpected locations.

To build and deploy these AI models, data about voters must flow across borders and often through third-party vendors. This raises complex questions about jurisdiction, regulation, and oversight, especially regarding data privacy and security. Here are some questions that election authorities can ask to help evaluate if and how to integrate AI:

- What data is being collected or used, and who has access to it at different points of its collection and use?
- Does the aggregation of different data points compromise the anonymity of the voter?
- Have the AI systems been tested for security vulnerabilities by developers and/or researchers before deployment?

Election officials can work with data protection authorities and relevant cybersecurity authorities from both their own countries and host countries to explore these questions.

Communicating with voters

Distance, different time zones, and linguistic and cultural differences can create communication barriers between election authorities and some segments of the electorate, especially certain minorities. Voters may speak different languages or dialects than the official language used in election materials, which increases the risk that instructions about registration, deadlines, or voting procedures could be misinterpreted.

AI-powered translation tools can convert election materials, reminders, and instructions into multiple languages, ensuring that voters receive information in their preferred language.

AI models can be developed to analyze voter data, including location and preferred communication channels, to send notifications and reminders when voters are most likely to receive and respond to them, helping to account for different time zones and communication habits.

Because AI-powered translation tools are typically trained by scraping data from the internet, languages with less visibility online are likely to suffer from issues of performance accuracy. Election officials would need to implement internal oversight processes to ensure all materials are reviewed by staff before becoming public. This need for enhanced scrutiny may ultimately negate efficiencies that initially made the use of AI attractive.

Digital infrastructure and threat detection

OCV processes may depend on a complex digital ecosystem, the specifics of which differ by jurisdiction, but may include some combination of online voter registration and ballot request

portals; electronic ballot delivery and tracking systems; and verification tools, such as electronic signatures, document uploads, and multi-factor authentication. These digital systems make OCV possible and convenient, but also create unique cybersecurity challenges, expanding the potential attack surface that AI-enhanced threats can exploit through impersonation, automation, or data manipulation. Out-of-country systems are more challenging to monitor and secure in real-time.

AI can amplify the speed, scale, and sophistication of cyberattacks. Out-of-country voters are particularly vulnerable because their greater reliance on digital systems creates more points of entry for AI-enhanced attacks, such as automated phishing attacks or AI-generated disinformation. For example, an out-of-country voter may receive an AI-generated email impersonating their local EMB, instructing them to submit registration information through a fake portal, thereby collecting their personal information. Electronic ballot return systems are particularly risky since a successful cyberattack could directly alter votes in transmission.

AI systems may be able to detect security vulnerabilities and potential cyberattacks and monitor suspicious activity in real time, helping to protect voter information if users are accessing systems from less-secure networks abroad.

AI models can be built to analyze the devices, browsers, and network conditions out-of-country voters are using and adjust election websites or portals for optimal performance, for example, by reducing data load for slow connections.

AI tools that detect and monitor cyber infrastructure and threats are often complex, requiring large amounts of computing power and substantial financial investments. Election authorities must invest adequate time and resources to ensure they have created adequate defensive strategies. As AI accelerates the scale and scope of attacks, an EMB's level of threat preparedness can inform decisions about what aspects of the OCV process to digitize.

Building Trust with Voters

Out-of-country voters are likely to feel particularly distant – both physically and institutionally – from the electoral process. While AI and other technologies can be used to increase participation among this constituency, this can be a double-edged sword, since the integration of digital technology into the electoral processes also often drives voter skepticism. This suspicion can be compounded with AI, given that the decision-making process powering the technology is often complex and opaque; providing the voting public and oversight bodies visibility into this process is thus critical.

EMBs should provide clarity on the purpose of an AI model, what and how data is chosen as inputs for the model, how the model is built and iteratively trained, how and at what points it will be reviewed, and how faulty or discriminatory data outputs will be addressed. For example, if AI-driven facial recognition technology is procured to verify voters residing abroad, independent auditors should be able to access and understand the AI's decision-making process, such that if a prospective voter is denied access, the rationale for that denial can be traced and any mistakes can be addressed. In some cases, a central government authority maintains a list of approved AI auditors that the EMB could draw from. In other cases, an oversight body such as the Ombudsperson or Inspector General conducts these audits. Alternatively, the EMB could issue a public tender for AI audit services. In all cases, it is critical that the auditor has no role in developing, procuring or operating the AI system in question. To ensure maximum transparency, all audits and follow-on actions should be made publicly available.

