



# **SACBC JUSTICE AND PEACE**

## **VOTER EDUCATION**

### **MANUAL**



**NOVEMBER 13, 2023**  
**SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE**  
**129 Main Street, Waterkloof, 0181**

# Voter Education Manual

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## 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference Justice and Peace Commission would like to acknowledge that the information contained in this manual is taken directly from the IEC material available on its website. It is adapted in this booklet, for the purpose of conducting voter education for our constituencies.

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## 2. INTRODUCTION

### a. The Purpose of the Manual

This manual is intended to provide general information and guidance on the electoral process in South Africa. It should be updated regularly to reflect any changes in legislation and electoral procedures.

### b. Importance of Voter Education

Voter Education plays a crucial role in ensuring effectiveness and integrity of democratic elections because it empowers citizens by providing them with the knowledge and understanding of their rights, responsibilities and electoral processes. It also enables individuals to make informed decisions.

By educating citizens about the importance of voting and electoral processes, voter education initiatives can combat voter apathy and help increase voter turnout. When more people participate in elections, the legitimacy of the electoral outcomes is strengthened and ensures that the voices of all citizens are represented.

In a nutshell, voter education is a vital component of any

democratic society. By providing citizens with the necessary knowledge and understanding of the electoral process, people are empowered to exercise their democratic rights and actively contribute to shaping the future of their country.

**c. Overview of the electoral process**

The electoral process in South Africa is governed by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and follows a multi-party democracy system. It starts with Voter Registration whereby eligible citizens register to vote. This process is open to individuals from the age of 16 years or older South African citizens with valid South African Identity Document or card. The IEC conducts regular voter registration drives to ensure that eligible citizens are registered to vote. Municipalities also assist eligible citizens to register on an ongoing basis.

**3. Understanding Democracy and Voting Rights**

**a. What does the Church say about Elections and Democracy?**

The Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes the importance of political participation, including elections and democracy. This is expressed in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, paragraph 190:

*“Participation in community life is not only one of the greatest aspirations of the citizen, called to exercise freely and responsibly his civic role with and for others [407], but is also one of the pillars of all democratic orders and one of the major guarantees of the permanence of the democratic system”.*

While the Church does not endorse specific political candidates or parties, she provides guidance and principles to help Catholics engage in the political process in a manner consistent with their faith and the common good. The Church encourages the faithful to actively participate

in the political process, including voting in elections. She views political involvement as a means to promote the common good and to contribute to the building of a just society. Common good refers to the well-being of all members of society. Therefore, Catholics are encouraged to vote for candidates and policies that promote the common good, such as policies that prioritize the needs of the poor and vulnerable. The Church's Social Doctrine describes the Common good, in paragraph 164, as:

*The principle of the common good, to which every aspect of social life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning, stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people. According to its primary and broadly accepted sense, the common good indicates “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily”.[346]*

The Church further says that (in paragraph 166):

*The demands of the common good concern above all the commitment to peace, the organization of the State's powers, a sound juridical system, the protection of the environment, and the provision of essential services to all, some of which are at the same time human rights: food, housing, work, education and access to culture, transportation, basic health care, the freedom of communication and expression, and the protection of religious freedom[350].*

Therefore, the common good principle ought to guide the faithful in their voting decisions as they are called to support candidates and policies that respect and protect human dignity.

## **b. What is Democracy?**

**Democratic:** Treating people equally no matter their status in society; voting for your government; being responsible for your behaviour; acknowledging that people have rights;

getting to know about other people's cultures; respecting people who do things that clash with your culture or religion; having a secret ballot on election days; allowing citizens to elect representatives; not excluding people because of their background or gender; trusting that people will obey the law; free and fair elections; being allowed to express your opinions; freedom, caring for self and others; being able to demonstrate against a decision; having a Constitution; being transparent about your actions and decisions.

**Undemocratic:** Kangaroo courts/mob justice; taking the law into your own hands; behaving in a violent way towards others when you feel your rights have been infringed, discriminating against people on the basis of their sexual orientation; giving members of minorities limits on how much they can learn, earn or own; leadership of government is established using military force; dictatorship, bribing people with money to get your own way; bullying.

### c. The Values of Democracy

**Equality** : All citizens have equal status and are treated equally in terms of their rights, and their right to have access to what the Constitution of their country provides.

