**Forum:** GA 4 – Political

**Issue:** Strengthening the role of UN international observers in electoral processes in Latin America

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**Position:** Chair



**Introduction**

Electoral fraud has been an ongoing problem in multiple Latin American countries for years now. The corruption behind elections is what takes some of these nations down dangerous paths, both socially and economically. A study done by the Global Corruption Barometer concluded that approximately 53% of people in Carribean or Latin American countries believe their elections have been tampered with. (Coralie Prieg, 2019) This electoral fraud, which later leads to a corrupt and self interested government, has been an ongoing issue the UN has been trying to solve for decades. Observers were introduced as a way to monitor elections and other undergoing issues which require a neutral third party to monitor them for any suspicious activity. This appears to be an immediate solution to the problem of election fraud that plagues so many countries such as Venezuela, but the actual power that these observers have is relatively limited. For example, in the 2011 Congo elections, the results that observers saw outside the polling stations was not the same as those announced by the media. The observers first handedly witnessed an indication of electoral fraud, but their assignment of solely writing reports of suspicious activity prevented them from halting or punishing said activities, which can later lead to a government that infringes human rights.

 Oftentimes, UN observers find traces of suspicious activity like the ones in Congo, yet their role puts serious restrictions on what they can do about it. Observers are allowed to be present in UN panels, but they can’t vote or propose solutions, and they are only allowed to monitor an election if that country personally gives them permission to go and is willing to share all information regarding the elections with them. (United Nations, n.d.) This is highly unlikely to be granted by countries suspected of corruption such as Nicaragua, either on account of past experiences with third party interventions or because of personal reasons. In Nicaragua’s case, it was due to their “Sandinista” elections, in which the United States’ intervention ended up affecting them, since it prevented any country other than the US from building a “Nicaragua Canal” like the one in Panama. (Zelaya, R., 1990) There are many other Latin American countries with this mentality who refuse to have UN observers in their elections, which facilitates the manipulation of results from corrupt leaders and harms their countries. What can the UN do to change this?

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Observer Status**

An unbiased third party that monitors an issue or election in order to raise public confidence and report on the legitimacy of the elections or intentions of certain parties by getting access to all information regarding the situation at hand, and then reporting back to reach a conclusion. These observers are normally NGOs or organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the Commonwealth Secretariat.

**Electoral Fraud**

The act of interfering with the process of an election, either by increasing the vote share of a certain candidate, taking away votes from the opposition, or both.

**Corruption**

Dishonest or fraudulent behavior by those in power, typically for self interested motives such as money or more power.

**Pre-election Polls**

A process that most countries use to predict the outcome of the election by releasing polls before it occurs. When there is an abnormally large difference between the pre election polling and the actual results, it can be an indication of electoral fraud.

**ISSUE OVERVIEW**

**Background Information**



It is the people of each country who suffer the most from a corrupt government. As seen in the above graph, a great percentage of Latin Americans have a below average trust in their election process and their democracy. The issue with these elections is that they are not monitored, and, if a candidate opts to dishonest methods, it is very rare for them to be caught because after all, people who do this already have accumulated great power within their borders and can escape any prosecution. It is very rare for observers to find concrete evidence of electoral fraud in a country, in fact, a study done by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) shows that 0.00006% of elections are deemed as fraudulent. This indicates that the actual proof of a corrupt government or fraudulent elections is very scarce, so why do citizens in Latin America have such strong negative feelings about the reliability of their democracies? It could be that the fraud goes on under the radar, or it could be that the citizens simply dislike their governments and therefore opt to blame the results on election fraud. Whatever the case may be, a strengthened role of UN observers could help ease the concerns of the people. An observer can help to give credibility to an election and if they have a stronger role, then the people may be more at ease. The issue begins when actual cases of fraud are suspected, such as the ones in Venezuela or Nicaragua, because even if suspicions are found, if there is limited evidence, there is also limited action that can be taken. With a strengthened role in the electoral process, and also a greater willingness by governments to accept these observers to monitor their elections, the situation of many countries as well as the trust people have for their governments may increase exponentially. **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

* **Venezuela:**Venezuela is one of the countries that has been labeled the most as a place where corruption and electoral fraud are ever present. Many government critics in Venezuela have argued that Maduro's Socialist party has an unfair advantage over its competitors due to its electoral campaign using public resources, access to the press, confusion of the voting cards, and the disqualification of several opposing figures. An example of this was Leonardo Lopez, who was sentenced to 14 years in jail on charges of “inciting anti government protests.” Venezuela has stated its desires to have UN observers in their next election in order to legitimize it. Despite their fraud and corruption, they know that this is not something that can easily be detectable or proven, even by the United Nations. They are confident that they won’t get caught, which is why many neighboring countries urged the UN to not observe the elections and legitimize the election.
* **Nicaragua:**Daniel Ortega has been in power since 2007: for 13 years he has been at the helm of Nicaragua as its president. Nicaragua is not a fan of UN observers due to their previous experiences with third party involvement, which has allowed them to stay in power for so long. “There’s no reliable information on how the Ortega government uses this money because everything is cloaked in the practice of official secrecy.” These resources should be public, but nobody knows where they go, and these resources, which should be going to programs such as “Zero Hunger”, are almost never actually delivered. This is some suspicious activity, but nothing can be done through UN intervention by observers because of their limited power.

**Timeline of Events**

**Date Description of event**

1857 The first monitored elections ever took place in Romania, and overseen by most European powers.

1960’s Less than 10% of elections were monitored

2000’s Around 90% of countries have monitored elections.

2004 OSCE creates the “Handbook for monitoring women participation in elections” to make sure equal rights are maintained.

2011 Nicaragua's Supreme Electoral Council dismissed opposition complaints and announced that President Daniel Ortega had been re-elected

2020 President Maduro invited the UN to monitor the elections. The UN refuses.

**Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

* Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization, August 1 2017 (A/72/260)
* Enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of *periodic* and genuine elections, November 19 1991 (A/46/616)
* Enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections, October 19 1999 (A/RES/54/173)

**Previous Attempts to solve the Issue**

UN First Resolution on enhancing effectiveness of elections, 1991: In this resolution, the idea of monitoring an election through a third party was introduced, yet it was still unclear as to what regulations these observers would have. The use of specialized agencies and international organizations to aid Member states with their elections was a key step forward in improving the reliability of democracies. Since then, the UN has stopped monitoring elections and now just sends observers to report on the elections. The role of these observers is now relatively limited, and not much has been done by the UN to strengthen their role in Latin American elections.

**Possible Solutions**

The issue of public distrust towards their country’s democracy, as well as actual cases of corruption and election fraud can be mitigated by strengthening the role of UN observers. It is important to take into consideration that a country has to give permission to the UN to moderate and monitor their election process, and therefore some corrupt governments don’t want to invite them. By making UN observers mandatory in all elections, or at least in those suspected of fraud, this sub-issue could be targeted. Another sub-issue would be the fact that it is very hard to actually prove fraud in elections, which is why Maduro wanted to invite the UN to monitor his elections. By giving more importance to post-election investigations and giving certain extra benefits to observers, they can be transformed from a technique corrupt leaders can use to falsely legitimize their win to an actual force to be reckoned with that can not only report about possible fraudulent behaviour, but actually stop it.

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**Appendix or Appendices**

1. UN Observers’s role in an election: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFb4b_7IHWw>
2. UN Video on role on elections: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fymsITB4Vqs>
3. Venezuela's request for UN observers: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-un-idUSKCN1GO2J0>
4. What is election monitoring: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKrAgytdXjg>