



**Issue:** Implementing measures to improve the transparency of elections

**Forum:** General Assembly 4

**Position:** President & Deputy President

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## Introduction

The difficulties of ensuring transparency during elections come to light once again after the general election in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) on the 23rd of December 2018. Where the least popular candidate, a protégé of the former president, won the majority of the votes. Despite many observers, it is now claimed, by the losing candidate's side, that the elections did not go accordingly. A recount will not occur as the new president does not see the benefit of this.

In Afghanistan in October 2018 elections are organised, after eight years. This goes terribly wrong. On election day there are 18 terror attacks by the Taliban that kill over hundred civilians, ballot fraud occurs in multiple polling stations, voting was partially delayed for a day, in one village even for a whole week and misconduct is detected with officials from the electoral commission.

*“Transparency is critical for the public examination and control of elections which is fundamental in democratic elections.” - O. Bélanger*

Procedures before, during and after the election should be as fair and transparent as possible. Transparency plays a key role in ensuring credible elections. This credibility, and trust that comes with it, is an absolute necessity for a newly elected government or president to lead a democratic country.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Democracy

A system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives.

### Corruption

Dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery.

## **Elector**

A person who votes

## **General Overview**

The important question that rises while solving this issue focuses on what the current problematic procedures are around elections. This will be discussed in the following paragraphs. The 4th General Assembly of this year's HMUN conference has to start thinking of solutions.

### **Corruption (and foreign intervention)**

Corruption is a self-evident problem that can also be detected regarding elections. Officials can be corrupt, bribed to count incorrectly or else. Many countries have an electoral commission that supervises the procedures of the elections, voting systems, volunteers, polling locations etc. This council also oversees the results of the election. These commissions are called 'independent' but in some countries, they are highly influenced by political views of (inter)national corporations. For example, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) in DR Congo took a loan from the BFGIBank in 2016, a bank that is, according to the French newspaper 'Le Monde', a highly political bank that profited from the fact that the new elections were postponed, by this CENI. This influence is not always detectable let alone that it can be proven which is why it is a very dangerous problem.

This is also seen in the United States of America where Donald Trump is getting investigated on his involvement with the Russian Federation. It is proven that a Russian Internet Research Agency posted and liked pro-Trump messages on all kinds of media platforms while also sharing degrading posts about Hillary. According to the Washington Post the GRU, Russia's military intelligence agency, was behind the cyberattack leaking Clinton's personal email. An affair that caused many Americans to doubt her credibility. Apart from the fact that this kind of foreign intervention is highly disputable Russia's action could also have led to Trump returning a favour, in that case, it could be seen as corruption.

Foreign intervention can also appear in other countries which is really unfavourable. Especially in Less Economic Developed Countries (LEDC's), monetary support from foreigners can give a candidate a strong leading position due to more campaigning possibilities. If a country has many natural resources or a big workforce this could lead to milder rules and legislation or a better position for set 'investor' to claim or make use of those resources.

Intimidation of opponents and voters and systematic fraud are still the order of the day in some countries, for example, Afghanistan, further discussed in following topics.

### **Prosecution of political opponents**

Somewhat in the line of corruption lays the (undemocratic) unfounded prosecution of political opponents (and its accompanying intimidation of others). This is still done in many countries. Last year Kem Sokha, leader of the political opposition of the government party with of president Hun Sen, who has ruled for over three decades, was arrested nearing the elections, based on allegations of treason. Other opposition politicians were also arrested or fled the country after this. Without any opposition, the president won the election with 100 percent of the votes. Since the election imprisoned politicians have been released, including Kem Sokha last September. This is an incredible example of what is still happening concerning political imprisonment, even in times of election. However political imprisonment is an issue that already has to be fought, which is done so by organisations such as Amnesty International, especially in times of elections this is a great problem that influences the transparency and course of elections. Such an event is also seen in Peru, where election candidate Fujimori is arrested because of a corruption investigation, this is according to a Dutch news organisation (NOS). In Afghanistan, there were even politicians killed.

### **Voting procedures**

This is possibly the most important part of the transparency of elections and concerns four subtopics.

#### *The ability for a recount*

In many countries, it is secured by law that a recount can be filled for. In the United States, this was granted by a judge in two states however it only goes on in one since the party in Michigan that wanted a recount failed to collect enough funds for the actual count. This could be improved by setting a fund for such situations.

In some countries, this is not secured and thus does not (often) happen. In the DR Congo the opposition asked for a recount, but this was not granted by the new president and did not occur. It is important that the ability for a recount is included in the legislation.

#### *A truly independent electoral commission*

Many countries have electoral commissions/councils, and if they don't, they should have, that claim to be independent. These councils organise and supervise the process of the election and therefore it is really important that it is a solid working truly independent council. This is not often the case, commissions are influenced and support a party by for example locating polling stations near certain areas and far away from others or delaying elections. Which leads to the following point;

#### *Endless delay*

In Afghanistan and the DR Congo elections were endlessly delayed due to 'instability' or 'insufficient resources'. This allows seated parties and leaders to remain in power for longer than

legal. This is unfair and unlawful; the United Nations should try to find an independent solution for this without interfering with national sovereignty.