**Fairness:** Being free of bias or injustice.

**Accountability:** Being answerable and taking responsibility for your actions and decisions.

**Transparency** : In the political context, this means that decisions and actions are able to be seen and witnessed by others, and communication is open.

**Participation:** The public participate in the government through voting, holding politicians accountable and making full use of their civic rights.

**Reconciliation:** In South Africa, this principle has particular importance because it recognizes the necessity to forgive for the past, pursue peace and build relationships

across the divides set up by apartheid.

**Rule of Law:** The principle that all people and institutions are subject to and accountable to law that is fairly applied.

**Responsiveness:** This is an attribute of the government and the leaders of institutions in the government. It means that they reflect and express the will of the people, so far as possible.

**Representation:** The public feel that their will and opinion is being represented in political spheres and public institutions.

#### **d. Fair and Unfair Elections**

##### **Fair**

- All candidates and parties can campaign without intimidation and restrictions.
- All people have opportunity to register to vote: to get ID books and Smart ID cards.
- Every registered voter can vote, irrespective of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability.
- All citizens can express their political views.
- Elections are conducted, managed and administered impartially and transparently.
- All parties accept the election results.
- Open public debate – ideas and opinions need to be allowed to be freely expressed and debated.

##### **Unfair**

- Bribing people to vote for a particular party
- Discrimination by race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability
- Forging ballots
- Intimidating people to vote for a particular party
- Rigging elections so that a particular party wins

#### **e. How Our Democracy Works**

##### **The Constitution:**

South Africa is a constitutional democracy. The



Constitution is the highest Law in the country. No person can go against it, not even the President. Parliament cannot pass any laws that go against the Constitution. The courts and the government must also make sure that their decisions and behaviour is constitutional. The Constitution contains The Bill of Rights which states the rights and responsibilities of all citizens. The Constitution guarantees democracy through giving every person over the age of 18 the right to vote. It ensures one Voters' Roll for all adult citizens, regular elections, and a multi-party system of government. The Constitution can only be changed if 75% of the members of the National Assembly and six of the nine provinces agree. All aspects of how our democracy works are explained in the Constitution.

### **Separation of Powers:**

The Constitution protects democracy by separating the power of the state into three parts or 'arms':

- The Legislature (Parliament, the nine provincial legislatures and local councils)
- The Executive (the part of government which runs the country from day to day)
- The Judiciary (the courts).

This separation of powers makes sure that citizens are protected from abuses of state power. Each arm of the state checks up on how the other arms are using their power. The courts can judge the actions of the legislatures and the executive but it cannot make laws or take executive action. The executive can run the affairs of the country but it cannot make court judgments or pass laws. The legislatures can make laws but they cannot make court judgments or take executive action.

### **The Government:**

The political party that wins the majority of seats in an election for Parliament (more than 50%) has the right to form the government. It is called the majority or ruling party.

The other parties are called minority parties or opposition parties. The government is not permanent – the citizens give it the right to rule the country for five years. After five years, elections are held and the citizens vote again. They may or may not vote again for the current government. The President is elected by Parliament after an election.

He or she forms the government by appointing the Deputy President and the Cabinet. The Cabinet is made up of the President, the ministers and the deputy ministers. Each minister leads a government department. For example, the Minister of Finance leads the Department of Finance, the Minister of Health leads the Department of Health, etc. These departments are responsible for running the country, e.g. The Department of Education makes decisions about education and schooling. The government is divided into different spheres: the national government manages the affairs that affect the whole country, the provincial governments manage the affairs of the provinces, and the municipal governments manage the affairs of the cities and towns.

#### **f. Voting Rights and Universal Suffrage**

Voting and Universal Suffrage are important aspects of a democratic society. Voting is a fundamental right and a key mechanism through which citizens participate in the political process. It allows individual citizens to publicly express their preferences and opinions on various issues and elect representatives who will make decisions on their behalf. Through voting, citizens play a crucial role in shaping the government and policies of their country.

Universal suffrage refers to the principle that all adult citizens, regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, social status or any other characteristic, have the right to vote in free and fair elections. It ensures that the political system

is inclusive and represents the interests of the entire population. Prior to 1994, South Africa did not have universal suffrage.

In summary, voting and universal suffrage are essential components of democratic societies, enabling citizens to participate in the political process and ensuring equal representation for all citizens.

