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Democracy at Stake: Risks Threatening Electoral Integrity Worldwide



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Executive Summary

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of democracy and the most effective means to convince and express the will of the people to choose their representatives and governors who manage their affairs, which contributes to the consolidation of sustainable democracies. Electoral processes are conducted in almost all parts of the world; however, they face many challenges that undermine their integrity and threaten the achievement of their objective to represent people who are considered the basis of the ruling authority. Such challenges are topped by electoral violence, hate speech, and disinformation that deprive citizens of access to health information during the electoral processes in a way that affects their electoral choices, along with suppression of political opposition, interference to influence the outcomes of the electoral process, lack of integrity of the procedures and rules regulating the elections, in addition to being manipulated by certain governments as a means to add legitimacy and justify their continued rule, which causes democratic backsliding in today's world more than ever before. On the occasion of the celebration of the **International Day of Democracy, Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights**, examines in this Study the challenges threatening elections worldwide by using realistic models, challenges, and obstacles faced by electoral processes, to address these concerns and propose many solutions that contribute to enhancing the safety and integrity of electoral processes to reflect the free choices of citizens.

Keywords: *Elections - Hate Speech - Electoral Violence - Disinformation*

Study Methodology

The Study analyzed the context of electoral processes across the world that took place from 15 September 2022 to the end of August 2023, that is, a full year after the celebration of **International Democracy Day** on 15 September 2022, relying on primary and secondary sources, to determine the biggest challenges and obstacles that affected the legitimacy, integrity, and transparency of electoral processes. The Study relies on the reports of independent human rights organizations during their follow-up of elections, as well as relevant publications, to identify the obstacles to those elections. In addition, it included references to international human rights rules and standards stipulated for holding free elections, to figure out the extent to which electoral processes conducted during the aforementioned period complied with the principles of transparency and freedom of elections. It is worth noting that Maat, in its analysis, focused on the parliamentary and presidential elections and referendums that were conducted during the specified period and did not take into account local elections, and run-off rounds were not counted as independent electoral processes.

Introduction

The International Day of Democracy is celebrated worldwide on September 15 each year. It is an opportunity to review the state of democracy around the world, identify challenges, and work to solve and overcome them. One of the main pillars of democracy is holding periodic, free, and fair elections based on universal suffrage and secret voting. When elections are threatened, it represents a decline in democracy. Elections are the most prominent means for citizens to have their voices heard, choose their leaders, hold them accountable, and ensure that the government responds to their needs.

In recent years, there have been increasing obstacles that threaten the safety and integrity of electoral processes. These include electoral violence, which prevents citizens from participating in elections out of fear for their safety; spread of misinformation during elections, which can be used to sway voters in favor of one candidate or another or to undermine confidence in the electoral process; spread of hate speech, which can be used to win votes at the expense of the rights of vulnerable groups in society; interference by non-democratic governments in the conduct of electoral processes, to favor one candidate or another or to suppress the opposition, violations that occur during the conduct of electoral processes, such as delays in the opening of polling stations, mass voting for a candidate, or forcing citizens to vote for a candidate.

For elections to be considered democratic and fair, they must allow everyone to participate, both as voters and as candidates. It is also important that all processes related to elections are conducted properly, without any form of pressure or violations that could influence people's opinions or hinder their participation.

This Study, issued by **Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights**, discusses the challenges and obstacles facing elections from 15 September 2022 to 31 August 2023. It identifies the most important of these obstacles and proposes solutions to overcome them, to enhance the integrity and transparency of elections, and achieve the sustainability of democracy at all levels.

Map of Elections Witnessed Worldwide since the International Day of Democracy

Maat monitored the electoral elections held from the International Day of Democracy on 15 September 2022, until August 2023, in order to identify the various challenges and obstacles that these elections faced. It was revealed through monitoring that the number of electoral processes reached **82 electoral processes in 58 countries worldwide, including 17 presidential elections, 59 parliamentary elections, and 6 referendums**, not counting the runoff rounds that were held in some countries. These elections have been subjected to numerous obstacles that have undermined and at times even eroded confidence in democratic values.

