

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Key findings from the qualitative
and quantitative research

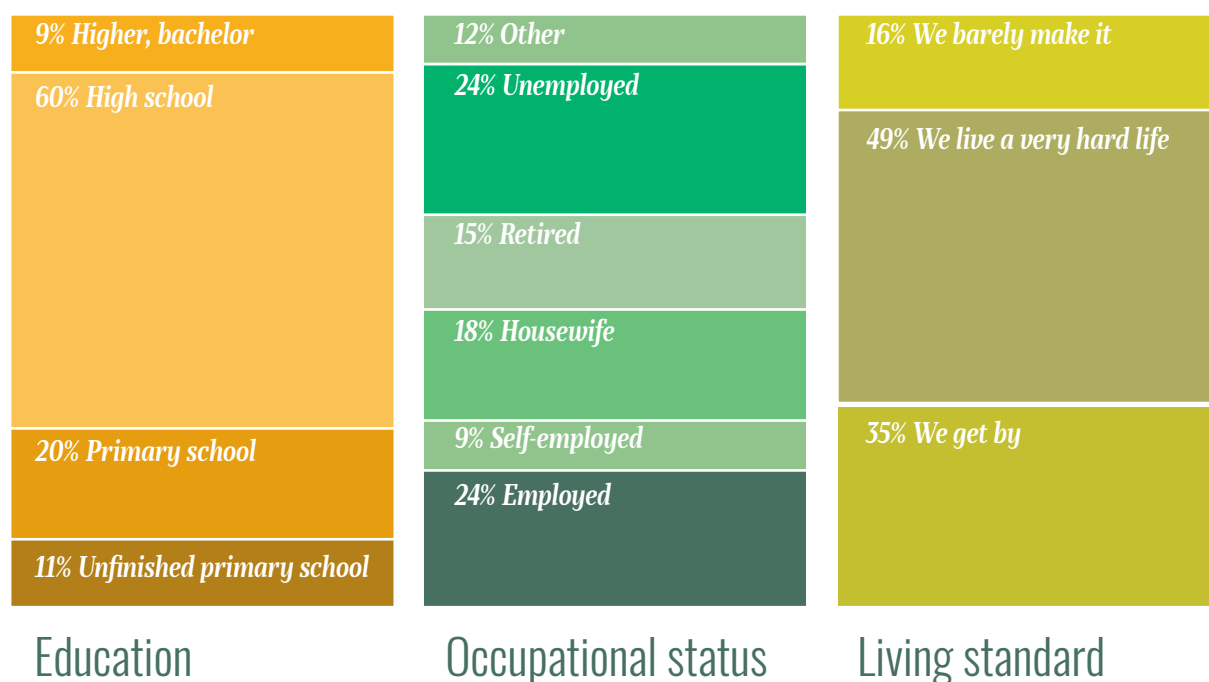
Persons with disabilities - Definition and Size

According to official data, it is estimated that 15% of the world's population has some type of disability. They are more likely to face poorer health outcomes, less education and lower employment.¹³ North Macedonia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on December 5, 2011.¹⁴ The Convention is the first international binding instrument that sets minimum standards for the rights of the persons with disabilities. Currently, there is no official data about the number of persons with disabilities in the country. However, according to the Institute for Public Health, 2017, an estimated 10% of the population in North Macedonia or about 200,000 residents can be categorized as people with disabilities.¹⁵

Demographic profile

A total of 55 citizens with disabilities took part in the quantitative face-to-face survey.

In order to gain an in-depth insight into the background, perceptions and opinions of the group, the quantitative survey was complemented by one focus group.



13 The World Bank, Disability Inclusion, (October 1, 2020), available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y6lkt5ym>, accessed on October 5, 2020.

14 Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, available at: <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/Konvencija%20za%20pravata%20na%20licata%20so%20invalidnost.pdf>, accessed on October 13, 2020.

15 Institute for Public Health, available at: <https://www.iph.mk/en/december-3-international-day-of-persons-with-disabilities/>

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Interest in the socio-political developments in the country

How interested are you in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world?



The research shows that 55% of the survey respondents are “not at all” or “not very interested” in the current socio-political developments in the country and in the world (9% more compared to the general population), while 42% are “very” or “somewhat interested”. Almost half of the survey participants (49%) rarely or never discuss these issues with other people (5% more than the general population).

