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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In the present report, the Secretary-General discusses developments in the field of elections and United Nations electoral assistance since the issuance of his previous report on that subject ([A/76/266](#)). During the reporting period, from 1 August 2021 to 31 July 2023, the United Nations provided electoral assistance, either at the request of the country concerned or on the basis of a Security Council mandate, to more than 60 States and territories.

The report highlights the contributions of multiple United Nations system entities involved in electoral assistance, progress in ensuring more coherence, consistency and coordination within the United Nations system and efforts made to strengthen cooperation and partnership between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, as well as with other international assistance providers.

Credible elections continued to be a prominent and effective way for citizens to express their political preferences and confer legitimacy on their chosen leaders and governments. Conducting elections involves implementing not only the letter of electoral legislation but also following the spirit and values of a genuine electoral process. There were, however, reports of certain elections not adequately safeguarding the principles that underpin democratic elections, such as ensuring that all parties and candidates are able to compete on an equal basis before the law. Such issues, together with instances of voter apathy, attacks or threats against electoral authorities and challenges to their independence, and the spreading of misinformation and disinformation, serve as reminders to Member States that elections and their institutional foundations require continuous investment in order to protect them. The report also notes that candidates and political leaders have a crucial responsibility to

* [A/78/150](#).



lead by peaceful and constructive example and to encourage similar behaviour from their supporters. This is particularly significant when faced with an electoral loss in a well-administered process, where the unsuccessful candidates may need to demonstrate courage in publicly conceding and accepting the results. For their part, winners also need to recognize that part of the electorate may prefer another candidate or party and give appropriate political space to such differing views.

The report includes consideration of ways of addressing disinformation that manifests in elections and of the pivotal role of the judiciary in ruling on election-related issues.

Despite sustained attention being given to the equal participation of women in politics, progress in that regard remains insufficient. Priority action needs to be focused on catalysing support in order to repeal discriminatory laws and remove structural barriers, and on addressing violence against women, including online. The report raises other important considerations for inclusive electoral processes, including ways to enable the participation of internally displaced persons and youth.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [76/176](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the status of requests from States for electoral assistance and on his efforts to enhance support from the Organization for the democratization process in Member States since the issuance of the previous report ([A/76/266](#)).

2. During the reporting period, from 1 August 2021 to 31 July 2023, the Organization provided electoral assistance, either at the request of the country concerned or on the basis of a Security Council mandate, to more than 60 States and territories. The support provided primarily consisted of technical assistance and engagement for enhancing the capacity of national electoral authorities and promoting inclusive electoral processes, in particular the participation of women. In addition to providing an overview of such activities, the present report includes observations on opportunities and challenges faced by Member States in conducting elections and by the Organization when providing electoral assistance. Annex I contains a list of the States and territories in which the United Nations provided electoral assistance during the reporting period, annex II contains examples of United Nations assistance activities and annex III contains a map illustrating the States and territories to which the United Nations provided electoral assistance during the reporting period.

II. United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

A. Mandates

3. In 1991, the General Assembly established a framework for United Nations electoral assistance, which has continued to evolve and remains the basis for United Nations work in this field. The Organization provides assistance only at the specific request of the Member State concerned or as mandated by the Security Council or Assembly.

4. Prior to agreeing upon and providing the assistance, the United Nations carries out an assessment of the needs and capacities of the Member State concerned to ensure that the support provided is tailored to respond to the specific context. The Assembly has reiterated on many occasions that electoral assistance must be objective, impartial, neutral and independent, with due respect for national sovereignty. It has also reaffirmed that while democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy and that the responsibility for organizing free and fair elections lies with Member States.

5. Since its forty-fourth session, the General Assembly has regularly considered the issue of enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections, and the promotion of democratization, including with respect to United Nations electoral assistance. Most recently, in its resolution [76/176](#), the Assembly recognized the importance of fair, periodic, inclusive and genuine elections, including in nascent democracies and countries undergoing democratization, and recommended that the United Nations continue to provide technical advice and other assistance to requesting Member States and electoral institutions in order to help to strengthen their democratic processes, also bearing in mind that the relevant office may provide additional assistance in the form of mediation and good offices, upon the request of Member States.

6. In 1991, the Secretary-General, with the endorsement of the General Assembly, designated the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs as the system-wide focal point for electoral assistance matters. The number of entities involved in electoral activities has continued to grow since then. In a field of diverse actors providing various types of electoral support, the Assembly has repeatedly highlighted the importance of the system-wide coherence and consistency of that support and the leadership role of the focal point in that respect. Accordingly, the responsibilities of the focal point include setting electoral assistance policy, deciding on the parameters for United Nations electoral assistance in a particular requesting Member State, and maintaining, as mandated by the Assembly, a single roster of electoral experts. Since 1 January 2019, owing to the restructuring of the United Nations peace and security pillar, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs serves as the focal point for electoral assistance matters.