If AI tools or systems are procured externally, establishing a transparent and consultative decision-making process with key stakeholders is also critical in securing public acceptance and support of the final procurement decision.

By taking these active measures to increase transparency and accountability in the integration of AI, EMBs establish themselves as trustworthy stewards of the technology, which will help strengthen trust with the voting public throughout the electoral process.

4. Out-of-Country Voting: True Means of Enfranchisement or Political Tool?

While it is positive that over half the countries and territories reviewed for this analysis offer some method of OCV, a gap remains between the *de jure* right being available and the *de facto* reality for many out-of-country voters. Voters' reasons for being abroad, their residency status, and a country's registration protocols have a range of implications for the ballot options available to a voter.

Some countries impose additional requirements on out-of-country voters than domestic voters, which in practice can disenfranchise voters. For example, Venezuela now requires voters to provide proof of permanent residence in the country they are currently residing in to register, which many displaced voters do not have.

Participation can also be limited by the size of the diaspora in a particular country. For instance, the Maldives will only set up a polling station in a diplomatic office if there are at least 100 registered voters. Georgia and Azerbaijan will only set up polling stations at consulates where there is a minimum of 20¹⁵⁰ or 50¹⁵¹ people registered to vote, respectively. In practice, this effectively disenfranchises voters who are unable or unwilling to travel to other polling sites. This increases the costs for the voter to travel to the consular office in their country of residence or return to their home country.

Some countries, such as Azerbaijan, only allow voters to participate from countries with whom they have diplomatic relations. Italy will only permit postal voting where there are 'conditions for its organization.' In the 2023 National Parliament elections in Timor-Leste, for example, polling stations were only established at missions or consular offices in nine cities across four countries; they also decided to not establish voting centers in Indonesia despite a large diaspora community.¹⁵² For in-person voting, many countries only will set up ballot boxes at their diplomatic offices, while a few, e.g. Dominican Republic and Rwanda, will also establish polling stations at other locations.

Although positive on its face, having multiple types of voting available to diaspora voters can introduce complexities when timelines and instructions for participation vary from method to

¹⁵⁰ Election Code, Organic Law of Georgia No. 2093 of 7 March 2014 & No 1232 of 26 July 2017, Article 23(7).

¹⁵¹ Republic of Azerbaijan. (2024). Election Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan (art. 35.6). Central Election Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan. <https://msk.gov.az/uploads/qanunvericilik/lzberatelnij-Kodeks-2024.pdf>

¹⁵² *Timorese citizens living and studying in Indonesia won't participate in upcoming elections*. (2022, December 16). TATOLI Agência Noticiosa de Timor-Leste. Retrieved June 23, 2025, from <https://en.tatoli.tl/2022/12/16/timorese-citizens-living-and-studying-in-indonesia-wont-participate-in-upcoming-elections/16/>

method. Estonian voters, for instance, may vote in-person at an embassy 10-15 days prior to an election, whereas they may vote online as late as two days before election day, and postal votes have their own deadlines to ensure the ballot paper reaches Estonia by election day. These different rules can widen the opportunity to vote, but also leave more room for misunderstanding and error, thus requiring sufficient voter education campaigns.

There are also restrictions on the types of election in which diaspora voters may participate. Italians abroad, for instance, may participate in national elections and referendums, but not regional, provincial, or municipal councils or local referendums. Danish voters may only participate in national or EU level elections. Greek electors abroad may vote on national lists but not for individual parliamentarians for regional constituencies. This too can differ based on voters' situation: Spanish electors temporarily abroad may vote in all elections, including municipal ones, but those with a permanent residence outside of Spain may only participate in a subset. Hungarian voters abroad with residency still in Hungary can vote for both a party list and one candidate in a single-member constituency, while a voter with residency outside of Hungary can only vote in the former.

In many countries, different restrictions overlap and create a unique set of OCV procedures. When the participation rules, requirements, and deadlines differ by voting method, by election type and the individual conditions of the voter abroad, it risks driving down participation of voters abroad.

