



# IFES Solutions:

## Achieving Credible Elections and Safeguarding Democracy During the COVID-19 Crisis

[COVID-19: A Survival Guide for Democracies](#) | Contact: [cbarnes@ifes.org](mailto:cbarnes@ifes.org) | vol. 1, April 28, 2020

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) supports Pillar Four of the USAID-State Joint Strategy on COVID-19: “Prepare for, mitigate and address second order economic, civilian security, stabilization, and governance impacts of COVID-19, in part to prevent development backsliding.”

COVID-19 threatens decades of democratic progress and taxpayer investment. As IFES continues its core programming, it is providing critical analysis and innovating new approaches to the ongoing crisis.

### Empowering electoral institutions to safely deliver credible elections

**Elections are possible during public emergencies, but, they must take place safely with proper planning, resources and management. IFES can assist by:**

- **Providing [guidance to election management bodies \(EMBs\)](#)** to support transparent, inclusive and legally compliant decision-making surrounding the postponement of elections.
- **Pivoting voter education to public health messaging** to counter mis/disinformation; build social cohesion and resilience; and explain new voting procedures to enable participation and mitigate risk.
- **Developing the crisis communications capacity of EMBs and key agencies** to strengthen outreach; engage civilian stakeholders, health authorities and media; and ensure transparency and accountability.
- **Cultivating [EMB leadership](#) to respond to public emergencies** by tailoring IFES’ Executive Curriculum in Electoral Leadership, [iEXCEL](#), which develops crisis management skills and institutional resilience.
- **Integrating health measures into poll worker training and voting processes** through social distancing, queue control, temperature testing and the safe exchange of voting materials.
- **Planning and preparing for increasingly complex polling operations**, including interagency coordination; inclusive and gender-sensitive planning; identification of high-risk areas; deployment of poll worker PPE; and alternative voting methods.

IFES is [carefully tracking](#) how the pandemic is affecting democracies around the globe. General and local elections have already been postponed in [more than 50 countries](#).

### Supporting effective, accountable governing institutions

**IFES can develop stakeholder capacity and support public dialogue surrounding crisis response, emergency powers and service delivery by:**

- **Mitigating corruption risks stemming from the public health crisis** by adapting our [abuse of state resources](#) and political finance work to help public agencies put into place rules, management systems and transparency mechanisms.
- **Strengthening public oversight of government responses to COVID-19** by developing the capacity of independent oversight bodies, civil society and the media to monitor and report on corrupt practices and the abuse of emergency powers.
- **Reinforcing judicial independence and integrity during the crisis** by preparing judges to adjudicate cases on rights violations arising from emergency measures and the postponement of elections.

## Ensuring all people participate safely in civic and political life on an equal basis

Traditionally marginalized populations are more likely to be negatively impacted by COVID-19. IFES can fight back by:

- **Mobilizing advocacy networks and elevating marginalized voices** to support voting rights; counter discrimination; and create pandemic-responsive accommodations, policies and tools.
- **Mitigating the impact of school closures on youth civic education** by working locally to move courses online and empower youth to mobilize digitally.
- **Adapting current tools and methodologies to confront increased domestic violence** during stay-at-home conditions (e.g., [Violence Against Women in Elections](#) and SMS outreach platforms).

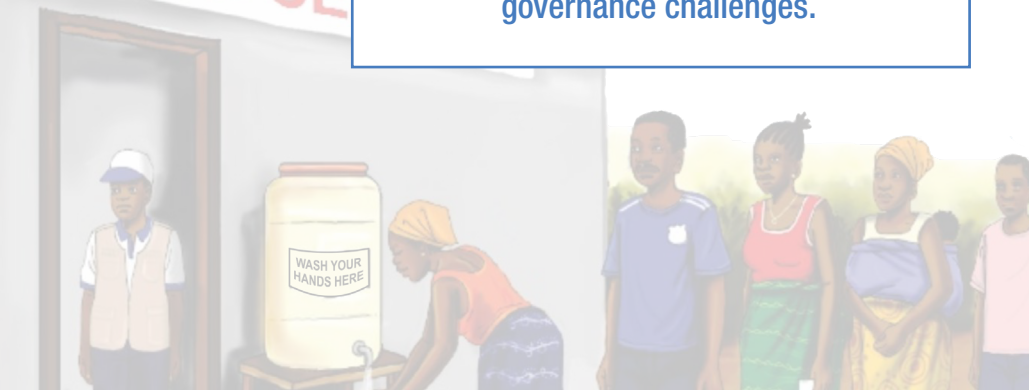
## Balancing technological solutions for social distancing with cybersecurity and integrity

Introducing technology into an electoral process must not undermine public trust or compromise security. IFES can help by:

- **Leveraging its expertise in online and out-of-country voting** to provide global analysis and local guidance on remote voting.
- **Innovating new ways for transparent counting and results tabulation** by supporting the software and training necessary for livestreaming results and counting processes.
- **Championing web-based initiatives to mitigate court closures and suspension of in-person hearings** by adapting election dispute resolution systems to enable video conferencing for hearings.
- **Advising partners on virtual communications** including online press rooms; engaging web-based content; and cyber hygiene.
- **Supporting EMB procurement to facilitate remote and online operations** by tracking and mitigating disruptions stemming from gaps in global supply chains.

Thinking ahead, IFES is preparing to help public institutions emerge from the crisis and address residual governance challenges.

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## IFES Expertise in Public Health Emergencies



At the height of the Liberian Ebola epidemic, IFES worked with the National Election Commission and medical experts to integrate practical health and safety measures such as social distancing and revised processing of voting material. During poll worker training, IFES focused on queue control and voter temperature testing. We also supported an aggressive voter education effort that built upon a public health campaign, which proved critical to changing behavior. As a result, the election proceeded safely, and Liberia's democracy, at a critical stage, progressed.



*During the 2014 Ebola crisis in Liberia, pollworkers are careful to have contact-free voter check ins.*

In **Ukraine**, IFES is engaging 30 university partners and 70+ university-level civic educators to combat mis/disinformation around COVID-19. We're also promoting cyber hygiene and supporting stakeholders in their tech use.

In **Myanmar**, IFES trainings are being converted to e-learning. We've shifted to more online outreach through social media, with a mix of public health awareness, countering mis/disinformation and civic education featuring quizzes and mobile-friendly posters and videos.