7. The Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs provides support to the focal point. Pursuant to requests from Member States and in consultation with relevant United Nations system entities, the Division conducts electoral needs assessments, recommends the parameters for United Nations electoral assistance and advises on the design of electoral mission components or assistance projects. The Division also develops and manages the single roster of electoral experts and maintains the institutional memory of the Organization with respect to electoral matters, in collaboration with other United Nations entities. On behalf of the focal point, the Division provides political and technical guidance to United Nations entities involved in electoral assistance, including on policies and good practice. When required, the Division supports the Secretary-General, including his special representatives and envoys, and political and peacekeeping missions, in the prevention and mediation of electoral crises. The Division also maintains partnerships with other regional and intergovernmental organizations involved in elections.

8. In mission settings, electoral assistance is generally provided through components of field missions under the auspices of the Department of Peace Operations or the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. Military and police components of peacekeeping missions support national law enforcement agencies in providing security for electoral processes. In countries with peacekeeping, peacebuilding or special political missions, electoral assistance is delivered in a fully integrated manner, whether or not the mission is structurally integrated. United Nations electoral assistance in mission settings is delivered under the overall authority of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General or the Head of Mission. This ensures that United Nations entities providing electoral assistance to a Member State are coherent in their communications and prevents the duplication of efforts, allowing for the optimal use of available resources.

9. In non-mission settings, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the largest provider of United Nations electoral assistance and the major body of the Organization supporting the development of electoral institutions, building partnerships, strengthening legal frameworks and processes, and supporting the conduct of elections. In addition, UNDP usually contributes to the implementation of electoral assistance mandates undertaken by field missions. In its resolution [76/176](#), the Assembly requested UNDP to continue its democratic governance assistance programmes in cooperation with other relevant organizations, in particular those that promote the strengthening of democratic institutions and linkages between civil society and Governments. Electoral assistance forms a key aspect of UNDP governance work in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. Furthermore, in non-mission settings, resident coordinators provide in-country strategic leadership and facilitate the coordination and coherence of electoral assistance by United Nations country teams, in addition to the assistance provided by

UNDP. Resident coordinators may engage in preventive diplomacy and good offices for electoral processes in coordination with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and coordinate common country analyses and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks that integrate electoral priorities into country-led development processes, as required. In some settings, peace and development advisers support resident coordinators and are deployed as part of the Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention managed by the Department and UNDP.

11. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) monitors and reports on human rights in the context of elections and engages in advocacy to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms in such contexts. OHCHR also provides technical advice and capacity-building assistance to ensure that local norms and institutions comply with international human rights law.

12. Within its mandate and through its normative support functions and operational activities, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) provides guidance and technical support to Member States, at their request, on gender equality, the empowerment of women, women's rights and gender mainstreaming. It promotes gender equality and the participation of women in electoral processes and also provides training and advice in those areas. In addition, UN-Women is mandated to lead, coordinate and promote the accountability of the United Nations system in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

13. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aims to support the development of fair, safe and professional media coverage, including during elections, as important elements of democracy, including by building the capacity of media professionals, media regulators, security forces and policymakers. It also supports access to information initiatives and training on fact-checking and the critical thinking of citizens.

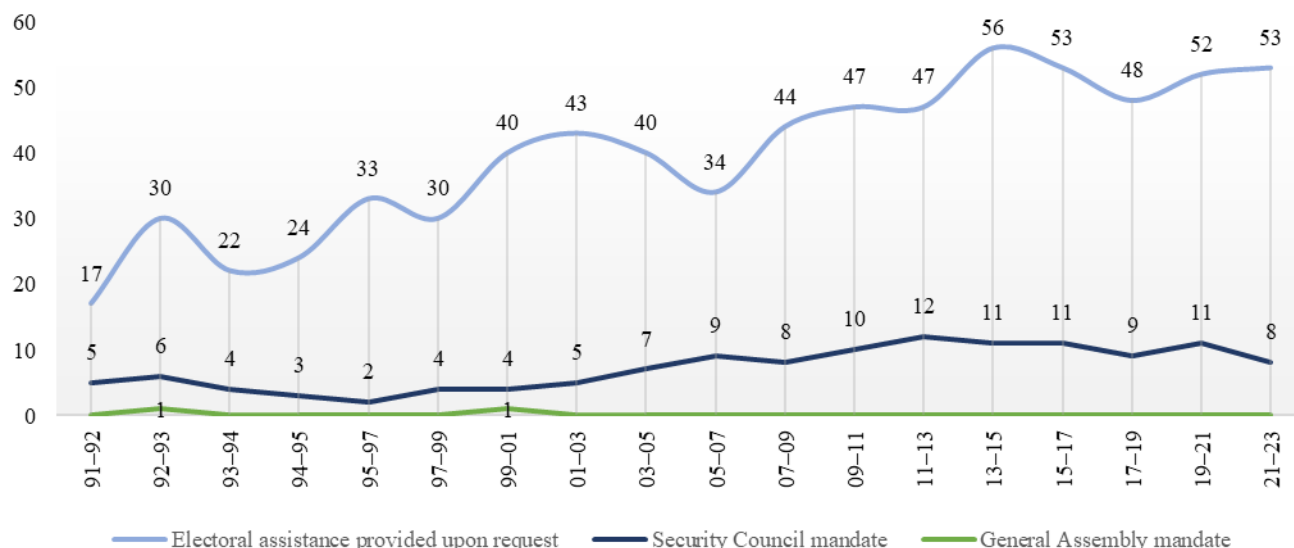
14. Numerous other United Nations entities are involved in electoral activities or have a mandate or an area of focus related to electoral matters. The Department of Operational Support provides administrative and logistical support to peacekeeping operations, special political missions and other field presences. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), in partnership with other United Nations entities, supports the implementation of electoral activities in both mission settings, including post-conflict and peacekeeping environments, and non-mission settings. The United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) works to integrate qualified and highly motivated personnel, both in person and online, into electoral projects and into the electoral components of peace operations, while at the same time promoting the value of inclusion through volunteerism, especially among women, youth and marginalized groups. The Peacebuilding Fund supports countries in creating an environment conducive to peaceful elections, with a particular focus on women, youth and other marginalized groups. In the context of disputed elections, the Peacebuilding Fund supports the reduction of tensions and the mitigation of violence by encouraging dialogue and engagement. The United Nations Democracy Fund empowers civil society organizations to bolster the groundwork for civic participation and foster the inclusion of all groups in democratic processes, including by funding civil society initiatives during elections. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) assists Member States, where relevant and appropriate, in facilitating refugee participation in electoral processes. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) supports the implementation of out-of-country voting programmes for refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. The Office of the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth, which is currently being integrated into the recently established United Nations Youth Office, advocates for the meaningful engagement of young people in political and public life, including in elections.

