POLICY BRIEF

NATIONAL DEBATE ON ELECTORAL REFORMS IN NORTH MACEDONIA: ELECTORAL REFORMS THROUGH THE PRISM OF CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS

SEPTEMBER, 2022
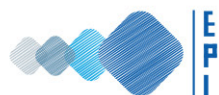
EPI

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC DEBATE

NED | NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

SUPPORTING FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of any democratic society, where the interests of the citizens are rightfully represented and accounted for. North Macedonia has underwent many cycles of electoral reforms since its independence, yet more often than not they are conducted in light of upcoming elections, limiting the space and time for an inclusive, transparent public debate. Aiming to bridge the gap of fragmented and non-inclusive dialogue on electoral reforms, the European Policy Institute conducted the National Debate on Electoral Reforms in May and June 2022, to shed light on the possible outcomes of the changes in electoral model that have been discussed by the political parties and policy actors in the country.

INITIAL SURVEY
N = 1000 citizens
65% Macedonian
25% Albanian
10% other ethnic communities

DELIBERATIVE EVENT
4-5 June 2022
129 participants

POST-DEBATE SURVEY
N = 129 participants
82.8% Macedonian
15.5 % Albanian
2.3% other ethnic communities

The National Debate was organized following the method of Deliberative Polling, developed at the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. Deliberative Polling is a unique form of political consultation that combines the techniques of surveying and public discussion, where participants are polled on targeted issue(s) before and after engaging in dialogue with experts and political figures.[1] The changes in opinion before and after the deliberation reflect the citizens' preferences, if they would have the chance to become more informed and more engaged by the issue(s). The main goal of the National Debate was to increase the involvement of the citizens in the upcoming reform of the electoral system, through an inclusive, objective dialogue with relevant experts and decision makers.

---

1   See https://cdd.stanford.edu/what-is-deliberative-polling/.

The initial survey was conducted in May and included both knowledge and opinion/attitude questions. Prior to the event, participants were provided with balanced briefing materials, reviewed by relevant experts to ensure unbiased and objective information, which served as the basis for the discussions with the experts and political figures. Upon the event, the participants were given the same survey, to measure changes in their perceptions on the topics discussed. The results of both surveys were analyzed using ANOVA test of variance, to check for any statistically significant differences in the citizens' opinions pre and post the deliberative event.

The debate resulted with statistically significant changes in some of the citizens' opinion on electoral reforms, especially regarding the number of electoral districts and the types of lists for MPs.

State institutions should regularly involve the broader public in the policy dialogue on electoral reforms.

Further educational and informational campaigns are needed on all (potentially adopted) electoral reforms.

While there are many aspects of electoral systems and different election models across the world, due to time constraints, the National Debate on Electoral Reforms focused on parliamentary elections, covering four topics: (1) the number of electoral districts, (2) the types of lists, (3) out-of-country voting and (4) registration of voters. The first topic covered two possible reform scenarios – the entire territory of the country is one electoral district or status quo – the country remains divided in six electoral districts. The second topic covered open or closed lists for candidates for Members of Parliament (MPs). The third topic covered three scenarios: status quo – non-residents votes and elects up to three MPs, non-residents votes and elects one MP, and non-residents do not vote at all. Finally, the last topic covered two scenarios: active and passive registration of voters.

In what follows, this Policy Brief outlines and discusses the key findings for each of the topics discussed at the National Debate, and presents policy recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

2. OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One of the key goals of the deliberative polling method is to see whether exposing citizens to unbiased, broad debate on a particular topic can contribute towards changes in their perceptions. In addition to looking at the specific topics, this National Debate also looked into citizens' opinion on elections in general. The results indicated their perceptions/opinions towards elections in general remained consistent. With other words, there were no statistically significant changes in the citizens' opinion on several general questions related to elections and electoral reforms, despite exposing them to significant information, both in writing as well as through public discussion with relevant experts and political figures.

Citizens have *almost neutral (neither positive, nor negative) perceptions about elections in general and they consider including the general public in the public debate on electoral reforms is important and needed.* Citizens are also *consistent in their opinion that electoral reforms so far have been somewhat unsuccessful and they find the implementation of electoral reforms shortly before elections somewhat unacceptable.* The latter is also not considered a good practice as per international standards, since pre-electoral reform "affects timely and consistent implementation of the law",[2] which can, on the

ON A SCALE OF 0 TO 10, DO YOU THINK THAT A WIDER INVOLVEMENT OF THE PUBLIC IN THE DIALOGUE ABOUT ELECTORAL REFORMS IS NEEDED?

