INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT OF FIRST TIME YOUTH VOTERS

In Myanmar's 2020 Election

INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT (IEA)

This Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) has been conducted to better understand information needs, access, flow and trusted sources of information among First Time Youth Voters (FTVS) of Myanmar who are expected to participate the upcoming general election in November 2020.

The findings will also inform political actors, information providers and policy makers of the information ecosystems surrounding FTYV to design suitable programs with the aim to maximize political participation of FTYV across Myanmar.

This assessment's findings are drawn from a nationwide online survey and in-depth discussions with FTYV in Myanmar about how they get their information, how they engage and share information with their peers and what or who is influencing their choices for the different types of news and information sources..

This is the selected highlights from the full report which is available at (https://www.dropbox.com/s/74jynow3g0f0xmd/IEA-FTYV-Full%20Report-2020-October.pdf?dl=0) Alternatively, please contact internews.mm@gmail.com for more information.
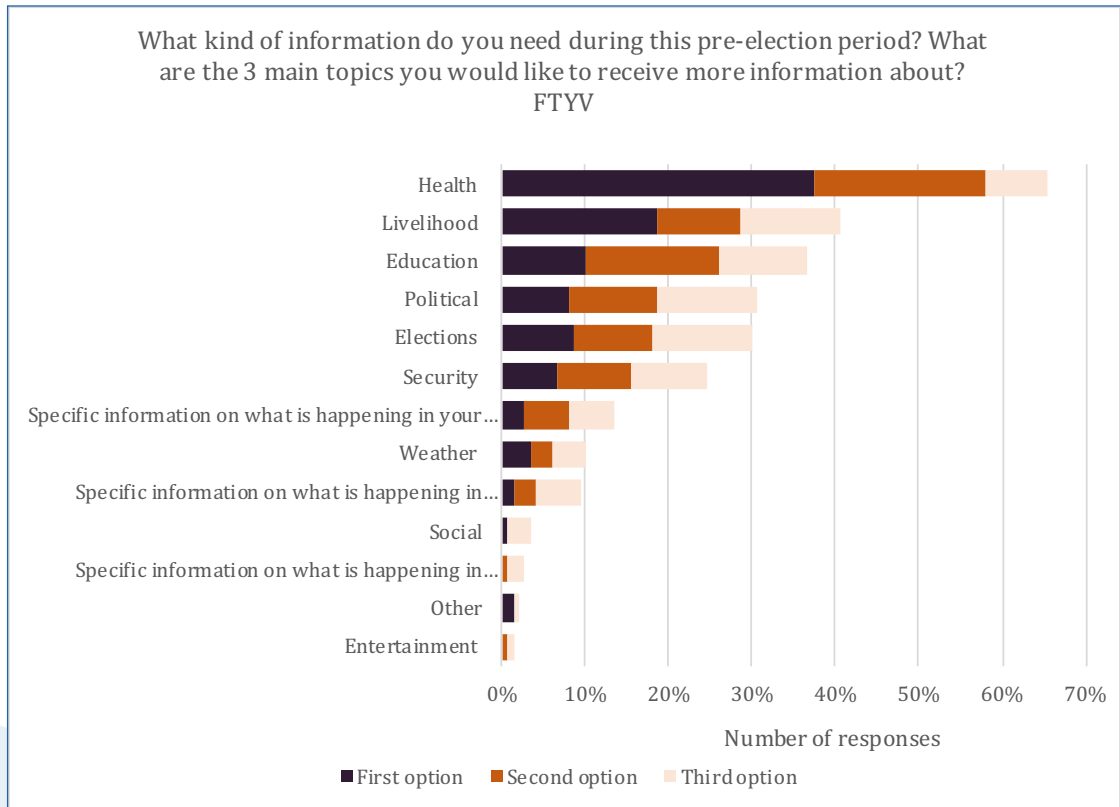
> *"I'm interested in elections, but I think there will be a lot of people who will ignore them."*
> *(Male FTYV from Yangon)*
>
> *"Young people in the IDP camps are not interested in election at all. The IDPs living in Kutkai camps say they do not even have a registration card to be eligible to vote."*
> *(Male FTYV from Lashio)*
>
> *"I only get a lot of information from major parties like NLD, UNSDP. We do not have enough information about ethnic parties, so we have a little possibility to make decision about who can really do something for our region." (Female FTYV from Mandalay)*
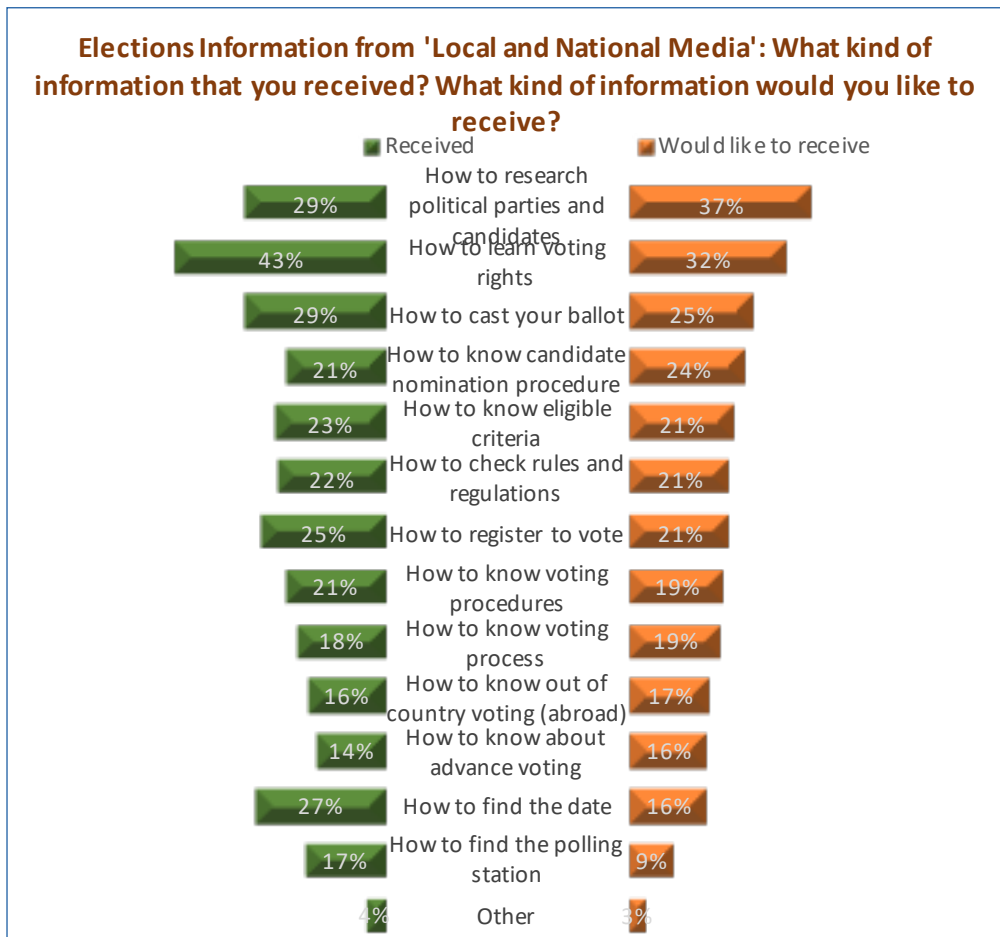
KEY FINDINGS

