

זולת
לשויון זכויות אדם

HEALTHY DEMOCRACY

Choosing a Model for Safe Voting During Corona

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SUMMARY

This operational policy paper aims to address the constitutional, legal and logistical problems that are likely to arise should Israel go to the polls during the corona crisis. According to a comparative study we conducted of 27 countries, elections held during the corona pandemic that did not introduce new voting tools (that is, held only under social distancing rules) had a significant cooling effect on one of the most fundamental rights in a democracy: The right to vote.

The study shows that in the eight countries where no new voting tools were introduced, the voting rate on Election Day dropped by 8% -15% and morbidity shot up significantly. In contrast, in countries that adopted safe or expansive models that added new tools to the classic in-person vote, such as early voting or mail voting, the citizens' right to vote was unimpaired and the elections did not lead to a surge in morbidity.

Consequently, to adapt the voting system in Israel to the corona period, we propose to implement the safe model used in 13 countries by adding Article 70B to the Election Law on "voting arrangements in the event of a health emergency," which would go into effect with the approval of a majority of 61 MKs. The proposed arrangements shall provide for the possibility of 14-day early voting, an increase in the number of polling stations, and voting by mail for citizens with underlying conditions, those required to observe self-isolation, and confirmed corona patients.

In light of the above, the fact that the Central Election Committee (CEC) is the body in charge of organizing the elections, and the fact that the elections to the 24th Knesset are taking place during the corona pandemic at a time when Israel's population (including eligible voters) has not yet attained full immunity from the virus, we proposed to the CEC to adopt the safe model, consisting of four

major tools for ensuring both the right to vote and the right to health, including a shuttle service, the option of early voting, and the option of voting by mail.

Indeed, following our proposals, the CEC recently ruled that in the case of voters either sick with corona or required to self-isolate, the voting will be done at drive-in polling stations accessible by car. In accordance with our fourth recommendation, **the CEC also set up a shuttle service that will allow sick or self-isolating voters to vote in a way that upholds both their right to vote and the right to public health, and that will prevent the virus from spreading.**