

Pollwatching:

A handbook for political parties in Yemen

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What is a pollwatcher?

In this election in Yemen, political candidates are permitted under the election law to appoint voters to serve as their representatives at the voting stations.

These representatives have an important job and play an important part in representing the interests of their candidates and parties on election day. Their job includes:

- Ensuring that everything at the voting station is in order before the voting begins.
- Staying at the voting place all throughout election day to record any unusual or improper activity they observe, and reporting this activity to their candidate and party.
- Representing their candidate when the votes are counted at the end of voting day and making sure that every possible vote for their candidate is properly counted within the provisions of the election law.

What is pollwatching?

Democracy works because people watch it work. Here in Yemen, and around the world, the success of an election depends not just on the participation of the voters, but just as importantly, it depends on the participation of thousands of observers who will attend voting stations from Hudaydah to Al Ghayda and from Saada to Aden. Their job will be to watch what happens and record what they see.

Some of these "pollwatchers" will be international observers, visiting from countries around the world -- observers with no stake in who wins or loses the elections, but only in helping, by their presence, to make the election more fair and open than it might otherwise be. Other pollwatchers will come from domestic observer organizations, like the *Arab Democratic Institute and the Election Monitoring Committee*. They also are neutral in their work, working with the international observer delegations to accurately record and report the events that they see on election day.

By their mere presence in elections, pollwatchers can reduce the number of irregularities in an election. Quite simply, the greater the scrutiny of the election process, the less likely individuals or parties are to believe they can violate the election laws without being caught.

Here in Yemen, the election law says that:

"Candidates running for election have the right to enter the election hall of balloting and they have the right to choose one of those registered in the voters list to represent them ... it is not permissible for anyone to enter the balloting hall except those registering in the schedule when they wish to cast their votes, **and the candidates and/or their representatives.**"

Clearly, since the candidates will have many places to be and many things to do on election day, and since the election law makes special provision for these representatives, the job of those

representatives on election day will be very important.

Why do parties pollwatch?

If there are all these thousands of neutral observers in all 301 constituencies on election day, then what is the use in candidates and parties trying to do the same thing? They're not like these other groups -- they're not neutral. So why would a party want to spend its time and resources on such an effort?

The representatives of political parties and candidates at the voting stations play a role at least as important as the other observers, exactly because they're not neutral. Parties and candidates have their own interests at heart, first and foremost. This "self-interest" can provide a greater guarantee of electoral fairness than any number of international observers. The parties' interests will include making sure that every possible vote in their favor is counted and making sure that their opponents play by the rules. When many parties are present at the voting stations on election day, watching carefully over each others' activities, they in themselves provide an important deterrent to those who would attempt to manipulate the election process.

Pollwatchers aren't just important in new democracies like Yemen, though. In Western countries, party pollwatchers are the key to honesty at the voting station. In the United States, for example, thousands of pollwatchers represent the interests of their parties (and keep a close eye on their opponents) on election day and Canadian and British political parties mount even larger efforts.

Pollwatching is also an important strategic element of any political party's election campaign effort. After months of campaigning, the outcome of the election will be decided in one day. Yemeni election law provides for each candidate to appoint a person to represent them at the voting station, but efforts by the parties to coordinate the efforts of these individual representatives serve not only the interests of the party, but the individual candidates as well. The party can play an important role in making sure that those representatives know what to watch for and what to do on election day, and in making sure that those representatives provide accurate and detailed reports of what they witnessed. The party and candidates will then be better able to file complaints after election day if they have concerns about possible irregularities. Just as

importantly, the party and candidates will be better able to defend themselves against any complaints that may be brought by their opponents.

Pollwatching is also political tool by which you can judge your political environment. Reports from voting stations in all nineteen governorates will help you to assess, throughout the day, voter turnout in regions throughout the country -- whether voter turnout is high in areas where your party is traditionally strong, or whether people are more likely to vote in areas of your opponents' strength. In some countries, an important function of pollwatchers is to monitor whether known supporters of a party have cast their vote. If necessary, the party can then mobilize other resources throughout the day to ensure that those voters don't forget to vote, and to assist in arranging a ride to the voting station, child care, or anything the voter might need in order to get to the polls.