The group expressed concerns with regards to the COVID-19 pandemics and the restricted functioning of the institutions, primarily in the sphere of health care and education. They also expressed concerns about the situation in the private sector.

The persons with disabilities are a vulnerable group which is still on the margins of society.

They are often faced with isolation in the community where they live. In addition to the unfavorable socio-economic relations of persons with disabilities, there is a need for social protection in all spheres of social life including health care, education, and employment.

Furthermore, the unemployment rate of the persons with disabilities is three times higher than that of the general population¹⁶ and most often these people take up low paid work and are segregated from the open labor market.

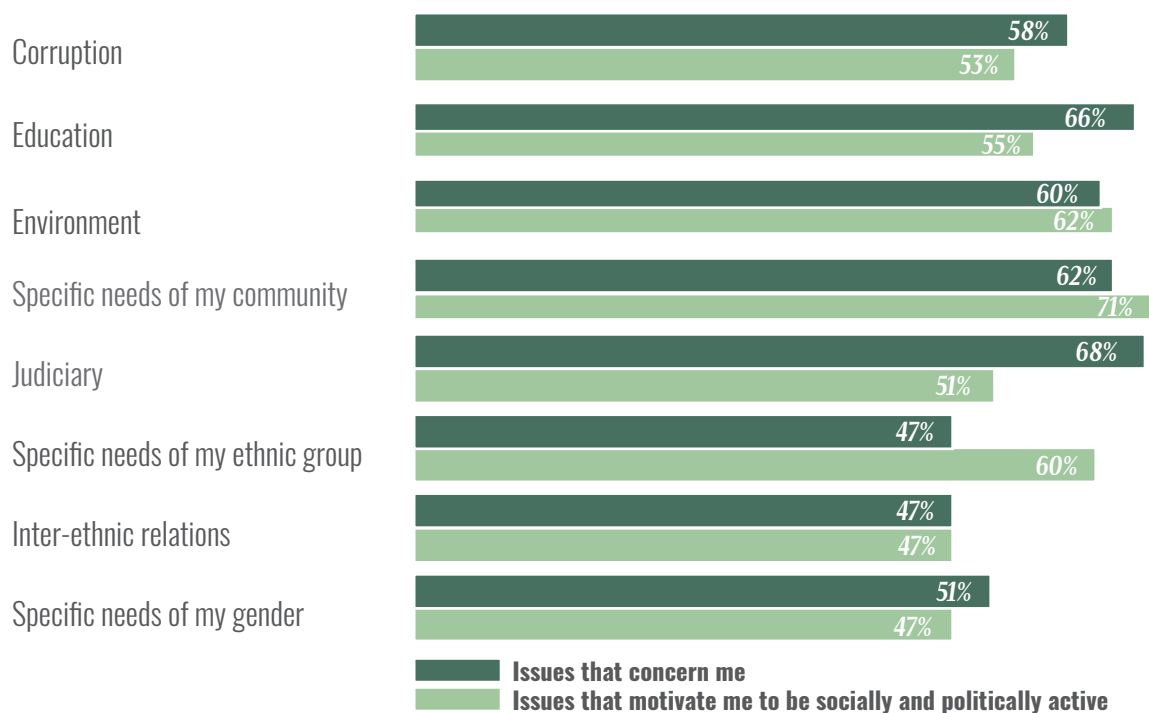
Concerns

How much would you say the following information/issues/topics concern you?

How much would you say the following issues/topics motivate you to be socially and politically active?



¹⁶ <http://iph.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Upatstvo-lica-so-posebni-potrebi-so-cip.pdf>



The survey respondents indicated that health care (75%), education (66%) and local issues (66%) are their primary issues of concern.

The respondents are the least concerned with the specific needs related to their ethnic group, interethnic relations and the specific needs of their gender.

Additionally, healthcare (73%), specific needs related to their place of living (71%) and economic and social stability (62%), along with the environment (62%) are the key motivators for this group to become more socially and politically active.

INFORMATION SOURCES

Similarly to the other groups, almost all participants in the focus group expressed a lack of trust in the media and a tendency to follow different media to compare and analyse information.