7.80

8.30
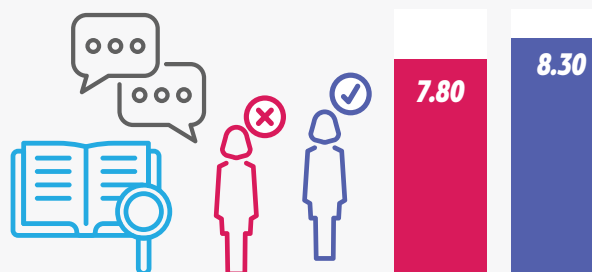
long run, bring further distrust in the system. Despite this, *citizens find that additional reforms should be implemented fairly urgent* - on the scale from 0-10 where 0 was not urgent at all and 10 was as urgent as possible, the mean score was 7.7 pre-debate and 7.8 post-debate). Lastly, *they generally neither agree, nor disagree that all citizens are adequately represented in the Parliament.*

---

2   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2011). Early Parliamentary Elections 5 June 2011. OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report (pp.1). Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Policy brief
National debate on electoral reforms in North Macedonia:
Electoral reforms through the prism of citizens' perceptions

Although the issues and stances mentioned above were not discussed in details during the debate, the consistency in the citizens' opinion can be an indicator that there really is a need of a broad, inclusive public debate. Ordinary citizens, whose lives will be significantly affected by electoral processes and results need to be properly informed on the consequences of electoral systems in relation to the principles of representation (geographical, ideological, gender, minority), inclusiveness, fairness and equality of votes, and other related issues of importance for the policy making and governing in general.

2.1. Number of electoral districts

The number of electoral districts, as well as their size (if multiple) are among the key variables to consider when designing an electoral system, given that it can largely influence the distribution of mandates, which is especially important for diverse societies fragmented across various lines of cleavages. The discussions on this topic looked into two reform scenarios: (1) the status quo remains and the country continues to be divided in six electoral districts, and (2) have one electoral district on the entire territory of the country.

Since 2002, the parliamentary electoral system in North Macedonia is proportional, with closed candidate lists. 120 MPs are elected in six electoral districts - 20 MPs from each electoral districts - and results are calculated using the d'Hondt formula. Up to three additional MPs are elected through out-of-country voting,[3] in one electoral district.[4] In the past year, the discussions on transforming the existing six into one electoral district have intensified, which is why this was one of the topic chosen for this National Debate.

Citizens were consistent in their support for one electoral district on the entire territory of the country, and post-debate they tend to agree that there should also be an established threshold of minimum votes that parties need to win one MP seat.

3   Since 2011
4   Since 2015

Although this can be considered a major electoral reform, the debate influenced the citizens' opinion on only three issues related to the number of electoral districts. While regardless of the debate they tend to agree that there should be one electoral district in the country, *post-debate there was a statistically significant change* (f-value = 9.41; p-value < 0.01) *in the participants' opinion that in addition to having one electoral district there should be a threshold of minimum votes that parties need to win one MP seats.* Namely, while pre-debate participants' opinion centered around a neutral position, post-debate the mean value leaned towards agreeing on the need for a minimum threshold. This can signal two important things. Firstly, it would be of immense importance that the Government ensures adequate voters education on why a minimum threshold is needed, how the minimum is decided and how votes are translated into mandates in one electoral district. Second, given the arguments presented to the participants prior to the debate and during the discussions, a stronger support for this model can be indicative to the fact that citizens are in favor of more parties entering the Parliament, while minimizing the risk of blockages in its work, to ensure effective functioning

One of the major theoretical arguments against one electoral districts is that this system can lead to weaker territorial representation and weaker voter-representative link, whereas multiple electoral districts improve the accountability of representatives to the voters, the debate resulted with contradicting opinion on this stance. Contrary to this, with a statistically significant difference (f-value = 8.8; p-value < 0.01), while pre-debate citizens had a somewhat neutral attitude towards this stance, *post-debate citizens predominantly disagreed that six electoral districts improve the accountability of representatives to the voters.* This difference could point towards lack of information and knowledge by citizens on this issue.

If we relate the above finding to the increased possibility for smaller parties to enter Parliament under one electoral district system, it seems intuitive that citizens would feel more represented if the smaller party they voted for would be able to get in Parliament without having to coalition with some of the bigger(est) parties.

