“The electoral cycle: electoral management in Spain.”

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23rd ACEEEO Annual Conference 2014 Bucharest.

The electoral process: a definition.

A possible definition of an electoral process could be this: “The most complex project a State is due to organize, as a general rule, in a very short period of time”, and, it should be added, at least lately, “with limited resources”.

In Spain the electoral legislation, nation level and Autonomous Communities’ legislations, provide for the following kinds of electoral processes, apart from the referendum:

- Parliamentary Elections (Congress and Senate). Spain has a bicameral parliament: the Cortes Generales, comprising a lower chamber, the Congress of Deputies (Congreso de los Diputados) and an upper chamber, the Senate (Senado). Members of both chambers are elected to four-year terms, even though early elections can be called. There are 50 provinces and two cities with special status, Ceuta and Melilla. Each province and each city of special status, 52 in total, represents an electoral constituency for the Chamber of Deputies. In the case of the Senate, in each peninsular province 4 senators are elected, in the islands of Gran Canaria, Tenerife and Mallorca, 3 senators are elected, in the Autonomous Cities of Ceuta and Melilla, 2 senators are elected, and 1 senator is elected in each of the following islands: Ibiza-Formentera, Menorca, Fuerteventura, Gomera, Hierro, Lanzarote and La Palma.

- Local Elections. Local Elections take place every four years, the last Sunday of the month of may. The constituency is the municipality. There roughly 8.100 municipalities in Spain.

- European Parliament Elections. Every five years, European Parliament Elections are held. Spain is a single constituency in this election.

- 17 Autonomous Communities’ Parliamentary Assemblies: Spain is a decentralized state, comprising 17 autonomous regions which have their own Parliamentary Assemblies and managed their own elections. These parliaments are elected to four-year terms. In 10 of these Autonomous Communities, their President may call for the elections before that term ends.

Spanish electoral management bodies (EMBs)

In Spain, as it regards electoral management, there is an hybrid system: electoral administration (electoral commissions) and the public administration (Ministry of the Interior, Electoral Census Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation).
The Electoral Administration consists of a four-tiered structure (members: mainly from the judiciary): a Central Electoral Commission; 50 Provincial Election Commissions; 303 District or Zone Election Commissions; and more than 50,000 Electoral Boards (EBs) (Mesas Electorales).

Each Electoral Board comprises a president and two members, as well as two substitutes for each of these positions. EB members are selected by lottery among all literate electors registered in the corresponding electoral section. Service on EBs boards is mandatory.

The main responsibilities of the Central Electoral Commission include not only to guarantee the transparency, equity and objectivity of the electoral process (i.e. uniform interpretation of electoral rules), but also to issue binding instructions to the Provincial Electoral Commissions, as well to resolve complaints and appeals, to supervise the activities of the Electoral Census Office, and to impose administrative sanctions for non-criminal electoral offences.


The Ministry of the Interior is in charge of: (at nationwide elections and referenda).

- Material resources: ballot boxes and voting booths; ballot papers; envelopes; forms/protocols/printed matters; ICT support for the electoral administration;

- Human resources: 300.000 workforce (only 27 of them are personnel of the Deputy Directorate of Internal Policy and Electoral Processes. Ministry of the Interior.)

- Voter education campaigns on Public Radio, TV and online (art. 50 Electoral Act 5/1985). According to the electoral legislation in force, and to its interpretation done by the Central Electoral Committee, the Spanish government cannot, by any means, promote electoral participation, arguing that abstention is as legitimate as casting the vote. Therefore, the Ministry of the Interior can only follow what's established in article 50 of the Electoral Law so that when a referendum or a Nationwide election is called, the Ministry of the Interior disseminates, on public TV and radio, institutional campaigns that give information about polling day, about how to vote and voting by mail procedure.

- The Ministry of the Interior opens a call for tenders, for every election or referendum called at national level, for the technology required for the collection and public dissemination of the provisional electoral results to be sent from the Electoral Boards at Polling Stations to the electoral preliminary Results' dissemination national Centre. (These results are available within an hour after the Polling Stations closing). (art. 98.2 Electoral Act);

- Political Parties Register and public funding of political parties;

- The management of the electoral budget (EPE 2014 120,58 euros. 15,90 million less than in EPE 2009 (-11,65%));

- The coordination, as well as the cooperation, of all Administrations which play a role in the managing of elections and referenda: the Central Electoral Commission, the Autonomous Communities and the States’General Administration (which, in the case of the electoral management, it comprises several institutions the Ministry of the Interior, as EMB, has to coordinate or has to cooperate with: the Electoral Census Office (Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, the Ministry of Finance and Public Administration and Correos (Postal service).
The electoral cycle and ICTs.

In order to address the management of a complex electoral process in which, as we have seen, there are several electoral management bodies, institutions, both public and private, and many stakeholders involved, and in which there are extremely tight deadlines (elections take place 54 days after the calling of the elections), it is necessary to undertake monitoring and evaluation measures, so that the preparation and the managing of electoral processes is constantly improved and streamlined.

In this respect, the electoral management, which comprises a large number of activities and procedures undertaken by several institutions, is the perfect environment for the use of the ICTs.

As it regards the different electoral-cycle stages, the Ministry of the Interior elaborates an evaluation after every nation wide election/referendum. It is not a comprehensive evaluation of all institutions with EMB tasks. This notwithstanding, the different evaluations issued since 2008 have been used by the Ministry of the Interior as a resource to produce the so called Electoral Management Handbooks (1 and 2); as well as inventory activities (human and material resources) have been crucial inputs to improve strategies (i.e. ICT) and to plan specific operations.

