General Assembly 4

Ensuring credible and transparent elections

MODEL UNITED NATIONS
THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THE HAGUE

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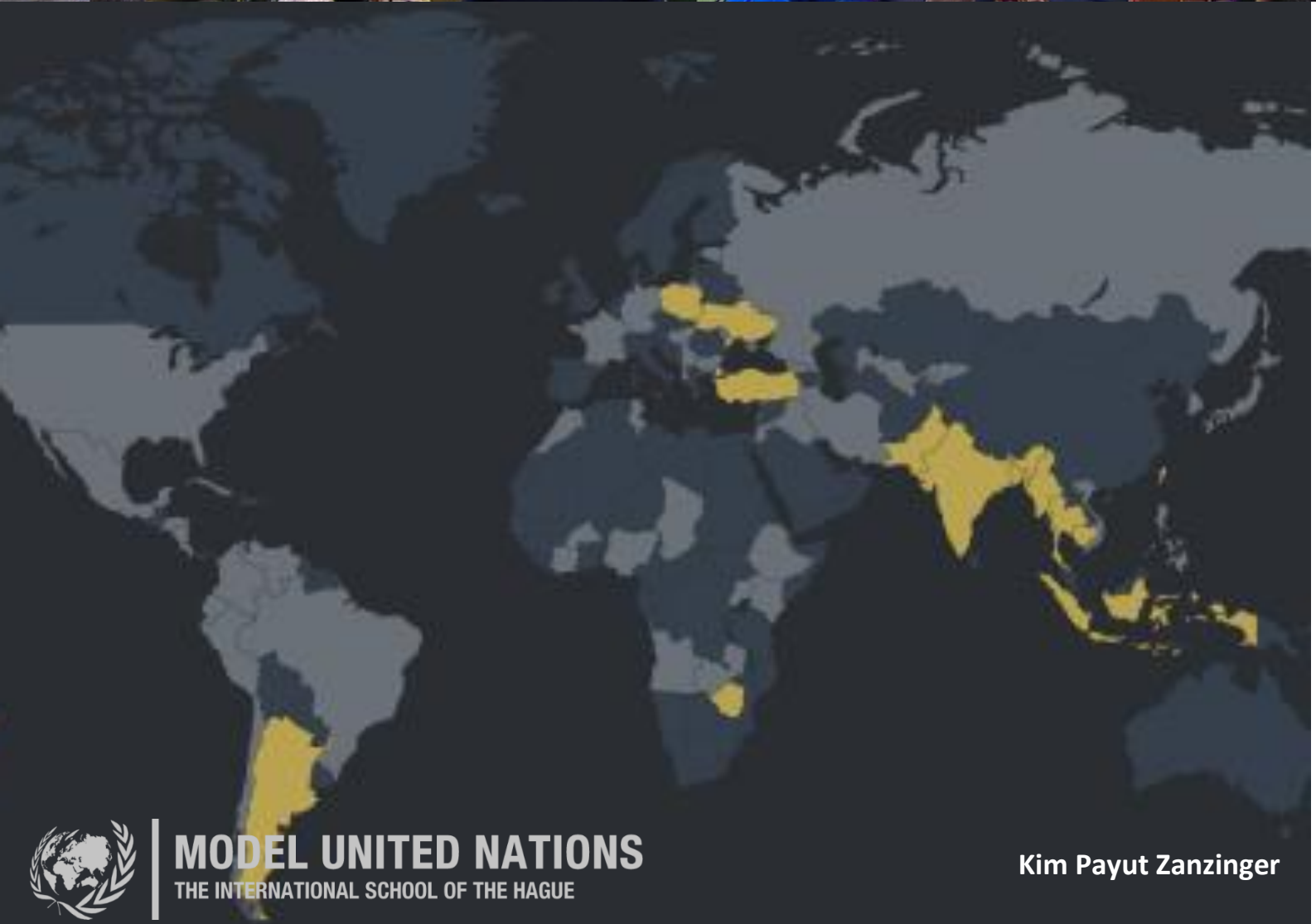
Introduction

In any democratic society, the process of holding elections serves as a fundamental pillar that upholds the principles of representation, accountability, and public participation. Credible and transparent elections are the cornerstone of a healthy democracy, providing citizens with the opportunity to utilize their right to vote and choose their leaders freely. These elections are not only essential for the legitimacy of the government but also for fostering trust, confidence, and stability within a nation. Elections are a vital part of democratic processes, including political transitions, implementation of peace agreements, and consolidation of democracy. The United Nations plays a major role in providing international assistance to these important processes of change for countries to their way into a more democratic society.