In the latter case, as experience shows, decision making can be brought to a bargain between who gets what, thus in the event of one electoral district, in an ideal scenario, their party would be able to win a seat in Parliament and work to represent their electorate outside of a coalition, whereas the electorate can hold them accountable on the basis of what their representative(s) did for them. Yet in reality, these dynamics are different.

Policy brief
National debate on electoral reforms in North Macedonia:
Electoral reforms through the prism of citizens' perceptions

These findings can indicate that while in theory the list holders are usually politicians that are popular in the electoral district where they run for election and voters can identify with them and form a closer bond, in practice it may not be case and what prevails at the end is the voting for party rather than for a candidate, regardless of the number of electoral districts. At the final instance, given the number of electoral districts can indeed influence the share of seats among the parties in Parliament, citizens should be properly informed on what does one electoral district mean, what are its benefits and flaws and how will that affect the voters.

Statistically significant changes (f-value = 13.5; p-value < 0.001) in the opinions also occurred on the stance that *six electoral districts contribute to more stable government coalition – while pre-debate citizen's had a rather neutral opinion on this issue, post- debate they leaned towards disagreeing on the stance.* Similar to the previous stance, this one goes contrary to the theoretical postulates, which might indicate that citizens find that the Government can maintain stability even though the Parliament will have representatives from more political parties.

ONE ELECTORAL DISTRICT
WILL RESULT IN LESS POLARIZATION
OF THE POLITICAL CULTURE BETWEEN
THE LARGEST PARTIES IN THE COUNTRY

6.04

6.69

If we look at their opinion on how one electoral district will influences the polarization of the political culture between the largest political parties, the above findings do not come at surprise. If the perception is that one electoral district will decrease the polarization between the largest political parties, then it seems intuitive citizens would expect it would strengthen the culture of cooperation, rather than contribute to further quarrels. At the same time, it might be the case that citizens would rather see their preferred party represented in Parliament, rather than think about what that does to the stability of the Government in general. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that parties in North Macedonia often form (or join) a coalition post-elections, so citizens do not believe that the number of electoral districts will significantly influence the stability of the Government coalition (which can be, as it often is) formed or broadened with more political parties post-elections.
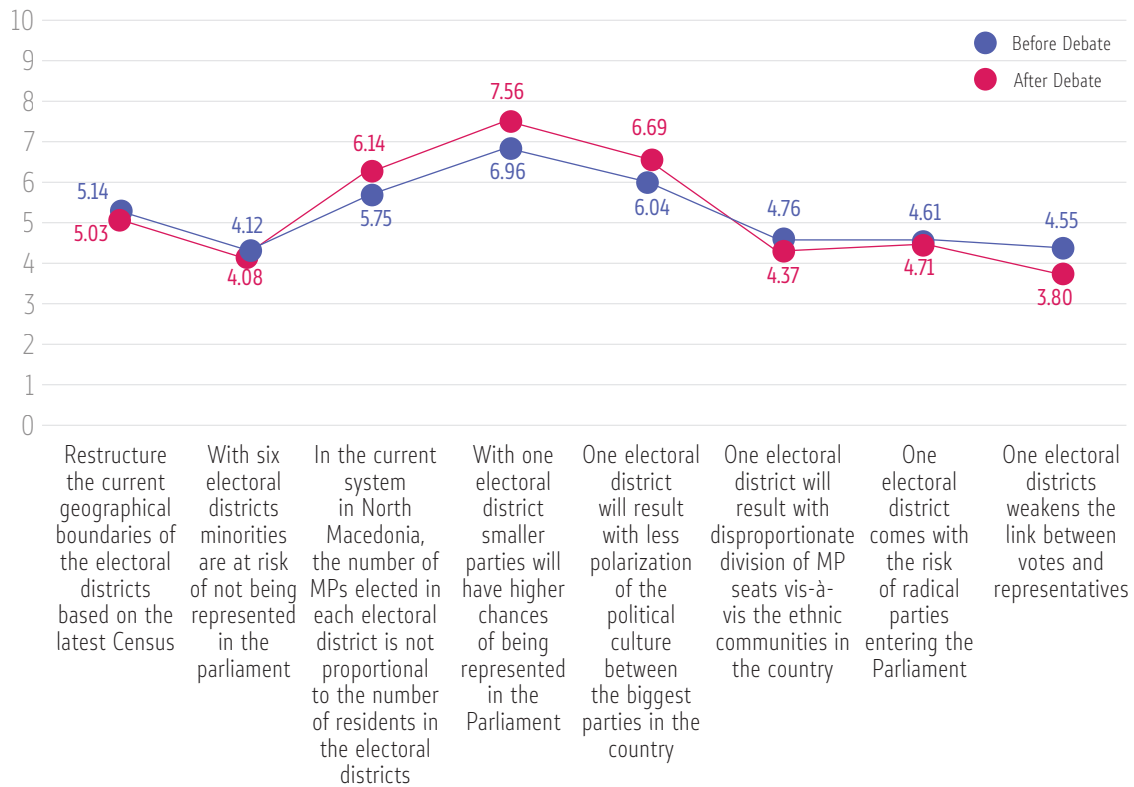
The National Debate did not contribute to statistically significant changes in the citizens' opinions on the other issues discussed (Table 1).