B. Electoral assistance activities

15. Throughout the reporting period, the Organization continued to assist States and territories in conducting their electoral processes in an inclusive, credible, professional and impartial manner, as well as in complying with the democratic principles of universal and equal suffrage and other international obligations. Part of the true measure of a successful election is ensuring trust in the electoral process and ensuring that the election results are credible and peacefully accepted. To that end, the United Nations works to provide needs-based expert assistance for enhancing the capacity of electoral authorities and other electoral stakeholders. Although the technical quality of the electoral process is important, electoral outcomes may be accepted even in the face of technical flaws or weaknesses, and even a competently managed election can lead to tensions or violence. Accordingly, the Organization recognizes the importance of combining technical assistance with political engagement and preventive diplomacy, where appropriate and as requested. Representatives of the Secretary-General, namely special representatives, envoys and resident coordinators, play strategic roles in cultivating environments conducive to encouraging the constructive participation of political leaders in elections and, where necessary, to defusing pre- or post-election tensions. This may include, for example, establishing a consultative framework to enable government and political party leaders to reach consensus on critical issues related to the holding of elections or supporting contestants in agreeing on an electoral code of conduct. Such efforts by the Organization are particularly challenging in environments where there is fundamental inequality or where an election exposes underlying divisions and conflict, and may therefore act as a trigger for violence.

16. Technical assistance remains the most frequent form of electoral assistance requested by Member States and provided by the United Nations. Since 1991, the United Nations has provided electoral assistance to 115 States and territories. The number of States and territories receiving United Nations electoral assistance since 1991, by biennium, is illustrated in figure I. Unless specifically mandated to do so by the Security Council or the General Assembly, the United Nations does not organize, certify, supervise or observe an electoral process, and these types of assistance are rarely mandated. Where a Member State seeks assistance from the United Nations in its electoral process, there must be broad public support in the State for the assumption of such a role by the United Nations.

Figure I

Number of States and territories receiving United Nations electoral assistance, by biennium, 1991–2023

Source: relevant reports of the Secretary-General.

C. Cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system

17. The General Assembly has often reiterated the need for ongoing comprehensive coordination among United Nations entities under the auspices of the focal point for electoral assistance matters, most recently in its resolution [76/176](#). The Electoral Assistance Division continued to advise and support the focal point in developing internal, system-wide electoral assistance policies, in consultation with other United Nations entities.

18. United Nations entities involved in electoral matters continued to discuss internal electoral assistance policy issues through the Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanism for United Nations Electoral Assistance. The Mechanism, which is convened and chaired by the Electoral Assistance Division, continued to enable the exchange of information, the coordination of electoral activities and the development of United Nations electoral assistance policy. It includes representatives of UNDP, the Department of Peace Operations, OHCHR, UN-Women, UNESCO, UNOPS, the United Nations Democracy Fund, UNHCR, UNV, IOM and the Office of the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth. The Peacebuilding Support Office is represented as part of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs in recognition of its role and the support provided by the Peacebuilding Fund for the prevention of violence in electoral environments.

19. In order to promote system-wide coherence, the Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP hosted a number of virtual global meetings with chief electoral advisers and chief technical advisers on elections to discuss trends, challenges and opportunities related to the Organization's approach to and delivery of electoral assistance. Virtual meetings were also held with peace and development advisers in order to discuss internal policies and share good practice.

20. The Electoral Assistance Division, in partnership with the United Nations System Staff College, continued to conduct its training course for United Nations personnel on a political approach to preventing and responding to election-related

violence. In order to further enhance cooperation with its partners, the Organization invited regional organizations to take part in the training course.