Both at the post electoral evaluation and the pre electoral planning something essential has gone from strength to strength in the last decade: the optimized use of ICTs in the field of elections.

As regards de innovations introduced in order to improve the electoral management these are some of the ICT tools already being used by the Ministry of the Interior:

a) Central Government provincial delegations (Administración Periférica) cooperate with the Ministry of the Interior in the managing of elections at the province level. Two software applications provided by the Ministry are used by this peripheral Administration:

- INVELE. Storaged electoral materials inventory software (ballot boxes, printed materials…) Peripheral Administration at every province are in charge of updating the information so that the Ministry of the Interior may at all-time know the resources available.

- CAJAELE. Electoral budget management software (more than 50 spending centres are users).

b) Many electoral forms, which until recently, were printed, since PE 2011 are only available in electronic formats (online). The implementation of this measure has reduced in 4 million the number of electoral forms printed in PE 2011, compared to the number of forms printed in PE 2008.

c) The Ministry of the Interior provides the Electoral Commissions with a software application to have access to the Political Parties’ Register certifications (N.B. there are more than 4.100 political parties registered), as well as software (and sometimes hardware) to the 50 Provincial Election Commissions, so that the Electoral Administration can fulfil their tasks (N.B. a software application to be used by the Electoral Commissions in the final tally of the votes).

d) Ballot papers on demand printing system: to be used on the day of the election in case a polling station needs additional ballot papers. This software application that allows printing ballot papers on demand, made it possible in 2011 to reduce the number of manufactured ballot papers in 600 million (saving 3 million euros). (N.B. in the past, up to 90% of the printed ballot papers was discarded after Election Day).
e) A software application for the Electoral Commissions in order to manage the presentation of list of candidates as well as the direct electronic connection with the Official Gazettes which have to publish the presented and the proclaimed lists of candidates approved by the Electoral Commissions. This software improves also the ballot papers printing process. In January 2011 the Electoral Act was amended to include the preferential use of electronic means so that political parties may send the lists of candidates to the Electoral Commissions and the electoral managers may send (electronic format) the ballot papers model forms to the Electoral Commissions. The Electoral Act does now establish that Electoral Commissions may send (electronically) the already approved ballot papers to political parties.

f) The most intensive introduction of new technologies in the past 10 years: innovation for the dissemination of preliminary results:

In Spain, preliminary counting (public) takes place at every Electoral Board immediately after the close of polls (20:00 PM mainland time). The final counting (escrutinio general) is undertaken by the Electoral Commissions and published by the Central Electoral Commission in the Official Gazette.

In order to fulfill the Government’s obligation to disseminate the provisional electoral results on election day, the Ministry of the Interior opens a call for tenders for a service contract for the technology required for the transmission of the provisional electoral results from the Electoral Boards to the Data Dissemination National Centre (DDNC) of those results.

Representatives of the Administration are designated to gather the preliminary electoral results on election day, (the Electoral Act established that they get a copy of the Electoral Board tally sheet) as well as information regarding the opening of the polling stations, and turnout.

In the past data gathered by these Government’s representatives was reported using telephones, to the Centros de Recogida de Información (Data Compilation Centers) located at each one of the 52 Central Government provincial delegations to centralize information related to the elections during polling day.

The Ministry of the Interior has been taking efforts to reduce costs and further enhance the efficiency of the results tabulation by a broad use of ICTs. Now, the Government’s representatives report the provisional results to the DDNC (Madrid) either via tablets, the Electronically Managed Electoral Board, this notwithstanding some phone transmissions are still received.

As regards the technical support for Electoral Boards, it has to be said that the Electronically Managed Electoral Board (EMEB) is a set of information technology provided to make it easier for polling station staff to carry out their duties on Election Day. The EMEB may also print ballot papers whenever this is considered to be necessary.

The EMEB is a system, designed by the Ministry of the Interior, supervised by the Central Electoral Commission and the Congress of Deputies (Constitutional Committee), which makes the most of the ICTs to improve electoral management and it is adapted to the Electoral Law provisions: no legal reform was needed. It consists of a lap top, with a National ID Card reader and a modem, a printer, and an optical barcode reader. (to read the barcode of the Electoral Census certificates of the postal votes counted at the Electoral Boards).
The fast and accurate electoral provisional results’ collection allows the dissemination of those results to take place one hour after the closing of the Canary Islands polling stations (Polling stations at the Canary Islands close at 21:00 PM mainland time. Mainland polling stations close at 20:00).

The Ministry of the Interior publishes the preliminary results on election night (online/via APPs/media) as well as press conferences are held on Election Day at DDNC. Electoral results are available at http://www.infoelectoral.interior.es/min/

Conclusions.

In the electoral cycle there is a multiplicity of events, agents, institutions stakeholders (Administration, Electoral Commissions, Electoral Boards, electors, candidates, media…) and ICTs are excellent tools to be used. The goal to achieve is a comprehensive modernization of the whole electoral cycle. Technologies have to be at the service of both the electoral process itself and its stakeholders.

The introduction of new technologies provides an increase of both efficiency and effectiveness, as well the rationalization or streamlining of electoral public expenditure. This notwithstanding, the main concepts to guarantee are trust and legitimacy.