Table 1: Opinions related to the number of electoral districts that were not significantly changed post-debate

For electoral reforms, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is completely disagree and 10 is completely agree, to what extent do you agree on each of the following reforms.

● Before Debate
● After Debate

	Restructure the current geographical boundaries of the electoral districts based on the latest Census	With six electoral districts minorities are at risk of not being represented in the parliament	In the current system in North Macedonia, the number of MPs elected in each electoral district is not proportional to the number of residents in the electoral districts	With one electoral district smaller parties will have higher chances of being represented in the Parliament	One electoral district will result with less polarization of the political culture between the biggest parties in the country	One electoral district will result with disproportionate division of MP seats vis-à-vis the ethnic communities in the country	One electoral district comes with the risk of radical parties entering the Parliament	One electoral districts weakens the link between votes and representatives
Before Debate	5.14	4.12	5.75	6.96	6.04	4.76	4.61	4.55
After Debate	5.03	4.08	6.14	7.56	6.69	4.37	4.71	3.80

Policy brief
National debate on electoral reforms in North Macedonia:
Electoral reforms through the prism of citizens' perceptions

2.2. Types of lists for candidates for Members of Parliament

List Proportional system is one of the two most popular types of proportional representation electoral systems. In North Macedonia, candidate lists were introduced in 2002, with the switch of the electoral system from majoritarian to proportional, and they have always been of a closed type. Political parties and experts have discussed the possibility of introducing open lists, yet the public discourse has been very limited with information, and the reform was never truly put on the table until recently, when open lists became one of the possible areas within the latest announced electoral reform package. Despite this, there has been little to no information on the political parties' preferred types of open lists, nor on how this will influence the allocation of mandates in the Parliament.

Depending on the type of list/ballot, the open-list systems differ in the 'level of openness', and there is no one-size-fits-all model. However, given the limitations of this deliberative polling, the reform options discussed did not go into details in terms of the type of open lists, given their general strengths and weaknesses are the same,[5] rather the general differences between open and closes list proportional systems. Participants were also informed that the most common type of open lists are those where voters can only give from one to three preferential votes for candidates, i.e. voters cannot vote for as many candidates as there are MP seats to fill in the electoral district.

Introducing open lists in a country can be considered a major electoral reform and given their complexity, it requires significant voter education, especially considering that this topic, along with the reforms in the electoral districts have been the two 'hottest' topics in the public discourse. Interestingly, despite being exposed to comprehensive reading materials and discussion with relevant experts and politicians, the National Debate did not contribute to statistically significant differences in the citizens' opinion on the issue of types of lists and their views remained unchanged post-debate (Table 2).
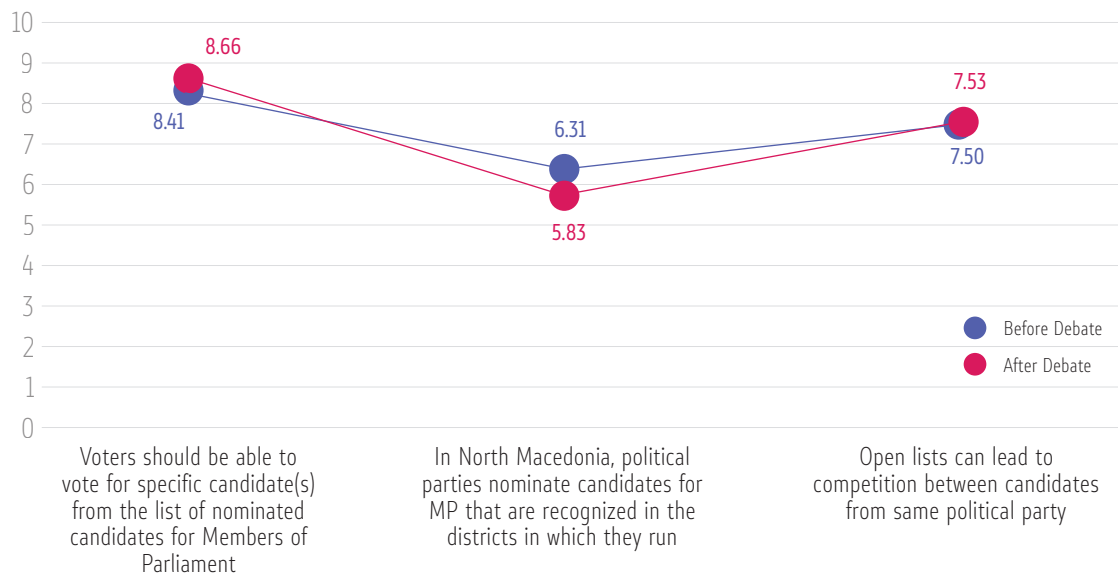
The findings of this National Debate signal that citizens are predominantly in favor of introducing open lists. Citizens support an electoral system that contributes towards reducing party centralization and the power of party leaders, as well as one that encourages elected MPs to feel more accountable to their electorate, thus strengthening the accountability and quality of the legislative branch.