21. OHCHR delivered training on human rights monitoring in the context of elections and in 2021 issued *Human Rights and Elections: A Handbook on International Human Rights Standards on Elections*. In September 2022, UNESCO and UNDP, together with their partner, launched a multilingual online course on information and elections in the digital era, which drew participants from more than 160 countries.

22. The United Nations single roster of electoral experts continued to meet staffing requirements in its field operations, as needed. The roster contains screened experts at various levels who can be rapidly deployed in support of electoral processes in Member States that request assistance.

D. Cooperation with other organizations

23. The Electoral Assistance Division, together with UNDP and other United Nations entities, continued to strengthen electoral partnerships with regional, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. During the reporting period, the United Nations organized or supported seven training sessions and capacity-building initiatives, further contributing to South-South and triangular cooperation, that covered topics such as the participation of women and youth in the electoral processes, enhancing the credibility and integrity of elections, and mitigating electoral violence. In this regard, the Organization cooperated closely with partner organizations, including the African Union, the East African Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Southern African Development Community. Participants included electoral officials, civil society representatives and other electoral stakeholders, from around 100 Member States. The Organization also continued to assist the secretariats of certain partner organizations in further enhancing their electoral capacities. For example, it supported the secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in updating its electoral database and further developing its institutional memory. The United Nations also worked with the Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit of the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the African Union Commission to develop a framework for technical assistance for electoral management bodies of member States of the African Union. In addition, the United Nations worked closely with other organizations, including the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States, the Commonwealth, the European Union, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

24. The United Nations continued to support platforms for electoral capacity development and knowledge-sharing at the regional and global levels. It also worked closely with partners to ensure that the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network remained up to date and accessible to electoral officials and practitioners worldwide. The Organization and its partners continued to support the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections programme, which is the most comprehensive modular electoral capacity development programme and which marked its twentieth anniversary in 2022.

25. The Organization supported the Arab Organization of Electoral Management Bodies in establishing the Arab Network for Youth in Elections. The Network serves as a regional mechanism for connecting youth organizations both with each other and

with electoral authorities in order to share good practice regarding the participation of youth in politics.

26. Furthermore, the Organization continued to support the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, which was commemorated at the United Nations in 2005. The Declaration, which is currently endorsed by 53 organizations worldwide, continues to play an important role in enhancing the professional international observation of electoral processes. The Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, launched at the United Nations in 2012 and now endorsed by 309 organizations and networks, continues to provide an important normative framework for organizations engaged in non-partisan citizen election monitoring.

III. United Nations electoral assistance resources

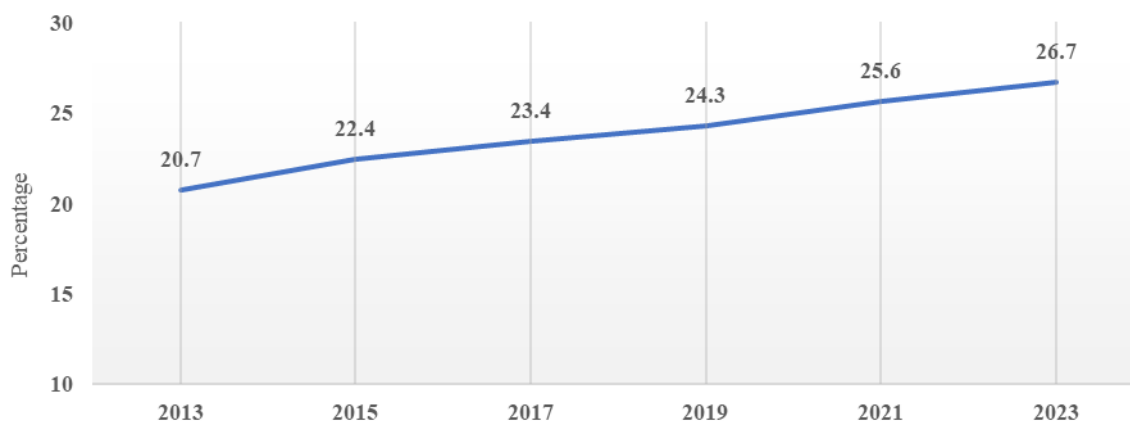
27. The core staff costs of the Electoral Assistance Division continue to be funded primarily by the programme budget of the United Nations. Thanks to generous contributions from Member States, the Division continued to use extrabudgetary funds as vital supplementary funding for carrying out critical substantive activities, such as conducting needs assessments and other electoral missions, enabling the rapid deployment of electoral experts to the field as necessary, maintaining the roster of electoral experts, and providing capacity-building support to regional organizations.

28. The Organization continued to benefit from the trust fund administered by the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, along with the UNDP funding window for governance and peacebuilding, to implement rapid response and catalytic projects and programmes aimed at mitigating conflict, promoting peaceful elections and supporting the participation of women and other underrepresented groups. UN-Women used extrabudgetary funds on programming to support the participation of women in elections, including by addressing violence against women in elections. Additional support, as needed, was provided by the Peacebuilding Fund and was largely related to leveraging United Nations expertise for establishing environments conducive to peaceful elections. Voluntary contributions from partners continued to be the principal funding source of United Nations electoral assistance projects in the field, which were mainly implemented by UNDP. Multi-partner basket funds established in specific Member States are often used to manage those resources.

