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Political

*Ensuring free and fair elections during
crises*

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Introduction

Elections as well as other democratic structures are critical to a country's governance quality, and they can either advance or hinder a country's long-term democratic growth, regional, and global foreign policy interests. The most basic principle that defines trustworthy elections is that they should always reflect the people's free expression of will. Elections must be open, inclusive, and ethical in order to accomplish this, as well as the candidates having equal opportunity to participate in the elections. Numerous election procedure requirements, as well as a variety of essential rights and freedoms established from public international law, support such conceptual frameworks. Rather than being a series of separate occurrences, the electoral cycle concept views elections as a continual, interconnected process composed of pieces that connect with and impact one another.

A global or regional crisis tests a states' infrastructure, including voting institutions and elections. Governments around the world have faced significant obstacles in sustaining the proper flow of democratic systems, especially free and fair elections, as a consequence of crisis situations such as the current Covid-19 pandemic, along with natural disasters or security issues. No free elections would mean a decrease in productivity and growth rates in a country which could result in a multitude of issues, ranging from national health emergencies to economic crashes.

Definition of Key Terms

Election: A formal and regulated process of electing someone to a political office or another post through a vote.

Electoral System: An electoral system, often known as a voting system, is a set of laws that govern how elections and referendums are held and decided.

Global Crises: Events such as war, economic recession, pandemics, and major natural disasters that have economic, social, cultural, political, and other types of impact on all countries.

Democratic Backsliding: Democratic backsliding, democratic decay, and de-democratization is the reversal of democratization. If left unchecked, democratic backsliding leads to the state losing its democratic characteristics and transforming into an autocratic or authoritarian regime.

Democratic Erosion: Democratic erosion refers to the gradual disintegration of democratic institutions, practices, and principles.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's): A non-governmental organization (NGO) is a non-profit organization that operates outside the government. NGOs, sometimes known as civil societies, are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are organized on a local, national, and international level to serve a social or political aim such as humanitarian issues or the environment.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is an international statement enshrining the rights and freedoms of all people adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It was adopted as Resolution 217 by the United Nations General Assembly during its third session on December 10, 1948, in the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, France.

General Overview

In theory, the transparency, and fairness of elections should not be disrupted given any circumstance or crises, always having infrastructure that prevents inequality and malpractice. However, it has been proven throughout history, especially in just the last two years, that countries face complications regarding free and fair elections during crises. Unfortunately in most cases, electoral candidates try to manipulate the result of an election, by using the condition their country is in after a crisis, in their favor. Most times, the consequence of this is civil unrest and governmental problems. An unfair election could end in the country developing issues in their main infrastructure.

The 21st century was celebrated as the age of democracy. Many formerly autocratic and hybrid regimes, became democracies. The people's will as the primary legal structure of governance began to be a strongly shared and fast-expanding ideology. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 outbreak has worsened a global pattern of rising authoritarianism, with many countries reverting back on the democratic scale.

The Global State of Democracy 2021 report finds that, now, several states, including developed democracies, are experiencing democratic erosion. The number of nations experiencing democratic backsliding has never been higher than in the last 10 years, and it includes major economic and geopolitical leaders such as Brazil, India, and the United States.

As it is seen, the Covid-19 pandemic has left countries vulnerable to unfair elections. According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), more than 60 elections, including United Nations-related ones, took place in the year 2020 alone. This raises concern about the fairness of all of these elections.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created gaps in democratic action, because of the virus's significant economic and organizational interruption, including its "quarantine" restrictions. National governments around the world found themselves with little or no option except to delay, cancel, or prolong plenty of democratic elections at any level. The 2020 Freedom House report also showed a number of responses associated with governments improper handling of the pandemic in the better interests of their citizens. Checks on corruption and abuse of power, the safety of vulnerable communities, transparency, independent expression and speech, and fair elections have all been damaged. As a consequence of Covid-19, they have been undermined around the world, which will have a long-term impact on developed democratic systems. A component of this long-term effect is the rising frequency of democratic backsliding; while appropriate solutions to a global pandemic are required, excessive measures enforced unfairly have generated fears that democracy is weakening internationally, particularly in countries where it is already vulnerable.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States of America

The 2020 presidential election in the United States was the 59th quadrennial presidential election, held on November 3, 2020. The election was held in the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic and Covid-19 recession. The continued Covid-19 outbreak, civil unrest in response to the police murder of George Floyd and others, the U.S. Supreme Court following the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and the confirmation of Amy Coney Barrett, and the future of the Affordable Care Act were all major topics in the election. Due to the ongoing pandemic, a record number of early and mail-in ballots were cast. A large number of mail-in ballots resulted in some swing states experiencing delays in vote counting and reporting, prompting major news organizations to postpone their projections of Biden and Harris as president-elect and vice president-elect until November 7, three and a half days after the election. The United States Capitol assault of 2021 was a crowd of supporters of Republican President Donald J. Trump attacking the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021. The attack occurred during a joint session of Congress that was summoned to certify the results of the 2020 presidential election, which Trump had lost to Democratic candidate Joe Biden. The incident was commonly viewed as an insurgency or attempted coup d'état because its goal was to prevent a lawful president-elect from taking office. The Democratic-led House of Representatives impeached Trump for "incitement of insurrection" after he gave a speech before the attack in which he encouraged a large crowd of his supporters near the White House to march to the Capitol and violently resist Congress's certification of Biden's victory, which many in the crowd did (he was subsequently acquitted by the Senate). This election showed how the United States of America was able to handle governmental events in a time of global crisis.