5   International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2009) *Proportional Represen-tation Open List Electoral Systems in Europe. Election Issues,* Paper 1.

Table 2: Opinions related to the types of list for candidates for
MPS that were not significantly changed post-debate

For electoral reforms, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is completely disagree and 10 is completely agree,
to what extent do you agree on each of the following reforms.

Although citizens tend to somewhat agree that political parties already nominate candidates for MPs that are recognized in the electoral districts they run in, they agree more strongly that voters should have the possibility to vote for specific candidates, which as Proximity Theory[6] argues, is explained by the fact that voters seek candidates who are ideologically close to their own positions.

Overall, the findings of this National Debate signal that citizens are predominantly in favor of introducing open lists, even though theoretically this can cause intra-party conflict due to increased competition between candidates from the same political party. Considering all of the presented arguments in favor of open list systems, the results of the national debate point that citizens support an electoral system that contribute towards reducing party centralization and the power of party leaders and one that encourages elected MPs to feel more accountable to their electorate, thus strengthening the accountability and quality of the legislative branch.

6   See Downs, 1957

Policy brief
National debate on electoral reforms in North Macedonia:
Electoral reforms through the prism of citizens' perceptions

As mentioned before, there are numerous options and varieties of open list systems. Involving the broader public in the reform dialogue is therefore important, including their preparation for what should be expected based on the type of open lists that will be selected by the policy maker. Adequate voters education will also be important, to mitigate the risks of invalid ballots due to "faulty voting" by voters that did not get properly informed on know how to express their preference on an open list ballot.

2.3. Out-of-country Voting

Voting rights in democratic societies are at the core of the political rights of people, yet voting from abroad remains a highly divisive question, especially regarding what electoral system should be applied, how this should be organized, who should be eligible to vote, what should the modalities of voting be. While ensuring non-residents the right to vote it is considered European practice that all EU Member states countries have adopted, there are countries in the world that do not organize out-of-country voting. Overall, about 73% of states and territories in the world had adopted some form of out-of-country voting by 2020.[7]

In North Macedonia, out-of-country voting was introduced for the first time in 2011, in three electoral districts,[8] merged into one in 2015, where up to three MPs are elected according to the proportional system. If enough voters register to vote and elections do take place, the election of these MPs is conditional on winning the minimum number of votes required to win a seat in one of the six in-country districts.

Citizens are generally in favor of providing non-residents their constitutional right to vote out-of-country. However, they find that reforms could be done in this area – most notably in decreasing the maximum number of MPs that could be elected to represent the diaspora.

7   International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2007), *Voting from Abroad:* The International IDEA Handbook, International IDEA

8   Electoral District 7 – Europe and Africa, Electoral District 8 – North and South America, and Electoral District 9 – Australia and Asia

The right to vote is a constitutionally guaranteed right for every citizen of North Macedonia, thus the debate on whether non-residents should vote out-of-country or not is a rather sensitive one, given their relationship with the state changes when they leave the territory of their home country, especially for a prolonged period of time.[9] Due to the different modalities of conducting out-of-country voting and given previous experience in North Macedonia with out-of-country voting, for the purposes of this deliberative polling event three options were presented: (1) a status quo, i.e. non-residents can vote in one electoral district and elect up to three MPs; (2) non-residents can vote in one electoral district and elect one MP; and (3) there is no out-of-country voting at all.