1. Information Needs

What kind of information do you need during this pre-election period? What are the 3 main topics you would like to receive more information about? FTYV

- **People are prioritizing the Covid-19 topic in order to better understand the risks and related preventive measures.** Election information is ranked below health, livelihood, education and politics. Elections-related content is not as relevant to their immediate everyday needs.

- Common information needs frequently referenced by FTYV included health related information with 64% of survey responses. Livelihood, education and political information are ranked as second, third and fourth, respectively, followed by elections related news and information at a 35% response rate.

2. Information Landscape

Elections Information from 'Local and National Media': What kind of information that you received? What kind of information would you like to receive?

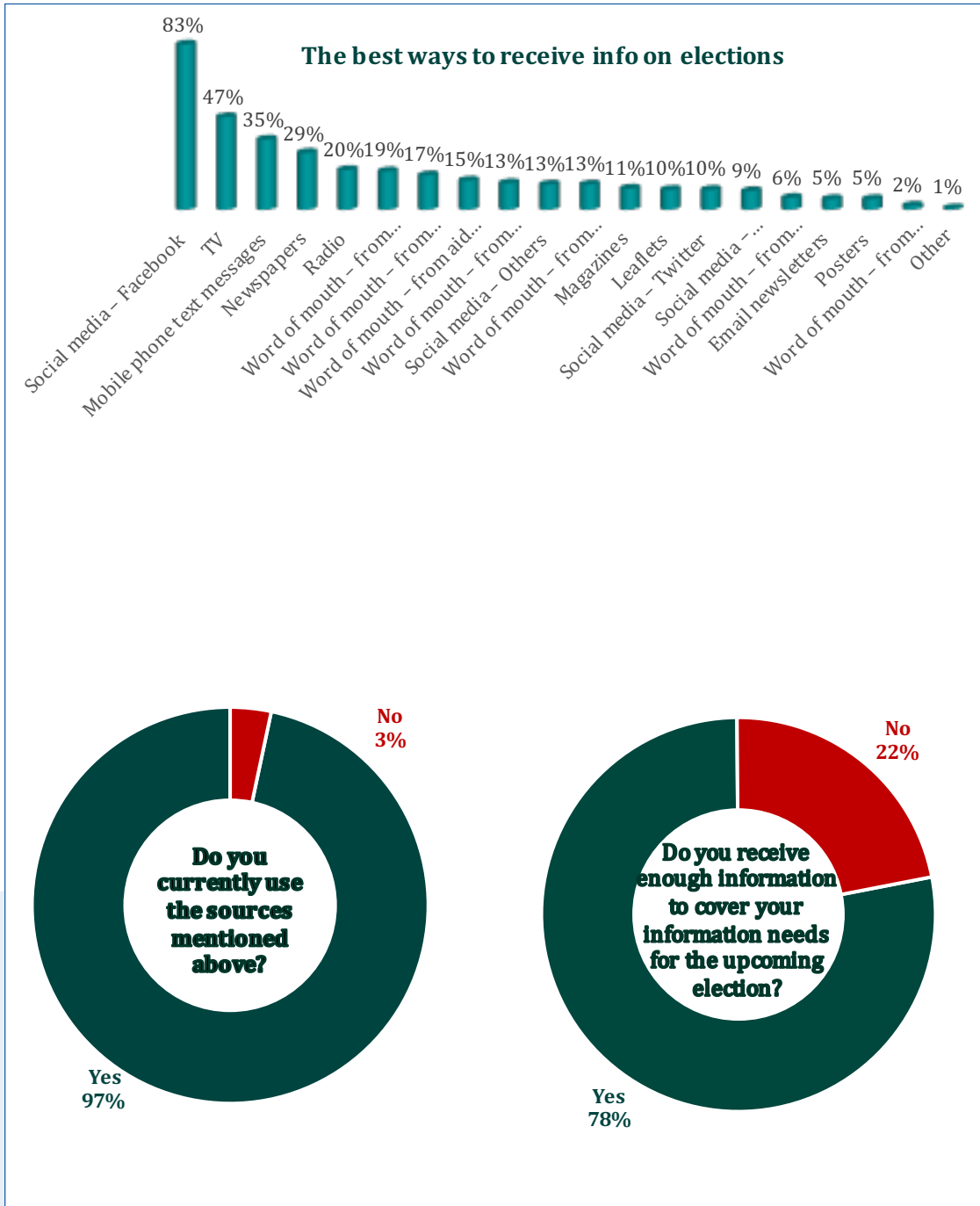|	Received	Would like to receive
How to research political parties and candidates	29%	37%
How to learn voting rights	43%	32%
How to cast your ballot	29%	25%
How to know candidate nomination procedure	21%	24%
How to know eligible criteria	23%	21%
How to check rules and regulations	22%	21%
How to register to vote	25%	21%
How to know voting procedures	21%	19%
How to know voting process	18%	19%
How to know out of country voting (abroad)	16%	17%
How to know about advance voting	14%	16%
How to find the date	27%	16%
How to find the polling station	17%	9%
Other	4%	3%

- **During the Covid-19 pandemic, the use of internet and social media has become more rampant than before. As confirmed by FTYV - who tend to spend most of their time on Facebook - cited as the social network as the best channel to receive news and information.**

- Until the voter registration lists have been recently announced, the information was available only on social media or by provided by the ward officials: **Little or incomplete information on which candidates can really do what for their region, interviewees and focus group discussion (FGD) participants said they have little agency in their voting decision.**

- Although social media penetration rate in Myanmar is high (41% penetration rate, with over 22 million users) traditional media were also cited by the respondents print media consumption remains as a traditional mean of information source (49%) despite struggling to survive. Many people responded that they still use State media as their information source.

- TV is frequently mentioned as their most trusted source, while radio is a valuable channel in the areas with inadequate infrastructure, such as limited electricity supply, internet access and transportation.

- Impact of armed conflict in Rakhine and Northern Shan State and restrictions on travel and movement during this period significantly affect the provision of available information to the audiences.

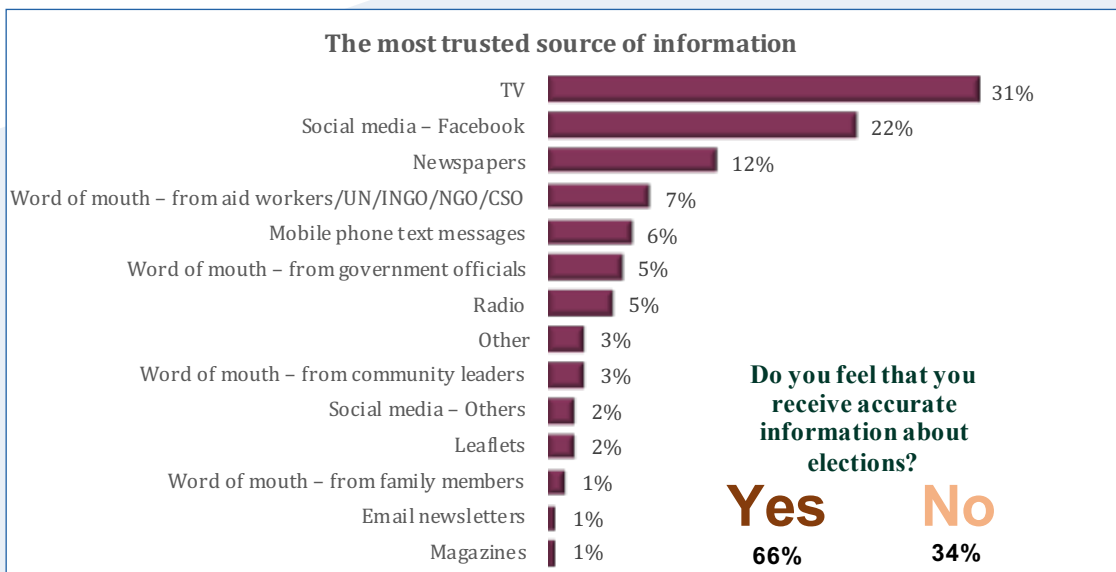| Category	Percentage
How to research political parties and candidates	47%
How to know candidate nomination procedure	34%
How to check rules and regulations	33%
How to cast your ballot	27%
How to know voting procedures	27%
How to know eligible criteria	25%
How to know voting process	22%
How to learn voting rights	21%
How to know about advance voting	20%
How to find the date	18%
How to register to vote	18%
How to find the polling station	15%
How to know out of country voting (abroad)	14%
Other	2%

What kind of elections information is needed for upcoming elections?

3. Production and Movement

The best ways to receive info on elections

Source	%
Social media – Facebook	83%
TV	47%
Mobile phone text messages	35%
Newspapers	29%
Radio	20%
Word of mouth – from...	19%
Word of mouth – from...	17%
Word of mouth – from aid...	15%
Word of mouth – from...	13%
Social media – Others	13%
Word of mouth – from...	13%
Magazines	11%
Leaflets	10%
Social media – Twitter	10%
Social media – ...	9%
Word of mouth – from...	6%
Email newsletters	5%
Posters	5%
Word of mouth – from...	2%
Other	1%

Do you currently use the sources mentioned above?
- No 3%
- Yes 97%

Do you receive enough information to cover your information needs for the upcoming election?
- No 22%
- Yes 78%

- **Facebook was mentioned as a primary information source among young users, who access it to receive and share news and information within their respective common interest groups.**

- This fact highlights the important role of informal networks on social media: they function as a key information sharing mechanism on Facebook.

- 83% of responses claimed Facebook as the best ways to get informed the elections information

- CSOs are also vital in contributing information production and flow in specific sectors ranging from voter education, elections observation and monitoring throughout the elections process in order to fill the gap of "right to information" for the public. CSOs use various initiatives to increase interest on elections and reach out to rural and remote areas.

- The vast majority of respondents said they receive enough information but not specifically the type they need for elections.

4. **Access and Barriers**

- **Respondents said that access to elections information is still low, with some FGDs and interviewees noting limited access to elections information and little engagement with election-related news. The findings are clear that youth don't have enough information to make an informed decision, which will ultimately affect their decision to vote.**

- Respondents felt that their ability to obtain accurate information in some rural and remote places is limited due to the **absence of elections coverage by news producers.**

- Other reasons that prevent FTYV from obtaining trustworthy information are accessibility and the lack of transparency of data shared publicly, living in remote areas, meaningful internet service and a mobile network connection, and/or delays or relevance to the context of their area.