On 9 August 2023, electoral elections were organized, including 4 presidential elections, 3 parliamentary elections, and a single referendum. In July of the same year, 6 electoral operations were conducted, including 2 referendums, a single presidential election, and 3 parliamentary elections. In June, 8 electoral operations were carried out, including 5 parliamentary elections, 2 presidential elections, and one referendum. In May, the number of electoral elections that were held was 6, including 1 presidential and 5 parliamentary. During April, 10 electoral elections were organized, including 8 parliamentary elections, one presidential election and a referendum. In March, 6 electoral elections were organized, including 2 Presidential and 4 parliamentary.

During February, 4 electoral elections were organized: 3 parliamentary elections and one presidential election. In January, 7 electoral elections were held, including 4 parliamentary elections, 2 presidential elections, and one referendum. In December 2022, 3 parliamentary elections were organized, and during November, 8 electoral elections were organized including, one presidential and 7 were parliamentary. In October, 10 electoral elections were organized, including 8 parliamentary elections and 2 presidential elections. In September 2022, 5 electoral elections were organized, all of them parliamentary.

The data obtained by Maat when reviewing the various electoral processes confirm that these processes face some electoral violence and interference from the executive authority, or the practice of human rights violations by preventing and restricting the opposition from fair competition during the elections, or the spread of hate speech, information disinformation, and the inability to access information. All of these can be considered obstacles and challenges that may undermine the integrity of the elections and undermine citizens' confidence in the democratic process.

Table No. (1) Elections and Referendums Conducted during the Period from September 2022 to August 2023

#	Country	Type of electoral entitlement	Date of Election Maturity
1.	Gabon	Presidential election	August 2023
		Parliamentary elections (National Assembly)	
2.	Zimbabwe	Presidential election	August 2023
		Parliamentary elections (National Assembly)	
		Parliamentary elections (Senate)	
3.	Ecuador	Parliamentary elections (National Assembly)	August 2023
		Presidential election	
		Referendum	
4.		Referendum	January 2023
5.	Guatemala	Presidential election	June 2023
		Parliamentary elections (Congress)	
6.	Central African Republic	Public referendum	July 2023
7.	Argentina	Presidential election	August 2023
8.	Spain	Elections to the House of Representatives (Senate)	July 2023
		Elections to the House of Representatives (House of Representatives)	
9.	Cambodia	Parliamentary elections (National Assembly)	July 2023
10.	Uzbekistan	Presidential election	July 2023
11.		Referendum	April 2023
12.	Federated States of Micronesia	Parliamentary elections	January 2023
13.		Referendum	July 2023
14.	Greece	Parliamentary elections	May 2023
15.	Sierra Leone	Presidential election	June 2023
		Parliamentary elections	

#	Country	Type of electoral entitlement	Date of Election Maturity
16.	Mali	Referendum	June 2023
17.	Montenegro	Parliamentary elections (Assembly of Montenegro)	June 2023
18.		Presidential election	March 2023
19.	Kuwait	Parliamentary elections (National Assembly elections)	June 2023
20.		Parliamentary elections (National Assembly elections)	September 2022
21.	Guinea Bissau	Parliamentary Elections People's National Assembly	June 2023
22.	Turkey	Presidential election	May 2023
23.		Parliamentary elections (Grand National Assembly)	May 2023
24.	The Islamic Republic of Mauritania	Parliamentary elections (Grand National Assembly)	May 2023
25.	East Timor	Parliamentary elections (Timorese National Parliament)	May 2023
26.	Kingdom of Thailand	House of Representatives elections	May 2023
27.	French Polynesian	Parliamentary elections	April 2023
28.	Paraguay	Parliamentary elections (House of Representatives)	April 2023
		Parliamentary elections (Senate)	
		Presidential election	
29.	Niue	Parliamentary elections	April 2023
30.	British Virgin Islands	House of Representatives	April 2023
31.	Principality of Andorra	House of Representatives	April 2023
32.	Finland	House of Representatives	April 2023
33.	Bulgaria	House of Representatives Bulgaria's National Assembly	April 2023
34.	Republic of Cuba	House of Representatives Elections to the National Assembly of People	March 2023