In addition, pollwatching can be an effective way of gauging the strength and organization of your opponents on election day, as well as your own ability to mobilize such an effort. This information can be very helpful to you in building your party, and in planning for future election campaigns.

Before Election Day:

Building a plan:

The success of your party's election day pollwatching program will in large part be a result of the planning you put into it. Such a technical task requires careful planning, weeks and sometimes months in advance. Only by developing a thorough written plan can you and your party be confident that your objectives will be met and that all the members of your team will clearly understand their respective roles.

1. What are you trying to achieve?

Even the smallest or poorest party or bloc can, with the proper planning, mount a successful pollwatching effort by focusing their energies on key constituencies and voting stations, and the

most crucial part of planning your pollwatching program will be defining an ambitious yet realistic objective. Different parties will have different resources available to them -- one might be able to mount a full-scale nationwide pollwatching program, while another might lack the financial resources, the volunteer base, or the national presence for such an ambitious undertaking. The most important thing is to ensure that resources are deployed where they are most needed.

For example, your party will likely go through the strategic exercise of determining which constituencies you will most likely win, which constituencies will most likely be won by your opponent, and most importantly, which constituencies will be so close that a few votes could make the difference between a victory and a defeat. Proper planning will allow you to make better use of your resources in these key targeted constituencies.

Be realistic about what you think you can achieve in your pollwatching program. Assess the resources that you have available to you, and the geographical areas where those resources will have the greatest impact. You will be better off having set modest goals, and implemented a thorough and precise pollwatching campaign in a few areas than to attempt to spread limited resources across the country.

2. How long will it take to organize?

In addition to the general objectives you set for your pollwatching effort, you should also set specific goals for your campaign along a "timeline." Your timeline should begin now, at the outset of the planning process, and should include specific dates for the various tasks you need to complete. For example, at what date must you have decided which constituencies you will target? At what date will you have appointed area coordinators to accept responsibility for training and organizing the pollwatchers in these areas or governorates? At which date will you have identified all the individuals who will be working as your pollwatchers in these governorates? At what date will you begin your training of pollwatchers, and at what date will the training be completed?

On election day itself, you should set specific hour-by-hour objectives on your timeline so that you'll be able to track events as they occur.

Your timeline should also extend beyond election day. You must determine the date by which your pollwatchers' final reports must be submitted to you, and when and how this information will be summarized and presented to your candidates and the leadership of your party or coalition.

3. How will you organize your program?

Organization is also crucial to a successful pollwatching program. One way of organizing your pollwatching effort is known as a "Zone System" or a "Hub and Spoke" system. This system allows a central pollwatching headquarters to receive reports throughout the day from a number of "Zone Houses." Each zone house is centrally located between a number of constituencies or voting stations. The zone house will receive reports throughout the day from all the pollwatchers located in its "zone." Coordinators at the zone house will examine the reports as they come in, ensuring that they are clear and complete, and filing regular reports throughout the day with the pollwatching headquarters.

Sometimes this system is used allowing pollwatchers to submit their reports verbally by telephone, but in most places it can be more practical for the zone house to coordinate drivers to constantly tour all the voting stations, receiving reports from the pollwatcher assigned to each station. The drivers then return periodically to the zone house to file the reports. Your driver doesn't have to use a car -- a motorcycle or even a bicycle can often do the job just as well.

You may choose to have any number of Zone Houses, and each Zone House may have any number of voting stations under its jurisdiction. In sparsely populated rural areas, a zone house might be responsible for only a few, or even just one or two, voting stations. Again, look realistically at your resources and the constituencies which you will be targeting, and build your

structure to suit your abilities and your objectives. (See Diagram: Illustration of Zone System)

4. Who will be on your team?

Parties and candidates will be served well by appointing a strong team of election day pollwatchers. The pollwatcher is on the front lines of the campaign's election day team, and must understand his or her duties well, and have the necessary skills for this important job.

What should you look for in choosing your pollwatchers?