China

In China, which is an authoritarian state, COVID-19 gave grounds to accelerate current projects to track, monitor, and control citizen behavior using new mobile-phone applications and other technology. For national executive leaders in Chinese provinces, there are no direct or competitive elections. Only the

lowest levels of government have direct elections. Independent candidates who collect ten signatures are authorized by law to seek seats in county-level people's congresses, and village committee elections are designed to give locals the opportunity to choose their representatives. In practice, however, intimidation, harassment, fraud, and, in some circumstances, incarceration are frequently used to keep independent candidates for these positions off the ballot or out of office. Only a limited number of independent candidates have been elected to office, while others attempt it each election cycle. There is no impartial body in charge of elections. The standing committees of people's congresses conduct indirect elections at various levels, whereas village-level elections are administered by a village electoral committee that reports to the local party committee.

Russia

In Russia, the electoral system was already being used in the interest of high-ranking officials, and specifically President Putin, but with the pandemic, they now had an excuse behind their actions to exploit the system. President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia announced the postponement of a referendum on whether he can govern until 2036 in Moscow, calling for "discipline and responsibility" in the face of the coronavirus. The Russian Central Election Commission decided on 3 April 2020 to postpone all elections originally scheduled for the period 5 April–23 June, affecting around 94 municipal and regional elections.

National Democratic Institute (NDI): The National Democratic Institute (NDI), sometimes known as the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, is a non-profit American organization that works with developing-country partners to improve the functioning of democratic institutions.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES): The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) is a non-profit organization based in the United Kingdom that was created in 1987. This group aids the development of new and emerging democracies by providing election assistance and support.

Timeline of Events

1965	<i>Sought to eliminate legal obstacles at the state and municipal levels that hindered African Americans from voting as established by the United States Constitution's Fifteenth Amendment (1870).</i>
1983	<i>The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was created.</i>
1989	<i>IFES began its first project, which focused on the Paraguayan general elections of that year.</i>
1991	<i>With the approval of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General appointed the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs as the focal point for electoral assistance matters.</i>

2003	<i>IFES acquired The Center for Democracy, an organization founded in 1985 by Allen Weinstein.</i>
2020	<i>The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, its first such designation since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009.</i>

Treaties and Events

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

This article of the UDHR states that “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures”. This illustrates some of democracy's essential principles: The people's will should be the foundation of political authority, and everyone should be able to participate in government.

Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization (A/68/301), 2013

The article evaluates trends and critical factors in the United Nations system's electoral assistance to the Member States during two years before 2013. The amount of Member States getting electoral support climbed marginally to 59 during the time mentioned.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

In many regions of Africa and abroad, each voter's finger is inked with indelible ink to prevent them from voting twice. However, even if this method prevents some malpractice during the initial voting process, it cannot guarantee transparency when the votes are being counted.

Recommendations for Elected Prosecutors' Engagement in Protecting the Right to Vote, Fair and Just Prosecution (2020), is a guide for elected prosecutors created by the United States of America that contains recommendations on specific steps elected prosecutors can take to protect voting rights and prevent election interference, ensure that the public is adequately informed about voting procedures and key information, and proactively dispel any misinformation or myths. However, this guide cannot be useful for many other countries other than the United States of America. In addition, it cannot dispel the bad intentions of officials who hope to manipulate the results of elections in their favor.

Possible Solutions

In order for in-person polls to be reliable and fair, the following factors must be attained. Delegates can think of ways to ensure these factors. Voters must be able to cast their ballots without fear of violence or feeling obligated to support a specific candidate or political party. There must be safeguards in place to prevent ballot boxes from being stuffed with votes that were not properly cast. Before being utilized, and when the voting session has ended, ballot boxes must be sealed. If ballot boxes are carried from polling stations to a central location where votes are counted, there must be an assurance that the same boxes that left the polling station will arrive at the vote-counting location.

Many governments use global crises as an excuse to postpone elections so that they may stay in power for a little longer. To ensure that this does not happen, delegates may consider creating organizations within the United Nations that oversee and assure that elections take place even during a crisis, or supporting organizations that already work in this area.

As citizens in many leading countries are unaware of what happens in less economically developed countries (LEDCs), ways to raise awareness is an important factor that delegates should consider. When the public and media are aware of unfair elections they will take further action to help those in countries where there are no free and fair elections.

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