Many of them expressed revolt against the political bias of the media in the country, stating that the partial and biased reporting of the media deepens the division among the citizens. This is cited as the primary reason for the lack of interest about social and political events in the country. The vast majority of the respondents prefer to watch TV programs about culture, nature and healthy life, as well as documentaries, content which is rarely broadcasted in the media.

Six out of ten survey respondents (58%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information and 15% indicated that they learn also about the socio-political developments via social networks. Seven per cent (7%) of the respondents obtain information via web portals, eleven (11%) through their family and friends and nine per cent (9%) state that they are not informed at all.

Six out of ten survey respondents (58%) indicated that television is their predominant source of information

TV 58%

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Two out of ten respondents have been involved in civic activity and express interest to be more civically engaged.

Have you been involved in any event, activity, or process that could have effected any change in the community or the place where you live?



Are you interested in a more active civic involvement?



The focus group participants indicated the following factors that contribute to their low civic involvement and civic participation, which are very similar to the factors emphasized by other demographic groups:

- ♦ Most people are passive and wait for others to take responsibility i.e. wait for “someone else to do the job”.
- ♦ People are disappointed and distrust the institutions.
- ♦ The institutions are dysfunctional, indifferent, and strongly politically influenced. “They are not aware that they are a service to the people. They act like gods”.

However, a number of factors are specific only to this demographic group:

- ♦ The institutions are not familiar with the needs of the persons with disabilities.
- ♦ Institutions lack access points and elevators.

- ♦ A number of associations represent the interests of the persons with disabilities, however there is a lack of coordination of activities, while the presidents of those associations “manipulate us because they take money from the state”.
- ♦ Discrimination against persons with disabilities: “mental barrier among people with regards to persons with disabilities”; stereotyping their behavior that they avoid work and are reluctant to engage in civic activities.
- ♦ No institution in the country takes the lead in the protection of the rights of the persons with disabilities.

“ I think that the biggest problems are the stereotypes and prejudices about persons with disabilities. The society still does not perceive us as people with equal abilities, opportunities and capacities. ”

Female, 44, Skopje

Factors that promote involvement

Personal or family benefits (24%) are the key motivators for most survey respondents to become more involved in activities that could effect change in the community. Other important motivating factors are related to their representation (18%) and responsiveness of the system (14%).

This group tends to be more motivated to participate in social and political life when there are tangible benefits to the quality of their life. Conversely, only 4% of the respondents believe that improving democracy is a factor that promotes involvement. There is an apparent tendency to generalize the efforts for “improving democracy” and to perceive them as an abstraction that does not resonate with the respondents.

Slightly over half of the respondents (51%) do not believe that they can have an impact as a citizen, while more than one quarter (27%) believe they can make a meaningful impact in their municipality.

The survey shows that the Parliament is perceived as a place where they can have the least impact as citizens, despite the direct election of their representatives.

Willingness and ability to participate in civic activities

With regards to participation in public life, the survey respondents are most willing to meet colleagues/friends to discuss an issue of personal or family concern (46%), read a brochure or a leaflet (44%) and respond to a questionnaire (42%). The interest for participation in a public debate (14%), political party gathering (13%), and online meeting (7%) is significantly lower among this group of respondents.

In which of the civic activities are you willing to participate?

42%

Respond a questionnaire



44%

Read a brochure or a leaflet



46%

Meet colleagues, friends to discuss



ELECTION PROCESS

Survey participants most often associate elections in the country with phrases such as “corruption” “green market”, “irregularities”, “bribing votes” and “charade”.

Do you think that every vote is important and can affect the election results?

75%

Yes

14%

No

2%

Refuses to answer

9%

Does not know

Persons with disabilities believe that elections are marred by irregularities. They cite strong political influence and vote-buying in the period **before elections**, pressure and intimidation of citizens, photographing of ballots, etc.

The group further cites a pronounced non-compliance with the requirements concerning voting of persons with disabilities, including:

- ♦ Limited access to polling stations (most of the polling stations are located in schools and there are very few schools with access for persons with disabilities).
- ♦ Lack of ballot frames for the visually impaired persons or failure to provide them to the those in need- “they stay packed in a bag”.

