

# Voter turnout in mauritius



## 1. OVERVIEW OF MAURITIUS

Mauritius is reflected as one of the best-governed, most established and prosperous African countries. It is an autonomous state that has supported the development of its people since independence in 1968. In general, the government of Mauritius has achieved the economy soundly, with relative fiscal transparency, good facility of education, sanitation, water and health services (EISA, 2008). The Mauritian Constitution's main features comprise the rule of law and strict separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary. The country has succeeded its ethnic, religious and cultural diversity with maturity and tolerance. The animated business climate has been favorable to investment, with refined financial and communications infrastructure. Compared to other African countries, as well as many developing and developed countries across a range of governance measures, Mauritius appears at or near the top of the rankings.

Mauritius has been continually a Dutch, Portuguese, French and British colony. It became self-governing of Great Britain on 12 March 1968 and granted to the position of Republic inside the Commonwealth on 12 March 1992. While many countries can express of their freedom by means of being powered by pro-self-government sentimentality, Mauritius experienced a changed situation altogether: no nationalist sentiment happened in Mauritius. Anti-colonial feelings were articulated by the Hindu majority but large divisions of the added ethno-religious crowds favored to uphold bonds with the mother nation. Mauritius was allocated as given its way towards independence: 44% of the inhabitants voted in contradiction of independence, but independence was lastly approved to Mauritius in 1968.

The Constitution of independent Mauritius demonstrated after the Westminster system, is the “ bedrock of Mauritian democracy” (Mohamed Bhai, 2002). Critics have pointed out that contribution of the public in the political process at regional, local and national levels flinches and finishes at the election booth on polling day.

In spite of the strains and clashes preceding independence and terror of the large ‘ Hindu hegemony’, Mauritius has never industrialized a ‘ bullet’ culture, embracing instead a culture of the ‘ ballot’. Post-independent Mauritius has had a reasonably sound track record of holding free and fair general elections since independence deprived of any major contestations. Elections have been held in 1976, 1982, 1993, 1987, 1991, 1995, 2000 and 2005. Procedures before, during and after elections are well valued by all political parties.

It is imperative to note, that there has existed a ‘ problem’ of incumbency whereby the ruling party has made use of its unfair access to the state media and other capitals. Voter turnout throughout general elections inclines to be relatively high – 81. 5 % for the 2005 general election (see the table 3. 1.) – But there is a scarcity of study in the country regarding voting patterns and behavior. Studies in the broad field of political science are missing and research on the gender width of politics is even smaller.

Table 3. 1. Voter Turnout: 1976-2014

Year	Voter Turnout	Total vote	Regi- stration	VAP Turn- out	Voting age population
The year the election took place or a law was passed					
2014	74. 41%	697, 231	936, 975	71. 23%	978, 887
2010	77. 82%	684, 768	879, 897	72. 63%	942, 840
2005	81. 25%	664, 081	817, 356	75. 34%	881, 457
2000	80. 87%	630, 292	779, 433	79. 57%	792, 125
1995	79. 69%	567, 810	712, 513	77. 09%	736, 560
1991	84. 08%	573, 419	682, 000	82. 45%	695, 500
1987	85. 00%	543, 565	639, 488	84. 63%	642, 320
1983	87. 04%	470, 008	540, 000	77. 04%	610, 080
1982	90%	486,	540, 000	91. 46%	531, 360

Year	Voter Turnout	Total vote	Regi- stration	VAP Turn- out	Voting age population
The year the election took place or a law was passed		000			
1976		400,486		84.43%	474,350

Source: [http://www. idea. int/vt/countryview. cfm? CountryCode= MU](http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode= MU)

There is freedom of association which permits political parties to function without restrictions. But, every political party must be recorded with the Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC) at least 14 days prior to the nomination of its candidates at any general election.