Disciplined

Election day is a stressful time -- not just for candidates and parties, but also for election officials, other election observers, and for many voters who have strong opinions in favor of their own candidates. Sometimes conflict can arise, and tempers may flare. It is important that your pollwatcher have the discipline to maintain their role of observing and recording the events that take place. While problems will inevitably arise at voting stations wherever elections are held, the pollwatcher must understand that these problems will not be solved by angry words or violence, and that it is not their role to find immediate solutions to these problems. The Election Law provides for legal avenues for concerns to be addressed, and these mechanisms must be respected if the elections are to proceed in a peaceful and orderly way.

The pollwatcher must understand that their value as a credible witness on behalf of their candidate and their party will be diminished if they allow themselves to be drawn into conflict on election day.

Able to read and write

It is very important that your pollwatchers be very comfortable reading and writing. The most important product of a pollwatcher's efforts will be the written reports they submit -- reports that must record events accurately, and in great detail. These reports will form the basis of the

post-election analysis of the party and the individual candidate. A well-written and well-documented report will carry considerably more credibility with the relevant authorities should you need to raise or respond to any concerns following the election.

Available

Finally, your pollwatchers should be available for all of election day, from the early morning when the ballot boxes arrive at the voting station, to the end of the day when the counting of the votes is completed. That's a long day, no matter who's doing the job. Make sure when building your team that your pollwatchers can commit to being at the voting station all day, and won't need to leave to meet other commitments. Your pollwatcher should be in good health, so that they will be able to be strong and focused throughout this challenging day.

Training

Prior to election day, your campaign organizers will want to meet with your pollwatchers to provide them with the necessary materials and with the necessary training for them to complete their job. While it is important that these training sessions be well planned and organized, it is also often useful to hold the sessions as near as possible to election day itself. You will be providing important information to your pollwatchers, and they will be more able to meet your expectations if the training is still fresh in their minds.

You may choose to hold a few large training sessions if your targeted areas are densely populated and close together, or you may wish to hold several smaller training sessions. Avoid having more than twenty people in a training session -- fifteen is an ideal number of participants. Trying to train too many people at once could result in some participants not having all their questions answered. A small group also allows your trainers to individually assess your potential pollwatchers, and ensure that they have the skills necessary for the job.

The training sessions do not need to be long and complicated -- keeping your instructions simple

and straightforward is the best way to make sure they get followed.

Choose your participants well in advance of the training, and make sure that your training session is only open to those who are there to be trained, and those who are there to teach. Too many people involving themselves in giving instructions or providing advice can create unnecessary confusion at the training session itself. You must convey to your pollwatchers the importance of being well organized and having clearly defined roles, and the training sessions provide an opportunity for you to set an example for them to respect and follow.

Assign key campaign members to serve as pollwatcher trainers, and ensure that they conduct all training of pollwatchers themselves.

Each pollwatcher should be given a "Pollwatcher's Kit" that will contain all the materials they will need for their election day work. Key elements of this kit might include:

1. A simple 1 or 2 page summary of your instructions to your pollwatcher.
2. A 1 page "checklist" that includes a variety of common situations that the pollwatcher must note and record.
3. Blank incident report forms, on which the pollwatcher will record any possible violations of the election law, or other unusual incidents, to be submitted throughout election day.
4. A blank "pollwatcher's log" form on which the pollwatcher can record significant events as they occur, to be filed at the end of the day.
5. A "vote count" form for recording the final vote tally.
6. A good supply of blank notepaper and writing pens.
7. Information on where to report at the end of the final vote count, and how and when to submit their final reports.

There may be other items which you'll want your pollwatchers to bring with them -- warm clothes for the evening, or a hat for the sun, or a bottle of drinking water to help them through the day.

You should ensure that each of your pollwatchers brings a reliable clock or wristwatch; an accurate notation of the time of day will be necessary on reports filed by the representative. Consult with local election officials, and if possible, visit voting locations in advance of election day to better anticipate problems or special needs which may arise.

Ideally your training session will be close enough to election day that you will have finalized your organizational plans, and will be able to give each pollwatcher their specific instructions as to where and when they will report to their stations on election day.

Election Day

Your campaign's planning and training will all be put to the test on election day, and it is crucial that each member of your pollwatcher team clearly understands his or her role and responsibility. Your pollwatchers must understand the importance of undertaking their task in a focused, disciplined, and professional way from the time they arrive in the morning until the submission of their final report.