“ If you do not have access ramps for people in wheelchairs, if you do not display the ballot guides for the blind on the tables, it’s a disaster. We have printed for everyone in the polling station an illustrative display of the needs of the persons with disabilities... but they were not displayed in any of the three polling stations I visited during the presidential election. ”

Male, 51, Kumanovo

Most of the respondents remarked that despite training the election board members on voting rights and raising their awareness on the needs of the persons with disabilities, these are not implemented on Election Day. A general observation is that the legal requirements have been put in place; however, there is no effective implementation. A portion of the participants indicates that persons with disabilities from rural areas are particularly discriminated in this regard, leading to their strong disappointment with the work of the

State Election Commission and the election administration.

Data from the survey shows that a significant percentage of persons with disabilities experience difficulties during the voting process due to lack of understanding of the voting procedures (20%). Fourteen per cent (14%) of the survey participants point out that they lack adequate access to the polling stations and 13% lack adequate transportation. However, in general, there are no major difficulties reported by the respondents with regard to voting.

Similarly to the general population, around three quarters of the respondents believe that every vote is important and can impact election results (74%), while 14% do not believe in the importance of every vote.

Compared to the general population, people with disabilities are less inclined to believe that voting per se is not sufficient to engage citizens in policy changes (53% or 11% less than the general population), a quarter (24%) believes that voting is sufficient, while 20% (11% more) claim ignorant on the issue.

Motivation to vote

How regularly do you vote?

34% regularly

20% often

22% sometimes

14% usually not

4% never

Thirty-four per cent (34%) of the survey respondents indicate that they vote almost regularly, 20% often, 22% sometimes, 14% usually do not vote and 4% never vote. This is indicative of the fact that there are fewer regular voters among persons with disabilities compared to the general population (76% always or often vote).

Nearly half of the survey respondents (51%) vote for different political parties, while 33% regularly vote for the same party, which is seven per cent lower than the general population (40% vote regularly for the same party).


Factors that influence their decision to vote

The top three factors that influence the respondents' decision to vote are: perception that voting is a civic right and duty (44%), better prospects (38%) and fear that someone would misuse their vote (29%).

People living in remote communities would like to see more representatives of people they know and young people as candidates on the party lists for elections (or as elected officials, for example in municipal councils).

Six out of ten respondents (60%) indicate that their decision to vote is the same or most often the same as that of their families, while three out of ten (29%) state their decision is the same or most often the same as that of their friends.


44%
Civic right
and duty



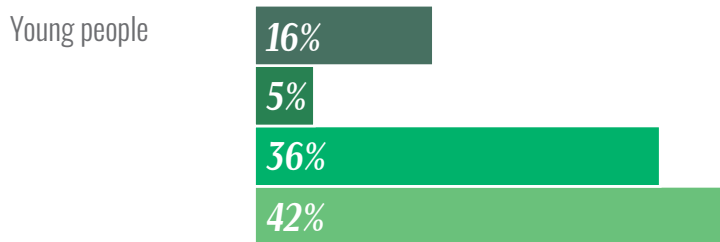
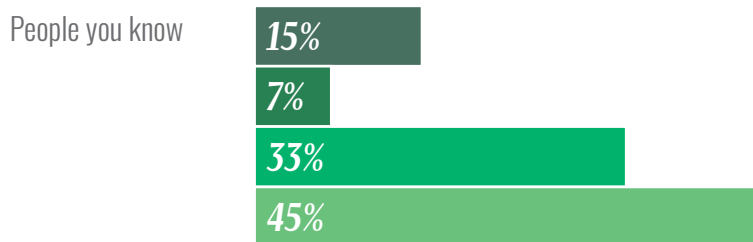
38%
Better
future



29%
Fear that someone
will steal their vote



If there are representatives of the following groups on the candidate lists, how likely is it that you would vote for that political party?



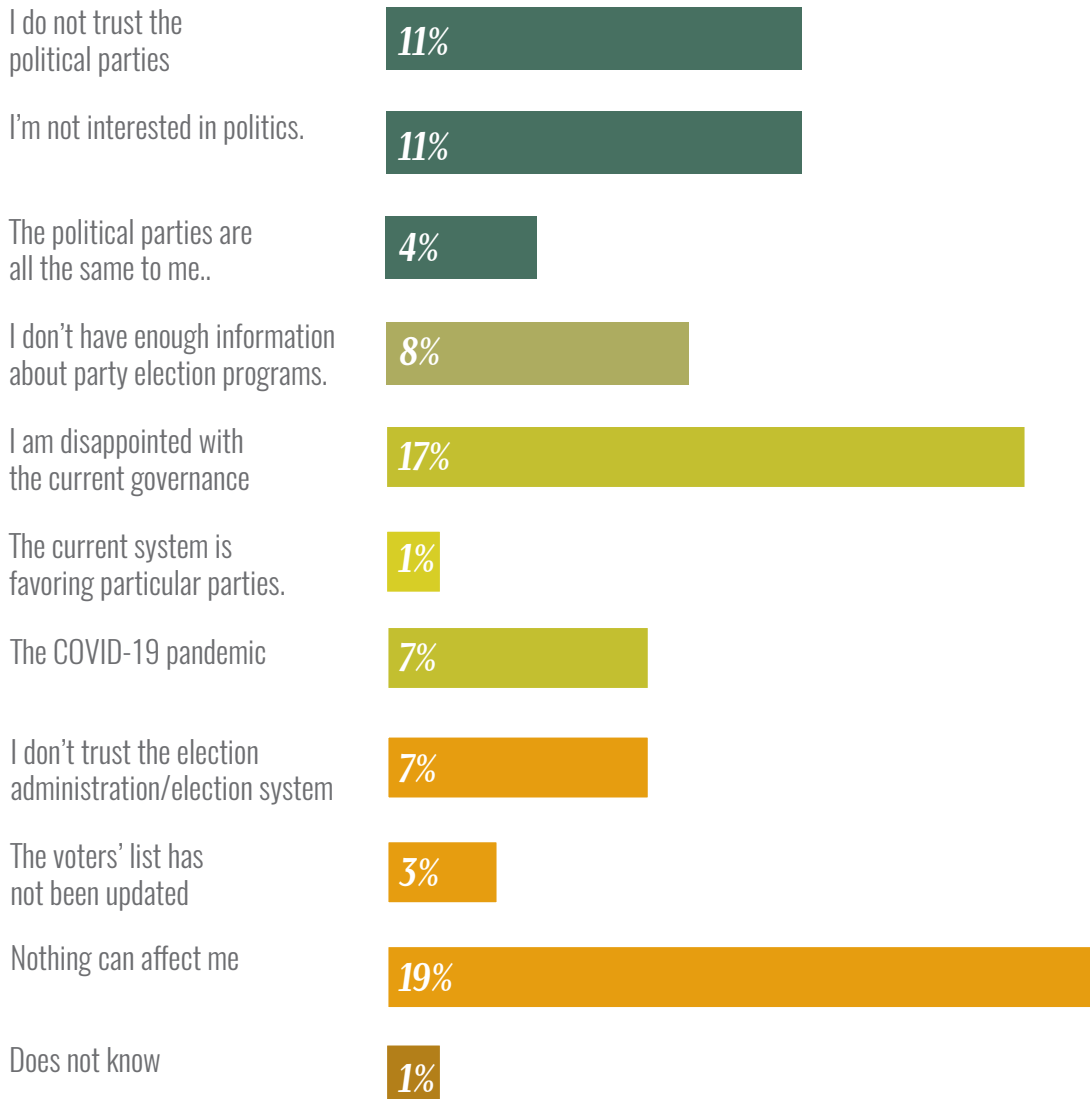
More likely  No impact  Less likely  Do not know 

The survey participants would like to see more representatives of people they know, young people and representatives from their local community on the candidate lists for local and parliamentary elections.

Demotivation to vote

Dissatisfaction with the incumbent government and the political parties demotivates people from remote communities to go out and vote.

What can influence your decision not to vote?



The focus group confirms the findings of the quantitative survey. Most of the participants in the discussion express their dissatisfaction and disappointment with the work of the political parties.

According to this group, abstention from voting is a legitimate right of every citizen and as such sends a significant message to the political parties. Nevertheless, the respondents believe that the political parties are not responsive to or interested in the needs of this category of people.