However, ensuring the credibility and transparency of elections is a complex endeavor that requires careful planning, robust institutions, and a commitment to uphold democratic values. This involves implementing a range of measures in order to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process, prevent fraud or manipulation, and guarantee equal access to the electoral system for all citizens. The journey toward credible and transparent elections is an ongoing one, demanding continuous improvement, adaptability, and cooperation from every person involved.

Inclusive elections provide all eligible citizens with equal opportunities to participate as voters in the election of their representatives and as candidates for election to the government. This right to participate is a broad concept and can only be subject to reasonable restrictions provided by law. Authorities must take steps to assess and remove any barriers to participation for all citizens. This includes removing barriers for traditionally marginalized populations such as ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities, women, youth, or older citizens but also people with disabilities.

Elections are transparent when every step is traceable and those involved can independently verify that the process is honest and accurate. The principle of transparency is related to the fundamental right of citizens to seek, receive, and impart information which mostly includes some elements of freedom of expression, as well as the right to participate in government and public affairs.

Decision-making processes must be accessible to the public, and adequate opportunities for public input should be provided. Citizens must be enlightened about all phases of the election cycle and made available to citizens, including voters and candidates. Non-partisan and partisan observers

should be accredited to observe all phases of the electoral process and should be allowed to comment publicly on the process without undue restrictions.

Definition of Key Terms

Elections

Elections refer to the formal process by which individuals within a society participate in choosing their representatives, and leaders, or making decisions on specific matters. It is a fundamental aspect of democratic systems, allowing citizens to exercise their right to vote and have a say in shaping the governance and policies of their country or community.

Democracy

Democracy is a system of government in which power is vested in the people, either directly or through elected representatives. It is characterized by principles such as political equality, popular sovereignty, and the protection of individual rights and freedoms. In a democratic society, citizens have the right to participate in decision-making processes, express their opinions, and hold their government accountable.

United Nations

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization established on October 24, 1945. The UN was the second multipurpose international organization established in the 20th century that was worldwide in scope and membership. Its predecessor, the League of Nations, was created by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and disbanded in 1946. Headquartered in New York City, the UN also has regional offices in Geneva, Vienna, and Nairobi. Its official languages are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish.

Westernization

Westernization is the adoption of the practices and culture of Western Europe by societies and countries in other parts of the world, whether through compulsion or influence. Some countries with old traditions are afraid of Westernization as they do not want their own culture to be replaced.

General Overview

The situation of credible and transparent elections is very different in all parts of the world. While specific approaches may differ, there are common principles and practices that contribute to credible and transparent elections worldwide. The world is divided into many different countries with each its own laws. Some are more democratic than others but, in every democracy, the principle of elections is laid down in the basic law of the country as this is what makes a country a democracy. Although there are stable democracies with operating and transparent election systems others are battling this issue or are only a democracy in their name.

Ensuring credible and transparent elections is a global concern within the United Nations and other Non-Member States and most countries all around the world employ various measures to uphold the integrity, credibility, and transparency of their electoral processes. Some states do not try to enforce more democratic elections as the leaders are afraid of losing their power or are afraid of a "Westernization" of their country, their people, and their culture.

Major Parties Involved

When it comes down to the major parties involved, the biggest part of enforcing credible elections depends on a state's government and how the political situation is in that country as the law can only be enforced by the state's law enforcement agencies, such as the police or in very extreme cases the military. If a country has a corrupt or influenced government credible and transparent elections might not be available for all citizens but rather elections on a small scale or for people with the same political mindset. Ethnic minorities are most likely to be oppressed in their country and also may not be given the right to vote or to nominate candidates in order to support the minority's opinion. Furthermore, opposition parties will most likely not be tolerated or simply shut down by the people in charge of the country's politics.

United Nations

One major party is the United Nations as they have the task to oversee the country's governments and make sure that basic human rights such as the right to vote are not mistreated or ignored such as the right to vote which is linked to other basic human rights. Furthermore, the UN provides guidance on electoral processes and works to ensure that elections are conducted in a transparent, inclusive, and accountable manner. The Office of the High Commission of Human Rights (OHCHR) has the task of overseeing the developments in each country the UN is currently working with.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems, (IFES) is an independent, non-profit organization that promotes credible and transparent elections around the world. It provides technical expertise and assistance in areas such as election administration, voter education, legal framework development, and election monitoring.