Before Voting Begins:

Your pollwatchers should be instructed to arrive at their voting stations well ahead of the time that voting is scheduled to begin, as they will have several important jobs to do before the polls open at 8:00.

First, they must examine the voting station itself, checking to ensure that the station is properly identified and located. Renaming or moving voting stations is one way in which voters may become confused.

Next, your pollwatcher should evaluate the environment inside the voting station. The arrangement of the voting station should be such that voters can be confident of casting their ballot in secrecy. The voting station's layout and the systems established by the local election

officials should be well organized. Although a voting station is a busy environment, a good organization by election officials helps to keep voters from becoming confused or intimidated. Third, before voting begins, your pollwatchers should take a moment to introduce themselves and become acquainted with other authorized individuals at the voting station, including representatives for other parties or candidates, the election officials responsible for the voting station, and representatives from domestic and international election monitoring organizations. It is vital to stress to your pollwatchers the importance of showing courtesy towards other representatives at the voting station, especially those representing other candidates and campaigns. Establishing an atmosphere of respect and cooperation at the beginning of the day will serve everyone's interests.

Fourth, your pollwatchers should inspect the election materials that will be used at the voting station. Prior to the beginning of voting, they should check to ensure that the ballot boxes are empty. They should check to make sure that sufficient materials, including indelible ink, ballot boxes, sealing wax, tape, tally sheets, voting booths, tables, etc., are on hand. Finally, your pollwatcher should check the ballots that will be used at your voting station to ensure your candidate's name and symbol properly appear, and check to see that the voters' registration lists are on hand and in proper order. Prior to the opening of voting, the election officials will count the number of ballots received by them for use throughout the day. Pollwatchers should observe this counting of ballots, and record the number of ballots on hand at the beginning of the day.

The voting process:

When voting begins, the pollwatchers' work will begin in earnest, and their most important role throughout the day will be to serve as the eyes and ears of their respective candidates and parties. It is crucial that your party's leadership and candidates are fully informed about any irregularities or perceived irregularities during election day, either witnessed by you or alleged against you.

Voter Eligibility:

The first step in the voting process is usually to determine whether or not the potential voter is properly registered under the provisions of the Election Law. Each registered voter will have received a registration card which will include the voter's photograph, full name, date of birth, and the constituency in which the person is eligible to vote. A voter who has lost his or her registration card must apply to have their card replaced up to one week before election day, but will not be entitled to vote if they have not done so.

Upon arriving at the voting station, the voter must present his or her registration card to the local election committee officials. The committee will check to make sure that the card is the voter's own, and that the voter is registered in the proper constituency. Then, the committee will look to make sure the voter's name appears in the schedule of voters. Finally, the committee will check the voter's thumbs for ink, which would indicate that the individual has already voted that day (see Voting, below.) If the voter's name is there, and the individual has not already voted, the committee will place a mark in the schedule next to the name, and give the voter a ballot.

A voter may be denied permission to vote if they do not hold a valid registration card, if their name does not appear on the official schedule of voters, or if they have already voted in that or any other constituency. Every voter must vote for himself only, and may not vote on behalf of friends family members.

One of the most important jobs of the pollwatcher on election day will be to make note of any instances that may arise where a potential voter who appears to be eligible to vote is not permitted to vote, or where a potential voter who does not appear to be eligible is permitted to cast a ballot. It is important in the days following the election that your party is able to determine how many of these incidents were recorded, and whether their number was significant enough to impact the result of the election in one or more constituencies. Your pollwatcher should also make note of any witnesses to these questionable events.

Keep in close contact with the non-partisan observer organizations who participate in the election, and build a good working relationship with them. If they share your concerns or observations,

even if only on a small number of specific events, their testimony could be helpful in any complaints you may choose to file.

It is not the role of the candidate's pollwatcher to intervene in these situations, however, but rather to document each of them carefully. The Election Law gives the Supreme Election Committee and its local committees the authority to make these rulings on a case by case basis through election day. By engaging in a debate at the voting station you run the risk of creating unnecessary confusion and conflict at the voting station, and creating more problems than might be resolved.