Mauritius marks 1 for political rights and 2 for civil liberties on the Freedom House Index, giving it an average of 1.5, and organizing the country in the 'free' group. The Freedom House Index of 1 for political rights reproduces the general freedom of rights and association for all political parties as well as the unrestricted general rights to vote afforded all Mauritian citizens irrespective of race, color, creed and gender. The inferior score for civil liberties designates that there are some restrictions in the country, and more work necessities to be done to broaden the democratic space. For example, trade unions do not have the right to go on strike; they are presently requesting for the right to strike to be involved in the constitution.

Democratic governance, this report claims, is not only about having regular and nonviolent alternation of parties through elections that are managed by an well-organized institutional framework accepted across a broad range, it is also about political parties evaluating and accepting the needs of the people and determining and framing policies that respond to those needs. In short, self-governing governance is about economic and social engineering that affords for sustainable human expansion.

Although it is true that good actions of legitimacy comprise levels of voter participation, the tendency and enthusiasm of all stakeholders to accept results, and the commitment to participation by political parties, state legitimacy rest on the nature of state society relations, the kind of social contract that is in place, and the suitable illustration of all groups in government.

Despite of all these, Mauritius is considered as a successful democracy in the African context. Storey (1997) has debated, though, that Mauritius is a business state where decisions on main issues are lashed outside Parliament, after bargaining between the state and various strong corporate bodies like trade unions, employers' federation, socio-religious bodies, sociocultural clusters, and so on. The annual compensation rate to employees has remained for long the result of tripartite negotiations between the state, employers and trade union federations. Reform of education concerning the addition of oriental languages for the Primary School Certificate was debated and negotiated between the State (Ministry of Education), religious bodies and other stakeholders. As far as administrative decisions are concerned, government accesses stakeholders

and civil society in general, not only over the budget, but also in the outlining of various legislations. Ad hoc consultative committees connecting different partners are at times set up. As for the implementation of policy, NGOs do have representatives on boards of parastatal or statutory bodies, whereby they are intended to be the relay between organized civil society and the implementation body/agency.

According to the EISA Report (2008), the civil society is rather dynamic in Mauritius nevertheless organised civil society appointment with parliament is weak. However, Bunwaree (2007) further claims that, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) process in Mauritius has been nearly a disastrous one and this may be the best illustration of the softness of the Mauritian organised civil society. On one hand many speak of a lively civil society in Mauritius, while on the other hand the realism is that the country's civil society organisations are legitimately apathetic with little popular debate (Bunwaree, 2007). Though, civil society has two gadgets to cooperate directly with parliament namely by way of petition and by way of bills supported through a member of parliament.

Dukhira (2002) emphasizes that the two vital partners to bring about good governance are government (meaning all state actors such as central government, the civil service and other public authorities) and all the citizens of the country. He assumes that: " The responsibility devolves on Government, the civil service and the police to achieve social and economic goals, ensure peace and order, exercise authority and enforce laws". He also adds: " Participation and citizen involvement should not be mere slogans.

(...) Nor is participation an end in itself. It is vital to the effective delivery of services and to further democracy. ”

Moreover, representation and consultation happen in governmental and other public or semipublic institutions that touch groups or the whole population is a fact. Those who are left out from the talks can still have the opportunity to express their views through the media, even though it is the latter which choose which voices are heard. However, the influence of the media to the vivacity of democracy in Mauritius cannot be underestimated. The right to prove also exists, just like the option to start a campaign to care or reject a public or private endeavor. It is thinkable for public gatherings to be organised by citizens and/or organisations to express a position or to voice complaints in contradiction of certain projects, issues, or decisions taken by the Authorities. Organisations are occasionally set up to protest alongside certain projects or issues, and they are now and then successful in making decision-makers review projects that are, for example, not environmentally-friendly (e. g. the case of Vallée de Ferney). However, it is to be pointed out that, certain projects can be announced for political or monetary interests.