Changes to OCV provisions, especially the expansion of voting options, are made for several reasons, from new technology to new provisions being adopted domestically. In other cases, EMBs sometimes consider diaspora voting as a laboratory for experimentation, enabling the election authority to introduce and test new technologies, voter registration solutions, voting options, or results transmission systems on a limited scale. The expansion of in-country postal voting in many countries during COVID-19 was in some cases directly enabled by the EMB's familiarity with that voting mechanism for its diaspora electorate.

However, there are also situations where OCV has been expanded in a way that appears to favor the ruling party. For instance, in Argentina in 2019, postal voting was introduced via an executive decree by President Mauricio Macri to amend the National Electoral code.¹⁵³ Postal voting was subsequently revoked ahead of the 2021 legislative elections when President Alberto Fernández argued that such a change could not be done without an act of Congress. Postal voting was also

¹⁵³ Argentina. (2019, January 11). *Decreto 45/2019 — Reglamentación de la Ley N.º 24.007 sobre el voto de los ciudadanos argentinos residentes en el exterior*. Boletín Oficial de la República Argentina. Retrieved from <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/decreto-45-2019-318749/texto>

prohibited during the 2023 presidential elections.¹⁵⁴ Most recently, however, President Javier Milei reinstated postal voting ahead of the 2025 elections – also by decree;¹⁵⁵ it is worth noting that the approval rating of Milei’s administration among voters abroad is high.¹⁵⁶ In another example, ahead of Hungarian elections in 2014, OCV was expanded with a special effort concentrated on so-called “near-abroad” Hungarians – individuals of Hungarian descent who lived in neighboring countries but many of who had *never* lived in Hungary. This voting contingent was granted preferential voting procedures that were not extended to other expatriate citizens and is allegedly credited with providing the additional mandates necessary to secure the ruling party’s supermajority.¹⁵⁷

Despite widespread legal provisions for OCV, its practical implementation remains uneven and sometimes exclusionary. Moreover, changes to OCV provisions – whether driven by innovation or political strategy – can either enhance enfranchisement or entrench partisan advantage. These dynamics underscore the need for careful and inclusive design, transparent criteria, and robust safeguards to ensure that OCV fulfills its democratic promise rather than deepening disparities and tensions.

¹⁵⁴ Argentina. (2021, March 22). *Decree 189/2021 – Derogación del Decreto N° 45/2019* (DCTO-2021-189-APN-PTE). Boletín Oficial de la República Argentina. Retrieved November 6, 2025, from <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/decreto-189-2021-348149/texto> (repealing Decree 45/2019), and Alberto Fernández deroga el voto por correo postal para los argentinos residentes en el exterior. (2021, March 23). *Perfil*. Retrieved July 6, 2025, from <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/politica/alberto-fernandez-derogo-el-voto-por-correo-postal-para-los-argentinos-residentes-en-el-exterior.phtml>

¹⁵⁵ Argentina. (2025, April 1). *Decreto 239/2025 – Apruébase la Reglamentación de la Ley N° 24.007 y su modificatoria* (Poder Ejecutivo). Boletín Oficial de la República Argentina. Retrieved from <https://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/detalleAviso/primera/323271/20250401>

¹⁵⁶ *Encuesta: los argentinos que residen en el exterior apoyan el rumbo del gobierno de Milei, pero no piensan volver al país*. (2024, December 10). *La Nación*. Retrieved June 23, 2025, from <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/encuesta-los-argentinos-que-residen-en-el-exterior-apoyan-el-rumbo-del-gobierno-de-milei-pero-no-nid10122024/>

¹⁵⁷ Scheppele, K. L. (2022). *How Viktor Orbán wins*. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(3), 45–61. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/how-viktor-orban-wins/>

5. A Process to Decide on and Implement Out-of-Country Voting: Recommendations

Assessing whether and how a country should enfranchise its diaspora is often a very complex, fraught, and controversial process that can be dominated by political and economic interests. Therefore, the decision-making process should be characterized by transparency and inclusion to encourage buy-in from citizens domestically and abroad.

Experiences from countries introducing and reforming OCV indicate that one approach to a transparent and inclusive decision-making process is to establish a dedicated OCV task force. This task force may include legislators, election authorities, the MFAs, cybersecurity agencies, postal services (as relevant), and other interested stakeholders, such as civil society and diaspora interest organizations. Such a committee might benefit from studying comparable global OCV experiences and drawing lessons for its own country, including lessons related to timelines for implementation, piloting, and scaling of OCV.

