

Forum: General Assembly 6 (GA6)

Issue: Ensuring transparent elections in post-conflict zones

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Introduction

Elections are an essential system through which citizens choose their nation's and government's representatives. However, for countries emerging from armed conflict, elections hold an importance far beyond the simple transfer of political power. They help transform violence and political disputes into peaceful competition and help restore hope in citizens regarding rebuilding their country. On the other hand, elections that appear to be fraudulent and give the impression of non-transparency can, conversely, deepen and worsen existing conflicts, creating division and promoting continuous violence. Therefore, the United Nations, highlighting the importance of assistance in elections to promote peacebuilding, has provided technical aid, educated voters, and provided assistance in many other areas to support the creation of transparent and inclusive electoral systems.

When ensuring transparency in post-conflict nations, elections require more than simply preventing fraud. It includes putting in place independent institutions that will oversee elections, ensuring accurate voter registration, overseeing that armed groups have no territorial control or coercive power, accessible information, people who can monitor the elections fairly, effective systems to solve issues and complaints, and adequate security to keep voters and candidates safe.

Definition of Key Terms

Post-Conflict Zones

Post-conflict zones are countries or territories where armed conflict or large-scale conflict has ceased but still have to tackle the consequences and instability.

Electoral Transparency

Electoral transparency is when the voting procedures are done in an open and verifiable manner, ensuring everyone understands the electoral procedures.

Electoral Integrity

Electoral Integrity refers to how fair the electoral process is and to what extent the entire voting procedures will be in accordance with national and international standards, ensuring to protect against factors such as election subversion or voting suppression.

Electoral Management Body (EMB)

An EMB is an institution or organisation who runs the legal primary elements in an

election, such as determining who is eligible to vote or the validation of nominated candidates.

Background Information

Institutional Weakness

After a conflict, states often face damaged institutions and weaker electoral systems, making the process of elections especially difficult. Conflicts can damage infrastructure and disrupt the work of institutions. Consequently, electoral authorities may lack the resources and capacity to organise effective elections independently. The EMB's may lack trained personnel, funding, and infrastructure. Government records and registrations may have been damaged or not kept up to date. Refugees, along with internally displaced persons, can further complicate voter registration for voters. As a result, eligible citizens cannot register, or the voters list might be inaccurate, opening the opportunity for electoral irregularities. Hence, elections cannot be fully inclusive or trusted. Therefore, rebuilding effective electoral institutions (EMB) becomes a priority to ensure that elections are transparent. For example, we have seen this phenomenon happen with Liberia, which experienced a civil war between 1989 and 2003. After the conflict, with the help of International organisations such as the UN, this state managed to rebuild its institutions and electoral systems, showing how helpful external help can be when rebuilding an electoral system.



Figure 1: Diagram about distorting elections at every turn by Freedom House



Figure 2: Map of Liberia by Britannica

Security and Political Violence

Security remains another prominent issue in post-conflict regions. Former armed groups can remain to have influence on political life, meaning that candidates or voters could be threatened, intimidated, or coerced. Attacks on polling stations could also interfere with the safety of citizens. However, the constant presence of military or security forces can weaken public confidence if they are deemed to support a particular political group. Therefore, post-conflict elections require enough security to protect voters and candidates while ensuring the neutrality and non-involvement of security forces in electoral procedures.

Electoral admissions and Observation

Efficient electoral administration is key to maintaining the public's confidence. Electoral Management Bodies should be independent and unbiased, with adequately trained personnel, enough funding, and clear registration, voting, and counting procedures. Ensuring voting isn't done by one political party helps avoid biased beliefs and extends transparency beyond the voting day itself. Domestic and International observers can monitor voting, registration, media, campaigning, and counting, and remain present post-election, following the whole election process, ensuring it remains transparent, compliant to the rules, and catching any irregularities if they do surge. Organisations such as the OSCE or the ODIHR therefore contribute to electoral transparency as they independently observe the process and give feedback for possible improvements.