**g. The role of citizens in a democracy**

In a democracy, citizens play a crucial role in shaping the governance and functioning of their country, through voting, participating in political processes, holding elected officials accountable, informing themselves and engaging in informed discussions, respecting the rule of law, volunteering and participating in civic activities and exercising rights and freedoms responsibly. Citizens in a democracy have rights and responsibilities. Their active participation, engagement, and responsible exercise of rights are fundamental to maintaining a healthy and vibrant democratic system.

**4. Electoral System in South Africa**

The electoral system in South Africa is a mixed one, combining elements of both proportional representation and constituency-based representation. It is designed to promote inclusivity and proportional representation while also giving some level of regional representation.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, the President of the Republic assented to the Electoral Amendment Bill, which is now an Act that allows independent candidates to contest national and provincial elections.

**a. Proportional Representation**

The National Assembly is elected through proportional representation. Political parties compile lists of candidates

and voters cast their votes for a specific party rather than for individual candidates. The number of seats a party gets is determined by the percentage of the total votes it receives in the election. 2024

**b. Constituency-based Representation**

There is also a constituency-based representation component. The National Assembly has 400 seats, and 200 of these are allocated through a first-past-the-post system.

**c. Mixed Electoral System**

The mixed electoral system aims to strike a balance between national representation based on party preference and regional representation based on individual candidates. It allows for a diverse range of political parties to be represented in the National Assembly while also ensuring that specific regions have their own representatives.

**d. Independent Candidacy**

As mentioned in the previous section, independent candidates will be able to contest the national and provincial elections in 2024. Therefore, in the national elections, independent candidates will contest the 200 regional seats alongside political parties, while the other 200 seats will be compensatory to bring back general proportionality for political parties. This means that the total votes for a party in a region determine the number of seats they hold. Remember that, as an individual, an independent candidate can only occupy one seat, even if they contest in multiple regions.

**5. Registering to Vote**

**a. Eligibility Criteria**

To vote in elections in South Africa you need to register as a voter. But who can register as a voter?

- You must be a South African citizen;

- You must have a South African bar-coded Identity Document (ID), a smartcard ID or a temporary ID certificate;
- You must be 16 years or older (but you will only be able to vote when you are 18 years or older); and
- You have to register in person. Nobody can do it for you.

**REMEMBER:**

- If you do not have your green bar-coded ID book or a smartcard ID, you need to apply for one at the Department of Home Affairs. It takes two to four weeks.
- Once you have registered to vote, you do not need to re-register to vote in future elections.

**b. Voter Registration Process**

- The barcode of your ID or smartcard will be scanned. The registration official will place a receipt in your ID book or on a form.

The receipt will show:

- Proof of application
- Your ID numbers
- The voting district number of your voting station
- Date and time of your application
- Your ID book/smartcard will be checked when you vote to make sure that it is YOU. Your personal details on the Voters' Roll will be the same as on your ID/smartcard.

**c. Importance of Keeping Voter Information Updated**

How do you check if you are registered?

Check at your local IEC Office from Monday to Friday during office hours.

SMS your ID number to 32810.

Go to the IEC website ([www.elections.org.za](http://www.elections.org.za)) and follow the link "Am I registered to vote?"

Before general elections, check the Voters' Roll at your voting station where you are registered to vote. You can do this during the voter registration weekends.

## d. Rights and Responsibilities Cards:

### **RIGHT:**

#### **To vote in elections**

All South African citizens, 18 years of age or over and registered on the Voters' Roll have the right to vote. No person can be prevented from voting because of their appearance, religion, wealth, disability, racial background, or where they live.

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### **RESPONSIBILITY:**

#### **Register as voters**

It's your responsibility to register on the Voters' Roll. Only people who have registered to vote may vote in an election. People can register to vote when they are 16 years old so that they are on the Voters' Roll ready to vote at the next election after they turn 18. Voters are required to reregister on the Voters' Roll if they move house.

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### **RIGHT:**

#### **Participate in regular elections**

It is the law for elections to be held every 5 years. This is outlined in the South African Constitution. Voters have the right to vote in national, provincial, and local elections.

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### **RESPONSIBILITY:**

#### **Be 'active citizens'**

This means having your say in choosing representatives who make decisions that affect your life. Citizens need to be aware of the issues that affect their lives and choose representatives who will take action on those issues.

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### **RIGHT:**

#### **To vote in elections**

All voters have one vote in each election. This is the same for everyone. Votes cannot be bought or sold, nor can extra votes be given to people. Every vote has the same value.