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

The IDEA is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. It provides research, training, and technical assistance on electoral processes, electoral system design, and democratic governance.

Electoral Integrity Project

The EIP is an academic research project that aims to measure and analyze the quality of elections worldwide. It assesses electoral integrity based on various indicators and produces annual reports on election quality and integrity.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

The OSCE, through its ODIHR, deploys election observation missions to participating states. These missions monitor and assess the entire electoral process, including pre-election preparations, voting, counting, and the resolution of disputes. The OSCE/ODIHR provides recommendations to improve electoral practices and ensures compliance with international standards.

Carter Center

The Carter Center, founded by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, works to promote democracy and human rights worldwide. It monitors elections, offers technical assistance, and engages in diplomatic efforts to support credible electoral processes. Until today they improved the quality of life in more than 80 countries for the inhabitants by advancing democracy and human rights resolving conflicts, preventing diseases, and improving mental health care.

African Union & African Union Commission

The African Union and its African Union Commission play a significant role in promoting credible elections in Africa. They provide technical support, conduct election observation missions, and work with member states to strengthen electoral systems and institutions.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
1776	The United States holds its first presidential election, with George Washington elected as the country's first president.
1877	The United States witnesses the contentious presidential election of 1876 between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden. The election results were disputed, leading to the formation of a special commission to resolve the issue, ultimately resulting in Hayes becoming president in a controversial compromise known as the Compromise of 1877.
1893	New Zealand becomes the first country to grant women the right to vote in national elections.
January 30, 1933	Adolf Hitler was elected Chancellor of the German Empire.
1945	The United Nations is established to promote democratic principles and human rights worldwide.
September 2, 1945	End of the Second World War and with that end of the dictatorship in Germany and Italy.

1947	India holds its first general elections after gaining independence from British colonial rule, marking the world's largest democratic exercise at that time.
1960	The United States experiences the infamous "Chicago voter fraud" during the presidential election between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Accusations of ballot stuffing and manipulation in Chicago raised concerns about the integrity of the election.
June 17, 1972 - August 9, 1974	The Watergate scandal unfolds in the United States, which includes illegal activities by members of President Richard Nixon's administration. These activities included the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters and efforts to cover up the involvement of Nixon's campaign in election-related wrongdoing. The scandal eventually led to Nixon's resignation.
August 1, 1975	The foundation of the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) with the tasks to ensure that politico-military, economic and environmental, and human aspects are being complied with.
June 1979	The European Parliament was elected for the first time by universal and direct suffrage for a five-year term.
June 29, 1980	Vigdís Finnbogadóttir becomes the first democratically elected female president in the world
November 9, 1989	The fall of the Berlin Wall signifies the end of the Cold War.
May 10, 1994	South Africa holds its first non-racial democratic elections, marking the end of Apartheid and the election of Nelson Mandela as the country's first black president.
2000	The United States faces the controversial presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore. The election in Florida becomes a focal point, with issues surrounding ballot design, recount procedures, and allegations of voter disenfranchisement. The Supreme Court's decision in Bush v. Gore effectively determined the outcome of the election.
2008	Barack Obama becomes the first African American to be elected as President of the United States.
2011	The Arab Spring begins, leading to significant political changes in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa, with demands for greater democracy and political reforms.
2014	Afghanistan holds its first democratic presidential elections following the fall of the Taliban regime.

2018	Brazil encounters the "Operation Car Wash" scandal, which has far-reaching implications beyond elections. The investigation reveals corruption schemes involving politicians and business leaders, leading to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and the imprisonment of several prominent figures.
2019	The United Kingdom holds a general election to decide the country's approach to Brexit, leading to a decisive victory for the Conservative Party.
2020	Belarus experiences allegations of widespread electoral fraud during the presidential election, leading to mass protests against President Alexander Lukashenko's rule. The election results were widely disputed, with accusations of voter suppression and manipulation.
2020	The United States holds a highly contested presidential election, resulting in Joe Biden being elected as the 46th President of the United States. Afterward, Donald Trump claims that the election was won due to election fraud.
August 15, 2021	The Taliban took over Afghanistan again and implemented a reign of terror.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

The United Nations plays a significant role when it comes to election monitoring, giving technical assistance, electoral reform, and conflict prevention. The UN often deploys election monitoring missions to countries holding elections. These missions consist of international observers who assess the electoral process, including the pre-election period, voting, and the post-election phase. They provide an impartial assessment of the fairness, transparency, as well as credibility of the elections, and make recommendations for improvements if needed. The United Nations also provides technical support to countries in various aspects of the electoral process. This can include assistance in developing legal frameworks, voter registration systems, training election officials, enhancing electoral infrastructure, and promoting voter education campaigns.