Figure 3: Diagram of the voting process by the Elections and Boundaries Department of Belize

Misinformation and electoral disputes

Misinformation is something that greatly affects nations post-war, as it can destroy public trust in the system. Rumors or false claims regarding candidates, voting procedures, or supposed electoral fraud can spread quickly, especially with the use of social media. This leads to people believing the elections are fraudulent; citizens may lose confidence in the

results, and it can also increase tensions. Disputes over results can equally create tension if there is no trust or system to solve arising conflicts.

Organisations and Major Countries Involved

United Nations (UN)

The UN provides electoral assistance to around 60 countries per year. For example, it provides technical support, training, educating voters, and support for institutions. To secure polling, they deploy peacekeeping forces, ensuring safety for voters and infrastructure. Additionally, they build institutions helping independent election bodies guarantee fair laws and transparent registrations. The UN also aids minorities and women, ensuring equal voting access and promoting inclusivity.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The UNDP leads operations to support countries in developing national electoral commissions. Their role is essential for nations as they strengthen the electoral system in the long term.

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)

The International IDEA provides research and guidance for electoral integrity, handbooks and tools to help these post-conflict nations create a fair democratic system. Their work aims to emphasise that each electoral system must be made in accordance with each state's political and security conditions.

Organisation for Security and Co-Organisation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE implements Election observation Missions which consist of conducting election observations through ODIHR and providing technical aid such as help in enhancing electoral law-making and administration. Ensuring democratic standards and stability in post conflict nations.

Liberia

After 14 years of civil war, in 2005 Liberia held its first post-war elections, heavily involving international actors. Today, they serve as a prime example of a nation that has successfully moved on from a UN-guided election to fully running their own transparent system. By creating their National Elections Commission they have managed to run elections without political interference. In addition, their parties have committed to keeping elections peaceful and non-violent. Proving that post-conflict countries can achieve peaceful and transparent elections.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

After a devastating civil war, in 1995 an international framework, the Dayton Peace Agreement, took over the electoral system temporarily to try and promote peace. Throughout the years, BiH built the Central Election Commission, showing how electoral power has

passed from an international body (OSCE) to being run by its nation. In addition, they have adopted anti-fraud (Boris Bovjak, 2005) and e-voting systems to restore public trust and implemented equal representation of their ethnic groups to keep the peace. Making BiH a prime example of a nation transitioning from being fully internationally supervised to being independent, and the positive effects of long-term international engagement, as Bosnia still remains under election observation till this day.

Possible Solutions

Rebuilding electoral institutions

The first solution would be strengthening independent electoral institutions, building credibility and trust amongst the nation. Then it would be to make voter registration more transparent and inclusive. Also, providing protection to people who might still be in an unstable zone where peace is still not completely settled.

Ensuring Security and preventing political violence

Another possible solution would be to expand international electoral observation in the long term, assuring that no national committees are present, but more independent actors with no specific ties or interest in the country. This can be strengthened by including local social organizations and diverse stakeholders as observers of the whole electoral process. Organisations such as the OSCE or the ODIHR contribute to maintaining electoral independence by independently monitoring elections and reporting any irregularities.

Strengthening Independent Electoral Observation

A further solution would be to expand international and domestic electoral observation throughout the entire electoral process, rather than only overseeing on the day of elections. Independent observers could oversee voter registration, campaigning, voting, counting, and even continue to monitor throughout the election period.

Fighting Misinformation and Resolving Electoral Disputes

Finally, creating a reliable system to solve election disputes and deal with misinformation. Citizens should be able to have clear and independent means to report irregularities and speak their opinion on elections when needed. At the same time, authorities should also provide clear and reliable information about voter registration, procedures, and results to reduce the spread of misinformation. This is essential because the spread of rumours about candidates or procedures can spread very quickly with the use of social media and lose the trust of the population.

Overall, processes that demilitarise politics and realising that solving conflict and political transition can help create a more trusted electoral system.

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