IV. Gender equality and elections

29. The rights of women to equal political participation at all levels of government are recognized in international normative frameworks, emphasized in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and endorsed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite these obligations, commitments and ongoing efforts, women remain underrepresented and there has been limited progress towards gender parity in elected and appointed positions, with women comprising only 26.7 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide. Representation at the local level is slightly higher, with women holding 35.5 per cent of elected seats in local deliberative bodies, but as at June 2023, women represented only 10.6 per cent of heads of State and 8.3 per cent of heads of Government.

Figure II
Average percentage of women in lower or single houses of parliament worldwide, (2013–2023)



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union.

30. Gender equality and the participation of women continued to be fundamental considerations of United Nations electoral assistance. All United Nations electoral needs assessments undertaken during the reporting period included an analysis of the political and electoral participation of women. Where appropriate, the assessments incorporated dedicated recommendations on temporary special measures, including with regard to electoral quotas. In many countries where the Organization worked to increase the political participation of women, the consideration of such measures among national stakeholders was often supported by United Nations entities combining technical assistance with tailored advocacy.

31. In Iraq, for example, the United Nations assisted electoral authorities in gender mainstreaming regulations and procedures and addressing violence against women in elections. In Paraguay, the Organization supported a national political school where hundreds of women leaders from parties and grass-roots organizations were trained on how to compete as candidates in elections. In Zambia, the United Nations supported national efforts to engage thousands of young women and men in community and intergenerational dialogues to help address conflict related to elections. In Mexico and Peru, the Organization deployed monitoring tools to assist in countering violence against women in politics. In the Gambia, Lebanon, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone and Vanuatu, among other States, the United Nations advocated changing electoral legislation to increase the representation of women in parliament.

32. UN-Women developed an online gender quota portal (genderquota.org), which is based on a global review of national laws and is the first United Nations platform of global comparative knowledge regarding legislated gender quotas in the public domain.

V. Observations

33. Throughout the reporting period, credible elections continued to be an effective way for citizens to express their political preferences and confer legitimacy on their chosen leaders and governments. In some cases, elections also served as important steps in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Some countries grappled with low public confidence and challenges to the integrity of electoral processes and to the peaceful retention or transfer of authority. A number of elections took place against a backdrop of broader political and economic instability, which placed a strain on

democratic institutions and processes. Conducting elections involves implementing not only the letter of electoral legislation but also following the spirit and values of a genuine electoral process. There were, however, reports of certain elections not adequately safeguarding the principles underpinning democratic elections, such as ensuring that all parties and candidates are able to compete on an equal basis before the law. In some of those cases, the credibility of the processes and the institutions that oversaw them was called into question. Such issues, combined with instances of voter apathy, attacks or threats against electoral authorities and challenges to their independence, and the spread of misinformation and disinformation, serve as reminders to Member States that elections and their institutional foundations require continual investment in order to protect them.

34. The majority of elections over the past two years were peaceful. In instances where elections led to tension or even violence, the acceptance of the outcome was often a central problem. Candidates and political leaders have a crucial responsibility to lead by peaceful and constructive example and to encourage similar behaviour from their supporters. This is particularly significant when faced with an electoral loss in a well-administered process, where the unsuccessful candidates may need to demonstrate courage in publicly conceding and accepting the results. The acceptance of the will of the people helps to maintain the legitimacy of the system in the long run. For their part, winners also need to recognize that part of the electorate may prefer another candidate or party and give appropriate political space to such differing views.

35. In a few instances, contestants used general allegations of electoral fraud as justification for not accepting officially declared results. In the experience of the United Nations, no system offers an absolute guarantee that irregularities will not occur during an election, whether deliberate or caused by an inadvertent error. Nevertheless, electoral fraud, defined as the manipulation of voter registration, polling processes or tabulation of results, is typically a highly detectable offence and traceable where quality control measures have been applied, transparency has been ensured and unbiased investigations are conducted. Electoral bodies and other national authorities are encouraged to adopt effective strategies in that regard in consultation with stakeholders. In addition, candidates and party leaders who allege fraud have a responsibility to be specific in their allegations and present specific evidence for their assertions rather than simply casting aspersions. Where the necessary transparency and quality control measures are in place, political actors are also encouraged to acknowledge through a code of conduct, for example, that irregularities, if they occur, would be detectable through such measures. In order to be effective, the code of conduct should be in place for all key stages of an election and may include mechanisms to hold signatories accountable. As there is no fixed model for such a code, it should be the outcome of an inclusive and nationally owned dialogue and fit the national political and legal context. Political actors should also be encouraged to follow legal and peaceful processes to resolve any election-related disputes, as not every irregularity is a sign of fraud and not all instances of fraud amount to a fraudulent election.