#	Country	Type of electoral entitlement	Date of Election Maturity
35.	Turkmenistan	Presidential election	March 2023
		Parliamentary elections	
36.	Kazakhstan	Parliamentary elections	March 2023
37.	Estonia	Parliamentary elections	March 2023
38.	Nigeria	Parliamentary elections (Senate)	February 2023
		Parliamentary elections (House of Representatives)	
		Presidential election	
39.	Djibouti	Parliamentary elections (National Assembly)	February 2023
40.	Cyprus	Presidential election	January 2023
41.	Principality of Monaco	Parliamentary elections	January 2023
42.	Antigua and Barbuda	Parliamentary elections	January 2023
43.	Czech Republic	Presidential election	January 2023
44.	Boys	Parliamentary elections (National Assembly)	January 2023
45.	Tunisia	Parliamentary elections	December 2022
46.	Fiji	Parliamentary elections	December 2022
47.	Dominican Republic	Parliamentary elections	December 2022
48.	Malaysia	Parliamentary elections	November 2022
49.	Equatorial Guinea	Presidential election	November 2022
		Equatorial Guinea's Senate	
50.	the two seas	Parliamentary elections	November 2022
51.	United States of America	House of Representatives	November 2022
		senate	

#	Country	Type of electoral entitlement	Date of Election Maturity
52.	Israel	Parliamentary elections	November 2022
53.	Denmark	Parliamentary elections	November 2022
54.	Vanuatu	Parliamentary elections	October 2022
55.	Slovenia	Presidential election	October 2022
56.	Brazil	Presidential election	October 2022
		Brazilian Federal Senate	
		Parliamentary elections for the House of Representatives	
57.	Australia	Presidential election	October 2022
58.	Lesotho	Parliamentary elections	October 2022
59.	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Parliamentary elections	October 2022
60.	Bulgaria	Parliamentary elections	October 2022
61.	Latvia	Parliamentary elections	October 2022
62.	Sao Tome and Principe	Parliamentary elections (National Assembly)	September 2022
63.	Italy	Parliamentary elections (Italian Chamber of Deputies)	September 2022
		Parliamentary elections (Italian Senate)	
64.	Nauru	Parliamentary elections	September 2022

***The Table prepared by Maat**

Spread of Electoral Violence

Electoral violence refers to the use of coercion, threats, physical harm, or intimidation to influence the electoral process. Such acts can occur before, during, or after the election and can disrupt voting or discourage individuals from participating. This violence can also contribute to disrupting voting or the reluctance of individuals to participate in the electoral process or determining the winner in the elections, regardless of the choices of individuals. There are many forms of electoral violence, including the assassination of opponents and participating politicians, armed group clashes, threats, coercion, and intimidation of voters to force them to choose a specific person, in addition to threatening opponents and election officials¹.

During the period covered by the study, many incidents of electoral violence emerged that affected the democracy of the electoral process. During the presidential and legislative elections that were held in Zimbabwe in August 2023, many international reports confirmed that voters were exposed to intimidation, threats of violence, harassment, and coercion². As well as observers of the electoral process and civil society organizations monitoring the elections were also subjected to acts of intimidation during the election period. On August 23, 2023, the government in Zimbabwe arrested 41 employees working for local civil society organizations, election monitors and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network. The police seized 38 laptops and 93 phones from the offices³, this is while carrying out their work as local election observers. This arrest was meant to intimidate them for their work and for reporting the violations they witnessed on Election Day⁴.

In Ecuador, before the presidential elections, presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was assassinated on August 9, 2023, and another local politician was subjected to an assassination attempt but survived it. Voters' testimonies before the elections indicate their fear of going out and voting due to the lack of security and the spread of crimes that prevent them from participating in the elections⁵.