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### **RESPONSIBILITY:**

#### **Know how to fill out a ballot paper correctly**

Voters should understand how the voting system works, from filling out a ballot paper correctly, to how it is counted when all the votes are collected. If a ballot paper is not filled out correctly, that vote cannot be counted.

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**RIGHT:****Secret ballot**

Citizens vote in secret. A voting booth is provided to prevent others from seeing how each person votes. The secret ballot allows people to vote without fear of intimidation from others and reduces the risk of bribery.

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S O U T H A F R I C A

**RESPONSIBILITY:****Register as voters**

From the age of 18, it's your civic responsibility to vote in elections, by-elections, and referendums.

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S O U T H A F R I C A

## 6. Political Parties and Candidates

### a. Role of Political Parties in Elections

Political parties play a crucial role in elections through nomination of candidates. Political parties select and nominate candidates to run for various offices in elections. They do this by conducting party conferences or conventions to select candidates who align with their party's values and objectives. They (political parties) also formulate policies that reflect their ideologies and visions for governance. Then they mobilize voters through various activities such as rallies, door-to-door campaigns and media adverts to vote for their candidates. They also fundraise to support their campaigns; they conduct voter education. If they win, they form governments.

Overall, parties play a crucial role in elections by serving as a vehicle for candidates, mobilizing voters, shaping policies and influencing the outcome of election.

### b. Understanding Party Manifestos

A political party manifesto is a document that outlines the party's vision, goals and proposed policies. It is crucial for citizens understand these political party manifestos. Comprehending these documents enables citizens to assess how well a party aligns with their values and priorities and the party's stance on critical issues such as the economy, social justice, education, healthcare, public

safety (crime) and corruption. to make informed decisions during elections. Manifestos also help the citizens to hold parties accountable for their promises.

**c. Evaluating candidates**

Evaluating party candidates prior to elections is crucial for making an informed choice. Researching about candidates' education, work experience and track record, with a view to find accomplishments or controversies is critical. It is equally important to explore candidates' integrity, ethics, character.

**7. Understanding the Ballot**

**a. Types of Elections in South Africa**

In South Africa there are several types of elections that take place at different levels of government. There are National and Provincial elections which are held simultaneously. National elections determine the composition of the National Assembly while the provincial elections determine the provincial legislature.

Another type of election in Municipal/local government election which are held to elect representatives for local government structures such as municipal councils.

Lastly, there are by elections. By-elections are held when vacancies arise between elections.

**b. Components of Ballot Paper**

The right front of the template has a flap which has cut- out windows numbered in Braille and in large, raised white print. When the ballot paper is inserted into the template, each window aligns to a particular candidate or party and the voter is free to make his or her secret and independent mark accurately.



### **c. Marking the Ballot Correctly**

How to make your mark?

- Make your mark in the box next to the party of your choice.
- Be careful not to let your mark touch any of the walls of the box.
- Make only one mark on the ballot paper:
  - It is best to make a cross like this: X
- Any mark is fine as long as it shows who you are voting for. This helps the voting officials when they count the votes.
- If you have made a mistake, tell the election official. He or she will then cancel your ballot paper. You will be given a new one.
- Fold each ballot paper in half, so nobody can see your mark.

An election official will check the stamp on the back of each ballot. Then place each provincial and national ballot paper in the correct ballot box.

### **d. What is the Universal Ballot Template (UBT)?**

The UBT is a voting aid made of hard, black plastic into which a ballot paper is inserted. The right front of the template has a flap which has cut- out windows numbered in Braille and in large, raised white print. When the ballot paper is inserted into the template, each window aligns to a particular candidate or party and the voter is free to make his or her secret and independent mark accurately.

### **e. Who can use the UBT?**

Blind and partially sighted people

Low-vision users

People who are dyslexic

The elderly

People with low literacy

People with motor and nervous conditions that do not allow for a steady hand

**f. When can the UBT be used?**

National and Provincial Elections  
Local Government Elections  
By-elections

**g. Can the UBT be used for special votes?**

Yes, it can be used at the voting station and for home visits.