- A major obstacle in getting credible and timely information is the **difficulty of accessing reliable information in areas of low connectivity or where internet access has been restricted** by authorities. Several townships in Rakhine state only access a 2G network.

- Respondents showed concerns about people displaced internally due to the armed conflicts, who do not own smartphones and lack access to critical information. **These factors increase their vulnerability and make it impossible for them to vote.**

5. **Trust in sources and influencers**

The most trusted source of information

Source	Percentage
TV	31%
Social media – Facebook	22%
Newspapers	12%
Word of mouth – from aid workers/UN/INGO/NGO/CSO	7%
Mobile phone text messages	6%
Word of mouth – from government officials	5%
Radio	5%
Other	3%
Word of mouth – from community leaders	3%
Social media – Others	2%
Leaflets	2%
Word of mouth – from family members	1%
Email newsletters	1%
Magazines	1%

Do you feel that you receive accurate information about elections?

Yes 66%   **No** 34%

- The information and news on social media gets verified against official sources by 60% of respondents and through established dynamics of trust and information sharing: 17% will filter and verify information with friends and informal network on FB groups; 5% with relatives; 3% would approach community leaders; and 11% receive and use it just as it is.

- Traditional (religious and community) leaders in remote areas are perceived as the most influential as well also famous celebrities and social influencers active online.

- The role of Myanmar's Union Election Commission (UEC) on different levels is critical for shaping the information flows in the upcoming election, with the backing of government and support of political parties.

- Voices from media and CSOs described their challenge in taking the pivotal role for supporting free and fair elections since UEC fails to convey key information and reaching out to the public is still weak.

Political Actors

- FTYV' interest in politics is ranked below health, livelihood and education. Political actors should consider using top ranked issues as part of their election campaign strategy in order to stimulate more interest in 2020 election among FTYV. Connecting the issues that matter to FTYV with 2020 elections might win more support.
- Information needs vary with the occupation of the FTYV and therefore, tailored information for each target group may be effective in reaching out to specific FTYV groups such as students or workers.
- Political parties and candidates should reach out to FTYV to better communicate about their political agenda at both organizational and personal levels, especially on the issues that FTYV are interested to know about.
- Social media (Facebook) is the leading medium followed by television and radio. The role of informal networks in sharing information within communities should not be underestimated.

Information Providers (media, NGOs and civil society)

- Election programming should provide critical coverage of the political parties' election manifestos to analyze their policies on the top-ranked issues such as health, livelihood and education.
- FTYV are interested to know more about the candidates' background information and their political agenda. More investigative reporting and programming will be appreciated by FTYV.
- FTYV want more information about political parties and candidates especially at sub-national level (regional or state level); National media should also cover sub-national (regional or state level) electoral issues.
- Voter education (VE) seems to be insufficient for FTYV. Information providers should consider creating VE content on social media platform (Facebook or Viber), television and radio, including entertainment-oriented FM stations.
- As 95% of survey respondents use mobile phones to access social media (Facebook), contents should be mobile friendly i.e., mobile friendly websites, low data graphics, videos or audios.
- Include sources of information or attribution to improve quality and credibility of information disseminated.

- Religious and community leaders as well as famous celebrities are considered influential and they should be included in the content dissemination strategy.
- Collaborative content production between media and CSOs may result in a more effective election programming for FTYV in targeted areas or regions.

Policy Makers of Information Ecosystems

- FTYV want to know how they can research political parties and candidates and therefore online-based platforms or tools which allow citizens to do basic research about political parties and candidates may be needed. An online database that hosts public information about political parties and candidates may be needed.
- FTYV in remote regions such as Rakhine, Chin or Shan states seem to be less interested in elections than the rest. Access to electoral information for them should be considered a priority at state level communication efforts.
- Internet access should be universal among urban, rural and remote areas so that electorates can access electoral information equally.
- TV is the most trusted source of information for the majority of respondents and therefore this platform should be used more widely for electoral communications by various actors. More programming targeting FTYV may be effective.
- UEC's information sharing is seen as inadequate, especially for FTYV based in remote regions and ethnic minority states. A more active collaboration with CSOs and media in information sharing mechanism may be required.
- Newspapers are still read by 49% of respondents but they are not considered as the best source of information. Improving newspaper contents may be effective in disseminating electoral communication for FTYV.
- More VE activities should be conducted at local (township) level where CSOs can stimulate interest from FTYV.
- Factchecking websites or services should be set up and widely promoted to counter mis/disinformation.