In June 2023, the government in Mali organized a referendum on changing the constitution to pave the way for elections and the return of civilian rule, but it was unable to secure the holding of the referendum in some central and northern regions of Mali

¹ الانتخابات ومنع نشوب النزاعات دليل للتحليل والتخطيط والبرمجة، برنامج الأمم المتحدة الإنمائي، <https://cutt.us/Gfpbl>

² Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General - on elections in Zimbabwe. <https://cutt.us/nqgFC>

³ Zimbabwe election: Poll monitors arrested amid election.bbc. <https://cutt.us/PpWrq>

⁴ The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum statement on elections. <https://cutt.us/b8WPv>

⁵ الإكوادور تختار رئيساً جديداً وسط موجة عنف غير مسبوقه، فرنسا 24، <https://cutt.us/W84fi>

due to fear of terrorist attacks or due to political differences⁶. Moreover, armed groups in the north prevented the voting process in the strategic city of Kidal and surrounding towns, and a terrorist attack occurred in the city of Bodio in central Mali, which contributed to disrupting voting for some time⁷.

In Sierra Leone, violence and clashes broke out following the presidential and parliamentary elections held in June 2023⁸. These clashes between police forces and opponents demanding the resignation of the chairman of the Electoral Commission resulted in the death of one person⁹. On the other hand, many local and international observers and civil society organizations were subjected to intimidation during Elections, including death threats¹⁰.

In this regard, the Nigerian elections witnessed an escalation in cases of armed violence, 238 cases of electoral violence were recorded, and 24 people were killed in incidents directly related to electoral violence¹¹. On February 27, 2023, 15 men pretending to be election officials stormed a vote gathering center in the Alimosho neighborhood of Lagos in Nigeria and attacked Labor Party delegates with knives and batons¹². In return, the elections were postponed in 141 voting centers for security and logistical reasons¹³.

During the presidential elections in the Czech Republic, the prominent candidate Petr Pavel at that time, along with his family and other senior Czech politicians, were threatened with death by unknown people¹⁴. In the United States of America, many calls for violence against American election workers spread on Facebook before the congressional elections, threatening the integrity of the elections¹⁵.

⁶ مالي: المجلس الدستوري يؤكد نتيجة الاستفتاء على الدستور الجديد الذي يعزز موقع المجلس العسكري، فرنسا 24، <https://cutt.us/fVvDf>

⁷ استفتاء حول دستور جديد في مالي وتعدر الاقتراع في شمال البلاد ووسطها، سويسرا بالعربي، <https://cutt.us/ulmvk>

⁸ Violence erupts as Sierra Leone awaits electoral results . <https://cutt.us/onczb>

⁹ Violence flares in Sierra Leone ahead of presidential vote FRANCE 24 . <https://cutt.us/n3JAh>

¹⁰ On Sierra Leone's Election. <https://cutt.us/QXzw5>

¹¹ 2023 polls 24 deaths, 238 violence recorded Report . <https://cutt.us/vffu8>

¹² نيجيريا هجوم على مركز اقتراع قبل أيام من إعلان نتيجة انتخابات الرئاسة، الشرق ، <https://cutt.us/HtCHF>

¹³ انتخابات نيجيريا أعمال عنف ومشاركة شبابية تعزز حظوظ أوبي، أسكاي نيوز ، <https://cutt.us/aSpwk>

¹⁴ Czech police investigate threats against presidential candidate. <https://cutt.us/e4oMR>

¹⁵ Facebook failed to detect death threats against election workers ahead of US midterm elections. <https://cutt.us/fdvDI>

Interfering in Elections and Restricting Opposition

Interfering in elections and restricting opposition is considered the most undermining of democracy, as during the electoral elections witnessed in the reporting period, some governments worked to support specific people to win the elections without taking into account the opinions and votes of citizens which is done through many methods, the most important of which is preventing opposition persons from being nominated or biased against them in election procedures, or committing violations against their supporters or against them to influence the course of the electoral process, while imposing restrictions on civil society organizations and many media outlets working to cover the elections.

During the elections held in Gabon in August 2023, the government imposed severe restrictions on media coverage and civil society organizations' monitoring of the electoral processes, which ended with the government imposing a curfew for fear of the spread of violence due to angry calls for the elections¹⁶. After that, a military coup took place objecting to the results of the elections and the lack of transparency and credibility of the various procedures¹⁷.