Assistance to make your mark:

- Voters with disabilities or special needs may ask for assistance from a companion to mark their ballot paper(s). Such a companion must be:
- Eighteen (18) years or older
- Not a party agent, candidate or observer

**8. The Electoral Code of Conduct**

**a. What is the Electoral Code of Conduct?**

The Code is a set of rules. The parties and candidates must:

- speak out against political violence and threats against other parties, the IEC, members of the public and the media;
- let the authorities know about planned marches or rallies;
- communicate with other political parties about planned political events;
- recognise the authority of the IEC;
- work with the IEC structures and allow them to perform their duties;
- work with the police in their investigation of election crime and violence; and
- accept the results of the election or challenge the result in court.

## **b. How does the Code of Conduct work?**

The Electoral Code of Conduct must be agreed to by:

- every registered party before the party takes part in an election; and
  - every candidate before he/she is placed on the list of candidates.
- Parties and candidates must stick to the code and must:
  - let the public know about the Code;
  - promote the purpose of the Code; and
  - support efforts to educate voters.
- Parties and candidates must also inform the public that all people (including women, persons with disabilities, and different language and cultural groups) have the right:
  - to be free to express their political beliefs and to be part of any political party; and
  - to join in any political campaigns, marches or public meetings.

## **What happens when you break the Code of Conduct?**

Any person who breaks the Code is guilty of a crime and can be fined or sent to prison for up to 10 years.

Political parties that break the Code can:

- be fined;
- be stopped from working in an area; or
- have their votes in an area cancelled.

## **9. Fraud and Offences**

Electoral fraud refers to illegal interference with the process of an election through deliberate wrongdoing.

Electoral fraud is a crime. Do not do the following:

- Do not get someone to give false information when registering to vote.
- Do not provide false information when registering as a voter.

- Do not register to vote or vote using the name of another person (living or dead).
- Do not register to vote in a voting district in which you do not reside.
- Do not vote in an election or voting station when you are not allowed to vote.
- Do not vote more than once in an election.
- Do not pretend to be one of the following:
  - an official of the Electoral Commission
  - a representative of a registered political party
  - a candidate in an election
  - an accredited observer
  - an accredited voter education official

It is an electoral offence to force anybody to do the following:

- To register to vote or not to register to vote
- To vote or not to vote in an election
- To support or not to support a political party or candidate
- To vote or not to vote for a political party or candidate
- To attend or not to attend a political event or rally of a political party
- To interfere with the fairness or independence of the Electoral Commission or any officer of the Electoral Commission.

The following behaviour is illegal. Do not:

- prevent someone from speaking to other voters;
- prevent a political event or rally from being held when you do not have the right to do so;
- bribe or influence an official of the Electoral Commission while they are doing their duty;
- misinform the Electoral Commission when you are asked to provide a statement.
- publish false information about an election that may disrupt, prevent or influence the election results;
- publish false information that may create anger or fear

- and could change the election results;
- interfere with a voter's right to secrecy when he or she is voting;
- give information about voting or the counting of votes when you are not allowed to;
- interfere with any voting materials;
- make, produce or supply election materials when by law you are not allowed to;
- remove, hide or destroy election materials when by law you are not allowed to;
- damage or remove election posters, billboards or placards – this is not allowed from the date that an election is proclaimed until the election results have been given out by the Electoral Commission;
- use the voters' roll or election materials for purposes other than the election;
- prevent the Electoral Commission from doing their duties in running the election; or try to harm the honesty and dignity of the Electoral Commission.

What happens if you commit electoral fraud or any of the offences listed?

- You may be fined.
- You may be sent to prison for up to ten years.

## **10. Election Campaign and Media Literacy**

### **a. Role of Election Campaigns**

The role of election campaign is to inform and persuade voters about the candidates or parties and their policies. Campaigns aim to create awareness among voters about the upcoming elections, the candidates, issues at stake to mobilize support for the candidates and parties. They also provide an opportunity for candidates to engage directly with the public. All in all, election campaigns aim to influence voter behavior and secure the majority of votes needed to win an election.