### *Ballot systems and vulnerability of fraud*

It is hard to say which system works best and which is the most vulnerable for fraud. What we can say is that this can go horribly wrong as it did in Kabul, Afghanistan, where the Electoral Complaints Commission wanted to declare all votes of Kabul invalid, increasing the chaos the top election authority of Afghanistan did not agree and rejected the other bodies' ruling. According to Reuters international news organisation, the election was blemished by accusations of "voter fraud, technical problems with biometric voter verification gear and inaccurate voter lists." The vulnerability is the main problem with a manually organised election.

E-voting, the other option, is used in the United States, and it is said that it is very secure and effective in contrast with a pen and paper ballot system. After the election in 2016, it was reported that the e-voting went considerably well, except for a few complaints of malfunction of voting computers. Many people are hesitant about this new form of voting and tend to prefer a simple 'pen and paper vote'.

This is because of three things:

- People cannot *observe* some key aspects of the voting process anymore. No more handing out ballots, casting in the ballot box, counting of ballots by volunteers.
- Only a few experts *understand* the process of e-voting and thus the integrity of the election relies on the expertise and experience of a small group instead of thousands of volunteers.
- The issue of corporate secrecy. Corporations inventing systems for e-voting protect their products with non-disclosure agreements and corporate-owned software codes that are kept secret. This obviously opposes transparency.

### **Unconstitutional exclusion**

In some countries, people with voting rights are deliberately excluded from voting by making it impossible to vote in various ways. In the United States of America voting rights are not effortlessly obtainable as it is in most countries. In the States, citizens have to register for voting, two months before the election. This mandatory preliminary is not always remembered by those with voting rights and has only been possible online since April 2018 this was not the case two months before and thus are these people excluded. One could argue that is the fault of those people and that is that.

This is true, however, human rights organisations have criticised set rules during the election of 2016 in the United States. People that did not have an identification document, such as native

Americans, but do have voting rights could not register since identification is necessary. This is since then changed. Another circumstance that disenables people from voting in the United States is if they are facing criminal charges. This means that if someone is not yet convicted, and might be found innocent, they are still excluded from voting. In other countries this is different.

Some observers noted that the new rules were only making voting difficult for minorities such as Afro-Americans. In Tennessee, electors were suddenly taken from the list. In Kansas and Georgia, some polling locations were suddenly abolished before the election day in 2016. This last problem occurs in more elections; for some people, voting is almost made impossible when polling locations seem to skip certain areas in cities or regions. Sometimes public transport is terminated on election day, forcing people to walk miles for a polling location where they have to wait for ages, not everyone can take the day off for voting.

Of course, the violence that occurred in Afghanistan in October 2018, during the elections, stopped a lot of people from casting their vote.

### **Influence of the media**

Media organisations can be influenced due to ownership (by the government), censorship and propaganda. More critical or independent news organisations are sometimes forced out of business by the government, this happened in Cambodia during the arrest of Kem Sokha partially because of 'breaches in regulations'.

It is incredibly important that voters are well informed of the (actions of) candidates and the current situation by the media. Information should be correct and accessible to all. It is of great importance that there is no fake or propagandistic news in regulation. However, polls are not necessary but very popular. The New York Times even lifted the 'payment barricades' to allow people to see polls before, during and after the election. Many people see the polls and critics say it really influences the voters to either go and vote for the candidate that is winning according to the polls since 'everyone wants to be a part of the 'winning team'' or the other way around that voters are forced to go and support their favourite even if they before seeing the polls decided not to vote or vote for the other candidate'. They argue that the number of polls should be reduced or even totally abolished.

### **Donors**

In the American system, there are a lot of donations for campaigns. Donating companies are believed to buy influence and support from the candidate, in case he/she wins. Donors are not always known by the public during the actual voting time due to late public filing days lots of expenditures can be paid for by donors whose identity is unknown until after the elections. Donors also 'hide' behind corporate names that could seem more politically neutral than if they

would give their own names. This is also a problem when it concerns foreign donations and therefore influence.

## Major Parties Involved

**Group of countries that don't want UN interference with their voting systems;**  
they claim sovereignty.

### DR Congo

Democratic elections in Congo took place for the first time in 20 years in December 2018. During the elections, the least favourite candidate won. Many accused the old president of manipulating the elections. A recount has been rejected by the president.

### United States of America

The USA presidential elections ended with the infamous Donald Trump winning the election whilst opponent Hillary Clinton got the most votes, this was due to the electorate system in the United States. A couple of months later the government denounced Russian intervention, assisting Donald Trump. Everything was denied and nothing strong was concluded.