As such, before the presidential elections in Zimbabwe, the government refused to grant credentials to international journalists and local civil society to cover the elections¹⁸, with the authorities refusing to allow some foreign media to cover the electoral entitlement¹⁹.

In Guatemala, during July 2023, and after the first round of the presidential elections, some judicial bodies attempted to suspend the Smila Party from operating due to alleged irregularities in how it was established. The party was searched and targeted before human rights pressure was launched by many parties to denounce attempts to undermine the presidential elections to prevent a candidate from running in the runoff elections²⁰. During the legislative elections in Cambodia, the opposition Candlelight Party was not allowed to participate in the legislative elections, and this undermined the seriousness and integrity of the elections²¹. In Equatorial Guinea, restrictions were imposed on the ability of representatives of political parties to access polling stations,

¹⁶ الانتخابات الرئاسية في الغابون: السلطات تعلن حظر التجول وتقطع الإنترنت، فرنسا 24، <https://cutt.us/y42mV>

¹⁷ انقلاب عسكري في الغابون والرئيس بونغو يوجه رسالة من مقر احتجاجه، الجزيرة، <https://cutt.us/coFTt>

¹⁸ شرطة زيمبابوي تعتقل 25 من أعضاء المعارضة قبل الانتخابات الرئاسية، أوروبا نيوز، <https://cutt.us/UQ6Du>

¹⁹ Zimbabwe's general elections. <https://cutt.us/m7gct>

²⁰ غواتيمالا مفوض الأمم المتحدة السامي لحقوق الإنسان يعرب عن قلقه البالغ حيال محاولات تفويض العملية الانتخابية، المفوضية السامية لحقوق الإنسان،

<https://cutt.us/CyBQ9>

²¹ مرة أخرى حزب الشعب الكمبودي يفوز في الانتخابات البرلمانية، الشروق، <https://cutt.us/rLHDk>

with unopened ballots being counted in favor of the Democratic Party for equality and counting of votes without representation of all political parties²².

Violations Committed During Voting

Many violations occur during election voting that affect the independence, competitiveness, and transparency of electoral entitlements, the most important of which is delaying the opening of polling stations in some areas and not others, or placing additional votes in ballot boxes, while directing voters during the voting process to give their votes to specific candidates or incidents of mass voting by voters.

During presidential and parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe, which took place in August 2023, the voting witnessed a large number of voters being unable to find their names on the lists inside the polling stations, and others were subjected to harassment inside the polling stations, and the opening of polling stations was delayed in several areas, especially within areas where the opposition is very popular, such as the capital, Harare, in addition to the shortage of ballot papers and the registration of a large number of voters in polling stations far from their homes²³. On the other hand, during the referendum on the constitution that was organized in the Central African Republic, many violations occurred, the most important of which was the lack of updated lists of voters, and directing voters to vote yes on the articles of the referendum²⁴. During the presidential elections in Sierra Leone, there were transparency issues in the vote count, and delegates of the General Congress Party candidate were not allowed to verify the vote count in some areas²⁵.

In Mauritania, the parliamentary elections held in May 2023 were subject to much criticism due to the delay in opening many polling stations and the refusal of party representatives to enter some centers, with the lack of sufficient voter cards in some offices and the names of some people appearing in offices in which they were not registered, sometimes in cities far from their places of registration, in addition to transferring them to centers that are not equipped for voting²⁶. During the legislative elections held in Turkmenistan in January 2023, there were mass voting operations and a violation of the secrecy of the vote. Voters were also directed to vote for their relatives,

²² On the Elections in Equatorial Guinea. <https://cutt.us/p3Xhx>

²³ تمديد الانتخابات الرئاسية ليوم ثانٍ في زيمبابوي، الاندبندنت البريطانية، <https://cutt.us/6mGi2>

²⁴ Central African Republic votes on new constitution as president eyes third term. <https://cutt.us/6MluV>

²⁵ Sierra Leone election: Julius Maada Bio sworn in as opposition cries foul. <https://cutt.us/B5wkA>

²⁶ لجنة انتخابات موريتانيا: حدثت أخطاء لكنها لا تؤثر على شفافية الاقتراع، الجزيرة ، <https://cutt.us/BmdMg>

not to mention the manipulation of voter lists²⁷, so all of these violations threaten the integrity of electoral entitlements.