36. Social media platforms are now well-established channels for the free expression of ideas and opinions and they can be effective tools for participation and inclusion during elections. There remains concern, however, over the spread of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech online, in particular taking into account the evolving nature and influence of artificial intelligence. Moreover, there are differing views as to how best to address such phenomena, including concerns that restrictions on content could unduly restrict freedom of expression. The issue is more clear-cut, however, when disinformation is specific to the administration of the electoral process, including legal and operational features such as eligibility and

voting rights; registration requirements; the date, location and manner of polling; and the announcement of election results. Deliberately circulating falsehoods about such aspects of elections, for example, in an attempt to suppress or change voting behaviour, should be considered unacceptable under any circumstance. The prerogative of electoral authorities to convey accurate and timely information throughout an electoral process regarding who is entitled to vote, when and where the process will take place, and the results of the election should ideally be established by law and may require enforcement mechanisms. This should include the capability to fact-check and address distortions by others. Candidates and party leaders play a central role in fostering an environment conducive to peaceful elections, which includes deferring to electoral authorities as the sole source of information on procedural aspects and not spreading misinformation or disinformation about the process, and calling upon their followers also not to do so. Political actors in some Member States are already adopting such commitments, which have been effective contributions to the integrity of the electoral process.

37. Disinformation in electoral contexts is not limited to falsehoods regarding electoral procedures. When present in public discussion and political debate, disinformation can amplify tensions and divisions by disrupting the ability of the electorate to make informed decisions. Despite there being no simple technological solution to countering the effects of disinformation, various efforts are under way. Forthcoming initiatives of the Organization, such as a code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms and the development by UNESCO of guidelines for a multi-stakeholder approach in the context of regulating digital platforms, may help to address the phenomenon by clarifying platform accountability and government responsibility, including during elections. As noted in the report of the Secretary-General on countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms ([A/77/287](#), para. 42), State efforts to address the impacts of disinformation should avoid approaches that impose an undue burden on freedom of expression or are susceptible to politicized implementation. Even when there is a legitimate public interest purpose, the risks inherent in the regulation of expression require a carefully tailored approach that complies with the requirements of legality, necessity and proportionality under human rights law. Two new digital tools developed by UNDP, namely iVerify and eMonitor+, are being used in a number of countries to help identify and counter misinformation, disinformation and hate speech in electoral contexts.

38. The experience of the past two years reconfirmed that courts and judges hold pivotal roles in ruling on election-related issues, thereby ensuring credibility in and bringing finality to electoral processes as quickly as possible. This can include ordering recounts or reviews and certifying or nullifying results. This is often done under situations of heightened tension owing to political uncertainty. In some circumstances, courts grapple with the question as to whether proven irregularities are of sufficient significance to warrant the election outcome being overturned. The extreme measure of overturning an election outcome would also annul votes that were legitimately cast, and therefore the decision in that regard requires a careful balancing of interests in a short period of time. In order for there to be legal certainty in such matters, Member States are encouraged to ensure that electoral and other applicable legislation clearly specifies the criteria for partially or fully invalidating election results and states that the burden of proof rests on the complainants. Judicial institutions adjudicate electoral complaints and disputes at all stages of such a process, and they should be able to do so without fear of pressure or manipulation. The institutions should therefore be provided with the necessary means to enable effective legal redress through prompt decision-making, at the same time as exerting independence, impartiality and technical proficiency.

39. Despite sustained attention being given to the equal participation of women in political life, progress in that regard remains insufficient. A strong normative framework exists at the global and regional levels, and often at the national level, but implementation continues to lag behind, primarily owing to a lack of political will and continued discriminatory attitudes and practices. Priority action needs to focus on catalysing support for repealing discriminatory laws and removing structural barriers. Effective temporary special measures should also be enacted, including gender quotas for elected and appointed positions, where appropriate, as well as capacity-building for women candidates and enabling measures for the nomination and media coverage of those candidates. Advocacy through public awareness and endorsement from political leaders should accompany such actions. Although temporary special measures are not sufficient instruments in themselves, they can contribute significantly to positive change. Gender quotas, when carefully designed and implemented, are effective tools for increasing the representation of women.

40. The level of violence against women in their role as politicians, candidates, voters, election officials, judges, journalists, human rights defenders or members of women's or civil society organizations is alarming and can limit the participation of women in political and public life. New forms of intimidation, sexual harassment and hate speech have emerged and spread through online and social media, the impact of which is particularly noticeable during an election. Member States are urged to recognize violence against women in digital contexts as a human rights violation ([A/77/302](#), para. 64). Furthermore, Member States are encouraged to take measures to prevent, investigate and prosecute acts of violence against women in public and political life, including in digital contexts; to provide women, in particular potential candidates, with safety measures, education and training to respond to ever-increasing threats; and to advocate for technology that supports the safe participation of women in elections.