### Afghanistan

The election held in October 2018 in Afghanistan had many questionable areas including killings of politicians, terrorist attacks, and fraud.

### Non democratic countries

#### China (and Arabic countries)

who does not want democracy forced on itself.

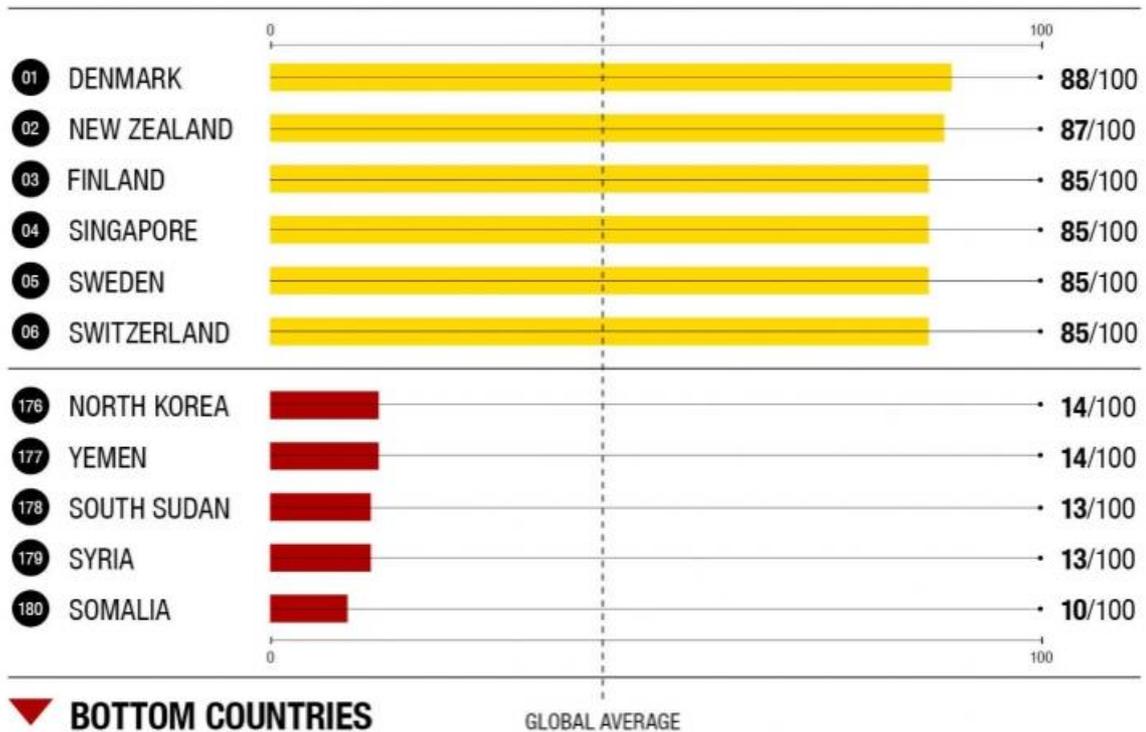
### Singapore

Singaporeans were meant to go to the polls at the end of 2017 to vote for a new president, but they'll no longer have the chance. There is only one candidate and they only allow one specific ethnic group to be a candidate, the election was annulled.

### Russia (and others)

that wants to influence other countries' elections.

### ▲ TOP COUNTRIES



*Top 5 and bottom 5 of corruption rates, by Transparency International*

## Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
December 23rd 2018	General elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the least popular candidate got the most votes, but it is believed that the election did not go accordingly.
October 2018	Elections in Afghanistan deal with many problems including terror attacks, fraud, misconduct of officials etc.
March 2007	This was the world's first nationwide vote where part of the voting was carried out in the form of remote electronic voting via the internet
September 2017	The arrest of Kem Sokha, opposition leader in Cambodia before elections in July 2018, he is released one year later
2016	Donald Trump's campaign is supported by Russian agencies who, among other things, hack and disclose Hillary Clinton's personal email
2016	Donald Trump's Cambridge Analytica affair

## Previous attempts to resolve the issue

This Subject has never had a conclusive solution. Each country has tried to impose laws to make the transparency as clear as possible. People still find fraud and find ways to go around the law.

## Possible Solutions

1. Provide federal funding for updating election infrastructure.
2. Perform mandatory pre-election testing on all voting machines, as well as continuous vulnerability analysis.
3. Expand threat information sharing, including comprehensive threat assessments accompanied by mandatory reporting requirements.
4. Update and secure outdated voter registration systems and e-poll books.

The idea of using blockchain for elections is worth more than just an experiment. Mobile voting using a safe and tested interface could eliminate voter fraud and it will make it more convenient for citizens to vote while abroad. It is also a beneficial tool for the election commission to maintain transparency in the electoral process, minimize the cost of conducting elections, streamline the process of counting votes and ensure that all votes are counted.

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