In 2008, “ Maurice Ile Durable” (MID) is a lengthy term vision set up by the current government, designed at upholding sustainable growth. The key thrust of MID is to create Mauritius a world model of sustainable expansion, chiefly in the background of small-island states. The defense of the environment and the social dimension of improvement are fundamental aspects of MID. At the heart of policy making is consultation with civil society. Since last year, the consultation process for the development of the



National Policy for a Sustainable Mauritius has been propelled in guaranteeing that necessities and goals of the Mauritian society are reproduced in the White Paper, which will be submitted to the Cabinet. Several consultative conferences covering of exposed public meetings, special interest groups meetings (NGOs, private sector, women and youth organizations among others), assemblies with district and local government and consultation with the ministries were detained. This consultative process delivers a platform for the diverse stakeholders to contribute in the MID project.

From time to time it can be as well too late for the public or any group to respond when decisions have not been made known – not only to the public, but occasionally also to organizations concerned. Information can be at times published in vague newspapers and accordingly, the information not recognized until it is too late to act or react. Even though certain decisions in use by the authorities might be correct, the lack of information, communication, and consultation not just concerning the public, nevertheless regarding current stakeholder bodies authorized for the very specific purpose, as well as experts, or peoples directly alarmed, leave an impression of absence of transparency and of democracy.

Babooa (2008) placed specific importance on the role of citizen participation in Mauritius, more accurately in the city of Port Louis. According to him, Mauritian public administration in the colonial era was considered by privacy, restrictive actions and lack of access to information detained by policy-making and policy-implementation government organizations. During the colonial establishment the mainstream of the Mauritians, particularly

women, did not have the right to vote and the chance to participate in Mauritian's governance and administration stated Dukhira (1994). This state of affairs ran to human rights violations, abuse of power, an impassive culture and lack of access to any information concerning the making and implementation of policy alleged by the government institutions. The Mauritian governmental system had arose from a one-sided and "top-down" approach to policy-making. The impact of the colonial regime is still being touched particularly at the Port Louis' local government. If a persistent public boredom and public neglect to participative democracy continues, this could lead to the demise of Mauritian's unexperienced democracy.

The public acts as protectors to encounter the actions or inaction of policymakers and policy implementers. When public participation is ignored, one may see the abuse or misuse of administrative and political power. This was a collective feature in local authorities in Mauritius during the colonial "top-down" administration which was branded by confidentiality and preventive measures to bind the public from gaining access to and distributing information detained by local government in Mauritius (Dukhira 1994). Even today citizens are prohibited from getting access to information held by government establishments through the Official Secret Act, 1972 (Act 30 of 1972). The Port Louis' local government looks the challenge of permitting access to public information regarding the making and implementation of policy. Moreover, Port Louis' local government wishes to grow well-organized mechanisms for letting public participation in the making and implementation of policy. Local government is a perilous aspect

of a reformed system of governance and hence its growth in the field of public participation is vital.

Dukhira (1994) has distinguished a series of democratic shortages and threatening signs in the Mauritian government. These have been recognized in relative to the functioning of the Westminster model of open-minded democracy in Mauritius. Dukhira (1994) voiced a perspective on defies which exist menacing the survival of liberal democratic form. Certainly, it is claimed that the difficulties tackled by Port Louis' local government are further compounded by the presence of various types of rigid and complex systems of rules, regulations, by-laws and administrative organizations.

All these endow the public officials at Port Louis' local government with wide optional powers which unfavorably disturb the citizens' democratic right. A cautious and insensitive culture is also a direct danger to community growth. However, if public participation is well-known at the Port Louis' local government, it will help retain the rulers responsible to the people and will avoid policy-makers from making policies which are disadvantageous to the general welfare of the community.

It is indispensable to note that the ballot box is not sufficient to express the judgment of the citizens at the Port Louis' local government, but it is also needy on the steady and constant interaction of the public with the creation and enactment of policy. The key objective of steering the background to the phenomenon of public participation was to articulate a clear problem declaration.