41. Internally displaced persons often face numerous barriers to participation in elections on an equal basis with other citizens. Provided that they meet voter eligibility requirements, internally displaced persons have the right to participate in an election and their displacement does not curtail this or other political rights. Although not a precondition for the legitimacy of an election, special measures to enable voting by internally displaced persons can be an important factor in overcoming political exclusion, strengthening the credibility of an electoral process, contributing to durable solutions to displacement and reducing sources of conflict. Such measures typically entail significant legal, political and operational complexities, and not all approaches may be feasible under all circumstances. Decisions on instituting special measures are best made by the Member State concerned in the specific context, after thorough consultations, including with displaced communities, to ensure broad political support, and taking into consideration legal, operational and financial factors. Ensuring active consultation with internally displaced communities and access to disaggregated data and research on the participation of internally displaced persons in political and electoral processes is necessary for enabling informed and consensus-based decisions. Although there may be instances where such provisions are limited or not possible, any decision by a Member State not to adopt special measures ought to be reasonable and justifiable in the national context and should not be made with the intent of exclusion or marginalization.

42. Enabling young people to exercise their right to participate in public affairs is crucial for cultivating their trust in political institutions, reducing the sense of alienation from elected leaders, and fostering more inclusive representation. A number of countries have taken steps to align the minimum voting age with that of standing for election, and some countries have adopted electoral quotas for young

people so as to ensure their representation. Member States are urged to continue to explore ways to further increase the participation of young people in decision-making and electoral processes as candidates, voters, electoral officials, party agents, observers and human rights monitors. In addition, political leaders and parties are urged to consider ways to cultivate young leaders and to include appropriate mechanisms in internal party regulations to that end. It is, however, important when considering increasing youth participation not to reduce “youth” to a single, simple denominator or cast the participation of young people as either exclusively positive or negative. Young people may be as diverse as other segments of the population in their political views, social background and level of engagement, and may also face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Where a youth quota is considered or adopted, it should ideally be accompanied by a requirement for gender parity within the targeted age group.

43. Flooding, rising sea levels, wildfires, storms and other disasters, in part fuelled by climate change, affect the conduct of elections worldwide. Disruptions caused by damage to infrastructure and equipment, or by the displacement of voters and electoral staff, are no longer hypothetical scenarios. Weather disruptions and natural disasters are unpredictable in their timing but they are not necessarily unforeseeable. Preparation and planning rooted in data-based understanding of potential climate impacts and risks can mitigate the impact of such disasters, including by reducing political tensions that could result from ad hoc decisions being taken. Reactive or late responses could limit affected and displaced communities in exercising their political rights. Electoral preparedness and resilience against climate impact could include providing flexibility in electoral legislation for addressing emergency situations; foreseeing alternative voting arrangements to enable participation, including of vulnerable groups; allowing electoral authorities to adjust preparations where necessary; and strengthening cooperation with relevant institutions involved in disaster preparedness. Some governments and electoral authorities are already adopting a “climate lens” to address the effects of one-time or cyclical natural events and irreversible shifts in climate patterns on electoral processes. For example, one Member State adapted an election vulnerability index in relation to tidal flooding, as a result of which it implemented pre-emptive measures for ensuring service continuity, voter access and the safeguarding of election materials. Lessons learned from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on developing, with broad political support, action plans to deal with large-scale electoral disruptions, which may also be of use.

44. The United Nations aims to respond positively to requests for electoral assistance from Member States. There may, however, be circumstances in which the Organization is not in a position to provide all or part of the requested support. Factors that may limit a response include insufficient time to deploy personnel or procure equipment; inadequate funding for the project or activity; limited comparative advantage in relation to assistance provided by other organizations; or a lack of broad domestic support for the electoral process in question or for engagement by the Organization. The focal point for electoral assistance matters will continue to consider those and other factors when deciding on the electoral assistance that can be provided to a Member State.

45. Experience during the reporting period reinforced the importance of coordinating United Nations electoral assistance and delivering as one. This is particularly important given the sensitivities around supporting elections with due respect for national sovereignty. Ensuring consistency and coherence at all stages of an assistance programme enables the support provided by the range of United Nations entities to fulfil expectations set by the General Assembly in that regard. Within the established framework, the focal point for electoral assistance matters will continue to play a critical role in deciding whether or not assistance should be provided by the United Nations and, if provided, how it is implemented.

Annex I

United Nations electoral assistance provided during the reporting period

Member States

Armenia	Mauritania
Bhutan	Mexico
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mozambique
Burkina Faso	Nauru
Central African Republic*	Nepal
Chad	Niger
Chile	Nigeria
Côte d'Ivoire	Pakistan
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Papua New Guinea
Ecuador	Paraguay
El Salvador	Peru
Ethiopia	Philippines
Fiji	Republic of Moldova
Gambia	Sao Tome and Principe
Guatemala	Sierra Leone
Guinea-Bissau	Solomon Islands
Haiti*	Somalia*
Honduras	South Africa
Iraq*	South Sudan*
Jordan	Sudan*
Kenya	Suriname
Kyrgyzstan	Timor-Leste
Lebanon	Tunisia
Lesotho	Uganda
Liberia	Uzbekistan
Libya*	Vanuatu
Madagascar	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Malawi	Zambia
Maldives	Zimbabwe
Mali*	

* Assistance provided under a Security Council mandate.