## b. Evaluating Campaign Promises

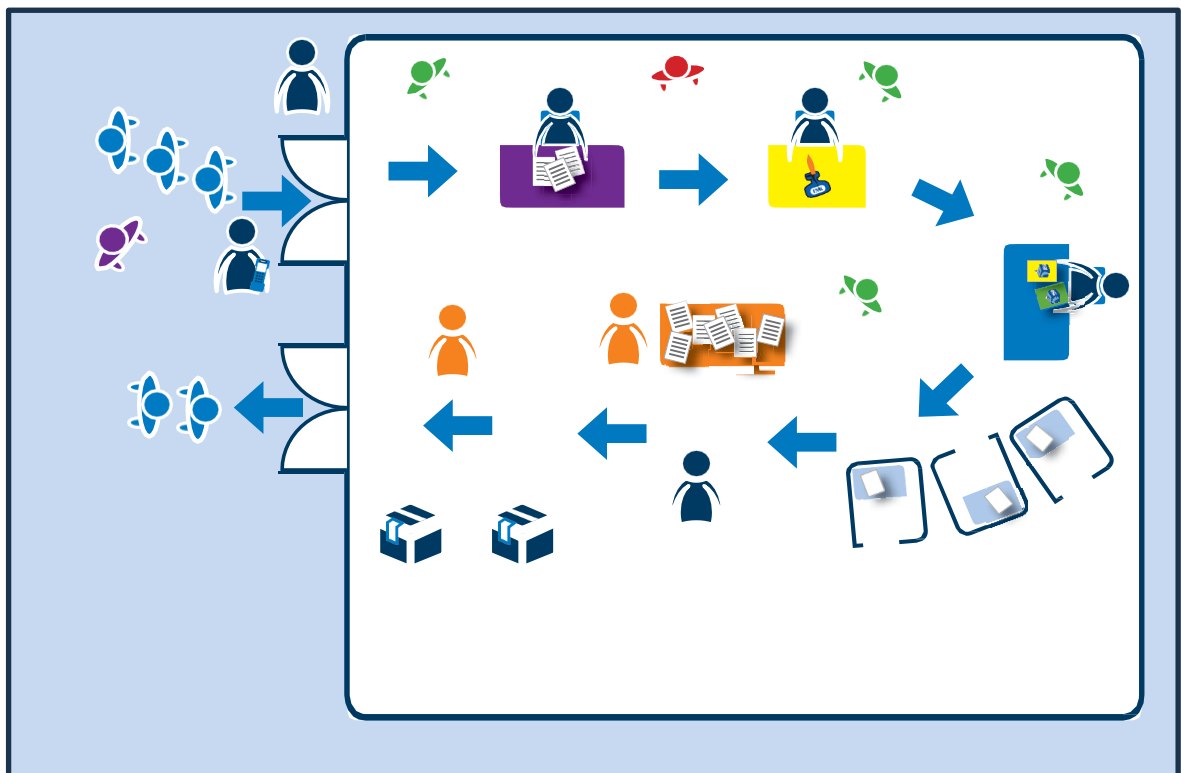
Evaluating campaign promises is an important aspect of assessing candidates and their suitability for office by examining the feasibility of their promises: are they realistic, practical and whether they are achievable within the promised timeframe. It's important to approach campaign promises with a critical mindset and not rely solely on rhetoric.

## c. Media Literacy and Evaluating Information

Media literacy and the ability to evaluate information are crucial skills in today's digital age. With the abundance of information available online, it is important to be able to discern reliable sources from misleading or fake news. Discerning will entail learning to verify the source providing the information. Look for the signs of bias, political affiliation, commercial interests, whether the source is appropriately qualified. Consider the intentions behind the information.

## 11. Voting Procedures

### a. Election Day Procedures



**b. Assisted Voting for Persons with Disability**

Assisted voting for people with disability is an important aspect of ensuring inclusivity and equal participation in the democratic process. Accessibility of voting locations, assistive technology, trained staff to provide necessary assistance, proxy voting, mobile voting can all contribute to ensuring inclusivity. In this regard, it is important to consult with and involve organizations representing people with disabilities in discussion and decision-making process related to assisted voting.

**12. Counting and Results**

**a. Vote Counting Process**

The vote counting process in South Africa follows a structured and transparent approach. At the counting venue officials verify the seals on the ballot boxes, to ensure that they have not been tampered with. The counting process begins with election officials sequentially counting the votes for each candidate or party. The votes are recorded on an official tally sheet before they are captured electronically. This process is closely monitored by political party agents.

**b. Role of Election Observers**

Unlike party agents, election observers can be present in the room to observe whether all the steps and process outlined above is followed accordingly and makes notes.

**13. Civic Participation Beyond Voting**

**a. Engaging in Community Politics**

Engaging in community politics is a great way to make a positive impact and contribute to your local area. Attending community meetings to stay informed about local issues, joining community organizations, volunteering, supporting local businesses, engaging in online forums and social media are some of the ways to engage in community politics.