The National Debate resulted with a statistically significant change of the opinions only on two issues related to out-of-country voting. Namely, with 99% certainty (f-value = 7.08; p-value = 0.01), *we found that while prior to the debate the citizens somewhat agreed that abolition of the right of the non-residents to vote will cause emergence of new lines of division among citizens (mean value 5.9), after the debate they somewhat dissagreed that this will be the case (mean value fell to 4.7).* Whether this change of perceptions were caused by their exposure to information on the decrease of the number of people registering to vote out-of-country over the years requires additional research, but this finding is nevertheless interesting, considering it is based on the oppinions of in-country voters.
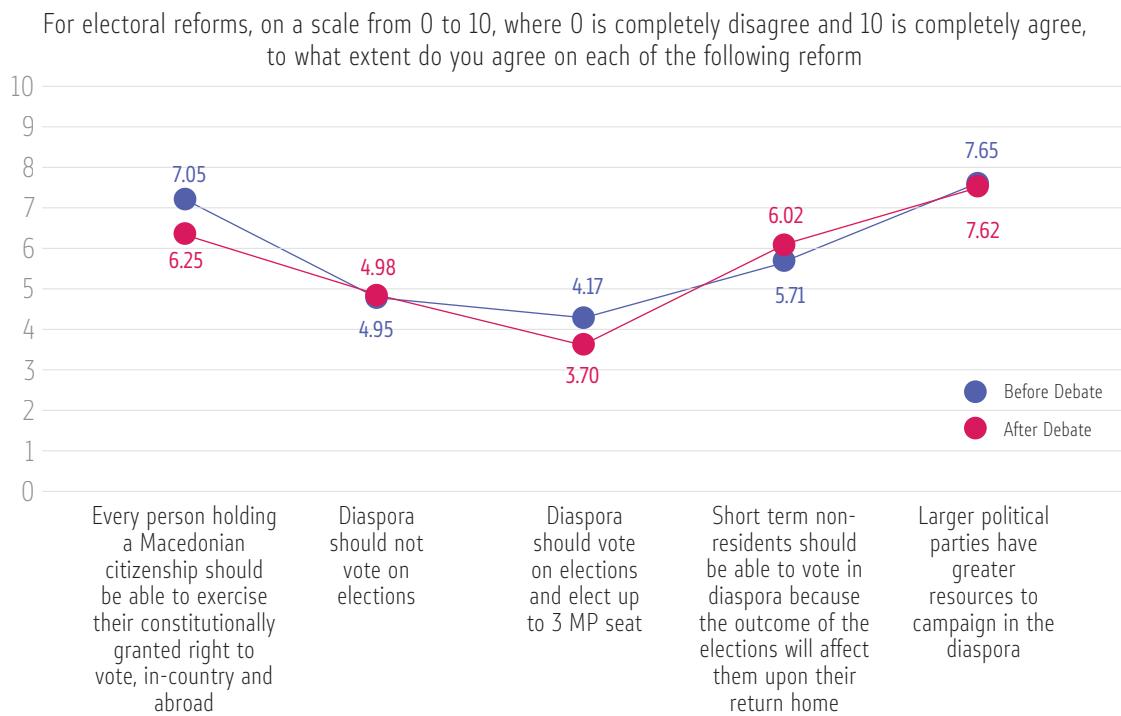
The second statistically significant change (f-value = 4.46; p-value < 0.05) in opinions post-debate refers to the number of MPs that are enough to represent the entire diaspora. *Pre-debate, citisens were almost neutral about one MP being enough to represent the entire diaspora (mean value 4.97), while post-debate they leaned towards somewhat agreeing with the claim (mean value increased to 5.9).* Given the materials participants received pre-debate and the discusscion during the debate, this indcates that they somewhat agree that one MP would sufice in representing the entire diaspora. In light of this, despite no statisticaly significant changes were noted post-debate, it is worth mentioning that citizens somewhat dissagree on keeping status quo – out-of country voters ellect up to three MPs.

---

9   Collyer, Michael and Vathi, Zana (2007) *Patterns of Extra-territorial Voting* (working paper). Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty.

Policy brief
National debate on electoral reforms in North Macedonia:
Electoral reforms through the prism of citizens' perceptions

Taking into account the consistency in the opinions on the rest of the questions on this topic covered with the survey (Table 3), it is indicative that citizens are generally in favor of providing non-residents their constitutional right to vote out-of-country, yet find that reforms could be done in this area – most notably in decreasing the maximum number of MPs that could be elected to represent the diaspora.

