

Session title: The Evolution of the Voting Process

Moderator/Panelists:

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Session Summary

Despite the social changes that have taken place and the discoveries that have been made since the last century, the following observation can be made about the numerous states on the planet: electoral processes have stayed essentially the same. Nevertheless, electoral administrators face new questions that will have to be answered using innovative means. Challenges on the horizon include the growing importance of the concept of transparency, declining voter turnout, decreasing interest in work at polling sites, and the hectic pace of working life. The electoral process suffers accordingly; its future health will depend on its ability to adapt to new realities.

Quebec is not exempt in this regard: its electoral system is plagued by certain problems that it is attempting to solve. One of these problems is citizens' loss of confidence in the political class and in the institutions that govern them. Certain polls and studies show that Quebecers have a rather negative view of their political leaders and do not identify with the political choices that are offered to them. One possible symptom of this crisis of confidence is the fact that Quebecers' current turnout rate is lower than in past elections. That said, they continue to believe that the electoral process itself is well managed. During Quebec general elections held in recent years, attempts were made to counter declining voter turnout rates by prolonging the advance polling period, bringing polling stations closer to less mobile electors, and introducing the right to vote from outside Québec and from outside one's electoral division. However, electoral administrators still face other challenges, including the recruitment and training of polling personnel and the role of internet in the electoral process; these continue to be crucial issues that administrators will have to confront.

The United States also faces its share of challenges. The modernization of polling stations remains a topical issue, especially following the defective voting machine saga that tainted the 2012 elections. Travis County, Texas, is a prime example of the search for the best way to record citizens' votes. After suffering several setbacks that stemmed from previous attempts to have citizens vote electronically, Travis County brought together various stakeholders to develop its own system, the Travis STAR Voting System. This system combines electronic and paper voting in order to maximize the security, transparency, internal control

and reliability of the electoral process by strengthening mechanisms used to verify results.

When confronted with the need to innovate to meet the new realities of the 21st century, electoral administrators must undoubtedly keep looking for solutions, as was done in Quebec and Travis County. However, it is in their interest to seek a certain equilibrium between the need to adapt a process that has stood the test of time and, most notably, the limits that are imposed by legislators or the appeal of the latest technologies.