Spread of Hate Speech during Electoral Process

The spread of hate speech is linked to undermining the integrity and transparency of electoral processes, as political parties and candidates use such speech to mobilize supporters and win electoral votes by attacking specific population groups, especially migrants, refugees, and ethnic and racial groups, or defaming the candidates' opponents with the aim of confusing voters not to vote for a particular candidate in exchange for supporting another candidate, which affects the results of the electoral process. Political movements, parties, and candidates often work to incite against candidates during the elections, this includes describing them with several expressions that increase the stigma they are subjected to in society, whether these are expressions that indicate betrayal of the country or others that accuse them of disbelief, rebellion against religion or the customs and traditions of society. This targeting is based on their political, religious, ethnic, or cultural beliefs, and the goal is to win votes during the electoral process, regardless of its integrity and transparency.

In June 2023, international estimates warned of the escalation of hate speech and incitement on social media in the constitutional referendum in the Central African Republic, before, during, and after the vote, which threatens the integrity of the electoral entitlement²⁸. On the other hand, during the recent Turkish parliamentary and presidential elections, all political parties used discriminatory and aggressive rhetoric against specific groups, such as Syrian refugees, where calls for hatred against minorities, including Armenians, Christians, and Jews, have spread, to win angry votes when attacking them²⁹.

In Nigeria, hate speech prevailed during both the parliamentary and presidential elections, and the trends that practiced these speeches varied among politicians, party supporters, students, youth, influencers on social media, clergy, priests, Islamic clerics, and Nigerians abroad³⁰.

In Tunisia, parliamentary election campaigns recorded a widespread spread of hate speech in the media and social networking sites. The Supreme Independent Election

²⁷ Turkmen Electoral Authorities Validate Polls For Rubber-Stamp Parliament, Despite Reports Of Violations.

<https://cutt.us/Nb1dH>

²⁸ UN expert warns constitutional referendum in Central African Republic poses human rights risks . <https://cutt.us/utSCR>

²⁹ Between Two Elections: Z Report on Hate Speech on Twitter. <https://cutt.us/E5MAg>

³⁰ 2023 Elections: Human Rights Commission Goes After Promoters Of Hate Speech. <https://cutt.us/PDmPp>

Commission confirmed that 54% of media publications, social networking sites, and field election campaigns include forms of hate speech, and 55% of the speeches on various television screens contain hate speeches³¹.

In Brazil, hate speech online during the parliamentary elections increased on a large scale, as estimates confirm that the election was a catalyst for increased hatred against citizens in northeastern Brazil, which is the part that includes the indigenous population of Brazil and people of African descent³², the spread of all these discourses during elections threatens the rights of ethnic and marginalized groups, weakening their voices and making them fall behind.

On the other hand, the period preceding the parliamentary elections in Israel witnessed an increase in the level of incitement and hate speech against the Palestinians in the West Bank and within the Green Line³³. Weeks before the elections, the head of the Jewish Power Party, Itamar Ben Gvir, published a picture of him on the social networking site X (formerly Twitter) with his children carrying toy guns with the words **“After the riots, I teach the children how to deal with terrorists”**, after he brandished a gun to threaten the people of Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem, in a clear message to the targeting of Palestinian citizens with repeated hate speeches during the elections³⁴.

In Italy, before the legislative elections in September 2022, many Italian politicians launched hate speeches against marginalized groups to win the elections and influence the voting behavior of voters. Alessio Di Giulio, a politician from the right-wing League party in Italy, published a video in which he promised citizens to get rid of the Roma communities if he won the elections, and this benefits him by obtaining more electoral votes, but in return, he limits democracy and the integrity of the electoral process and subjects an ethnic group to danger of continued targeting³⁵.