Voting

Upon receiving a ballot, each voter will go to mark their ballot and cast his or her vote. There must be an enclosure inside the voting hall where the voter can cast their ballot without fear of others seeing how he or she is voting. Campaign representatives, election officials, and other observers should all watch from a discrete distance, however, to make sure that the voter is marking and casting their ballot themselves.

Your pollwatchers should document any instances where a voter appears to encounter any intimidation while casting their vote, or instances where an individual's vote is observed by another person. The Election Law does, however, provide for disabled or blivoters to receive assistance from a trusted person of their own choosing in casting their ballot.

After the voter has placed their ballot in the ballot box, the election committee officials will place a second mark next to their name in the schedule of voters to record that the person has cast his or her vote, and they will dip the voter's thumb in indelible ink to protect against any attempts to vote a second time. Finally, the voter must place their fingerprint in the schedule of voters next to their name.

The Count

Voting will continue throughout the day, until 6:00 p.m. If at that time, there is nobody still

waiting to cast their ballots, the Election Committee will declare the end of voting. If there are still people waiting to cast their votes, then voting will continue until the last person has voted, or until 8:00 p.m., whichever comes first.

When the end of voting has been declared, with the candidates' representatives observing, the election committee will seal the ballot boxes with sealing wax, and then fully tape all openings on the election box. This tape seal will then be signed by the election officials, and all candidates or their representatives.

After the sealing and the signing of the boxes, the election officials, accompanied by the candidates or their representatives, will take the ballot boxes to the headquarters of the local election committee, where the ballot boxes will be opened and the votes counted in the presence of candidates or representatives.

It is important for your party to determine well in advance in which places the candidates themselves will play the role of observing the vote count, and in which areas the representatives will fulfill this role. Observation of the vote count is a crucial element of your election day work and you will need those who are monitoring the count to have a clear understanding not just of the election law itself, but of their responsibilities in this important job.

The seals on the ballot boxes may not be broken by the election committee until all members of the local election committees and its subcommittees (together constituting the "counting committee") as well each candidate or their representative, are present. After everyone has inspected the ballot box seals to make sure they are still intact, the ballot boxes will be opened.

Once the boxes are opened, each ballot will be counted and observed by all present. The "counting committee" has the ultimate authority to decide on all issues of vote casting. The counting committee may declare some ballots to be invalid. These "spoiled" ballots might include blank ballots, ballots naming more than one candidate, or votes not cast on officially provided ballot cards. The Counting Committee may rule other ballots to be out of order, however, if they

are unclear or improper in some other way. Your representative should declare their objection to the elimination of any ballots which they believe are valid and clear in their support of your candidate. Additionally, your representative should declare their objection to any votes counted in favor of an opposing candidate if they believe the ballot is unclear or improper. Your pollwatcher should ensure that these objections are noted in the minutes being recorded by the counting committee, in addition to making a separate report to the party to be submitted after counting is completed.

Keeping your pollwatchers happy

Each of your pollwatchers will be making a big contribution to your campaign. It will be a long day for everyone, and it's important that your campaign give your pollwatchers the support they need. By conveying to them that you appreciate their contribution of time and energy, you'll have a team of pollwatchers that is that much more committed and disciplined.

If possible, try to arrange a meal for your pollwatchers. They'll be having a long and tiring day, and they'll appreciate some food and water to help keep their minds on the task at hand. A team of volunteers in each zone house can easily spend a few hours packaging up a simple and inexpensive meal. Even a piece of fruit, some bread, and a bottle of water will send a message to your pollwatchers that you value them and their work. These lunches can then be delivered by your drivers on their regular rounds to pick up reports from each voting station.

Finally, be sure to thank your pollwatchers. Their presence will make sure your party's interests are well represented, and their experience in this election will make each one of them a valuable resource in elections to come. You might want to host a social gathering on the evening of the election after the polls close, or in the following days, to celebrate all the hard work that has been done.

APPENDICES:

1. Copy of the election law
2. Zone system illustration
3. Sample Check List
4. Sample Incident Report form (completed)
5. Sample "Pollwatcher's Log" form
6. Planning Timeline