The decision-making process should, ideally, also include public hearings – especially hearings held abroad with diaspora communities – to gain acceptance and support of the final decision. In the pursuit of transparency, a draft report could be widely circulated to illustrate all factors that influenced the recommendation of the task force and to give interested stakeholders the opportunity to comment before the formal decision is taken.

The following practical recommendations will support countries to deliver a credible, inclusive, and trusted OCV process:

Mitigation of Operational Challenges

Plan & Prepare Early

- ✓ Assess legislative needs and operational capacity before committing to a new voting method or methods.
- ✓ Establish a dedicated team to manage OCV preparations and implementation.
- ✓ Sign MoUs and/or draft scopes of work outlining responsibilities, timelines, and resource commitments of different involved agencies. Include them in the planning process.
- ✓ Create an operational plan for OCV mentioning timelines, budget, and staffing needs as a subsection of the overarching operation plan for elections.

Invest in Staffing & Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Consider NGOs as a recruitment source for poll workers, when necessary. ✓ Develop manuals and/or video tutorials and interactive e-learning modules focusing on specifics of OCV operations such as how to identify and respond to election day complaints, and ensure they are prepared to direct voters to the proper channels for reporting potential integrity breaches or disputes. ✓ Schedule live virtual sessions to address complex procedures taking into consideration different time zones.
Train Staff on Accessibility & Assistance Protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Design training programs that account for embassy staff's workload and limited availability (in cases where the election operation is carried out by diplomatic staff). ✓ Provide political parties and candidates with training or guidance on rules applicable to OCV campaigning, including permissible outreach methods abroad, campaign spending, financial reporting requirements, and compliance with both home-country regulations and relevant host-country laws.

Safeguarding Election Integrity and Security

Develop a Dedicated OCV Integrity Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identify vulnerabilities specific to each voting method and design targeted safeguards. ✓ Create a fraud risk mitigation strategy with clear responsibilities and oversight mechanisms. ✓ Appoint a dedicated officer or team to monitor integrity safeguards. Include cybersecurity and infrastructure specialists alongside traditional security actors.
Strengthen Oversight & Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Share clear information on how votes are cast, transported, and counted. ✓ Invite observers to monitor overseas voting where feasible. ✓ React proactively and transparently to disputes around OCV processes. Where formal complaints are submitted, follow up with all concerned parties on the status of the case, and decisions made by relevant authorities in a timely manner.
Enhance Cybersecurity & Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Proactively plan for resilience by ensuring cybersecurity incident response plans for various OCV-related technical and security contingencies are in place. EMBs should conduct regular evaluations including stress testing the systems, plans, and processes through simulations and "red team" exercises that help inform a continuously updated threat model. ✓ Mandate minimum security standards for online voting, if applicable. Countries offering internet voting abroad should adopt internationally-recognized encryption, identity management, and audit protocols, with independent review prior to deployment.

Voter Registration

Adapt Registration Systems to Diaspora Realities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure legal clarity on eligibility and documentation requirements. ✓ Offer flexible registration methods, when legally permissible, and reduce documentary burdens wherever possible. ✓ Reach remote or underserved communities through mobile consular teams and diaspora events.
---	---

Use Technology to Expand Access

- ✓ Implement, when legally possible, secure digital registration tools using biometric verification and encrypted platforms.
- ✓ Apply data protection best practices and comply with privacy regulations.

Enhancing Accessibility

Design Voting Services with an Eye for Equity

- ✓ Evaluate how each of the voting methods used affects marginalized groups to ensure equitable access at all stages of voting.
- ✓ Equip polling officials with assistive tools like braille ballots, tactile templates, and audio interfaces, and provide clear guidance on how to use them.

Voter Outreach

Start Early & Use Available Data

- ✓ Adopt a voter education and outreach plan for out-of-country voters, aligned with the overall electoral calendar and updated regularly.
- ✓ Begin voter outreach at least a year before elections.
- ✓ Use data from foreign affairs offices or past elections to find where citizens abroad live.
- ✓ Coordinate with embassies to combine registration with consular services like passport renewals.
- ✓ Promote early through community groups and local-language media.