Table 3: Opinions related to the out-of-country voting that were not significantly changed post-debate

For electoral reforms, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is completely disagree and 10 is completely agree, to what extent do you agree on each of the following reform

	Every person holding a Macedonian citizenship should be able to exercise their constitutionally granted right to vote, in-country and abroad	Diaspora should not vote on elections	Diaspora should vote on elections and elect up to 3 MP seat	Short term non-residents should be able to vote in diaspora because the outcome of the elections will affect them upon their return home	Larger political parties have greater resources to campaign in the diaspora
Before Debate	7.05	4.95	4.17	5.71	7.65
After Debate	6.25	4.98	3.70	6.02	7.62

2.4. Registration of voters

Under current legislation, the registration of in-country voters in North Macedonia is passive, i.e. all eligible voters are registered in the Voters' List by cross-checking of relevant data sets by the State Electoral Commission. The Macedonian Voters' List contains all citizens of the country that have turned 18 on the day of the elections and that are residents in the country. Non-residents that want to vote out-of-country should self-register to do so, i.e. there is active registration. Separate Voters' list is prepared for citizens that are temporary residing in a foreign country for the purposes of work or studying that have a valid residency on the territory of North Macedonia, which have not registered to vote in a Diplomatic-Consular Office (DCO) are contained in a separate Voter Lists. Citizens who are temporarily employed or residing abroad during the elections and have registered for out-of-country voting at the DCOs or the consular offices are not included in the Voter Lists used for voting in North Macedonia.[10]

> Regardless of the debate, given how consistent citizens remained in their opinions pre and post-debate, it seems their general mood is not favoring one over the other reform options when it comes to registration of voters, which could be due to the lack of information on the topic in the public discourse.

For the purposes of the National Debate, two reform options were presented for in-country voting: (1) voters have to register themselves to vote (active registration), and (2) status quo - the Voters' List is prepared by the State Election Commission (passive registration). Even though there are different ways to organize the active registration of voters, given the country already uses a specific system for active registration of voters for out-of-country voting, the starting point for the discussions was that the same system can be applied to in-country elections, or modified as per the possibilities and available resources (technical, financial, etc.).

10   "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" N. 40/06, 136/08, 148/08, 155/08, 163/08, 44/11, 51/11, 54/11, 142/12, 31/13, 34/13, 14/14, 30/14, 196/15, 35/16, 97/16, 99/16, 136/16, 142/16, 67/17,125/17,35/18, 99/18,140/18, 208/18, 27/19 and "Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" N. 98/19, 42/20, 74/21 and 215/21

Policy brief
National debate on electoral reforms in North Macedonia:
Electoral reforms through the prism of citizens' perceptions

Statistically significant changes were noted on two issues. *Pre-debate, citizens they agreed more that the rise of IT makes it easier to design a well-functioning system for online registration of voters, than they did post-debate* (the mean values went from 8.2 to 7.3; f-value = 5.98, p-value = 0.01), which is interesting given almost half of the participants belong to the age group 30-49 years old, a group that can be considered fairly digitally literate and frequent user of digital tools and platforms. Furthermore, despite the fact that in theory, active registration of voters should contribute to a better and more accurate Voters' List, *post-debate citizens were almost neutral on this stance (mean value 5.8), compared to pre-debate, when they somewhat agreed (mean value 6.9) this will indeed happen* (f-value = 6.88; p-value = 0.01).

While today it is indeed easier to design a well-functioning online system for voters' registration, there are no guarantees that the system will not be abused, and it is not really given that this system will contribute to less irregularities in the Voters' List. Nonetheless, based on the observed trends, it seems that the trust in the institutions is still low and more work and education of voters is required in order to increase the tryst in both the use of IT technology and the institutions that utilize it. Another thing to consider is the fear that mandatory voter registration can hinder the political participation of persons with disabilities if voting registration procedures are inaccessible.

Worth discussing are also the issues where no statistically significant differences were noted post-debate (Table 4). Overall, the general mood of the citizens is somewhat neutral when it comes to the mandatory active registration in order to be able to vote on Election Day. Citizens somewhat agree that trust in elections will be higher if active registration is mandatory, but are more inclined to agree that passive registration is more likely to ensure all eligible voters are registered. Finally, they agree more than they disagree that there should be educational campaign on voter registration if active voter registration is introduced in North Macedonia.