COMMUNICATION WITH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

TV (58%), friends and family members (13%), and web portals (11%) are the predominant sources of information about elections.



Survey participants indicated that newscasts (69%) and debates (13%) are the most useful ways of sourcing information about elections. Six per cent (6%) indicate that they do not source information about elections at all, whereas 48% find newscasts a more useful method of obtaining election information compared to the general population.

Twenty-seven per cent (27%) of the respondents rely on traditional media as a source of information on elections, whereas 22% rely on the track record of the party candidates and elected representatives when making an informed decision **in the period between elections**.

The focus group findings show that communication with political parties and institutions usually takes place through associations for persons with disabilities or non-governmental organizations that represent their interests.

All participants in the discussion show extreme dissatisfaction with the situation of persons with disabilities and the attitude of the country towards this category of citizens.

They believe that the political parties are interested in persons with disabilities **only before elections** when they make many promises in order to win votes, but once they assume power, they abandon them.

Most of the participants express interest in the political programs of the political parties, mainly out of curiosity, to see to what extent they cater to the needs of the persons with disabilities.

“ No party program includes a single line to address the needs of persons with disabilities. I live in a building and in the mailbox I receive party programs from almost all political parties. None of them mentions us. So, how can we expect anything when they behave as if we do not exist? In their programs, our problems do not exist. ”

Male, 37, Gostivar

Survey participants would like political parties to focus on:

- ♦ Equal representation of all citizens.
- ♦ Equal rights for all citizens in the country.
- ♦ Making realistic and objective promises that they can keep.
- ♦ Improving the rights of the persons with disabilities.
- ♦ Inclusion of the persons with disabilities.

BARRIERS

Persons with disabilities have the right to participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, but there continue to be significant barriers to inclusion of this community.

A set of actions should be undertaken to empower persons with disabilities to equally participate in the socio-political life of the country.

In addition to the barriers identified by the general population, persons with disabilities face:

Physical barriers to political and civic participation and to exercise their rights (limited accessibility to voting places, institutions, etc.).

Physical barriers in everyday life, such as access to public transport or adapted vehicles, which also impacts participation, particularly for the rural population.

Communication barriers - communication not tailored to their specific needs, as recipients of information but also as participants in debates or as guests in programs.

Attitude barriers - they are not perceived as persons with abilities, capacity and potential to contribute to the civic and political life.

The feeling of underrepresentation of their specific needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure that all requirements are met to effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis

- ♦ Ensure that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use.
- ♦ Use new technology where appropriate to enable them to participate.
- ♦ Ensure they have all the necessary voting information in understandable language and user friendly format.

Actively promote an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the socio-political life, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in socio-political life

- ♦ Promote electoral, political and/or public success of persons from these groups.
- ♦ Include and promote candidates from this group.

Create alliances:

With non-government organizations to empower and facilitate civic and political participation of persons with disabilities.

- ♦ Inform and educate about the voting process.
- ♦ Represent their needs.
- ♦ Inform and alarm about the barriers for participation.
- ♦ Give support and strengthen skills of persons with disabilities for confident participation.
- ♦ Set up links between the community of persons with disabilities and the institutions.
- ♦ Strengthen the capacities, position and networking of NGOs to increase their credibility and influence.

With the media (digital and traditional)

- ♦ Promote narratives focused on positive and successful examples of activists among persons with disabilities.
- ♦ Raise awareness about the needs of the people with disabilities.
- ♦ Contribute to building a political culture that encourages persons with disabilities to participate at all levels of society, without fear of discrimination.
- ♦ Make information and programs accessible to persons with disabilities, particularly the voter information.

Choose relevant communication channels

and apply both traditional and non-conventional approaches. Adjust communication and communication channels to their specific needs.

Use TV to reach the majority of the disabled population

- ♦ Use formats that give opportunities to adjust the accessibility of the information.
- ♦ Always add title and sign language to the information presented.
- ♦ Consider other formats in addition to newscasts e.g. debates, editorials, short stories, and testimonials.
- ♦ Whenever possible, present information in an illustrative manner, especially about the voting process, voting rights, reporting election irregularities.

Use social media to cater to the younger population such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.