Work Closely with the Foreign Ministry

- ✓ Set clear roles between the EMB and the foreign ministry for all communications.
- ✓ Train embassy and consular staff on election information and give them standard materials.
- ✓ Hold regular coordination meetings and agree on cost-sharing and decision-making.

Use Every Channel to Reach Voters

- ✓ Promote registration through online platforms, embassy newsletters, social media, and diaspora media.
- ✓ Create a countdown campaign (e.g. “30, 15, 7, 1 day(s) left to register”).
- ✓ Partner with diaspora influencers and community groups.
- ✓ Translate materials and make the message simple: (e.g. “Register online in 5 minutes—before June 30!”)

Give Simple, Step-by-Step Voting Instructions

- ✓ Provide easy-to-follow guides for each voting method (mail, in-person, electronic).
- ✓ Use visuals—infographics, photos, or screenshots—to explain the process.
- ✓ Repeat key details like deadlines and ID requirements across all embassy channels.
- ✓ Ensure no voter is left wondering “how do I vote?” or “how do I get help if I think something has gone wrong?”

Information Integrity

Use Digital Tools Strategically

- ✓ Be present where diaspora voters are online.
- ✓ Keep your social media and website updated daily during electoral periods.
- ✓ Share clear posts on registration, procedures, and key dates.
- ✓ Run live Q&A sessions and use targeted ads to reach diaspora communities.
- ✓ Strengthen cybersecurity and use trusted channels like email or SMS alerts to share verified updates.

Fight Mis- and Disinformation Quickly & Factually

- ✓ Monitor online spaces for rumours or false claims about overseas voting.
- ✓ Respond fast with accurate information across all channels—website, social media, and embassies.
- ✓ Publish a “Myth vs Fact” page to correct common misunderstandings.
- ✓ Ask trusted diaspora leaders to share corrections within their private networks to stop false news from spreading.

Be Transparent to Build Trust

- ✓ Clearly explain how overseas votes are cast, transported, and counted.
- ✓ Share regular updates on registration and turnout to show transparency.
- ✓ If issues occur (postal delays, system errors), communicate openly about fixes.
- ✓ Remind voters that their participation matters—show real example where diaspora votes made a difference.

Useful Resources¹⁵⁸

General Publications and Literature

Compilation of Venice Commission Opinions and Reports Concerning Out-Of-Country Voting – CoE, 2025

Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/cdl-pi-2025-017-e>

External Voting. The Patterns and Drivers of Central European Migrants' Homeland Electoral Participation – Szulecki, K., Erdal, M., Stanley, B. – Palgrave Macmillan, 2023

Available at: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-19246-3>

Out-of-Country Voting: A Brief Overview – Peter Erben, Ben Goldsmith, Aysha Shujaat – IFES, 2012

Available at: <https://www.ifes.org/publications/out-country-voting-brief-overview-0>

Out-of-Country Voting: Learning from Practice – Adhy Aman; Mette Bakken – International IDEA, 2021

Available at: <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/out-country-voting>

Vote by Mail: International Practice During COVID-19 – Wally, M., Wall, A. – IFES, 2020

Available at: <https://www.ifes.org/publications/vote-mail-international-practice-during-covid-19>

Voting from abroad in European Parliament elections – Cîrlig, C.-C., Mentzelopoulou, M.M. – European Parliamentary Research Service, 2024

Available at:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751457/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)751457_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751457/EPRS_BRI(2023)751457_EN.pdf)

Unravelling Out-of-Country Voting, A Deeper Look into OCV Practices, the Use of Technology and Turnout – International IDEA, 2022

Available at: <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/ocv-technology-turnout>

¹⁵⁸ IFES recognizes that additional relevant publications and resources exist beyond this non-exhaustive list.

Online Tools

ACE The Electoral Knowledge Network's Topic Page on Out-of-Country Voting

Available at: https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/va/explore_topic_new

IFES ElectionGuide

Available at: <https://www.electionguide.org/>

International IDEA Voting from Abroad Database

Available at: <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voting-abroad-database>

MER Migrant Electoral Rights dataset by Umpierrez de Reguero S., Wegschaider K., Bauböck R., EUI, RSC, Research Data, 2025

Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/93661>



2000 M Street NW, Washington, DC, 20036, United States

www.IFES.org