Table 4: Opinions related to registration of voters that were not significantly changed post-debate

For electoral reforms, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is completely disagree and 10 is completely agree, to what extent do you agree on each of the following reforms

Overall, the findings indicate that citizens are not opposing the idea of active voter registration in order to be able to vote on Election Day. Still, if this is introduced, considering all the benefits it can bring, relevant institutions need to ensure there are substantive and comprehensive voter education campaigns, which will not only explain how active registration should be done, but also to ensure enough information about how the system used works, who has an oversight on it and what are the benefits of active registration, both on the short and on the long run.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many different electoral systems and models and there is not one right way to implement elections, given the different electoral systems have their advantages and disadvantages and highly impact the wider political and institutional framework.[11] Whatever system a country chooses, it is important that it ensure free and fair elections, reflecting the society and the interests of the electorate, as well as to ensure adequate representation of all groups. More importantly, an inclusive and transparent public debate on electoral reforms is more than necessary, to prevent reforms that are solely driven by the interests of political parties and elite groups, whose interests tend to solidify around the electoral system once chosen, responding to the incentives thereof.

This National Debate on Electoral Reforms contributed to bridging the gap of fragmented and non-inclusive dialogue on electoral reforms, and to further informing the public on why some reforms are needed or how they will influence the electoral process and the results of the elections. The two-day discussion provided a lively debate and fruitful exchange of information and opinion between the experts and politicians on one hand, and the citizens on the other. Despite significant differences on several stances pre and post-debate, there have been stances where citizens remained consistent in their opinion. This should not be interpreted neither as discouraging, nor as a non-effective event, rather as a call for urgent increase of the involvement of the citizens in the dialogue on electoral reforms, and perhaps more importantly, it should point to the need of immediate educational campaigns. Based on the findings, our recommendations for policy makers in continuing forward with the electoral reforms are presented below.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:
1. The Ministry of Justice, as the policy maker in this area, should regularly involve the broader public in the policy dialogue on electoral reforms.
2. The State Electoral Commission should ensure the preparation and dissemination of materials targeted at voters' education on all (potentially adopted) electoral reforms, including the number of electoral districts, open lists, registration of voters.

---

11   International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2005) *Electoral System Design: Overview of the New International IDEA Handbook,* International IDEA

IF THERE ARE CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF ELECTORAL DISTRICTS:

1. State institutions should ensure voters are properly informed on what introducing one electoral district means, what are its benefits and flaws and how will that affect the voters.

IF OPEN LISTS FOR CANDIDATES FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ARE INTRODUCED:

1. State institutions should prepare and widely promote specific, detailed information on the decided type of open lists.
2. Party leaders should take the opportunity to promote the open lists it across their party and encourage healthy competition between potential candidates, in order to mitigate intra-party conflicts.
3. The State Electoral Commission should timely prepare and provide to the citizens educational materials on voting with open lists, to mitigate the risks of invalid ballots due to "faulty voting" by voters that did not get properly informed on know how to express their preference on an open list ballot.

ON POTENTIAL REFORMS ON OUT-OF-COUNTRY VOTING:

1. State institutions could look into the possibility of opening up a debate on the number of MPs elected from out-of-country voting.

IF ACTIVE REGISTRATION OF VOTERS IS INTRODUCED:

1. In order to avoid high levels of distrust in the electronic system for active registration of voters, relevant institutions should provide information to the public on how the system works, who has an oversight on it and what are the benefits of active registration, both on the short and on the long run
2. State institutions should envisage and put in place specific mechanisms that will ensure the potential electronic system for active registration of voters is not abused or misused by political parties.
3. 1State institutions should design the system for active registration of voters in a way that is inclusive and non-discriminatory for any specific demographic group, especially for persons with disabilities.
4. The State Election Commission should prepare and disseminate substantive and comprehensive voter education campaigns with relevant and detailed information on how to register for voting.

REFERENCES

1. Collyer, M. and Vathi, Z. (2007). *Patterns of Extra-territorial Voting* (working paper). Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty.

2. Downs, A. (1957). An economic Theory of Democracy. New York.

3. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2009). *Proportional Representation Open List Electoral Systems in Europe.* Election Issues, Paper 1.

4. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2007). *Voting from Abroad: The International IDEA Handbook,* International IDEA.

5. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2005). *Electoral System Design: Overview of the New International IDEA Handbook,* International IDEA.

6. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2011). *Early Parliamentary Elections 5 June 2011. OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report* (pp. 1). Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

EPI.Skopje
epi_mk

www.epi.org.mk