³¹ خطاب الكراهية عنوان منشورات مواقع التواصل والتغطية الإعلامية في تونس، العرب، <https://cutt.us/juYHE>

³² Online hate speech increased during Brazil's elections, new study finds . <https://cutt.us/TKSW0>

³³ Al-Haq Annual Field Report on Human Rights Violations in 2022. <https://cutt.us/JZx4w>

³⁴ بن غفير رأس الحربة في الانتخابات الإسرائيلية، الاندبندنت البريطانية، <https://cutt.us/Pkc8L>

³⁵ Italian politician's threat highlights dangers Europe's Roma face. <https://cutt.us/OeNnY>

Misinformation Speeches & Inability to Access True Information during Elections

The spread of misinformation and false information, especially on social media during elections, threatens democracy because it misleads voters' will and undermines confidence in the electoral process. Misinformation is used to influence the results of the electoral process by discrediting candidates and political parties. It also provides incorrect information about the voting process during elections and the impact on voting options for a particular segment of citizens. The source of such information could be from outside States, aimed at undermining confidence in electoral processes.

Before the July 2023 Spanish elections, misleading allegations about mail-in ballots and election fraud had spread on social media to question the election results even before the vote was counted. The campaign is being conducted by many supporters of the center-right People's Party and the far-right Vox Party, which undermines and threatens confidence in the democratic process. In May 2023, During the Turkish parliamentary and presidential election perpetrated by all parties, much misinformation spread online to influence citizens' electoral behavior. In Thailand, rights estimates confirmed that State-sponsored misinformation affected the integrity of parliamentary elections by disseminating misinformation about political parties, thereby depriving voters of the correct information to choose their candidates during the elections³⁶.

In Thailand, human rights estimates confirmed that misinformation disseminated by the State had affected the integrity of parliamentary elections by disseminating misinformation about political parties, thereby depriving voters of the right information to choose their candidates during the elections³⁷.

In the Czech Republic, during the presidential election and the period leading up to it, misinformation that affected voters' choices was widespread. Before the second round of elections, many Czech media and social media users received emails announcing the death of prominent candidate Peter Pavel. Some voters also obtained many text messages from presidential candidate Pavel's team requesting them to go to the nearest armed forces branch to mobilize equipment in Ukraine. Nobody knows who is behind any of these fake messages, but they affect citizens' right to choose and participate in elections without any doubt.

³⁶ الانتخابات التركية كل الأحزاب مارست التضليل الإعلامي، <https://cutt.us/xGt4k>

³⁷ State sponsored Disinformation To Impact Thailand's Election Integrity. <https://cutt.us/jB9F0>

Recommendations

Overall, there are many obstacles to electoral entitlements that affect democratic values and principles, and they require actions across two basic levels as shown in the set of recommendations below:

At the International Level

- United Nations international organizations and bodies such as the United Nations Department of Political Affairs and Peacebuilding need to act to protect the integrity of elections before they are held in States with high levels of electoral threats, provide substantive improvements in elections, and address those States' electoral problems.
- Bodies and donors should support civil society organizations working to address issues that threaten the integrity of elections while investing in building their capacity to monitor electoral processes efficiently and deal with issues of misinformation, hate speech, and violence during elections to reduce them.
- It is necessary to transfer and share international experience on successful practices that have overcome challenges and obstacles to electoral processes while promoting communication among electoral professionals.
- It is necessary to develop a global framework, including protecting and promoting elections under new technologies that facilitate the violation of electoral processes and threaten stable democracies by disseminating hate speech and misinformation.

At the National Level

- It is necessary to build the capacity of electoral bodies to deal with hate speech and misinformation during elections to monitor and correct such rhetoric through network establishment that reduces such phenomena in collaboration with civil society organizations.
- Problems that cause widespread violence within communities should be resolved, particularly during elections, and violence cases should be investigated and their perpetrators should be held accountable.
- Allowing media and civil society organizations to cover elections and work freely before elections to overcome challenges.
- Local civil society organizations should examine and identify all challenges faced by elections in their State through robust studies and develop a plan to deal with them according to their potential in cooperation with other civil society organizations and electoral experts.