Countries that undergo electoral reforms in order to enhance credibility and inclusivity and transparency in their electoral system are often supported by the UN. They again have the task of overseeing and assist in setting up a more democratic election system. This can involve advising on legal and institutional changes, promoting transparency and accountability, and strengthening electoral management bodies. Another topic that the UN assists with is elections in post-conflict or fragile states. These can be particularly challenging as the government is most likely not willing to

give up its power and therefore more conservative to UN missions that aim for credible, transparent, and democratic elections. The UN works to prevent electoral violence and promote peaceful elections by supporting conflict resolution efforts, providing security assistance, and fostering dialogue among political stakeholders.

While there are no passed treaties specifically dedicated to credible and transparent elections, there are international conventions and treaties that promote democratic principles and human rights, which are crucial for the conduct of credible and transparent elections.

- Libya, December 23, 2015 (S/RES/2259)

There are several relevant events that play a significant role in ensuring credible and transparent elections. These events often take place before, during, and after the election process and contribute to the overall integrity of elections.

Election campaigns provide an opportunity for candidates and political parties to present their platforms, engage with voters, and compete for votes. Fair and transparent campaign rules, including regulations on campaign financing, media access, and equal opportunities for candidates, aid ensure a level playing field and credible electoral competition. The nomination of candidates is another important event in the electoral process. It allows individuals or political parties to put forward their names as candidates for various positions. Transparent and fair nomination procedures, with equal opportunities for all eligible candidates, contribute to the credibility of elections. Voter registration is a critical event that occurs before elections. It involves the process of enrolling eligible voters and creating a voter list. Transparent and inclusive voter registration processes, with adequate safeguards against fraud and manipulation, help ensure that only eligible individuals can participate in the elections. The actual voting day is a crucial event in any election. It should be organized in a transparent and efficient manner, ensuring that eligible voters can cast their ballots freely and without intimidation or coercion. Adequate polling station arrangements, ballot secrecy, and proper counting procedures are essential for the credibility of the voting process. The presence of domestic and international election observers during the voting and counting processes is an important event for ensuring credible and transparent elections. Observers assess the adherence to electoral laws, procedures, and international standards, and provide an impartial assessment of the electoral process. Their reports contribute to transparency and accountability. The announcement of election results and the subsequent resolution of disputes are critical events. Transparent and timely release of results, with mechanisms for addressing complaints and disputes,

help build confidence in the electoral process. Independent and impartial electoral bodies and courts play a crucial role in ensuring fair and effective dispute resolution. After the elections, conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the electoral process is highly important. This evaluation includes assessing the overall conduct of the elections, identifying any shortcomings or irregularities, and making recommendations for future improvements.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

In order to ensure credible and transparent elections the OSCE has founded the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) which is an institution specifically for fostering democratization in specific countries. It is entrusted with providing support, assistance, and expertise to participating states and civil society to promote democracy. Furthermore, the ODHIR has to observe governments to ensure that the rule of law, human rights and tolerance, and non-discrimination are not disregarded or suppressed. ODIHR specifically observes elections, reviews legislation, and advises governments on how to develop and sustain democratic institutions. The Office also conducts training programs for government and law-enforcement officials and non-governmental organizations on how to uphold, promote and monitor human rights. Efforts to solve and ensure credible elections worldwide have been ongoing for many years and various approaches have been taken to address the challenges involved.

In fact, there were no big previous attempts to solve the issue other than on a national governmental level, such as the reformation of a government with new elections. In certain countries where no real democracy exists, it is very difficult for the international community as well as the citizens to ensure credible and transparent elections as these governments are mostly not willing to completely give up their power nor hold new elections and only have a small amount of influence in the country's policy.

Possible Solutions

The electoral system is very different in each country in the world. It all depends on the basic law but also on the government and the wealth of a state. Enforcing and stabilizing the democratic election system in a More Economically Developed Country (MEDC) is safer, easier, and faster than in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs).

The international community is trying hard to solve the issue and guarantee that every citizen in their country has the right and access to safe, fair, and transparent elections as this is the cornerstone to a more international and peaceful environment and world with more room for dialogue between the head of a state.

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