Observer States

State of Palestine

Non-Self-Governing Territories

New Caledonia

Annex II

Examples of United Nations electoral assistance provided during the reporting period

Gambia

For the presidential election in 2021, legislative elections in 2022 and local elections in 2023, the United Nations supported the Independent Electoral Commission and other stakeholders by providing training and capacity-building, voter education, and police training and election security, as well as by promoting the participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities. The Organization supported political dialogue through a national stakeholders' forum, where parties contesting the presidential election signed a peace pledge, which also applied to subsequent elections, committing to abstain from incendiary language and hate speech. The efforts were complemented by training for journalists on combating hate speech.

Honduras

The United Nations has supported political dialogue in Honduras since the 2017 electoral crisis. Pursuant to a request, the Organization provided electoral assistance for the general and local elections held in 2021. As part of electoral reforms, the electoral framework was overhauled, including by establishing the National Electoral Council and the Electoral Justice Tribunal and revamping the National Registry Office. The United Nations provided technical assistance to and strengthened the capacity of those institutions, including by supporting a new civil and electoral registry, involving the production of 5.4 million biometric identification cards and a credible civil registry that served as a basis for a more robust and trusted electoral roll. The Organization supported the National Electoral Council in fostering political participation. Efforts targeted traditionally marginalized groups, including Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Honduran persons and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. Support from the Organization also included the provision of a platform to help identify and counter disinformation and of an early warning system on electoral violence.

Iraq*

The United Nations engaged in multidimensional support for the legislative elections held in 2021, including support aimed at fostering an environment conducive to peaceful elections. Following the Government's request for a stronger United Nations electoral presence and under the terms of Security Council resolution [2576 \(2021\)](#), the Organization's electoral mandate was expanded, combining technical assistance with the deployment of United Nations experts to provide monitoring on election day, to support strategic communications and to coordinate the work of international election observers. The United Nations provided support to the Independent High Election Commission, including on electoral reform, public outreach, gender mainstreaming, voter registration, procurement, results management and the recruitment and training of polling staff. The Organization also supported national efforts to develop a new electoral code of conduct for political parties that promoted electoral integrity, including by addressing violence against women candidates. Such efforts also included providing support to civil society to counter violence against women.

* Assistance provided under a Security Council mandate.

Lebanon

Under the leadership of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, the Organization supported the parliamentary elections held in the country in 2022. Technical assistance and operational support was led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and provided to electoral management bodies, including the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, the Supervisory Commission for Elections, and the Constitutional Council. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon UNDP and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) worked with national partners to promote the participation and representation of women, youth and persons with disabilities. The Organization worked closely with political leaders and religious authorities to encourage them to refrain from using hate speech and intimidation, including against women candidates. The United Nations continued to support temporary special measures as a way of increasing the representation of women, and some political parties adopted internal gender quotas.

Pakistan

The Organization provided targeted support for local elections in four provinces and in preparation for general elections scheduled for October 2023. The support was aimed at increasing public confidence in the administration of elections, strengthening the engagement of the Election Commission of Pakistan with stakeholders, providing technical assistance for electoral reform, and supporting civic and voter education to enhance the participation of vulnerable and marginalized groups. For example, the United Nations helped more than 85,000 women and members of marginalized groups in flood-hit districts to acquire national identity cards, thereby enabling them to vote. The Organization also supported the authorities in addressing gender gaps in voter registration and in training election officials on special measures in areas affected by floods.

Sao Tome and Principe

Assistance provided by the United Nations for the presidential election held in 2021 and for parliamentary and local elections held in 2022 included enhancing the capacity of the National Electoral Commission, judiciary, security forces and media; advising on electoral operations and civic and voter education; and helping to procure election materials. For the presidential election, the United Nations encouraged candidates to sign a code of ethics committing them to non-violence and respecting the election results. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa maintained close contact with national stakeholders and engaged in good offices in coordination with the Resident Coordinator Office, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the Economic Community of Central African States.

Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

Following a formal request from the National Electoral Council, the United Nations deployed a panel of electoral experts for the regional and municipal elections held in November 2021. The panel undertook an independent technical assessment of the elections, provided an internal report to the Secretary-General and formally presented its recommendations to the National Electoral Council. The panel was deployed at a crucial moment for the country, as the elections were the first to include

the participation of opposition groups since 2017 and the first at which the deployment of a large-scale international election observation mission was permitted since 2006.

Zambia

The United Nations combined technical assistance and political support for dialogue and conflict prevention for the general elections held in 2021. Technical support was focused on civic and voter education; promoting the inclusion of youth, women and persons with disabilities; and training and capacity-building for electoral officials and other stakeholders, including the police. Engagement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union ahead of the elections and the deployment of senior United Nations electoral experts complemented national efforts to defuse tensions, promote dialogue and enable the peaceful conduct of the elections. The United Nations and partner organizations, including the Commonwealth, supported civil society in convening a peace conference, at which political parties publicly endorsed a pledge for peaceful elections.

Annex III

Map of States and territories to which the United Nations provided electoral assistance during the reporting period (1 August 2021–31 July 2023)

